Key Points:

1. We were impressed by the significant progress in the last four years since the restructure of doctoral education at the University of Helsinki (UH). We felt that much effort had been on making the new structure work. Now we feel the leadership should become more strategic. They should discuss and plan how to make UH really internationally outstanding in doctoral education i.e. focus on how to make it really special and distinctive. This would help raise profile and attract more high quality international young researchers. The leadership should have oversight of both strategy and quality assurance to ensure a consistent high quality experience. We recommend that a senior academic post be established to lead this agenda. The coordinators are crucial to success and have been doing an excellent job.

2. We felt financing of doctoral education could be more transparent and aligned to University strategy. Finance should include leadership and supervision time as part of workload management systems as well as direct spend (studentships, conferences etc.).

3. We were pleased to see that there is more consistency in the processes now through a common set of regulations. We would like guidelines for processes also to be more consistent while allowing for disciplinary traditions. So much work is now cross-disciplinary it is important in a leading research University to be sure that researchers are not restricted by unnecessary differences. Communication of doctoral education policy and practice needs to be centralized to make it more transparent to the candidates.

4. There was considerable confusion about the division of labour between the various actors. The University should review this. We believe that programmes should be responsible for a high quality training experience, overseen by the doctoral schools with faculties responsible for the research environment in which the students are placed. Specific responsibilities should flow from this.

4. We would like to see that all candidates, wherever their funding comes from, are treated equally and given the same opportunities. Students reported that self-funded students in particular were not given access to all activities and support.

5. We make some specific comments about central provision and monitoring, supervisor training, representation, recruitment, and careers advice.

6. On the issue of one, two or four doctoral schools we felt that either one or four were workable although they would be different structures. However, two would not be effective. For the moment, it would best to keep to four doctoral schools (as is discussed in more detail below).
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Preamble

The University of Helsinki commissioned us to review doctoral education at the University of Helsinki. This is in the context of a changing landscape in recent years – the creation of four Doctoral Schools to oversee Doctoral Programmes in 2013, devolving of funding from the Academy of Finland, University restructuring, and the Big Wheel reform. We were given a number of questions to consider and these questions we have used as section headings within the report.

The evaluation team would like to thank everyone involved in the process for being open and constructive in discussion about both strengths and concerns. The change implemented four years ago was very significant and the team would like to congratulate the University on the huge progress that has been made. In particular, much effort has been made in focussing on how to make the new structure work and to be accepted by the University community. Going forward we believe that the University’s doctoral education leadership team needs to focus on more strategic thinking about how the environment and processes can best position UH globally through world leading programmes and research training environment.

The transition from national programmes to University programmes has been difficult for some members of the University community. However, it has been embraced by the University and allows it to plan strategically, develop synergies, and to develop more international as well as national links. There seems to have been a considerable reduction of support in some areas and there should be a top level review of the provision of doctoral scholarships to ensure that the balance of funding is in line with the University’s strategic objectives. This should be a balance between reinforcing strengths, developing new growth areas, and some allowance for radical ideas outside the key lines (that may turn into the future strategic directions of the future).

1. The integration of doctoral education into the strategy and overall operations of the University

The UH Strategy has three high level lines:

1. A creative, international environment for learning and top-level research
2. Focus on the student
3. Resources for reform

All three have relevance for doctoral education and researcher training which sits between research and teaching. As is common with University strategies if you are concerned with doctoral education you can see the relevance but if you are not it is not obvious and is often forgotten. We were pleased to see that doctoral degrees were mentioned and there was a page on ‘support the career advancement of exceptionally successful junior researchers’. But we would like to see an explicit reference in the University strategy to research training separate from research and teaching – it sits between these two as a distinct activity (training of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers and to a degree the life long learning of all researchers). This should focus on all
researchers at the University, not just ‘exceptionally successful ones’ since they will not all be. With research training as a distinct priority it would signal to the University community its importance and centrality to the social mission of the University in training researchers for innovation in both academic and non-academic roles in society.

With this is a need to recognise the important role of academic leadership of doctoral education. While there are leaders in place they are not backed up with resources, particularly in allocation and recognition of their time as all said they are doing it ‘on the side of all their other responsibilities’. Distinct recognition of the time needed for the role would give them more time to think strategically about doctoral education at the University to make it not just nationally leading but in the international front rank. This would help with the international aspirations of the University Strategy so that the University can have a distinctive place in research training internationally and be more attractive to students and staff from abroad.

The strategy seeks ‘to have established itself as a cutting-edge research and learning environment’. In the modern world, much research is cross-disciplinary requiring the environment to facilitate working across the structures of the University. Currently there is quite a degree of inconsistency in expectations, processes and resources allocated to doctoral education and we believe this should be addressed. There are disciplinary differences of course but there should be consistency unless there are good reasons for diverging. Therefore, an element of the operationalisation of the strategy should be added for achieving a greater degree of consistency between Doctoral Schools, Programmes and Faculties to remove barriers to cross-disciplinary working. This was of particular concern to the students who also highlighted considerable inconsistency of treatment of research students across the University and between those funded by different means. The University should aspire to a consistently excellent research student experience. There needs to be more consistency of responsibilities across support staff and leadership such that there is more clarity about the roles of actors in doctoral education.

As mentioned above there were mixed opinions favouring either one, two or four doctoral schools. Our three arguments why we do not touch the structures are:

- Doctoral education organized under this model has been there only for four years. It is way too early to say something definitive on its impact and how the structures possibly have influenced these impacts.

- Given the series of major organizational restructuring efforts (establishment of University Services, decision on academic unit structure in 2016 abolishing departments,) and other reforms (most notably, Big Wheel), now the status quo and stability should be prioritized over changes. The staff seems to be tired of having constant structural changes, therefore it might be a more prudent approach to improve processes under the existing structures. All of the challenges identified by the evaluation team do not require redesigning organizational structures as they can be addressed via improving processes of coordination and division of labour.
We believe that either one or four doctoral schools are workable although they would be different structures. For the moment it would best to keep to four while ensuring that they continue to work together facilitating cross-disciplinary working and that some things should remain central such as monitoring, establishing key information sets and much transferable skills training. Obviously this needs a strong central unit which needs to be seen as part of the research management structure. We felt that two schools would not be an effective solution given the current context of organization structures: it might be too remote to programmes to provide any real practical value and lead to an unhelpful fracturing of research cultures together with inefficiencies in central provision and co-ordination.

The reform of doctoral education at the UH has brought a number of positive changes. However, it seems that there are too many players involved (Board of Directors of Doctoral Schools, directors of doctoral programmes, steering committees of doctoral programmes, faculty councils, coordinators, planning officers) whose roles and responsibilities are not always clear to doctoral candidates and the staff. The role and decision-making power of directors of doctoral schools is rather weak and it seems that the key decision-making body/person (the hierarchical layer above them) is missing (Vice-Rector for Research has a lot of other duties in addition to doctoral education). This is discussed more fully in section 5. The coordinators have the most important role in the process of doctoral studies – at least in relation to doctoral candidates – and it seems that most of responsibilities are on their shoulders in a rather unbalanced way. The role of Faculties is unclear and might be a reason for some tensions with doctoral programmes.

Moreover, we feel that doctoral candidates should be represented on all the organs of governance of doctoral education including the Board of Directors of Doctoral Education.

2. The role of the doctoral schools in coordinating and developing doctoral education in their specific fields of research

Coordination of doctoral education

The primary task of doctoral schools is to coordinate and develop doctoral education which is delivered by the doctoral programmes. A recurrent theme during the site visit was the presence of good practices that have been implemented in some but not all doctoral programmes. We recommend to define a general set of rules and regulations which applies to all doctoral schools and programmes, and to which the individual doctoral schools and/or faculties can add additional specifics that may be required for their disciplines. These regulations should define the roles and responsibilities of supervisor and doctoral candidate (this is often done as a Code of Practice), the organization of the doctoral school and the doctoral training (including different committees and quality assessment mechanisms), and how disputes are dealt with (ombudsperson, committee for scientific integrity, complaints processes etc.). All Programmes should aim to build a sense of community amongst students through academic and social activities to help build peer support networks prevent isolation which is a common concern of research students.
Training courses

Although we have not seen a complete list of courses, it goes without saying that sufficient diversity and capacity for courses in statistics, communication (e.g. manuscript/grant/… writing, oral presentation, poster design and presentation), and time/project/self-management are a must. Generic skills courses are probably most economically organized centrally, while discipline-specific courses are best organized by the respective programmes with sharing between programmes as appropriate. Involvement of representatives of doctoral candidates in discussions of the quality of existing courses and the need for additional courses is highly recommended.

ECTS system

Full-time doctoral students are expected to finish their doctoral training in four years. During that period, doctoral candidates need to gather 30 ECTS of discipline-specific studies and 10 ECTS of transferable skills studies. From an international perspective, this is a considerable number of credits, both in time investment for the doctoral candidate as well as financially for the University. This is solved, at least in part, by using Masters courses for which doctoral candidates who have already followed them as master students are exempted. Some candidates have collected up to 30 ECTS before the start of their doctorate. Unfortunately, this leads to a situation where applicants are selected based on ECTS ‘baggage’ they already have, undermining the objective of doctoral training. This also gives a potential disadvantage to foreign students.

A more rational approach could be to limit the amount of obligatory courses to real post-Masters courses (e.g. advanced training, hot-topics, journal clubs) and add Masters courses on an individual needs basis.

Ombudsperson

Conflicts and disputes between supervisors and doctoral candidates occur in all Universities. At the moment, the coordinators of the doctoral programs function as a first line of intervention if there are supervisory problems. Although this is a low-threshold solution, the impartiality and subsequent functioning of the coordinator in the program may become compromised as a result of a conflict. They should also be able to seek advice from doctoral schools who will have more independence from the problem. We suggest to appoint ombudsperson(s) who can be contacted confidentially and whose task it is to mediate in the conflict. These roles should be made clear in the Code of Practice.

3. The role, thematic division, cohesiveness and embeddedness to the research community of the current doctoral programmes

The current doctoral programmes are often aligned with Faculties, although some interfaculty programs exist. This helps embed the students within existing research communities, and will facilitate ‘belonging’ of doctoral candidates. On the other hand, the programmes should have enough breadth for interdisciplinary training to broaden the doctoral candidate’s horizon and stimulate out-of-the-box thinking. Increasingly, programs are interdisciplinary which can lead to tension between the Faculty structure
and the interdisciplinary training. The structures need to be flexible – programmes have responsibility for monitoring progress, coordinating training and ensuring they are high quality world-leading while Faculties are responsible for ensuring that the research environment where they are embedded is excellent. Doctoral schools and programmes must be appropriately empowered and resourced to deliver this. Students belong to many different communities (school, programme, research group, professional network, international scholarly network etc.) and this needs to be acknowledged while being clear about the purpose of each. Thematic meetings, where doctoral candidates present their work to peers from the programme, are existing good practice to stimulate collaborations and communication.

Communication with students is a problem for all doctoral programmes everywhere (not just UH). Email correspondence is important but communication via events can help reinforce key messages. The existing platform for communication between the director of a doctoral school and the directors of the doctoral programmes are most useful to discuss current affairs and foster interdisciplinary activities and collaborations. Furthermore, this platform is well-suited for developing strategies for international orientation and recruitment.

4. The clarity and transparency of the division of labor between doctoral schools, doctoral programmes and faculties especially in terms of quality assurance (admissions, supervision, feedback mechanisms, criteria and assessment of doctoral dissertations)

Division of Labour

We found that there was ambiguity about the roles of the different actors: Doctoral schools, programmes, faculties, and the different co-ordinators. An example is that the programme coordinates the training but the faculty awards the degree and it was not clear to us why this was so. As the University of Helsinki is the institution formally awarding the degree, the University should ensure comparability of standards and of experience of the degrees awarded.

Coordinators are playing a key role in many ways. We were impressed that they were so committed, organised, and experienced but also some concerns were raised. They are educated to PhD level and this should be maintained as it gives them the required understanding and credibility for their work. Coordinators are extremely important in their role as a first person a doctoral student may turn if there is a conflict and a need to be able to speak confidentially to a neutral person. However, is their role attractive enough? Are there sufficient resources to do their job? It seemed to us that they are overloaded with insufficient time for strategic thinking. Can some administrative tasks be delegated? The division of labour with planners was not clear in all cases and this needs to be explored. Co-ordinators are vital to successful doctoral schools and programs and need to be valued and resourced appropriately (see further discussion on this in section 6.).

We believe there should be a senior academic with responsibility for doctoral education for the University. This is addressed in more detail in section 5 below. Academics provide
leadership as an extra to normal duties which but they also seem to have limited time for strategic thinking and could be supported in this role if the coordinators had more time.

**Quality Culture and Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance (QA) of doctoral education is rather complex but a crucial part of maintaining a quality culture. The assessment of the quality of doctoral training is linked to the assessment of research quality that is based on peer review and sensitive to disciplinary differences. QA also covers a range of processes, procedures and indicators that need to be developed by each university according to its institutional mission, strategies and priorities (such as processes related to recruitment and admission, supervision, feedback mechanisms, criteria and assessment of doctoral dissertations). LERU has produced a report¹ which recommends

1. Have clear expectations and principles
2. Maintain regular and independent scrutiny processes
3. Decide on and measure key indicators
4. Include regular feedback from all actors and promote enhancement processes on the basis of feedback

A key principle of QA is that all students must be clear as to the unit responsible for their training which at UH is the doctoral programme. The University should maintain a QA system, co-ordinated centrally, that has regular and independent scrutiny of each programme and this should be co-ordinated at University level to ensure common standards and sharing of good practice. Along with reports a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) should be developed to satisfy the Board of Directors of Doctoral Education that quality and commitment remain high.

It is increasingly important that the University support cross-disciplinary, and therefore often cross Faculty, supervision. This requires more consistency of processes which QA processes can achieve. It also requires supervisors being sympathetic to differences in research cultures and practices in different disciplines. QA cannot solve this but it can help alleviate it.

**Recruitment and Admission**

According to Salzburg II Recommendations of the EUA-CDE (2010), "structured programmes should develop recruitment strategies that correspond to their particular mission and profile. Recruitment strategies should be connected to explicit outcomes, identifying clear profiles of the candidates wanted. Such profiles should build on the parity of esteem of a range of different qualities and ensure equality of opportunity....

Admissions policies must be transparent and accountable and should reflect the research, supervisory and financial capacity of the institution. Admissions policies should also provide the appropriate flexibility in the choice of supervisor. Transparency and

accountability will be strengthened by having a single, identifiable place to apply, at least at programme level. Admissions should be based on a well-defined, public set of criteria. Institutions should accept risk in admitting doctoral candidates and allow them to demonstrate their potential through a monitoring system.

At the UH, until August 2017 admission of doctoral candidates to doctoral programmes was organized by faculties, since then it has been organized by University Services and their operational sector Teaching and Learning Services/ Admission Services (through planning officers). It seems that there is a certain tension, lack of understanding and unclear division of responsibilities between the Teaching and Learning Services/ Admission Services, and the Research Services/ Coordination of doctoral programmes unit (through coordinators). As doctoral education is always situated between „teaching“ and „research“, but is very different from the first two cycles as it is primarily research-based, the recommendation is to organize all key processes and procedures of doctoral education (including recruitment and admission) under a single operational unit within Research Services/ Coordination of doctoral programmes, even if it requires additional investment in human resources. This change would clarify and strengthen the role and responsibility of the Coordination of doctoral programmes unit towards doctoral candidates, research staff, supervisors and all other actors (with services under one umbrella). It is not good if the stakeholders in the field of doctoral education at the UH describe doctoral education at the UH as “a no man’s land which does not belong to anyone”, but it demonstrates that the structure is not understood and should be clarified and simplified.

The application process is clearly described on the website of the UH and gives the candidate a good overview of how to apply. Eligibility is linked to a masters degree (or equivalent), verified language skills and academic background. Before applying, candidates are encouraged to find the right supervisor and to look for funding. However this is not a pre-condition to being accepted.

It is not clear how deeply the research staff are involved in the admission process. According to the UH Summary Report, admissions are organized through University Services (Teaching and Learning Services and their unit Admission Services) at the level of the doctoral programmes. It is highly recommended to create more transparent institutional admission policies and define clear selection criteria and degree requirements.

More attention should be paid also to recruitment processes that should be related to missions and strategies of particular faculties and doctoral programmes and should clearly identify the profile of candidates needed for particular programmes/ projects. Faculties and potential supervisors should advise on recruitment but it should be coordinated centrally. Students were particularly concerned that recruitment processes were in some cases not transparent.
Supervision

Supervision plays a crucial role in the process of doctoral training. It is no longer only an individual relationship between a supervisor and a doctoral candidate (although one-to-one relationships are still important). It is increasingly a collective effort and an institutional responsibility. In order to improve the quality of supervision, there is a growing trend to provide various opportunities for the professional development of supervisors.

At UH doctoral candidates are encouraged to find their supervisors before applying for doctoral studies. It is not clear how the workload of supervisors is monitored. From the interviews during the evaluation process we heard that there were supervisors with 20 doctoral candidates at the time, which was rather surprising (we believe it is impossible to manage and properly supervise 20 candidates simultaneously).

Good practices from other countries show some inspirations. The institution (university/faculty) identifies its research priorities related to research as well as to doctoral education (which are closely related areas). It is then the supervisors (with their proper capacities – not only academic capacity, but also time related capacity) who announce a possible (and rather broad) doctoral project topic in the recruitment and application processes (the supervisors do not need to do it every year – it depends on their capacity – in some countries there is a limit on how many doctoral candidates a supervisor can manage at the time – usually it is 5 on average).

The key recommendation in the area of supervision is to create opportunities for professional development of supervisors (common in numerous European countries and institutions). It is obvious that there are some good practices already present at the UH, such as “Becoming a LUOVA supervisor” but it seems they are not well known and followed. The UH should develop an institutional instrument – a professional development strategy for supervisors that should target primarily all new supervisors. In addition, it would be good to create regular opportunities (even if it is once a year) for meetings of senior and junior supervisors as a platform for exchange of experience and practice.

It seems that there is no common (institutional) knowledge about the fact that the Faculty of Education of the UH has been offering and providing supervisory courses for some time. It is highly recommended to improve the marketing of the course within the university.

Another recommendation follows the “carrot and stick” approach: in addition to “sticks” (training for supervisors) it is recommended to start an annual competition for “the best supervisor” voted by doctoral candidates that could motivate the supervisors to improve their performance.

Monitoring of supervisors should be part of the institutional strategy (with a number of KPIs such as number of candidates per supervisor, success and completion rates of their

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Supervision agreements are an increasingly common way of achieving this as they make clear responsibilities and benefits. Students reported that some supervisors were reluctant to allow their students to attend courses or go to conferences. A supervision agreement would make such expectations clearer to all parties.

We also heard that there are considerable numbers of ‘sleepers’ who although still registered are no longer active. This could be solved by improving progress monitoring with clear criteria as discussed in the next section. The monitoring processes should aim to identify these (and ideally to de-register them although we recognise that at the moment this can’t be done in Finland) since they cause confusion and unnecessary use of administration time which should be spent on the support of active research students.

Feedback mechanisms and progress monitoring

Progress monitoring is a very important part of the whole process of doctoral education. According to the UH website, the study progress of postgraduate (doctoral) students is led by the Student Register (Decision of the University Senate 7 June 2006 and Rector’s Decisions No 234/2006 and 6/2011). “The monitoring system applies to all doctoral candidates enrolled at the University of Helsinki.”

Within the organization of doctoral education at the UH, there seems to be no clear and common institutional strategy for (6-month or annual) progress monitoring of doctoral candidates (their research results and other achievements) - the practices differ across different schools and programmes. The candidates in most doctoral programmes are supposed to write a regular report on their achievements in all areas of their work (publications, presentations, public outcomes etc.). However, this seems to be only a formal exercise without any serious consequences. The time to degree (TTD) is rather high in most programmes and drop-out data are not monitored and analysed properly. It is recommended to follow the data on TTD and drop-outs, analyse them regularly and introduce mechanisms of a „no go“ moment when the doctoral candidate is not allow to continue in doctoral studies if s/he does not show any progress. Data about the monitoring processes (how compliant each programme is with reporting expectations) should be monitored centrally through the new IT enabled system (either by The Doctoral Schools or better by the central Doctoral Office in Research Services) with regular reports being feedback to programmes.

Criteria and assessment of doctoral dissertation

Criteria for the quality of doctoral dissertation are discipline-based and must be defined by the community of researchers within each discipline. However, there should also be institutional guidelines on the dissertation formal format and the defence/examination process. At the UH, the examination of dissertations is organised by the faculty. The
problems appear when doctoral programmes cut across different faculties that might have different criteria, procedures and practices. The interviews showed that there is a tension between faculty councils and directors of doctoral programmes in this area. The roles/duties of all players involved in the process of final examination of the dissertation should be clarified, simplified and made more consistent – it seems there are too many players involved in the process. It would be more logical if this were the responsibility of doctoral programmes with overall responsibility for standards at University level.

5. The functionality of the management system and leadership of doctoral education at the University of Helsinki as a whole

As mentioned above one of our biggest concerns was the lack of a dedicated leadership position for doctoral education. We felt there is a need for a senior academic (possibly at the same time as other academic activities but with a significant fraction of time dedicated to this) with leadership responsibility for Doctoral Education (and could include postdoctoral training). Currently this is the Vice-Rector (Research) but this is too much for this role and so we recommend a senior academic (who would report to the Vice-Rector (Research)) be given this responsibility. This would provide clear academic leadership for early career research training. This model is very common now around the world (e.g. UCL, Stanford, Zurich among many others). There is a need for a strong advocate for doctoral education at University level which lies between education and research and is often overlooked.

This post would chair the Board of Directors of Doctoral Education which includes the Doctoral School heads. This would make a senior team responsible for doctoral education (and it could also be postdoctoral training as is common around the globe) with time to think strategically: how to place UH at the forefront of doctoral education worldwide, ensure that it is in line with UH strategy, determine the optimal size and shape of the doctoral cohort, and oversee the monitoring and implementation of quality and any planned change.

6. The bureaucratic load of the current structure of doctoral education and the organization of the corresponding administrative services

Much of the “bureaucratic load” of organizing the administrative services of doctoral education is a result of problems in coordination and division of labour. The complete reorganisation of administrative services as centralized “University Services” in 2016 to some extent added already existing ambiguity related to coordination. In particular, it seems that the division of labour between the doctoral programme coordinators and the planning officers or other administrators in faculties has been problematic in some programmes as was referred to earlier in this report. Also based on the feedback from doctoral students, the roles and tasks between the programme and faculty are not clear to students in all programmes. On the other hand, at the same time there are positive examples where the division of labour between the faculties and programmes has not created major problems, or that emerged problems have been solved. This is particularly the case with doctoral programmes hosting students only from just one faculty. Also the
division of labour between the doctoral schools and doctoral programmes seems to be relatively clear and unproblematic in most cases.

One of the frequently mentioned challenges creating unnecessary administrative “transaction costs” has been a high turnover rate of programme coordinators in some doctoral programmes. Therefore, providing greater level of stability in the key administrative positions should be one of the important development priorities for the future. Another challenge seems to be the too heavy workloads of programme coordinators, which also may have something to do with the high turnover. Having only 14.6 FTE coordinator staff for 32 doctoral programmes altogether (each having 24–430 doctoral students) we consider to be relatively low. Particularly there seem to be challenges when one coordinator is coordinating several programmes and in cases where a coordinator is responsible for larger doctoral programmes. Therefore, coordination challenges may be a result of lack of time that coordinators have to perform their work. This issue could be solved, not only by increasing the number coordinators, but also by redesigning the tasks assigned to them. For instance, it seems that the coordinators perform a lot of secretarial work which could be done more efficiently by assisting administrative personnel. In this way, coordinators’ time could be freed for more important and demanding tasks.

There is no “magic bullet” or “quick fix” which would solve all the coordination problems at once. Nevertheless, there are available options to solve the problem within the current organizational structures. For instance, already existing good practices in some programmes and faculties could be used more visibly as benchmarks of best practices from which others could learn; there are cases where programme coordinators and faculty planning officers are working closely together and sharing information seamlessly. In addition, at the school level, there are examples of important “liaison roles” (e.g. a single person playing a dual role both in the faculty and school/programme) which have been helpful in distributing information and ensuring smooth practices in decision-making.

Also more formal and structural solutions could be found. One of these would be to formalize distribution of responsibilities and division of labour between faculties and programmes by standardizing particularly those processes and practices (at the level of the whole university) which have been identified to cause the most serious coordination challenges (often related to admissions, curriculum, human resources, conferring the degrees, and quality assurance). This could be further backed by offering financial and other incentives for faculties aiming to support inter-faculty doctoral programmes and to provide shared interests between programmes and faculties.

Current plans of the university to introduce three types of roles/positions (senior advisors, service coordinators and doctoral education planning officers) assuming the tasks of current coordinators and working together with the student advisors and education planning officers of faculties should offer new possibilities to tackle the coordination challenges mentioned above. Again, we would like to re-emphasise in this context the vital importance of skilled and motivated coordinators.
7. The progress of studies, timely graduation and career development of all doctoral candidates

The intended duration of a full-time doctorate in Finland is four years. An important task of the doctoral school is to stimulate the timely completion of doctoral studies. A major hurdle to implement a more strict mechanism for timely graduation is that universities in Finland are not legally permitted to set limits on duration of doctoral studies. On the other hand, the newly implemented progress monitoring system ‘Thessa’ is a major step forward. This creates the possibility for implementing and following up milestones. Assuming that it is within the legal framework, we recommend that if yearly progress reports are missed, students can only register as ‘sleepers’. The monitoring of progress should be a robust and objective system.

Appointing a thesis advisory committee, composed of the supervisor(s) and other internal experts at the beginning of the doctorate, is crucial for quality assessment and will stimulate timely graduation. The whole committee should have access to reports and should be expected to sign them off.

A special point of attention is career development. Although unemployment of doctorate holders in Finland is currently only 3%, it was a matter of great concern of the Board of Directors of Doctoral Education. At present, the doctoral candidates drive the career development initiatives themselves. Although laudable, the doctoral schools should take initiatives as well in raising awareness of the plethora of job options available in Finland and elsewhere after finishing a doctorate by organizing (in a structured and recurrent way) company visits, job fairs, and testimonials. In addition, organization of courses in collaboration with non-academic partners (e.g. ‘business acumen’ together with a consultancy company, ‘clinical writing’ with a pharmaceutical company) or intersectoral internships, will help the orientation of doctoral candidates towards future employment. In this context, we also recommend the creation of a career centre with one or more career specialists with understanding of needs and various opportunities outside academia for early career researchers. This centre can help doctoral candidates with self-assessment and career guidance.

8. The coherence and transparency of funding of the salaried positions for doctoral candidates, continuous four-year funding for doctoral candidates at the beginning of their studies

In general, it seems that salaried positions (doctoral fellowships) are considered extremely important by all parties. For obvious reasons, doctoral students with salaried position tend to graduate faster and they often play a key role as additional teaching and research staff. Moreover, it seems that the operative appropriations to doctoral schools (appropriations for organising transferable skills courses and dissertation completion grants) have clearly supported the overall development of doctoral training in terms of transferable skills training and courses taught by international visiting scholars. The same applies to the travel grants which have provided financial opportunity for doctoral
candidates to present their research in international conferences and build their own international networks.

However, what seems to be the problem most commonly mentioned was the very limited number of doctoral fellowships (salaried positions) available. A look at the statistical data provided verifies this concern: For the four year funding period of 2018-2012, University of Helsinki is able to allocate only 78 new fellowship positions which are applied for by almost 1600 students (in 2016, 1571 students).

Despite the low number of salaried positions, their allocation process is, in general, considered fair. The process where the funding for 4-year positions is first distributed between the doctoral schools on the basis of their share of the degrees produced (within the last three years) and after which doctoral schools use their own extra criteria for making their final allocation of the fellowships is, according to most opinions, both coherent and transparent. However, some of the interviewees expressed a wish that the allocation criteria could be more performance driven, particularly by taking into account outputs/outcomes such as employability of the graduates, and publishing activity.

It seems that no special attention has been paid to align funding with strategic development areas of the University at any level of allocating the funds and therefore it does not play any meaningful role in allocation decisions of salaried positions. Mixed opinions were expressed whether more strategy-driven approach would be desirable. According to some views, academic freedom and merit-based evaluation of the candidates require that no specific areas of research or thematic topics should be prioritised over the others. However, according to other opinions, providing additional funding which would be earmarked solely for strategic areas of research would be desirable. We believe that there at least some of the funds should be aligned to strategic University priorities to help strengthen the international position of the University.

Given the current dynamics of allocating funding to salaried positions, the level of autonomy and therefore the strategic role of the doctoral schools is rather weak. If the university would consider giving doctoral schools a stronger and autonomous role in the future, the way appropriations allocated could be changed. This would mean that the salaried positions, travel grants, appropriations for organising transferable skills courses and dissertation completion grants would be pooled together as a one grant which would be then allocated to doctoral programmes according to the criteria developed by the school. For instance, doctoral schools could freely decide whether it would be wiser to grant two year positions over four year positions, or whether offering part time positions ranging from one year to four years would bring more value for the programmes than full time positions. Similarly, a school could decide whether it should invest more on travel grants rather than completion grants, or vice versa. Schools could also develop and provide new types of funding instruments fitting the needs of the doctoral programmes, including allocating part of the funding as “matched funding” for competitive projects.

Moreover, if the university would like to steer schools more strategically, it could provide competitive and earmarked funding on the top of the core funding which would stimulate
strategic orientation of the schools. Even though doctoral schools are not performance units like faculties, the University could consider if they could receive some kind of “funding premium” for their efforts in realising university strategy.

We would also like the University to encourage a wider set of sources of funding. There are many national sources but we did hear a comment that EU sources are considered too cumbersome to apply for. This may be true but success in European calls (H2020 as well as ERC) demonstrate that the programmes are internationally competitive as well as bringing in new funding and eligible foreign students. It seems that the incentives to seek external funding are not yet strong enough either for whole awards or for increased gearing (topping up partial awards).

9. The development of the strategic research areas of the UH and its academic units

A number of actions will allow the University develop its strategy to take its place as an international leader in doctoral education.

1. Properly resourced academic leadership roles.
2. More transparent finance: staff resources (academic and administrative), allocation of doctoral resources, budgets at Doctoral School level.
3. Clearer division of labour
4. Clearer incentives to encourage staff to develop programmes to support the strategic priorities of the University

At the moment we believe the Board of Directors of Doctoral Education is lacking the strategic tools necessary to consider the size and shape (numbers of programmes, and their size and mix). This makes it difficult to make decisions about whether to open or close (merge) programmes to meet agreed academic priorities. This needs to be done on clearly agreed criteria with challengeable metrics to avoid conflict. The Board should be able to (and empowered to or clearly empowered to advise the Rector where this is required) make these decisions with clear criteria sympathetic to disciplinary differences.

The Board needs to be clearly linked in to the highest decision making body of the University. This ensures that doctoral education clearly supports the goals of the University but also will make clear the key role that doctoral education must have in a world leading research intensive University.