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The purpose of the Ph.D. : a South African perspective

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Abstract

The article sets out to explore how Ph.D. programme leaders in South Africa view the purpose of the Ph.D., and how their views shape their responses to recent policies with regard to the Ph.D. It refers in particular to the vision of the Department of Science and Technology for a five-fold increase in the number of Ph.D. graduates by 2018, and to the drive to achieve racial and gender equity as part of the transition to democracy. The article is based on interviews with leaders of 16 doctoral programmes in nine top Ph.D.-awarding South African universities, representing a range of disciplines. The data indicate that there is a strong predisposition among Ph.D. programme leaders to perceive the doctorate largely as an academic pursuit. At the same time, some tentative changes are being seen on the ground in response to the needs of industry and business, to the various policies, and to a diverse student cohort. It seems that the Ph.D. attempts to serve several purposes within the single structure provided by the Higher Education Qualification Framework, sometimes in tense associations. Going forward, the article discusses two policy options available to South Africa. (HRK / Abstract

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