

The Doctorate - a tale of three cities

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In the 200-plus years of its modern history, the doctorate has moved from one small city to a much larger city and now, in the twenty-first century, finds itself 'unfit for purpose'. I want, in the provocative space of my presentation, to identify the two cities, the one that it has left behind and the one in which it is now ensconced, and to make suggestions as to the conditions of a doctorate that is more fitting for our times.

The old city, now abandoned, is the city of scholarship, in which a dissertation was expected to say something of significance and open the way to an academic trajectory, with a major monograph and a professorial chair and inaugural lecture ahead. The PhD injected velocity and promise into an academic career. Now, in an age of mass higher education, and with the incorporation of the academic world into 'knowledge capitalism', the doctorate has become a matter of the acquisition of a certain but disparate assemblage of research skills. No longer is the dissertation a unitary text with a flowing argument of substance.

Neither of these two cities of the doctorate can offer a proper home for the doctorate. The question therefore is this: What should we expect of the doctorate such that it may be fitting for the twenty-first century? What would be the conditions of its wellbeing, not least in a world of incessant challenge and of ecological inter-connectivity? Could a new city be designed for the doctorate? I shall offer some suggestions along these lines.



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