

Overall Comments

The Australian Council of Graduate Research welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion about the structure and future of higher education in Australia and strongly supports the premise of the discussion paper that higher education is “a key source of innovation for business and industry, central to Australia’s successful economic transition and a valuable export”.

We recognise that research and research training are not only core business for universities they are also the primary drivers of this innovation and economic agenda. It is therefore disappointing that there is little acknowledgement of research and research training in this paper.

As critical and influential components of most global ranking systems, research and research training activities affect institutional reputation, influence the recruitment of high quality coursework students and attract excellent academic teachers and researchers. This has direct consequences on the quality of program delivery and the financial sustainability of the institution. Teaching and research are not discrete and standalone endeavours in Australian universities. Any discussion of the future of universities must acknowledge and support the contributions made by both researchers and higher degree by research candidates to the success of our higher education system.

Excellence and Quality

In respect to Excellence and Quality the ACGR Inc acknowledges the importance of maintaining and boosting quality in both teaching and research and the need to provide information to prospective students to inform their university of choice decisions. Data on student satisfaction and experience also informs government and external sponsors’ investment strategies. We would like to draw attention to the need for adequate data on the graduate research student experience.

The ACOLA Review of Research Training concluded that currently available data are inadequate to determine the performance of the research training system and its value to Australia’s economic and social wellbeing. It states that:

The absence of this data prevents effective performance monitoring and evaluation and the development of institutional performance incentives. Data gaps could be filled by making changes to some existing data sources and collector methods, exploring opportunities associated with administrative data linkage, and introduction of a specialised fit-for-purpose longitudinal survey.

The ACOLA Review recommended that longitudinal data on HDR course satisfaction and career outcomes be collected and reported. The current Graduate Destination Survey does not achieve this.

ACGR therefore supports the proposal to enhance the QILT surveys to include longitudinal surveys of graduate outcomes and recommends that the graduate destinations of HDR candidates be considered separately especially to be assured that the current and previous work experiences of these candidates be factored into the analysis.

The current PREQ which surveys recent graduates has garnered useful insights into the experiences of those who successfully complete their degrees and should be retained.

Finally, in contrast to the Student Experience Survey (SES) for undergraduate students, the suite of QILT surveys does not include an instrument to assess the student satisfaction of current HDR candidates. This is a significant information gap and given the 4 to 8 year duration of candidature (full and part time) it is important that we have timely data on student satisfaction regarding key aspects of the current program delivery and candidature experiences. ACGR recommends the introduction of HDR specific version of the current Student Experience Survey and is very willing to play a role in this process.

The Review of Research Training and the Science and Innovation Agenda recognise the importance of industry engagement by HDR candidates but acknowledge the lack of data on the scope and levels of these types of activities. Both the current PREQ survey of graduates and the proposed HDR SES should be designed to collect this information.

Professor Denise Cuthbert, Convenor
On behalf of the Australian Council of Graduate Research Inc
www.acgr.edu.au