Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates:
The CRC Contribution to Research Training

Jason Fox and Nigel Palmer

CRCA Conference 2012: Collaborate Innovate
Adelaide, Australia May 16th, 2012

Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates

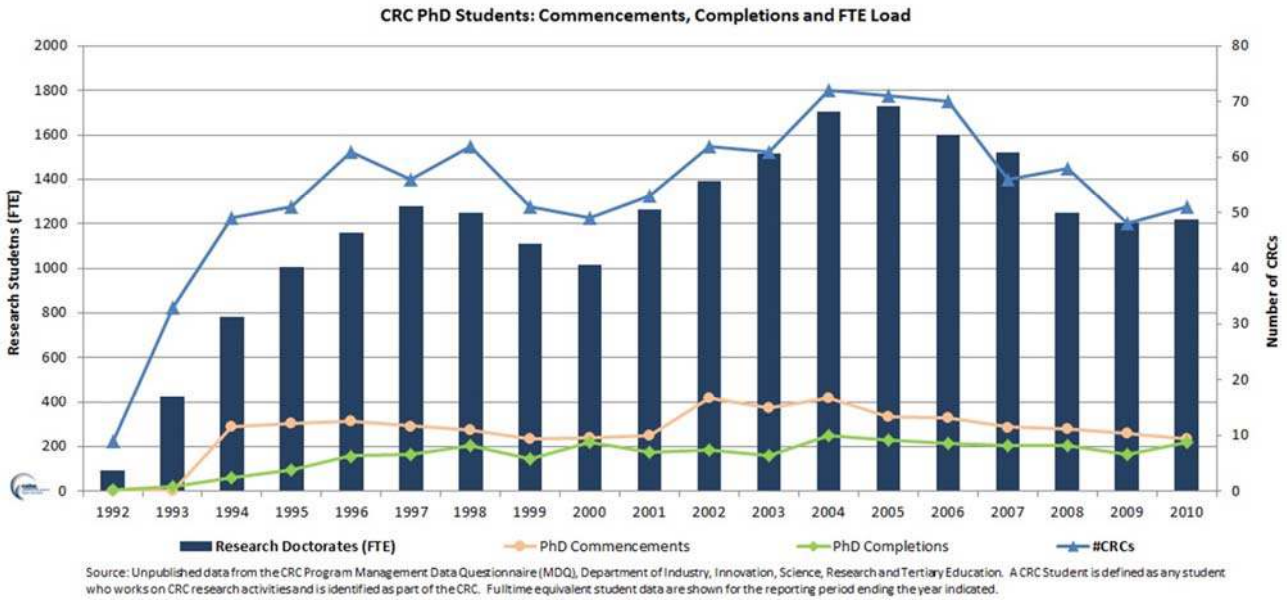
- Available metrics
- Opportunities for future development

cshe centre for the study of higher education
Melbourne Graduate School of Education
Shaping minds, shaping the world

Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates

- Available metrics
- Opportunities for future development

Metrics – preliminary findings



Source: Unpublished data from the CRC Program Management Data Questionnaire (MDQ), Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. A CRC Student is defined as any student who works on CRC research activities and is identified as part of the CRC. Fulltime equivalent student data are shown for the reporting period ending the year indicated.

Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates

How can the CRC contribution to research training be demonstrated?

What is the CRC 'value add'?

This could be through evidence of:

- Quality and value in what they offer
- Distinctiveness in what they do
- Sustainable quality outcomes over time

Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates

Dimensions and aspects of a quality research training environment

Some domains have emerged to broadly describe aspects of this environment that are *salient* for both students and supervisors and potentially *useful* in supporting successful outcomes (Palmer, 2012).

These may be summarised as follows:

Dimension	Aspect
Infrastructure and resources for research	Infrastructure, equipment, facilities and resources provided to support research, appropriate to enabling successful and timely completion.
Supervision and examination	Quality in supervision, and of the examination process.
Collegiality and intellectual climate	An open, collegial and productive learning environment, with support for doing and learning about research.
Skills and professional development	Opportunities for personal and professional development, including the development of skills and professional capabilities.
Administrative, student support and QA policies, programs and strategies	Administrative and student support services and programs. Policies, programs and strategies to promote and assure quality and to manage risk.

cshe centre for the study of higher education
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Shaping minds, shaping the world

Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates

Appendix I: On Quality and Standards in Research Training - Potential Dimensions, Aspects, Characteristics and Measures

Key: T - threshold; P - performance; I - input/process; O - output/outcome; C - criterion referenced; S - scaled/comparative; L - longitudinal; *regardless of status as a potential standard, performance measure or threshold requirement.

Dimension	Aspect	Characteristic	Activity type*	Indicator Type*	Criterion type*	Measure	Criterion
re and resources for research	Infrastructure, equipment, facilities and resources provided to support research, appropriate to enabling successful and timely completion.						
	Each institution should have a readily-accessible policy on resources for research doctoral candidates (DDoGS).	Adoption of minimum resource standards policy	T	I	C	Audit	Policy is in place
		Accessibility of minimum resource standards policy	P	I	C	Audit	Policy is accessible
		Enforceability of minimum resource standards policy	P	I	C	Audit	Policy is enforceable
		Implementation of minimum resource standards policy	P	I	C	Audit	Policy is appropriately implemented with good compliance
	Secure desk and study space (DQ).	Secure desk and study space specified in minimum resource standards policy	T	I	C	Audit	Secure desk and study space specified in minimum resource standards policy
		Reported accessibility of a suitable working space	P	O	S	Infrastructure Subscale PREQ03	Comparative
	Physical resources and access to research facilities including research infrastructure, laboratory or other facilities required across a range of disciplines (DQ).	Access to necessary facilities and equipment specified in minimum resources policy	T	I	C	Audit	Access to necessary facilities and equipment specified in minimum resources policy
		Reported access to necessary equipment	P	O	S	Infrastructure Subscale PREQ12	Comparative
		Access to computing facilities specified in minimum resource standards policy	T	I	C	Audit	Access to computing facilities is specified in minimum resource standards policy
		Access to necessary specialist software specified in	T	I	C	Audit	Access to necessary specialist

From: Palmer, N. (2011). On Quality and Standards in Research Training. Melbourne, Australia: Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE). Available at www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/people/palmer/Quality_and_Standards_in_Research_Training.pdf.
See also:
Palmer, N. (2010). Minimum Resources for Postgraduate Study 2010. Melbourne, Australia: Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations. Available at www.capa.edu.au.

Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates

Dimension	Aspect	Characteristic	Activity type*	Indicator Type*	Criterion type*	Measure	Criterion
Administrative, student support and QA		clear understanding of the requirements of thesis examination	P	O	S	Clear Goals Subscale PREQ19	Comparative
	Access to independent support & advice (DQ).	Postgraduate association able to offer independent advocacy and advice on a professional and confidential basis	T	I	C	Audit	Postgraduate association is able to offer independent advocacy and advice on a professional and confidential basis
	Appeal and dispute resolution processes.	Mechanisms to collect, review and respond to feedback	T	I	C	Audit	Mechanisms to collect, review and respond to feedback are in place
	Transparent policies and procedures.	Transparent admission criteria, procedures and processes	T	I	C	Audit	Admission criteria, procedures and processes are transparent and available to current and prospective students
		Transparent intellectual property policies and procedures	T	I	C	Audit	Transparent intellectual property policies and procedures are in place
	Transparent monitoring of the progress of each candidate via a structured process with significant milestones, and regular monitoring/reporting of progress throughout candidature, including prior to submission for examination (DDoGS).	Clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting student progress	T	I	C	Audit	Clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting student progress are in place
		Guidance to supervisors and students on monitoring progress and providing appropriate records	T	I	C	Audit	Guidance is made available to supervisors and students on monitoring progress and providing appropriate records
	Other outputs and outcomes	Overall satisfaction with the quality of the research higher degree experience	P	O	S	Overall satisfaction PREQ28	Comparative
		Completion rate	P	O	S	HEIMS	Comparative
		Attrition rate	P	O	S	HEIMS	Comparative
		Graduate contribution to knowledge through research outputs, including (but not limited to) theses, publications, exhibitions, grants and patents	P	O	S	ERA?	Comparative

From: Palmer, N. (2011). On Quality and Standards in Research Training. Melbourne, Australia: Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE). Available at www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/people/palmer/Quality_and_Standards_in_Research_Training.pdf.

cshe centre for the study of higher education
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Shaping minds, shaping the world

Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates

How can the CRC contribution to research training be demonstrated?

This could be through demonstrating:

- Quality and value in what they offer
- Distinctiveness in what they do
- Evidence of quality outcomes over time

- This need not duplicate all of the research training activities supported by university partners.
- The scoping study could provide the basis for more comprehensive benchmarking within CRCs.

Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates

What about completion times?

'Crude' calculations for research degree time to completion are also problematic, particularly when relying on completion rates derived from calendar year participation data.

As with completion rates, these data are also confounded by the higher rates of part time enrolment and variations in candidature typical of research students.

This kind of variability is not the problem – research shows a tendency for part-time research candidates to make more efficient use of candidature time (Bourke et al. 2005).

The key to reporting accurate completion times for CRC engaged research students lies in recording and reporting elapsed candidature time. This is potentially more complicated, and the benefits of recording this in parallel with unis would need to be weighed against the costs.

cshe centre for the study of higher education
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION Shaping minds, shaping the world

Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates

- Available metrics
- Opportunities for future development

Improving Postgraduate Completion Rates:
The CRC Contribution to Research Training

Jason Fox and Nigel Palmer

CRCA Conference 2012: Collaborate Innovate
Adelaide, Australia May 16th, 2012

cshe centre for the study of higher education
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Shaping minds, shaping the world