

Submission to the Review of Research Policy and Funding Arrangements for Higher Education

September 2015

The Council for Private Higher Education (COPHE) welcomes the Review of Research Policy and Funding Arrangements for Higher Education and the opportunity to make a submission.

In a submission to the Review of Research and Research Training being undertaken by ACOLA, COPHE described the research context for many private providers in higher education.

The key issue is that only universities and their students can access any Commonwealth support for research, irrespective of the individual or institutional capacity that may exist in the private higher education sector. Twelve non-university providers are currently accredited to deliver HDRs and employ research active academics. More are moving in that direction. It is a distinctive part of the culture of higher education.

The Review of Research Policy and Funding for Higher Education should take into account all opportunities for encouraging quality research and research training in the sector and not ignore capacity and opportunity in the private sector.

It is inequitable that:

- Only universities receive support for the training of research students even though the private sector has capacity and employs research trained academics.
- Only HDR students enrolled at universities can be granted scholarships.
- HERDC data are only collected from universities, despite data from the private sector institutions being readily available. It is considered by TEQSA.
- Private higher education providers are ineligible for ARC grants.
- University librarians with the responsibility for archiving HDR theses have declined PhD theses from outside the public universities. (Whether this is simply ignorance or deliberate is unclear).
- The inability of private providers to support their PhD students has encouraged something of a "brain drain" of students who are driven to public universities.

Nevertheless, private providers of higher education employ academics who are active researchers with the capacity to deliver research training and public policy needs to encourage their contribution.

The number of HDR completions in private higher education is small and support extended to candidates would mostly be to people who would have otherwise enrolled in a public university,

however the impact on the capacity of private institutions and their research active staff would be significant.

Key characteristics to emerge from our review of private providers, their research activity and capacity include:

1. An emphasis on *industry ready* graduates rather than *research* graduates;
2. An emphasis on *applied research* rather than *theoretical research* due to close relationships with industry and stakeholders;
3. That private providers have very strong industry and stakeholder connections to support research candidates in taking up employment opportunities and offering them a range of career options;
4. Consultation with stakeholders aligns their requirements with research graduate attributes in research training;
5. That HDR candidates tend to be fully employed and serving at the peak of their professional practice;
6. Delivery of other postgraduate coursework programs that include research components and require research active staff rather than HDR enrolment; and,
7. Negotiation of industry placements and collaboration around the development of research topics is part of the process.

Noting that the private higher education sector overall enrolls a higher proportion of students in postgraduate courses, have more mature age and has in general closer links with employers and stakeholders than the wider sector, we consider the most valuable “commercial” outcomes to be encouraged is the development of people who can take their research skills and be the drivers of innovation in all manner of enterprise.

This will best occur when employers and end users are linked with research candidates and engaged in the journey with them. One of our colleagues indicated that support for their research capacity from stakeholders came with the clear expectation that the research project would have impact and that closer consultation on implementation of the outcomes would follow completion.

This response outlines five key areas that need to be considered:

- 1) Factors impeding the commercialisation of research output in universities and private providers;
- 2) Measures of research funding;
- 3) Research training supervision;
- 4) Built-in model of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and;
- 5) Funding incentives.

1) What are the main factors impeding the commercialisation of the research output Australia's universities and private providers?

As noted above, a major barrier for private providers is the lack of any funding support for research training and collaborative research initiatives. This is a significant limiting factor on the development of PhD graduates and other research graduates in many disciplines that are a focus in the private sector such as education, theology, hospitality, design, law and business.

We also believe that:

- There is a lack of appropriate measures for research-industry engagement, the current focus is on measures of research;
- Research training methods are currently research specific rather than industry specific;
- More focus needs to be spent on Work Integrated Learning (WIL) placements that need to be embedded in both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees; and,
- There is a lack of funding incentives that rewards the outcomes of industry and research collaboration, driving further innovation.

2) Measures for Research Funding

The current measures for research funding [research income, publications, student completions, student load] do not measure industry engagement. Furthermore, the current focus is on fields of research rather than different forms of enterprise and innovative endeavour.

Some areas for consideration:

- Missing from the research measures are indicators for applied research which is a major focus of industry and in turn private providers.
- The Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) does not include any industry related items which is aligned to the Graduate Destination Survey;
- The PREQ does not record 'other' types of research funding, only APA or RTS funding.
- The University Experience Survey (UES) has the following indicators: 1) overall quality of educational experience; 2) teaching quality; 3) learner engagement; 4) learning resources; 5) student support; and 6) skills development. The indicator, Skills Development has the item, 'Development of work-related knowledge and skills' but it does not include industry placement or industry experience. We consider this a flaw. A version of the UES should be developed and implemented for HDR candidates.
- The Employer Satisfaction Survey (ESS) needs to further develop feedback from employers on graduates' generic skills, technical skills and work/industry readiness;
- Case-studies should be used a qualitative indicator for industry engagement; and,
- More work should be done on developing measures with an industry focus such as industry growth rate measures and industry benchmarks (such as those used by the Australian Tax Office). These research and industry measures must include private providers.

3) Research Training Supervision

We consider that for research to be made sustainable for the HE sector there needs to be the capacity to recognise industry specific research training supervision. Most of the research candidates within private providers are already working and choose projects relevant to their context and which they believe will have implications beyond the immediate.

For example, within theological education, research methods training are 'industry' specific and supervisors are mentors who are employed in the 'industry' where 'industry' is defined as Christian institutions. Another private provider has the college supervisor and employer involved in tailor making the particular course content and research project.

4) Built-in Model of WIL

To build capacity for industry and research engagement, students need to learn at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level, gain industry skills and have industry experience. Work-integrated learning (WIL), as outlined in the national WIL Strategy, is critical to building capacity for strong industry involvement and collaboration.

For WIL to be successful, it needs to be embedded throughout the degree, with industry involvement or perspectives introduced from the beginning and developed as a core component of teaching and learning. It is also critical that PhD candidates learn through a WIL component how to build innovation capacity in all manner of enterprises across the business, not for profit and government sectors.

5) Funding Incentives

Funding incentives should be increased to universities and made available to private providers to increase and improve engagement and collaboration with industry in order to improve and innovate in HDR training. Consideration should be given to expanding government-industry partnerships such as the research and development corporations (RDCs). For example, primary producers and the levy on their production to contribute to collective R&D for their sector, and the Australian Government contribute matching funding up to capped level. These industry partnerships should be further incentivised as they provide strong support in providing effective and innovative HDR training.

Recommendations for the Review of Research Funding

COPHE has put forward three recommendations for the review.

These are

1. Convene an ongoing roundtable of business, employer, research capable institutions and relevant Commonwealth portfolios to develop a coordinated cross-portfolio approach for developing measures to ascertain research-industry impact, rather than focusing on just research impact;
2. Contribute to national surveys [such as QILT initiative] together with the development of performance indicators to assess and monitor the extent of research student satisfaction and employer participants and industry impact; and
3. Recognize private providers for their capacity to contribute to research and industry training initiatives and extend funding incentives for good outcomes.

About the Council of Private Higher Education

COPHE is a peak body representing higher education institutions that are independent of Australian public universities. The membership is diverse and includes private universities and institutions operating from more than 80 campus locations across Australia. Members vary in student enrolments from under a hundred to a few thousand and include not-for profit and for-profit operations. Courses offered range from pathway diplomas through to bachelor and master's degrees, often linked to professions and employment. Some members also offer research degrees, including PhDs.

The private sector in higher education is recognized for the quality of student outcomes from a diverse range of smaller institutions that focus on the quality of teaching.

The diversity is also evident in the provision of international education. For COPHE, seeking policy that encourages all students to be global citizens is a priority.

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