Coursework in the PhD: Why, How, What and When?

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Overview

• Main findings

• Components of study
  – Interviews and focus groups (reported last meeting)
  – State-based workshops
  – Online survey

• Conclusion
Suggest that the contemporary Australian doctoral curriculum aims to enable candidates to:

– produce quality research

– be well rounded researchers who can clearly articulate the knowledge and skills that they have developed during candidature

– identify how their doctoral education supports future endeavours including employment, career development and contribution to society, and

– know the world and themselves as learners and researchers
Particular issues

• The term “coursework” appears to be inappropriate

• Suggest instead:
  – “Integrated doctoral curriculum”
  – “Structured programme” or
  – “Structured approach”
Curriculum issues mean that:

- Alignment was very important where courses align with:
  - milestones
  - expectations
  - administration
  - student systems
  - assessment and
  - graduate outcomes
State-based workshops

• 127 participants from 21 universities in five locations
• Differing views of “coursework”
• Why introduce coursework?
• The notion of readiness vs teaching
• Prior learning vs integration
• Aligning the doctoral curriculum

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Benefits of structured approach…

- Cohort building
- Developing advance disciplinary knowledge
- Developing generic skills
- Broader approaches to research
- Advanced research methods—not only related to supervisor's approaches
Provision

- Cross-institutional work-shopping/training
- Discipline-specific training
- Structured, semi-structured and unstructured provisions
- Student-organised training

- Key need: Clear mapping of what is available and development of learning plans
Issues

• Enrolment dates
• Placing research training before the PhD
• Avoid repeating work
• What say does the candidate have?
• “Taking away” from the project
• Funding
• Need to have staff with expertise e.g. research methods
Survey: 724 responses from five universities (six data sets)
Demographics

- 93% undertaking a PhD
- 62% female
- Almost 75% domestic
- 48% STEM and 52% HASS
- 36% entered with Honours, 27% c/w masters and 25% a research masters
- 66% of respondents in HASS ≥ 40 years of age
- 34% of the total in STEM areas ≥ 40 years
Employment

• Prior
  – 56% employed full-time (53% domestic and 63% international) – see figure

• During
  – Of those who were employed during candidature 60% were in Education

• Post
  – 48% international and 40% domestic expect to be working in Education
Employment (prior)

Field of employment prior to enrolment by domestic and international profile

- **Domestic**
  - Education: 194
  - Government: 113
  - Private: 95
  - Non-profit or other: 40
  - Self-employed: 39

- **International**
  - Education: 92
  - Government: 35
  - Private: 22
  - Non-profit or other: 5
  - Self-employed: 2
### Minimal-moderate opportunities to develop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Extensive (%)</th>
<th>Moderate (%)</th>
<th>Minimal (%)</th>
<th>Non-response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial skills related to research</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant writing</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working as part of a team</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching skills</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to prof practice</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Extensive-moderate opportunities to develop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
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<th>Moderate (%)</th>
<th>Minimal (%)</th>
<th>Non-response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent research skills</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge about designing and undertaking research</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills/knowledge in using appropriate research tools</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of specific discipline</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge substantive area</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>14</td>
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</table>
### What additional preparation do you need?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More publications</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching experience</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translate existing skill set to new job</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation/communication skills</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>567</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>232.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

There appears to be a strong move from the “PhD as research project” to PhD as an integrated curriculum which develops graduates who can:

– Produce research
– Contribute to society/the economy
– Reflect of what they have learned and “become”
– Articulate what they have learned
Disclaimer

Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

The views in this project do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.