PhD Candidates: Graduate Attributes and Leadership

Project Contact/Postdoctoral Research Fellow:
Dr Rachael Pitt (r.pitt@uq.edu.au)

Chief Investigators: Dr Catherine Manathunga, Prof Paul Boreham, Prof Paul Lant, A/Prof George Mellick, Prof Christa Critchley (retired)
Project Manager: Ms Laura Cox Research Assistant: Ms Jacqui Davis

The University of Queensland & Griffith University

Framing the Study

Aim: This study aims to examine graduate attributes within the context of Australian research higher degree training, specifically the PhD. In particular, the study posits that at the PhD level, graduate attributes should include those that prepare individuals for taking leadership roles in Australia’s research and innovation systems. The impact of industry involvement during the PhD research training phase has been examined as one potential pedagogical tool for the development of these attributes. The Australian Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) Program was examined, as it is Australia’s most concerted effort to bring together university, industry, and government involvement in the research training of PhD candidates.

A mixed-methodology has been utilised to determine the attributes required by recent PhD graduates (five-to-ten years post-PhD) and employers of recent PhD graduates:

- Literature reviews - graduate attributes, employability, leadership, management, research innovation
- Interviews – research leaders, CRC Education & Training Managers, Deans & Directors of Graduate Studies
- Surveys – recent PhD graduates including those involved with a CRC and sample from three Go8 universities, employers of recent PhD graduates within Australia
- Ethnographic case studies – one university, one research company, one government division

Lessons Learnt Along the Way

1. Determining which PhD graduates were involved with a CRC during their candidature is a complex task involving multiple potential definitions of CRC involvement.
2. Research training programs within CRCs vary markedly over time and across CRCs.
3. There are many initiatives examining graduate attributes but few at the PhD level.

Three Key Issues

1. Determining which findings to focus on.
2. Getting the mix right between formal (e.g., journal articles) and informal dissemination (e.g., networks and workshops) of the findings.
3. Translating the findings into recommendations that are relevant for policy (for government, university, and industry).

Progress

- The initial literature reviews have been collated.
- The scoping interviews have been conducted and the results used to inform the development of the surveys. The results from the interviews will be collated into a journal article.
- The survey of recent PhD graduates has been conducted with 1,171 responses (approx 34% response rate for those who received the invitation email). The results of this survey are being analysed and dissemination options considered. The survey of employers of recent PhD graduates will be completed by mid-July 2009.
- The ethnographic case studies will be conducted throughout late 2009.