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2016

# Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience: Good practice guide

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Australian Government



Office for  
Learning & Teaching



# ENGAGING POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AND SUPPORTING HIGHER EDUCATION TO ENHANCE THE 21ST CENTURY STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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## Good Practice Guide to Support the Postgraduate Student Experience

2016



<http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com>



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# PROJECT KEYWORDS AND DEFINITIONS

**Citizen Scholar** is 'a student who cares not only about gaining information and generating knowledge but one that is rooted in the reality of their context, problem oriented and interested in applying their knowledge for the betterment of a society.' (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016, p. 1)

**Diversity** refers to implicit and explicit understanding that each student is unique. It is the notion that all postgraduate students have individual learning preferences, backgrounds, needs, and capacities, which need to be respected and valued to provide excellence and equity in higher education (Morgan, 2013).

**First Year Postgraduate Experience** describes the totality of students' experience with, and transition to, their higher education. Consistent with previous definitions of the FYE, which largely focused on the undergraduate context, it is acknowledged that this transition is often affected by social, cultural, and situational factors, resulting in a multiplicity of first year experiences, with no common end-point to the transition (Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2006; Kift, 2009).

**Graduate Employability** means that higher education alumni have developed the capacity to obtain and/or create work. Furthermore, employability means that institutions and employers have supported the student knowledge, skills, attributes, reflective disposition, and identity that graduates need to succeed in the workforce (Hinchcliffe & Jolly, 2011, Holmes, 2013, Kinash et al., 2015a; Kinash et al., 2015b; Knight & Yorke, 2004; Yorke, 2006; Yorke & Knight, 2006).

**Loneliness** is defined as a lack of contact with families (personal loneliness); loss of networks (social loneliness); separation from preferred culture or linguistic environment (cultural loneliness) (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008).

**Learning Management Systems (LMS)** is a software application or web-based technology used to plan, implement, and assess a specific learning process. Typically, a learning management system provides an educator with a way to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance. A learning management system may also provide students with the ability to use interactive features such as threaded discussions, video conferencing, and discussion forums.

**Postgraduate Student Experience** describes the totality of students' involvement with, and engagement in, their higher education, and the prioritisation of learning within their broader contextual environment.

**Student Experience** can be defined as '...a phrase that encompasses not only the academic aspects of teaching, learning, and curriculum but also student lifestyle and extracurricular activities, academic advice, support and mentoring, and work experiences' (Benckendorff, Ruhanen, & Scott, 2009, p. 84).

**Student Voice** is conceptualised as students' feedback and perceptions about their learning as essential in determining what support needs to be offered to them (Andrade, 2006; Novera, 2004).

**Transition Pedagogy** is “a guiding philosophy for intentional first year curriculum design and support that carefully scaffolds and supports the first year learning experience for contemporary heterogeneous cohorts” (Kift, 2009, p. 2).

**Work-study-life balance** is defined as a complex triad in which students simultaneously manage their occupational roles and obligations (paid or volunteer/ internship based), academic commitments (both research and/or coursework), and personal life responsibilities.





# INTRODUCTION

## Introduction to Good Practice Guides to Support the Postgraduate Student Experience

This Good Practice Guide to support the Postgraduate Student Experience is part of a suite of resources developed during the 2014 Strategic Priority Project: *Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21<sup>st</sup> century student experience*, funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. This three part guide is primarily intended to provide recommendations that can be used for easy reference by the following stakeholders:

- ⊕ Postgraduate students seeking to maximise their engagement with their program of study;
- ⊕ Educators seeking to improve their curriculum and/or support structures in ways that enhance postgraduate student experience; and
- ⊕ University administrators/leaders seeking to embed institutional policies or frameworks that support educators and postgraduate students.

Most recommendations can be contextualised to apply to either postgraduate coursework or higher degree by research; however, some are specific to one group or the other.

For this reason, the Good Practice Guide has been conceptually separated into three main sections addressing either the totality of postgraduate experience or particular features of coursework or higher degree by research:

- 1 Supporting a quality postgraduate student experience;
- 2 Good practice for coursework postgraduate students;
- 3 Good practice for research postgraduate students.

The recommendations are extracted and synthesised from the primary resources of the project. More detail and information about the project methodology and recommendations can be found in those resources – they are:

- ⊕ The Final Report
- ⊕ Three Case studies:
  - (i) First Year Postgraduate Student Experience
  - (ii) Postgraduate Student Diversity
  - (iii) Postgraduate Student Career Development and Employability
- ⊕ Presentations, posters and discussion at the National Symposium for Postgraduate Student Experience hosted by the project in April, 2016.


All resources (including this three part Good Practice Guide) are available from the project's website:

 <http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com>


Additional exemplars of good practice are included as appropriate. These originate from published literature and a range of publically available sources and have been included to illustrate initiatives that are underway to improve the postgraduate student experience.

The sources include:


OLT Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning

 <http://www.olt.gov.au/awards>


Presentations at the 2016 National OLT Conference: Learning and Teaching 2030: Collaborating to shape the future of learning and teaching.

 <http://oltconference2016.com.au/index.asp?IntCatId=14>


Final reports and websites of projects funded by OLT Australian University Teaching including the Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards Framework


 <http://uniteachingcriteria.edu.au/resources/resources/>

Awards targeted at good practices within university learning and teaching including:


 The AFR Higher Education Awards

 <http://www.afrhigheredawards.com.au/>

 The Wharton Business School QS Stars – Reimagine Education

 <http://www.reimagine-education.com/>

Australian Council of Graduate Research

 <http://www.ddogs.edu.au/>



# PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The recommendations contained within the sections of this Good Practice Guide are sourced from synthesis of the results from the activities and literature searches conducted as part of the project. A summary of these activities is presented below to place the recommendations that follow in context. A full description of the activities including participant demographics is available in the Final Report, which can be downloaded from the project's website:

 <http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com>

## PROJECT PARTICIPANTS & DEMOGRAPHICS




Engagement with a total of 319 postgraduate students and 47 staff ( $N = 366$ ) was conducted through: student engagement breakfasts ( $n = 223$ ), face-to-face interviews ( $n = 82$ ), and face-to-face focus group ( $n = 61$ ).

## SUMMARY OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Project activities were managed in three phases that were progressive, in that themes from the first approach were used as probes in the second and so on into the third.

### 1 *Secondary Analysis of National Surveys*

Secondary analysis was conducted on the results of three surveys by a project team member under the employ of ACER. The surveys were:

-  Secondary Analysis of National Surveys
-  Student Engagement Breakfasts
-  Interviews and Focus Groups



## 2 Student Engagement Breakfasts

Seven student engagement breakfasts were held in six of eight States/Territories. Participants were targeted to ensure a diverse range of experiences with course and research-based postgraduate degrees, on-campus, online, and mixed-mode study, and professionally and non-professionally focused courses. Participants sat at self-selected tables of 4 to 7 students, and discussed five key questions at each of the engagement breakfasts:

- + What do the words 'student experience' mean to you?
- + What are the most valuable and/or key components of the postgraduate student experience?
- + What is well-done by your university?
- + What is not well-done by your university?
- + What strategies do you suggest to improve the postgraduate student experience

At each table, participants generated word clouds to illustrate their collective responses to each question using coloured markers on poster paper. The students were encouraged to illustrate emphasis through use of colour and size. Word clouds were subsequently analysed by team members to identify themes arising across all tables and breakfasts.

## 3 Interviews and Focus Groups

A total of 82 interviews (44 staff and 38 students) were conducted across all eight States / Territories. The staff interviews were conducted with higher education teaching academics, executive, and other leaders. Students and staff were each asked nine research questions (see Final Report for details of the questions asked). Interviews were fully audio-recorded and transcribed, with the transcriptions subsequently analysed by team members and research assistants until concordance of theme identification was reached.

There were a total of nine focus groups. Eight were comprised of postgraduate students and the other was comprised of staff. Each of the focus groups was facilitated by one of the Project Leaders and/or the Project Manager. The facilitator followed a semi-structured interview guide, which provided structure, yet also allowed the focus group conversation to be participant-directed. All of the prompts were derived from themes arising in the student engagement breakfasts. Two audio-recorders were used to ensure all comments were captured. The recordings were fully transcribed and a narrative analysis software tool (NVivo) was used for the thematic analysis, allowing identification of key words and themes from the transcripts

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART I - SUPPORTING A QUALITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The following recommendations are relevant to students enrolled in, or university educators/leaders involved with, postgraduate study whether they are coursework or higher degree by research.

Consistent with the major themes identified within the project these have been grouped as particularly relevant to first year students as they commence their studies; support services for students; support for employability; and those relating to students' social and/or networking activities or student representation within the university system.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS

### *First year experience*

- ⊕ Even before you have enrolled, ensure you are aware of and use the institution's preferred methods of communication, which are frequently the institution website and the institution email system. There is no value in missing important opportunities because you are only monitoring your personal preferred methods of electronic communication.
- ⊕ Participate in an induction event that focuses on the course, the lecturers, and the postgraduate students.
  - ➔ Do not make instant judgements, such as: 'orientation seems to be more for undergraduates, why am I being asked to attend'. Rather, take the initiative and find out which parts of orientation are likely to add value to your experience and then attend with an open and enquiring mind.
- ⊕ Early in your program, ensure you know the range of support services available to you and take full advantage of all they have to offer (see 'Support' section below).
  - ➔ Again, do not make instant judgements, for example: 'study supports seem to be more for undergraduates, why am I being asked to attend'. Rather, take the initiative to find out which study supports may add value to your experience. Being a postgraduate does mean performing more like a mature learner, it is a process of reflecting on your skill set (both strengths and weaknesses) and seeking opportunities to develop these.
- ⊕ Work-life-study balance is arguably the most significant challenge you will face. Remain cognisant of this, and take proactive actions, such as;
  - ➔ planning before you commit;
  - ➔ developing interpersonal skills;
  - ➔ obtaining a mentor to provide guidance – this could be a senior student, a recent graduate, or a trusted advisor;
  - ➔ making careful, considered and planned decisions about workload, percentage enrolment, and social activities;
  - ➔ remembering that social activities are a vital component of success.

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART I - SUPPORTING A QUALITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

## *Social/networking*

- + Get to know your fellow postgraduate students.
- + Participate in social networks, forums and / or seminars.
- + Form study groups that are face to face, online, or combination of both.
- + Engage with postgraduate students who are not from your primary cultural group.
- + Study in teams with other postgraduate students. Establish networks while you are in university for future contacts, connectors and clients.

## *Student representation*

- + Participate in a Postgraduate Student Association (or equivalent).
- + Use your student voice. Let the institution know that you are there and have concerns and ideas to contribute to the discourse about your student experience. Always approach these discussions with a value add and action orientated intent.

## *Student support services*

- + Introduce yourself to the university librarian(s) and seek their assistance (e.g., Endnote, research literature synthesis, navigating research data bases, library catalogues, journals and e-journals, library guides, and theses).
- + Be proactive in seeking assistance from Academic Support personnel in your university (e.g., academic writing, referencing).
- + Be proactive in seeking assistance from Information Technology (IT) specialists that are employed by your university to assist you with IT related matters.
- + Be proactive in seeking assistance from Blended Learning design specialists that are employed by your university to assist you with Learning Management System (LMS) related matters.
- + Develop confidence in navigating and maximising the potential of the Learning Management System in your university to enhance your learning.
- + Just because something is labelled as a “generic” skill, do not assume that means it is a low level skill just for undergraduates. Be aware that even the most successful individuals sometimes contract professional “coaches” to provide guidance in developing interpersonal skills and skills associated with task orientation and time management.

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART I - SUPPORTING A QUALITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

## *Student support services cont ...*

- + Actively look for and seek advice on finding the right balance in your approach to learning. Yes, postgraduate is a higher level qualification than undergraduate but that does not mean you need to (e.g., do it all on your own in order to meet the requirements of the program. Self-directed learning does not mean it is all up to you; rather it is a collaborative approach to identifying the learner's strengths and weaknesses with respect to the programs outcomes and then working constructively on building strengths and developing capacity in areas of weakness.

## *Employability*

- + Undertake industry-related projects when you have a choice of assessment modes.
- + Find out about internships and work experience your university offers and do them.
- + Engage in extra-curricular activities, particularly leading student societies and/or contributing to your university by being the postgraduate student representative on university committees.
- + Get to know your professors and make sure they know you for future job leads.  
Go to optional workshops, particularly if they are skills-based.
- + Be as interdisciplinary as possible. Ensure that you obtain a broad-base of study and knowledge.
- + Differentiate yourself and understand where you 'sit' in the world of research and/or practice.
- + Self-identify and present yourself as a citizen scholar.
- + Be confident and proud of your discipline of study.
- + Practice telling employers about all of the transferable skills you have gained through postgraduate studies, like spoken and written communication, analysis and team work.
- + Do your research about target employers and positions and be able to express why you want *that* job.





# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART I - SUPPORTING A QUALITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

### *First year experience*

- ⊕ Specifically plan, develop, and implement orientation activities and processes that support the diversity of postgraduate students, inclusive of online students. Details of orientation programs should be specifically communicated to postgraduate students, clearly identifying the benefits for these programs.
- ⊕ Ensure that there are opportunities to access information and support for postgraduates with diverse backgrounds.
- ⊕ Be cognisant of the structure and scheduling of postgraduate orientation programs to ensure students can access the information and support they need, without the distraction or annoyance of less relevant information. Only take the time required to achieve the objectives. Ensure that orientation only takes the time that is needed to achieve its objectives.
- ⊕ Early in the program incorporate more sophisticated generic skills like managing uncertainty in student supports programs and clearly communicate the benefit of such skills to postgraduate students.
- ⊕ Develop a communication strategy about the support programs to ensure postgraduate students are able to understand the intended value and applicability of the program to their study.

### *Curriculum/program strategies*

- ⊕ Facilitate postgraduate learning opportunities and engagement using blended learning approaches.
- ⊕ Ensure that all postgraduate students can access and use the relevant features of the Learning Management System (LMS).
- ⊕ Maximise the potential of the LMS to engage your postgraduate students and extend their learning.
- ⊕ Create activities / projects that require online students to interact with each other near the beginning of your course/unit.
- ⊕ Develop a culture of collaboration rather than competition in your postgraduate classrooms.
- ⊕ Seek feedback from your postgraduate students about how you can assist them in their learning.

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART I - SUPPORTING A QUALITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- + Strategise, develop, and implement plans to not just manage the diversity of postgraduate students in your courses and programs, but also seek avenues for this diversity to enrich the experience for all participants.
- + Explicitly identify the mode of study for each course, and provide mechanisms to explain this to students as well as the other types of study modes identifiable within the institution. Adopt common language and, as much as possible, common structures and processes within Faculties and Schools in the same institution and (if possible) across the institution.
- + Consider ways in which student support services can be embedded in the curriculum.
- + Develop opportunities for cross program engagements that not just provide opportunities for socialisation but importantly provide opportunities for skill development in learning and working in multidisciplinary teams and environments.
- + Look for technology based solutions to minimise isolation felt by online students. Create program time and space in learning management systems, for online students to share experience, preferably without the gaze of the educator.

## *Social/networking*

- + Facilitate opportunities for postgraduate students to engage, work, and/or collaborate across cultural groups.
- + Facilitate postgraduate students to network with alumni and potential future employers .
- + Seek multiple ways to stimulate a sense of belonging for your postgraduate students.
- + Invite postgraduate students (and particularly international postgraduate students and their families) to your home for a meal (i.e., pot luck-bring food to share).
- + Develop opportunities for cross program engagements that not only provide opportunities for socialisation, but also important skill development in learning and working in multidisciplinary teams and environments.
- + Be conscious that although sometimes poorly attended, face-to-face events are often highly valued by students. Remember that often lack of attendance can be due to inappropriate scheduling and/or lack of communication about the purpose and value of interaction, rather than an intrinsic lack of student interest. Consider using the student voice to identify and explain the value.

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART I - SUPPORTING A QUALITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

## *Student support services*

- ⊕ Educators and learning support staff develop collaborative ways and means to explicitly develop and/or identify support resources that are deliberately tailored to the needs of diverse postgraduate students in diverse modes of study and strategically communicated to each student group. Increasing the accessibility of existing and new support resources by tailoring the communication to diverse postgraduate students groups about the values, applications and outcomes of these resources is likely to enhance the experiences of educators and students alike.
- ⊕ Specifically identify the study support requirements of your postgraduate students and plan, develop, implement appropriate support programs.
- ⊕ Increase access and acceptability of support programs by developing flexible support programs that can be accessed “just in time” with respect to the individual student needs.
- ⊕ Acknowledge and communicate that work-life-study balance can be a concern for postgraduate students.
- ⊕ Develop flexible and accessible supports tailored to these learners who may already have significant education and life experience.

## *Employability*

- ⊕ Embed employability in the everyday postgraduate curriculum and assessment.
- ⊕ Make employability and the concept of *citizen scholarship* explicit to postgraduate students.
- ⊕ Design project-based work for postgraduate students.
- ⊕ Actively engage with industry throughout postgraduate studies to facilitate practical experience.



# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART I - SUPPORTING A QUALITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY LEADERS

### *First year experience*

- + Facilitate informative induction programs and regular professional development activities that enhance the transition, learning and engagement experiences of postgraduate students.
- + Develop enabling language and discourse, and genuinely flexible delivery, to ensure the accessibility of study support programs to students. Remember that generic skills are actually sophisticated and whilst requiring foundation in first year should be scaffolded throughout the student experience. After all, these are often the skills that experienced professionals encounter in continued professional development programs, usually for a good reason.

### *Curriculum/program strategies*

- + Facilitate opportunities for cross-disciplinary activities that encourage postgraduate student engagement.

### *University processes/administration*

- + Interrogate feedback from all stakeholders about the organisation's administrative processes. If positive feedback seems to be related more to people than process, fix the process.
- + Develop flexible systems and processes enabling all aspects of administration to be completed after hours and off-campus.
- + Ensure administrative requirements are clearly communicated, and that necessary information is accessible, understandable, and meets the applicant/student needs.
- + Lobby for an investigation into the utility of current testing methods of English language proficiency with respect to testing for readiness for tertiary and, in particular, postgraduate tertiary studies.
- + Lead discussion of the appropriate fulltime load for international students for whom English is not their first language.

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART I - SUPPORTING A QUALITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- ⊕ Review institutional language support centres and study support programs to assure services and supports are:
  - ➔ appropriate for the diverse mix of students;
  - ➔ robust and sufficiently tailored to meet requirements for English language proficiency across the diversity of postgraduate offerings;
  - ➔ clearly and consistently communicated to all students;
  - ➔ safe, flexible, and accessible;
  - ➔ appropriate and accessible for on-line students.
- ⊕ Identify the study supports necessary for the postgraduate student experience to ensure a transformative experience that enables students to reach high-level postgraduate outcomes.

## *Social/networking*

- ⊕ Facilitate opportunities for international students to engage socially and academically with domestic students: presentations, performances or discussions.
- ⊕ Provide suitable facilities for postgraduate students to meet in and talk with peers (e.g., kitchen facilities, reading area).

## *Student representation*

- ⊕ Facilitate postgraduate student representation on key university research, learning and teaching and academic boards/committees.

## *Student support services*

- ⊕ Provide Academic Support Services that postgraduate students can access during the day and evening.
- ⊕ Provide Blended Learning design and Information Technology specialist personnel who can provide academics and postgraduate students with support as required.
- ⊕ Ensure that the online (LMS) infrastructure is accessible and reliable for academics and postgraduate students both domestically and internationally.
- ⊕ Facilitate professional development and training sessions that enhance postgraduate students' skills and capacities to engage successfully with the LMS and other aspects of online learning.

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART I - SUPPORTING A QUALITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

## *Employability*

- ⊕ Explicitly identify postgraduate students in the context of employability within university-wide policy and strategic plans, and involve postgraduate students (student governance) in the design and development of services and supports.

In addition to these recommendations that were synthesised through the project, discussion at the National Symposium for Postgraduate Student Experience gave rise to a series of **Action Recommendations for Executive Leaders of Higher Education**.

The symposium was attended by 107 delegates from 28 Australian universities and three national organisations (*Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, and the Australian Council for Educational Research*)

These Action Recommendations were discussed during the final session and subsequently circulated to delegates for comment. Delegates expressed the opinion that implementation of the strategies outlined in the nine recommendations would greatly enhance overall postgraduate student experience and so contribute to maintaining the quality of Australia's higher education sector.



# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART I - SUPPORTING A QUALITY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

## THE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE LEADERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION ARE:

- 1 Create regular national forums for cross-university and cross-discipline postgraduate conversations.
- 2 Create tools and dissemination vehicles for national data collection on the postgraduate student experience (coursework and research considered separately and together).
- 3 Across the country, establish positions with responsibility and authority for coordination of postgraduate coursework programs at the school/faculty/university level as appropriate. This action requires support and training and must be valued and recognised through such means as protected time and recognition in workload/promotion criteria. This action is also intended to establish feedback/action channels for coursework students.
- 4 Create and disseminate a national 'value postgraduates' campaign. As part of this campaign, advance a shared understanding on a national basis, of 'postgraduate student experience.' Furthermore, establish clear and agreed indicators of postgraduate 'success.'
- 5 Implement supports and strategies at the university level that are customised to address postgraduate employability needs and engage a national campaign to heighten opportunities for graduates from postgraduate degrees.
- 6 Improve national policies and practices regarding universities as employers. Put more mechanisms into place to support PhD students in the transition from student to academic. Advocate for improved working conditions for early career academics (i.e., longer contracts, reduced workload, improved access to resources and services.)
- 7 Make postgraduate student experience a priority within universities and nationally. Extend equitable and appropriate supports to postgraduate students (as to undergraduate students).
- 8 Create (and support postgraduate students to achieve and sustain) authentic governance positions (nationally and locally). Furthermore, engage an equity campaign so that ATSI students achieve governance positions that are not limited to ATSI portfolios.
- 9 Foster greater senses of community within universities and on a national basis so that postgraduate students have increased levels of social supports throughout their studies and into their graduate experiences.



# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART II – GOOD PRACTICE FOR COURSEWORK POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

The following recommendations are particularly relevant to students enrolled in or university educators/leaders involved with coursework postgraduate courses. These recommendations should be read together with those addressing the needs of all postgraduate students in Part I of this Good Practice Guide.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS

- + Undertake industry-related projects when you have a choice of assessment modes.
- + Study in teams with other postgraduate students. Establish networks while you are in university for future contacts, connectors and clients.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS/UNIVERSITY LEADERS

- + Develop, enunciate and enact the value proposition for postgraduate programs, particularly postgraduate coursework programs.
- + Identify the place for postgraduate coursework students within the institution, the sector and within debate about the reform and enhancement of the sector.
- + Develop and embed best practice frameworks to support the postgraduate coursework student experience across the sector, particularly the first year student experience.
- + Investigate the dimensions of a fulltime study load for postgraduate coursework programs and develop recommendations for fulltime load.
- + Explicitly identify the mode of study for each course, and provide mechanisms to explain this to students as well as the other types of study modes identifiable within the institution. Adopt common language and as much as possible common structures and processes within Faculties and Schools in the same institution and if possible across the institution.


# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART II – GOOD PRACTICE FOR COURSEWORK POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

*Prior reports addressing good practice in postgraduate courses:*


- 1 **Reid, I., Rennie, L. & Shortland-Jones, B. (2005). *Best practice in professional postgraduate coursework*. Australian Universities Teaching Committee.**

This report provides an overview of best practice approaches to postgraduate coursework programs in the fields of Health, Business and Education. The report can be retrieved from:

 [http://www.web.uwa.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/494334/best-practice-in-professional-postgraduate-coursework.pdf](http://www.web.uwa.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/494334/best-practice-in-professional-postgraduate-coursework.pdf)

- 2 **Hamilton, J., Thomas, M., Carson, S., & Ellison, E. (2014). *Good practice report: Postgraduate research and coursework degrees*. Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.**

This report provides an overview of grants and fellowships funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching and its predecessor bodies on postgraduate coursework and research degrees. The report can be retrieved from:

 <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-good-practice-report-postgraduate-research-and-coursework-degrees-2014>

*Individual institution initiatives:*

Two examples of individual initiatives are included – one at a whole of institution level and one at an individual discipline level.

- 1 **La Trobe University Postgraduate Help**

This initiative provides support for postgraduate students through individual consultations, workshops and a range of other services tailored for postgraduate coursework or Higher Degree Research (HDR) students. To learn more, visit:

 <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/learning/postgrad-help>

- 2 **University of Queensland MBA Career Resource Centre**

The Career Resource Centre provides individual career advice, and is responsible for the delivery of specialised events, programs, and workshops designed to prepare students for an increasingly competitive, global job market. For more information, visit:

 <https://www.business.uq.edu.au/mba-career-resource-centre>

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART III: GOOD PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

The following recommendations are particularly relevant to students enrolled in or university educators/leaders involved with higher degree by research (HDR) postgraduate courses. These recommendations should be read together with those addressing the needs of all postgraduate students in Part I of this Good Practice Guide.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS

- ⊕ Develop confidence to discuss supervision matters with your supervisor in a timely manner (e.g., more or less regular meetings; more transparent feedback).
- ⊕ Attend conferences and present your project and/or research work. Particularly try to participate in international conferences.
- ⊕ Try to get published while you are still a student.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS/UNIVERSITY LEADERS

- ⊕ Educators and leaders are encouraged to think of other service type roles, apart from teaching, that HDRs could contribute to such as a scholarship involving responsibility for managing a range of HDR student engagement activities.
- ⊕ Consider implementing and refining existing frameworks for multiple supervision of HDR students to meet the needs of students and programs.
- ⊕ Facilitate the appointment of a supervisor(s) (and the related process) that will maximise the postgraduate students' learning, research and writing capacities.
- ⊕ Rethink scholarships for HDR students to expand on opportunities to contribute to academic work, such as sessional teaching, by including roles associated with developing and managing student network and engagement activities.



# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART III: GOOD PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

*Prior reports addressing good practice in postgraduate courses:*


### 1 Graduate Research Good Practice Principles, Australian Council of Graduate Research

A statement of good practice principles for the development of graduate research programs developed by the Australian Council of Graduate Research. To retrieve, visit the following link:

 [http://media.wix.com/ugd/f39714\\_e846281b7f0d405284613846baa86377.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/f39714_e846281b7f0d405284613846baa86377.pdf)

### 2 Hamilton, J., Thomas, M., Carson, S., & Ellison, E. (2014). *Good practice report: Postgraduate research and coursework degrees*. Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

This report provides an overview of grants and fellowships funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching and its predecessor bodies on postgraduate coursework and research degrees. To view the report, visit:

 <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-good-practice-report-postgraduate-research-andcoursework-degrees-2014>

*Individual institution initiatives:*

A number of universities have recognised that many HDR students will seek employment in academic roles when they complete their studies and have developed programs to enhance employability – either through general programs or programs designed to improve teaching skills. Links to those programs are below:

### 1 Employability in Europe: Enhancing post graduate complementary skills training

The gaining of complementary skills is one of the aims of the European Higher Education Area as it promotes training to ensure that all graduates have the skills necessary to enter the global job market. Whilst PhD training in the UK has seen the inclusion of transferable generic skills, in addition to subject-specific, such training is not common in all European universities. There often exists a lack of understanding amongst academics supervising PhD studies as to the importance of such skills to the future employability of their students. The Marie Curie Initial Training Network DITANET (Diagnostic Techniques in Particle Accelerators) aimed to improve the employability of researchers by providing both subject specific and generic training from a variety of academic and industry trainers. In this contribution, the training concept is presented and student feedback summarised as a means of understanding the benefits, or otherwise, derived from such trainings. To learn more about this initiative, visit:

 [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/psc\\_159\\_0.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/psc_159_0.pdf)

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE PART III: GOOD PRACTICE FOR RESEARCH POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS


## 2 La Trobe University Postgraduate Help

Support for postgraduate students through individual consultations, workshops and a range of other services tailored for postgraduate coursework or Higher Degree Research (HDR) students. For further information, visit:

 <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/learning/postgrad-help>

## 3 Macquarie University Genes to Geoscience Research Enrichment Program

One key aim of the Genes to Geoscience Research Enrichment Program (GGREP) is for researchers to encounter new research questions and possibilities across a wider range of fields than just in their own lab. They will then be better prepared to take the lead as new cross-discipline fields emerge. The second key aim is for researchers to learn useful skills, at higher standard and more efficiently than by self-education. To learn more about this program, visit:

 <http://www.mq.edu.au/research/research-centres-groups-and-facilities/secure-planet/centres/centre-for-genes-to-geoscience/research-enrichment-program2>


## 4 Queensland University of Technology Teaching Advantage Program (2015)

Teaching Advantage (TA) is a professional development program for advanced PhD students at Queensland University of Technology. The program builds skills in teaching, unit coordination and forging an academic career through a series of interactive workshops. The workshops include in-depth activities and guest presentations to illustrate practical and relevant teaching, coordination, and career-building techniques. This program is designed to fill the teaching experience gap between part-time tutoring while undertaking a PhD, and completing an Early Career Academic Development program once candidates secure their first Lecturer role. To learn more about this program, visit:

 <http://doctoralteaching.org/teaching-advantage-program/>

## 5 Curtin University Enhancing learning in the laboratory: identifying and promoting best practice in the professional development of demonstrators.

A Laboratory Demonstrators Professional Development Programme (LDPDP) was developed to enhance the teaching skills of laboratory demonstrators. The benefits are twofold – an enhanced learning experience of students in laboratories and enhanced professional skills of demonstrators who are often HDR students. To learn more about this initiative, visit:

 <http://www.olt.gov.au/olt-national-teaching-fellow-mauro-mocerino>


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For further information & resources:

 <http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com/>

THANK YOU TO:

The many postgraduate students and staff (366 from 26 Australian universities) who so generously volunteered their time and energy contributing to this student experience research.

 WE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR INITIATIVES!

When researching the contents of the good practice guides, we came across so many great exemplars of good practice. Unfortunately, there was just not enough room to fit them all. As such, we would like to take the opportunity to invite you to let us know about your wonderful initiatives and programs that support and/or enhance the postgraduate student experience. With your permission, we plan to create an online catalogue of domestic and international initiatives on our project webpage.

To let us know, please email:

[olt@bond.edu.au](mailto:olt@bond.edu.au)



