

In M. Kiley & G. Mullins (Eds.) (2002). *Quality in Postgraduate Research: Integrating perspectives*. CELTS, University of Canberra.

PART-TIME RESEARCH STUDENTS: THE ‘RESERVE ARMY’ OF RESEARCH STUDENTS FOR UNIVERSITIES

Terry Evans

Faculty of Education

Deakin University

AUSTRALIA

Email: tevans@deakin.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Over the past twenty years, in Australia, there has been a steady growth in the numbers of part-time research students. However, they have generally been invisible in government policy on research training, and have rarely been the focus of specific treatment in universities, where the full-time scholarship-holder is taken as the norm. Yet, these are people who often undertake their research in their workplaces on problems germane to their work. They do so with relatively less ‘drain on the public purse’ and they are well placed to ensure their research has effect.

This paper suggests that this ‘reserve army’ of research labour—part-time research students—could benefit from the integration of the perspectives that have driven other aspects of adult education with those, often economic rationalist perspectives, that have driven research training policy. In this way, government policymakers may appreciate that this ‘reserve army’ provides good value, and universities may shape their research training policies and practices to provide support, infrastructure and supervision that matches the needs and contexts of part-time students, and which facilitates ‘technology transfer’ and links between universities and industries and the professions.

INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on various sources of ‘inspiration’ that have culminated in my concern to bring the matter of part-time research students into the discussion of *Quality in Postgraduate Research*. It is important to note the sources of inspiration at the outset, partly to acknowledge my intellectual debts, and partly to illustrate that they reflect, as the Conference theme invites, a degree of integration of perspectives. These sources are:

- For a long time I have been persuaded by colleagues from Deakin and elsewhere (especially my late friend Alistair Morgan of the UK Open University (for example, Morgan, 1993, 1997) and also Daryl Nation of Monash University (Nation, 1991) that approaches to teaching, supervising and supporting adults in their learning need to take account of both the personal and social contexts in which the learners are located, and that social (and even psychological) theories from outside of education need to come to bear on our theory and practice. These ideas were grounded in the teaching of adults in what we would call ‘courses’ and were not related to the matter of research students, and I have taken the step into doctoral pedagogy.
- Another source of inspiration to me has come from my own work as a supervisor and manager of postgraduate research in the Faculty of Education at Deakin University. About eighty percent of our doctoral students are part-time and virtually all of the students have been or are educational practitioners of one kind or another. Over the past decade I have encountered many of our doctoral graduates who are very impressive people, whose research gets published, some have a profound impact in their work-places, and a few (especially international students) even affect national and international practices.
- Almost all of these graduates are employed, often after graduation they with make job changes or obtain promotions as a result of their doctorates. They are not ‘doctored’ washers-uppers of dishes or taxi-driving PhDs, they are doing important jobs for the community and/or economy.
- The Government has inspired me too! The West Report (West 1998) followed by the Green and White Papers (Kemp, 1999a, 1999b) and then culminating in the implementation of the Research Training Scheme and its various monitoring (especially the PREQ and Completions (Martin, and others 1999)) and quality assurance imperatives, are impressive sources. However, I was often inspired by what I saw as the flaws and absences.

In M. Kiley & G. Mullins (Eds.) (2002). *Quality in Postgraduate Research: Integrating perspectives*. CELTS, University of Canberra.

• Finally, I was inspired by an invitation, from Erica McWilliam and Richard James, to write an article for a forthcoming special issue of *Higher Education Research and Development* on the topic of *Doctoral Training and the Knowledge Economy* (Evans, 2002). This task drove me to obtain data on part-time students and to formulate an argument about their invisibility and potential in relation to the knowledge economy. This paper draws on this article for some of its argument.

Together, these matters lead me to believe that any consideration of *Quality in Postgraduate Research* needs to take account of the significant and growing proportion of part-time postgraduate research students¹ and their personal, social and professional contexts. The contemporary concerns for Australia's place in the global knowledge economy may well be allayed, by a more explicit understanding of these matters.

MAKING GOODS FOR THE KNOWLEDGE MARKET

The so called 'knowledge economy' is predicated partly on the assumption that, not only is knowledge (and the associated skills) a 'tradeable commodity', but also that new knowledge is as necessary to the knowledge marketplace as fresh fruit and veg is necessary to the local community market. However, whereas the freshness of the fruit and veg is a qualitative condition of the *reproduced* products, in the knowledge market, it is the originality and utility of the newly produced products that is the essential qualitative condition for tradeability. Therefore, a knowledge producer cannot rely on reproducing the same knowledge that the market has eagerly consumed in the past, but rather has to produce something sufficiently original and useful for it to be traded successfully. This is an over-simplification of the circumstances of the knowledge economy, and it ignores many of the distortions and aberrations of the knowledge marketplace. Of course, there are many markets where goods are traded, such as many consumer durables, which contain new knowledge and are reproduced for limited periods until a 'new model' is launched.

If a premise of the knowledge economy is the production of new knowledge (and ideas and skills) then the matter is raised of how this production is achieved. Research is commonly lauded in public and government debates as the production engine of new knowledge and, although one might wish to qualify this assertion, it is a reasonable general position to adopt. However, research itself is a body of knowledge, skills, practices and values that leads to the production of knowledge. Or rather, research is an umbrella that covers a range of such bodies of knowledge, skills and values that produce new knowledge valued as original and useful within its particular discipline, field, community, industry, profession etc. The usual way in which people become members of such research communities—that is, become researchers—is through 'research training' in a university, especially through a doctoral program. Such programs provide teaching and supervision to enable a candidate to undertake a piece of research that produces, in the eyes of the examiners, a significant contribution to knowledge in the field. That is, a person with a research doctorate has 'proven' that they can produce new knowledge.

DOCTORAL STUDENTS: A KNOWLEDGE-PRODUCING LABOUR FORCE

The numbers of people with doctorates in a nation might be considered as a measure of its strength as a knowledge economy. In Australia, although the number of doctoral candidates has risen substantially, from 5,753 in 1979 to 28,629 in 2000 (DETYA, 2001, p. 13), this has been reversed by the Government with the intention of reducing the number of government-funded research students by about twenty percent by 2003. This reduction was planned to be phased in from 2001, however, the growth in 'non-overseas' research students (including research Masters) was only 22 people (0.07%) between 1999 and 2000, from 32,905 to 32,927 (DETYA, 2001, p. 133). In the same period, 'overseas' numbers increased by 193 (8%) from 2,405 to 2,598. Furthermore, there are reports from both the UK and the USA that, after peaks in doctoral numbers in the mid to late 1990s, reductions have occurred to local enrolments but which are also masked by increases in 'overseas' students (AHES, 10 October, 2001, p. 29; Geiger, 1997). Therefore, it seems that this measure of research strength is in decline in these nations.

Further investigation of doctoral enrolment figures shows some other important trends, too. Evans and Pearson state that part-time doctoral study in Australia has risen from practically zero to about forty percent from the early 1970s to 2000 and that nowadays about half of all research doctoral students are enrolled in the DETYA Broad Fields of Study related to the professions (Evans & Pearson 1999). Therefore, a significant proportion of the rise in doctoral students has been contributed by an increase in part-time students. Partly this is explained by both the availability of part-time study for research

In M. Kiley & G. Mullins (Eds.) (2002). *Quality in Postgraduate Research: Integrating perspectives*. CELTS, University of Canberra.

degrees which commenced as universities changed their regulations from the 1970s onwards, and also partly by the increase in demand from an increasingly credentialled population, especially in the Education Field of Study. Since the 1970s, a similar pattern is evident in North America, the UK and some other European nations, where there have been rises in doctoral enrolments in professional and 'practitioner-oriented' fields of study, in comparison with traditional arts and science, to the extent that they now comprise the majority of degrees conferred (Becher, Henkel, & Kogan, 1994; Clark, 1993; Noble, 1994).

Professional doctorates have been offered in Australia since the mid-1990s and by 1997 Trigwell, Shanahan and Maurizi (1997) were able to report that the majority of universities offered at least one professional ('research-coursework') doctorate. In 2001 virtually every Australian university has one or more professional doctorates in fields such as Education, Health, Psychology, Business and Creative Arts. The term 'professional doctorate' is often undefined and taken-for-granted but typically it can be said to encompass doctoral programs that are designed to serve the interests, contexts and circumstances of professional people. Therefore, the programs usually are designed with part-time candidature in mind, draw upon the researchable questions, issues or matters from the field in question, and expect the thesis and its actual and potential research outcomes to be adjudged in terms of significance to this field. To the extent that the candidates represent highly skilled 'knowledge workers' in both the 'old' and the 'new' economies, then their 'research training' is 'upskilling' them to create and apply new knowledge in those economies.

It is noteworthy that professional doctorates have sparked a range of scholarly interest and concern over the past five years. There have been: several publications (for example, Brennan & Walker, 1994; Evans, 1997; Green, 1997; Green Maxwell & Shanahan, 2001; Trigwell et al. 1997); a number of conferences on the topic organised through staff at the University of New England; and a set of guidelines produced by the Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies (Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies, 1998). What this work shows is a serious consideration of the issues involved in developing professional doctorates in Australia. Likewise, there are emerging debates in the literature and at conferences about doctorates in general, doctoral pedagogy, supervision and examination (Evans, 2001; Lee et al. 2000; Maxwell & Shanahan, 2001; McWilliam & Taylor, 2001).

Australian writers, such as Brennan (1994) and Lee, Green and Johnson (2001) or overseas authors, such as Bournier, Bowden and Laing (2001) and Smyth, Allen and Wahlstrom (2001), demonstrate in somewhat different ways, there are arguably more fundamental pedagogical, research and practice relationships being pursued or changed within many professional doctorates. Indeed, Green, Maxwell and Shanahan (2001) are of the view that a 'new generation' of professional doctorates is emerging which embraces new ideas about doctoral pedagogy and research to reflect the needs, interests and contexts of professional doctoral candidates working and researching their professional practice.

The consideration above of professional doctorates illustrates that over the past seven or more years there have been major changes to doctoral programs in Australia which have important potential impacts on the ways and places in which research training and research is conducted in the new economy. A key aspect of these new programs is that they usually foreground part-time study, whereas the traditional PhD foregrounds full-time study. It is arguable that, irrespective of whether they are enrolled as 'off-campus' or 'external' students or not, most professional doctorate research is conducted outside of the academy, in the workplace or professional context. Conversely, most PhD full-time study is conducted by 'on-campus' or 'internal' students working within the academy, although in many disciplines fieldwork is conducted outside its walls.

DETYA figures show that in 1998 41% of research doctorate students were studying part-time. Although a few may have been studying part-time and not working, most can be assumed to be employed. The proportion of part-time to full-time students in the professional fields of study is 47%.⁴ Therefore, it can be seen that at best a slight majority of research doctorate students conform the 'traditional' conception of the fulltime student in terms of enrolment type, but that there is a large minority (41% in 1998) who do not. This large minority is ignored in the most recent major Australian Government policy document on research and research training (Kemp, 1999b) despite the evidence in the previous year's (1998) DETYA figures which, one assumes, the authors would have had to hand and reviewed.

In M. Kiley & G. Mullins (Eds.) (2002). *Quality in Postgraduate Research: Integrating perspectives*. CELTS, University of Canberra.

The Government is not alone in ignoring the rise of part-time research students in Australia. In many respects universities, students' associations (to a lesser extent), industry and the professions have not taken full account of the significance of part-time students. Therefore, these agencies have either not been lobbying government on matters associated with part-time research students when research training is under review, or have only been doing so relatively weakly. In particular, universities have tended to make only minor adjustments to their supervision, administration and support practices for part-time research students. Other than in some of the professional doctorates, there is generally little specific tailoring and enhancement of programs to attract and support part-time students. The reasons for this are probably concerned with the relative 'invisibility' of part-time students, especially those who are actually or effectively 'off-campus', and the gradual increase in numbers and proportions of part-time students also being relatively 'invisible' from year to year. Given the heightened scrutiny of research training in Australia, there is a good case for taking part-time students seriously in both governmental and institutional policy and practice.

ARE PART-TIME STUDENTS A RESERVE ARMY OF ENROLMENTS FOR UNIVERSITIES AND OF RESEARCH LABOUR FOR THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY?

It is common in the new economy to see labour become casualised in many aspects of the public and private sector. Indeed, the rising generation of workers seems to be accepting this fate as if the flexibility that so interests their employers is in their own interests too. In many respects they are what Marx saw as the 'reserve army of labour' to be employed when the means of production required it, and to be sacked when it did not. As has been demonstrated above, part-time research students have increased in numbers, much like the casual workers of the new economy. Like those workers, they remain the relatively poorly resourced research students by their universities and the government (not for them the scholarships, nor often the office and lab space of the full-timers). Some have even paid HECS for their places in the past and full-fees have been mooted, too. The invisibility of part-time students in universities in terms of them explicitly being recognised as having different needs and contexts, and requiring different approaches to supervision (Brennan, 1995; Evans, 1998) has generally been ignored, except in terms of professional doctorates. The full-time PhD students are often said to be valued in universities for their contribution to their universities' research cultures; but what about the part-time students' contributions to the research culture of the workplace and the community? The pressure in the 1990s for universities to expand their numbers of research students contributed to the universities willingness to see enrol part-time students. The emphasis on completions and completion rates in the Government's Research Training Scheme, combined with reductions in places, may lead to these same universities treating part-time students as a 'reserve army' of enrolments that can be 'turned-off' or 'turned-down' to suit the doctoral 'means of production'.

Yet this approach seems fairly short-sighted on the part of those of us in universities because other aspects of Government policy are pressing for universities to have better links with industry and the professions. We are encouraged to foster 'technology transfer' from the academy to industry. In both respects it would seem that by having members of the industry and professions leaping over the academy walls in order to undertake their research training represents a powerful opportunity to recognise that these students *are* industry and the professions. That is, they are people whose working identities and social relations are what constitutes their industry: it is not the buildings, presses, smoke stacks or humming computers, but the people. Likewise, universities are not lecture theatres, libraries, labs and meeting rooms (and multiple, humming desktop computers), but rather they are constituted the complex patterns of social relations that the people (staff, students, visiting scholars) enact. Therefore, if we understand that 'technology transfer', 'university links with industry' etc are actually about social relations—meshing the social relations of the university with the social relations of industry or the professions—then part-time students can be appreciated differently. No longer need they be seen (in effect) as a reserve army of enrolments to help maintain HDR load and to produce new knowledge for the knowledge economy, but rather as very important people who help constitute the life of both universities (as students) and industry or the professions (as employees or employers) as they find their ways in the new knowledge economy.

This new appreciation suggest that the ways in which part-time students are defined and treated within universities needs to be developed in ways which draw upon, build and sustain the personal interrelationships that students have between the world of work and the world of university. At a basic level this means: encouraging research that fits both these worlds; providing supervision that

In M. Kiley & G. Mullins (Eds.) (2002). *Quality in Postgraduate Research: Integrating perspectives*. CELTS, University of Canberra.

understands, recognises and values the cultures of these worlds; ensuring examination that understands, recognises and values the cultures of these worlds; encouraging research outcomes and research dissemination that is of benefit to both these worlds. Some of the professional doctorates have made useful steps in these directions, however, there is a prevailing view that they are 'inferior' to the real doctorates of the academy: the PhDs. Of course, the professional doctorates are almost exclusively populated by members of the reserve army and not the 'regulars', and this helps explain their status. (Some of the professional doctorates have also contributed to the weakening of the status by reducing the standards, durations and research (see, Evans, 1998, 2001)).

The suggestions noted above are focused on the individual student and what are the conventional aspects of doctoral candidature. However, on this basis there is scope for seeing that, far from being a 'reserve army', part-time students can be viewed as potential ambassadors and collaborators for research and development within their workplaces. That is, not in terms of their topics or projects for their degrees, but for other, sometimes related, projects and research dissemination. ARC Linkage applications would seem to be an obvious site for developing collaboration, but other joint ventures such as conferences, consultancy, visiting scholars, joint research and development are others. However, what is required is for those of us in universities to take seriously the matter of understanding the worlds of the research student and to appreciate that increasingly it is becoming necessary for universities to be proactive in working beyond the academy in the sorts of worlds that the part-time research students occupy for their full-time working lives.

CONCLUSION

The burgeoning numbers of part-time research students in Australia can be seen to represent a 'reserve army' of higher degree students in universities. They have generally been invisible in government policy on research training, and have rarely been the focus of specific treatment in universities, in comparison with the 'regular army' of full-time peers. However, part-time research students are people who help constitute the world of the university as well as of their industry or profession. It has been suggested that we need to appreciate the potential importance of the part-time students to the ways in which universities can fulfil their responsibilities in terms of technology transfer and links with industry in the new knowledge economy.

There have been important (and some counter-productive) developments that have occurred with the professional doctorates that indicate that people in universities have been taking the matter of research training for part-time students and full-time workers in industry and the professions seriously. However, this work generally is seen as inferior to the PhD in status and, because of its size, the PhD program with its assumed full-time, on-campus orthodoxy has limited the capacity of universities to appreciate the significance of part-time students to their endeavours in the new knowledge economy.

It is time for the matter of part-time doctoral students to be made visible and exposed to critical analysis, scrutiny, research and debate. It could well have a significant bearing on the quality of doctoral education and the outcomes for industry, commerce and the professions in the new economy.

REFERENCES

- AHES (2001). Research dwindles, *Australian Higher Education Supplement*, 10 October 2001, p. 29.
- Becher, T., Henkel, M., & Kogan, M. (1994). *Graduate Education in Britain*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Brennan, M. (1995). Postgraduate research supervision in the emerging open universities. *Australian Universities' Review* 38, 2, pp. 23–27.
- Brennan, M., & Walker, R. (1994). Educational research in the workplace: developing a professional doctorate.
- Clark, B. R. (Ed.). (1993). *The Research Foundations of Graduate Education*: University of California Press.
- Clark, J. (1996). *Postgraduate skills: A view from industry*. Paper presented at the Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies meeting, Adelaide.

- In M. Kiley & G. Mullins (Eds.) (2002). *Quality in Postgraduate Research: Integrating perspectives*. CELTS, University of Canberra.
- Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies (1998). *Guidelines: Professional doctorates*: Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies.
- DETYA. (2001). *Higher Education Students: Time series tables*. Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA).
- Evans, T.D. (1997). Flexible doctoral research: emerging issues in professional doctorate programs. *Studies in Continuing Education* 19, 2, pp. 174–182.
- Evans, T. D. (1998a). ‘Doctoring the Doctorate: issues and standards for the 21st century’ *Quality in Postgraduate Research National Conference*, Adelaide, unpublished.
- Evans, T. D. (1998b). Research as independent learning: emerging issues in supervising postgraduate researchers in their professional contexts. In C. Rust (Ed.) *Improving Student Learning: Improving students as learners*. University of Strathclyde, Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford Brookes University, pp. 377–384.
- Evans, T. D. (2001). Tensions and Pretensions in doctoral education. In B. Green & T. W. Maxwell & P. Shanahan (Eds.), *Doctoral Education And Professional Practice: The next generation* (pp. 275-302). Armidale: Kardoorair Press.
- Evans, T. D. (2002). Part-time research students are they producing knowledge where it counts?. *Journal of Higher Education and Research and Development* 21, 1. In press.
- Geiger, R. (1997). Doctoral education: the short-term crisis vs long-term challenge. *The Review of Higher Education*, 20(3), 239–251.
- Green, B. (1997). *Theorising the professional doctorate: representation, practice and the curriculum problem in postgraduate research education*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education, Brisbane.
- Green, B., Maxwell, T. W., & Shanahan, P. (Eds.). (2001). *Doctoral Education And Professional Practice: The Next Generation*. Armidale: Kardoorair Press.
- Kemp, D. (1999a). *Knowledge and Innovation: A policy statement on research and research training*. Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Kemp, D. (1999b). *New Knowledge, New Opportunities: A discussion paper on higher education research and research training*. Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Lee, A., Green, B., & Brennan, M. (2000). Organisational knowledge, professional practice and the professional doctorate at work. In J. Garrick & C. Rhodes (Eds.), *Research and Knowledge at Work: Perspectives, case-studies and innovative strategies*. London: Routledge, pp. 117–136.
- Martin, Y. M., Maclachlan, M., & Karmel, T. (1999 (released 2001)). *Postgraduate Completion Rates*. Canberra: DETYA.
- Maxwell, T. W., & Shanahan, P. (2001). Professional Doctoral Education in Australia and New Zealand: Reviewing the Scene. In B. Green, T. W. Maxwell & P. Shanahan (Eds.), *Doctoral Education And Professional Practice: The next generation*. (pp. 17–38). Armidale: Kardoorair Press.
- McWilliam, E., & Taylor, P. G. (2001). Rigorous, Rapid and Relevant: Doctoral Training in New Times. In B. Green, T. W. Maxwell & P. Shanahan (Eds.), *Doctoral Education And Professional Practice: The next generation*. (pp. 229–246). Armidale: Kardoorair Press.
- Morgan, A. R. (1993). *Improving Your Students’ Learning*. London, Kogan Page.
- Morgan, A. R. & Beaty, L. (1997). The world of the learner. In F. Marton, D. Hounsell, & N. Entwistle, (Eds.) *The Experience of Learning*. Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, pp.

In M. Kiley & G. Mullins (Eds.) (2002). *Quality in Postgraduate Research: Integrating perspectives*. CELTS, University of Canberra.

Nation, D. E. (1991). Teaching texts and independent learning. In T. D. Evans, B. King, (Eds.) *Beyond the Text: Contemporary writing on distance education*. Geelong, Deakin University Press, pp. 101-129.

Noble, K. A. (1994). *Changing Doctoral Degrees: An international perspective*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.

Pearson, M., & Ford, L. (1997). *Open and Flexible PhD Study and Research*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs Evaluation and Investigations Program.

Smyth, E. M., Allen, C., & Wahlstrom, M. (2001). Changing Educational Environments for Professional Doctorates at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). In B. Green, T. W. Maxwell & P. Shanahan (Eds.), *Doctoral Education and Professional Practice: The next generation?* (pp. 69–84). Armidale, NSW: Kardoorair Press.

Spear, R. H. (1997). *Professional Doctorates: A discussion paper*. Canberra: Graduate School, Australian National University.

Trigwell, K., Shannon, T., & Maurizi, R. (1997). *Research-coursework Doctoral Programs in Australian Universities*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs Evaluation and Investigations Program.

West, R. (1998). *Learning for Life (final report): Review of higher education financing and policy*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

1 For simplicity, when the term ‘postgraduate’ is used, it will be taken to mean research postgraduate.

2 Part-time students here are taken to be those people who wholly or mostly undertake their research degrees enrolled as part-time. There are also some full-time students who complete their degrees part-time, however, such students are not part of this discussion.

3 DETYA figures for 1998 show that 13,023 (52%) were enrolled in the Broad Fields of Study of ‘Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences’ and ‘Science’ and 11, 949 (48%) were enrolled in the Fields including Agriculture, Building, Education, Engineering, Health and Law. One might expect that several doctoral students in the ‘non-professional’ categories could well be conducting research which is professionally related, for example, in social policy and welfare in the Field of Social Sciences’ or in information technology in the Field of Science. These figures are for research doctorates and therefore will include all PhDs and professional doctorates that have two-thirds or more research.

4 The term ‘profession’ and its derivatives are used in this chapter in an inclusive sense to capture occupations which require a degree for entry and which may or may not be regulated (by government) or self-regulated (through a professional body). It is usual to see a profession as being regulated or self-regulated so, in this sense, the professions and students encompassed in the range of Australian ‘professional doctorates’ include students (such as artists, business persons or bureaucrats) who are not always professionals (such as architects, teachers or lawyers) (Evans, 2001) p.276.

5 Part-time students are typically enrolled as half-time students, so enrolment load figures in an institution will reflect this difference. The argument here is based on the numbers of people enrolled as doctoral candidates.