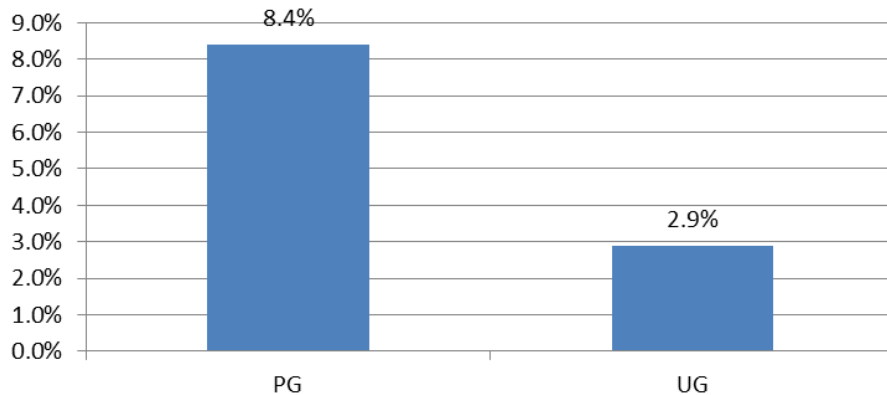# Postgraduate Student Experience

Professor Keitha Dunstan

Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning & Teaching
Pro Vice-Chancellor Research

Bond University

Postgraduate vs. Undergraduate

Percentage increase in postgraduate vs. undergraduate student enrolment

To 2014 there was a 8.4% increase in PGs to 376,055 vs. only a 2.9% increase in UGs to 952,280

http://education.gov.au
Department of Education & Training

Explanatory Factors

- Labour market shifts requiring graduate upskilling
- Increased life expectancy
- Alterations to government policies
- 21st century social and technological advancement

Beattie & James, 1997
Forsyth et al., 2009
Wells, 2008

Coursework vs. Research

Percentage increase in coursework masters vs. research masters student enrolments
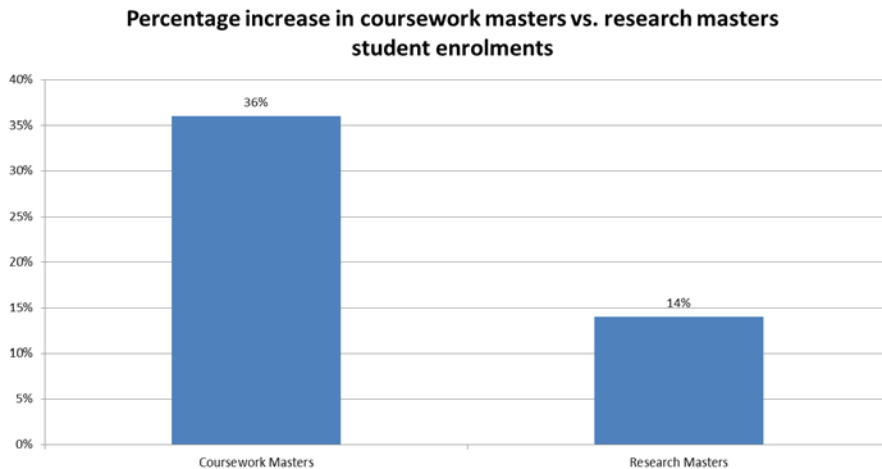
From 2003 to 2009, Coursework Masters enrolments increased by 36% whereas Research Masters enrolments increased only by 14%

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

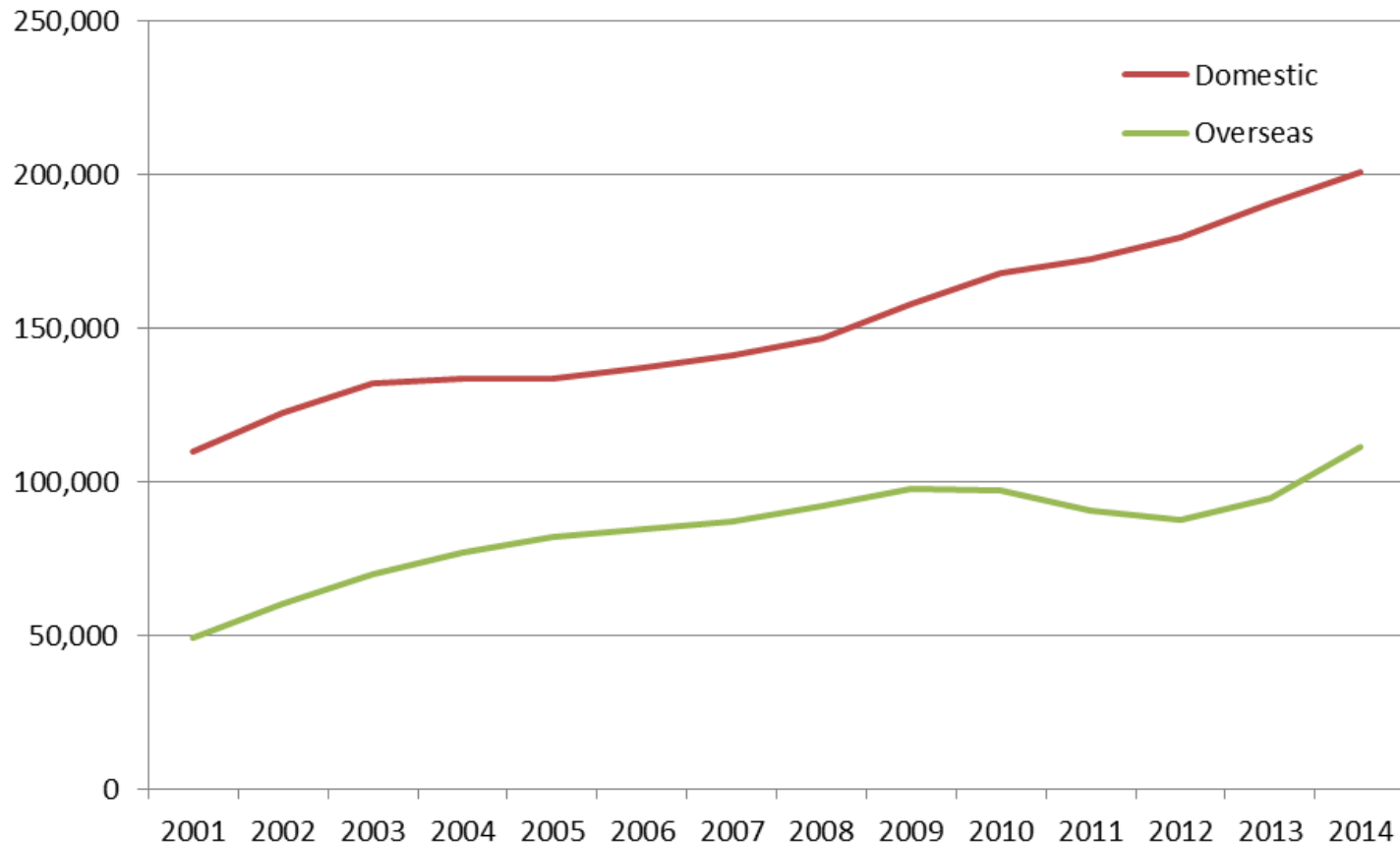Most Common Profile of Coursework Masters Students
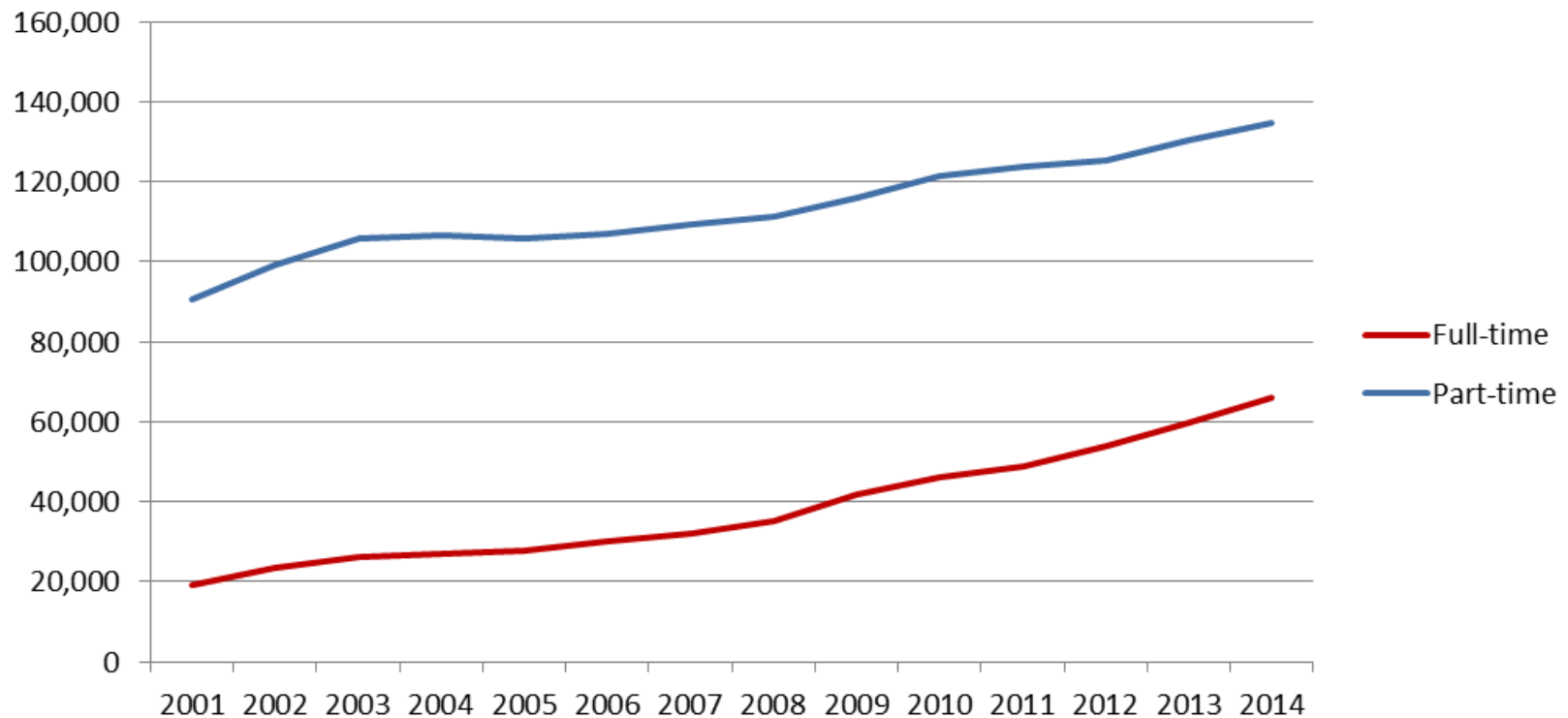
- Female
- 20-29 yrs
- International

Kiley (2013)
http://courseworkmasters.anu.edu.au/dissemination.htm

National Enrolment in Postgraduate Coursework Degrees (From Department of Education and Training)

National Enrolment in Postgraduate Coursework Degrees (From Department of Education and Training)
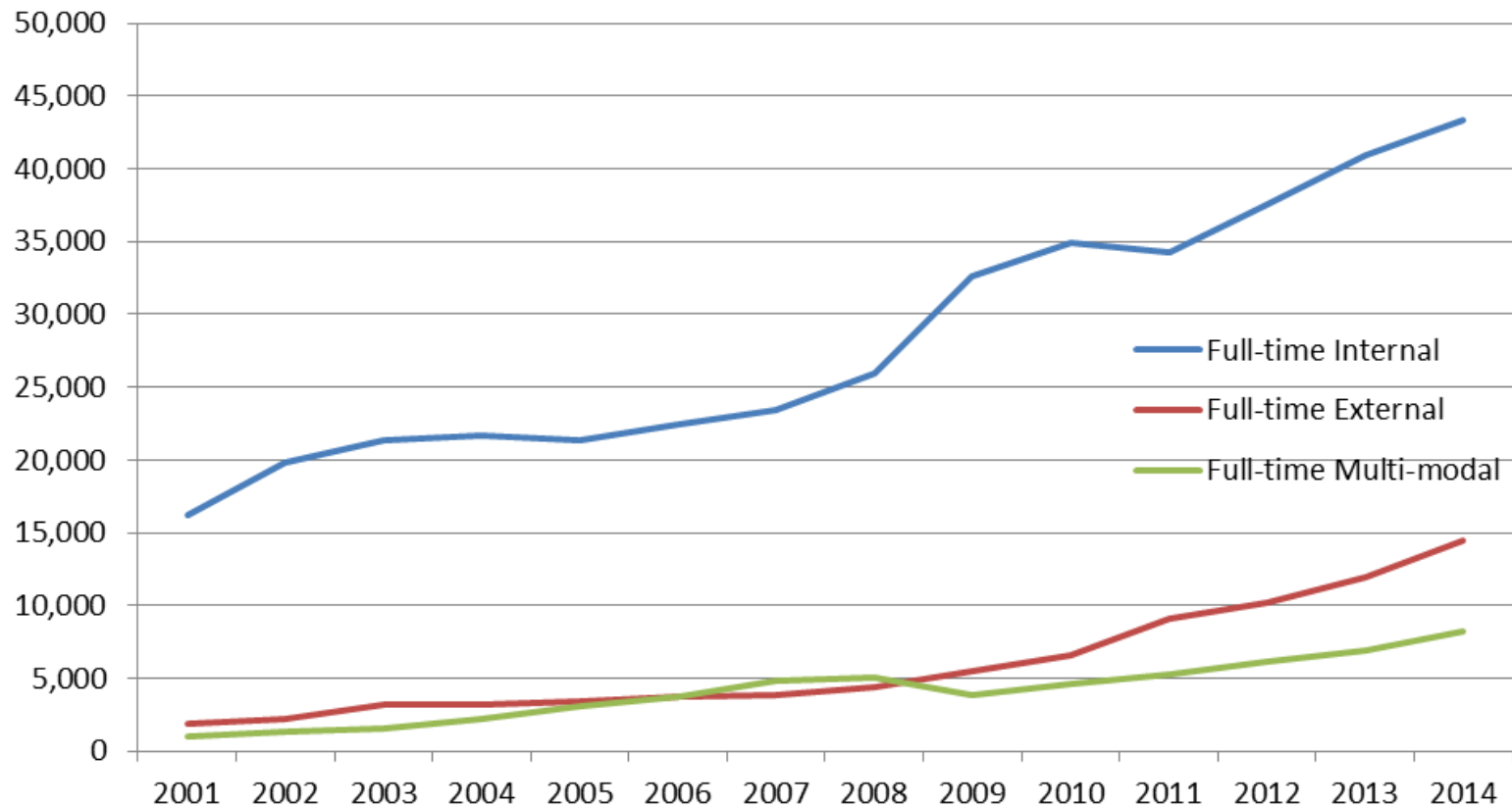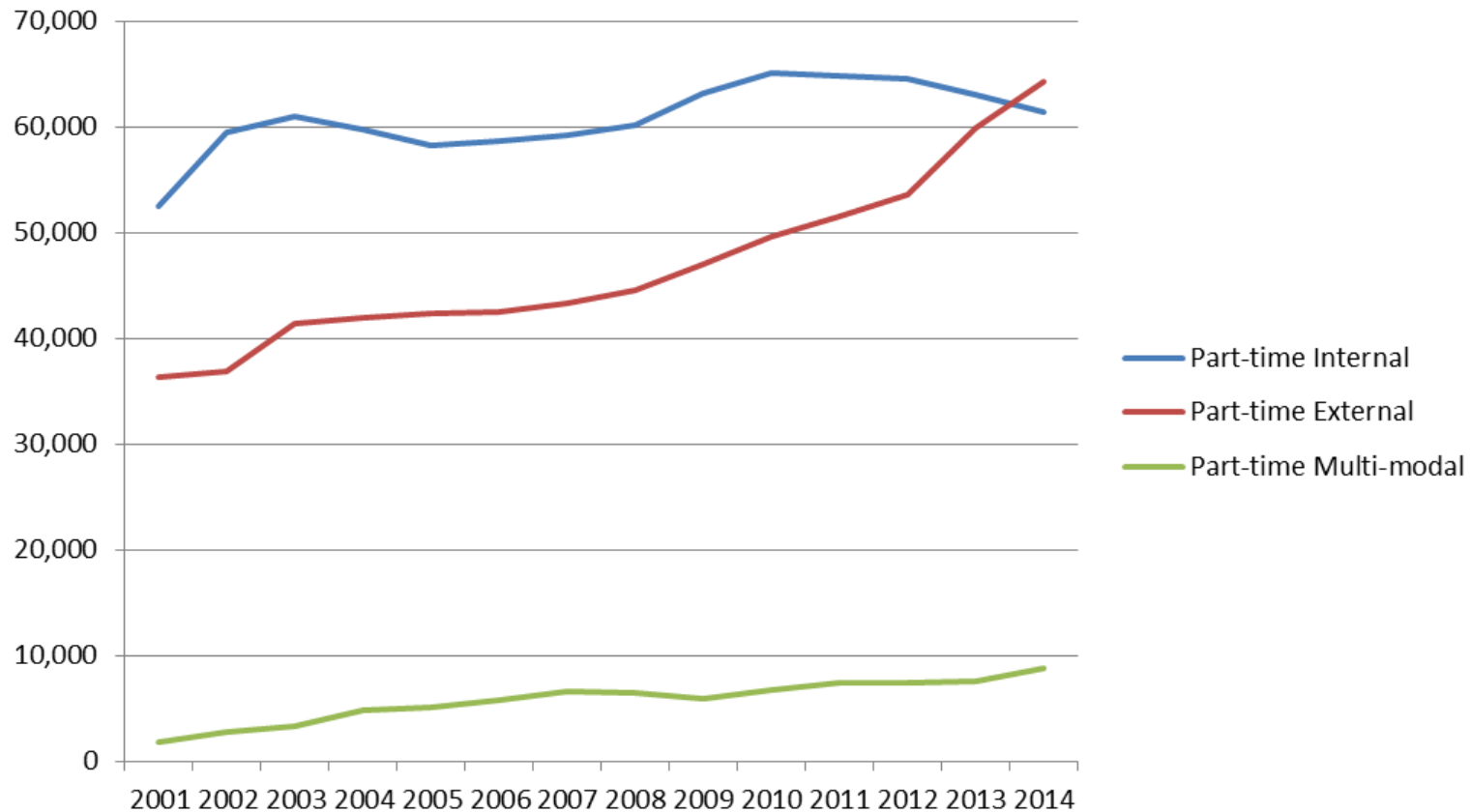
National Enrolment in Postgraduate Coursework Degrees (From Department of Education and Training)

National Enrolment in Postgraduate Coursework Degrees (From Department of Education and Training)

QILT (Quality Indicators for Learning & Teaching)

ɡᴏhttps://www.qilt.edu.au/

ɡᴏStudent Experience Survey

Undergraduates Only

Institution tables and graphs from 2013-2014

University Experience Survey

Student Experience Survey (Undergraduates)

Student Experience Survey

- In 2015:

    - 40 Australian universities participated

    - 368 698 students participated

    - The response rate of students was 37.6%

        - Up from 30.1% in 2014

- Assesses:

    - Overall quality of educational experience

    - Teaching quality

    - Learner engagement

    - Skills developed

    - Employment outcomes

https://www.qilt.edu.au/

Overall Quality of Educational Experience (2013/2014 UG Data)
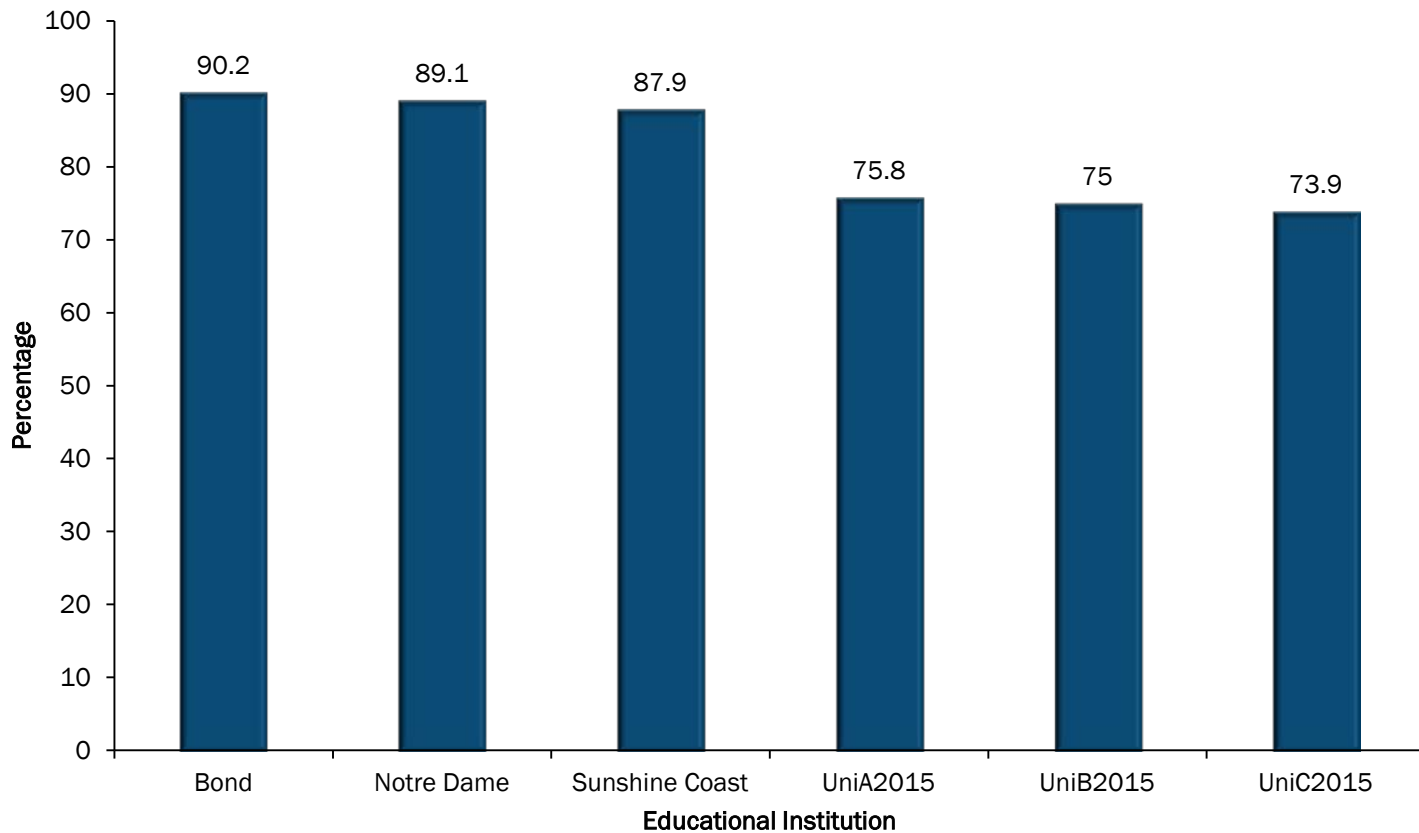
Teaching Quality
(2013/2014 UG Data)
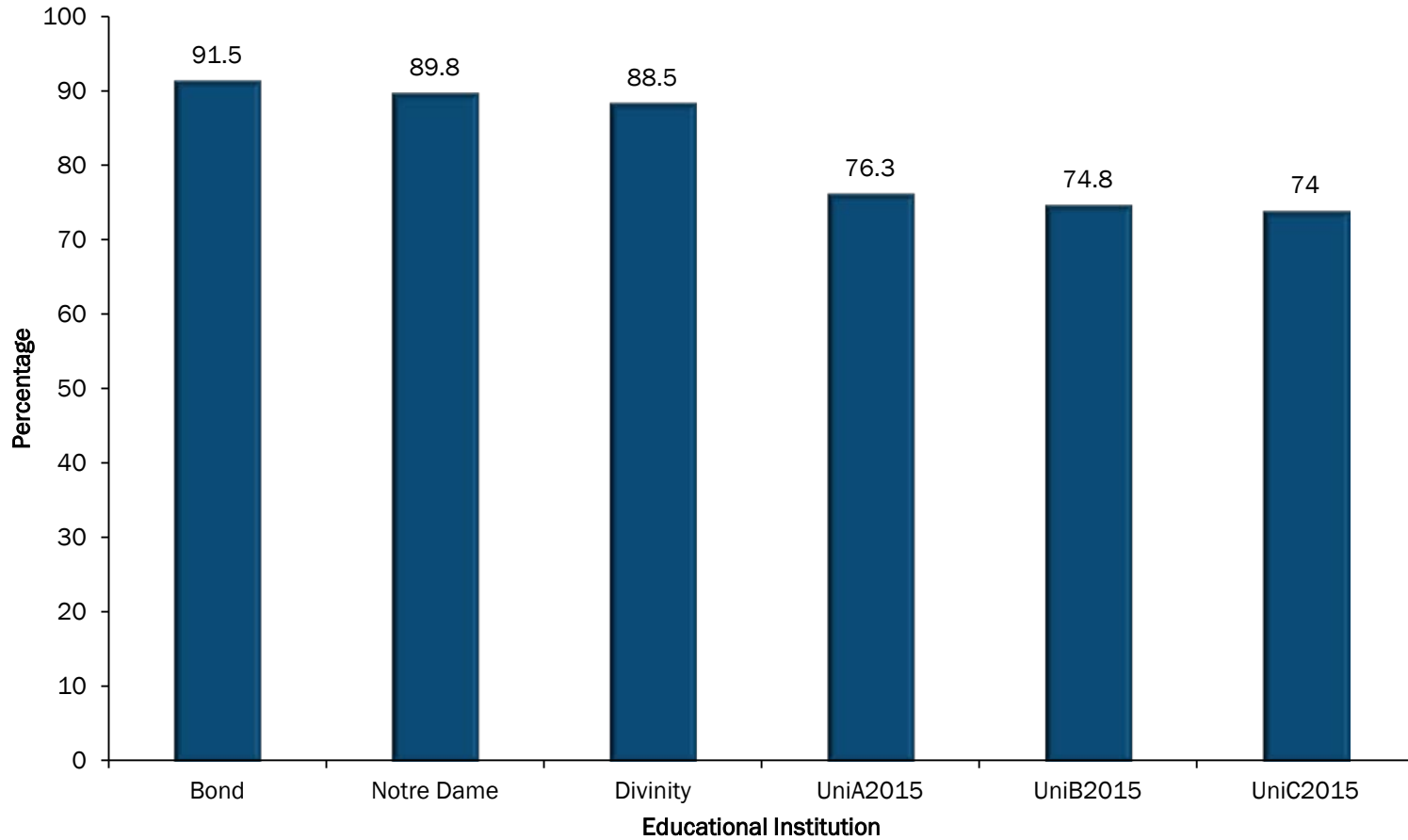
Learner Engagement
(2013/2014 UG Data)
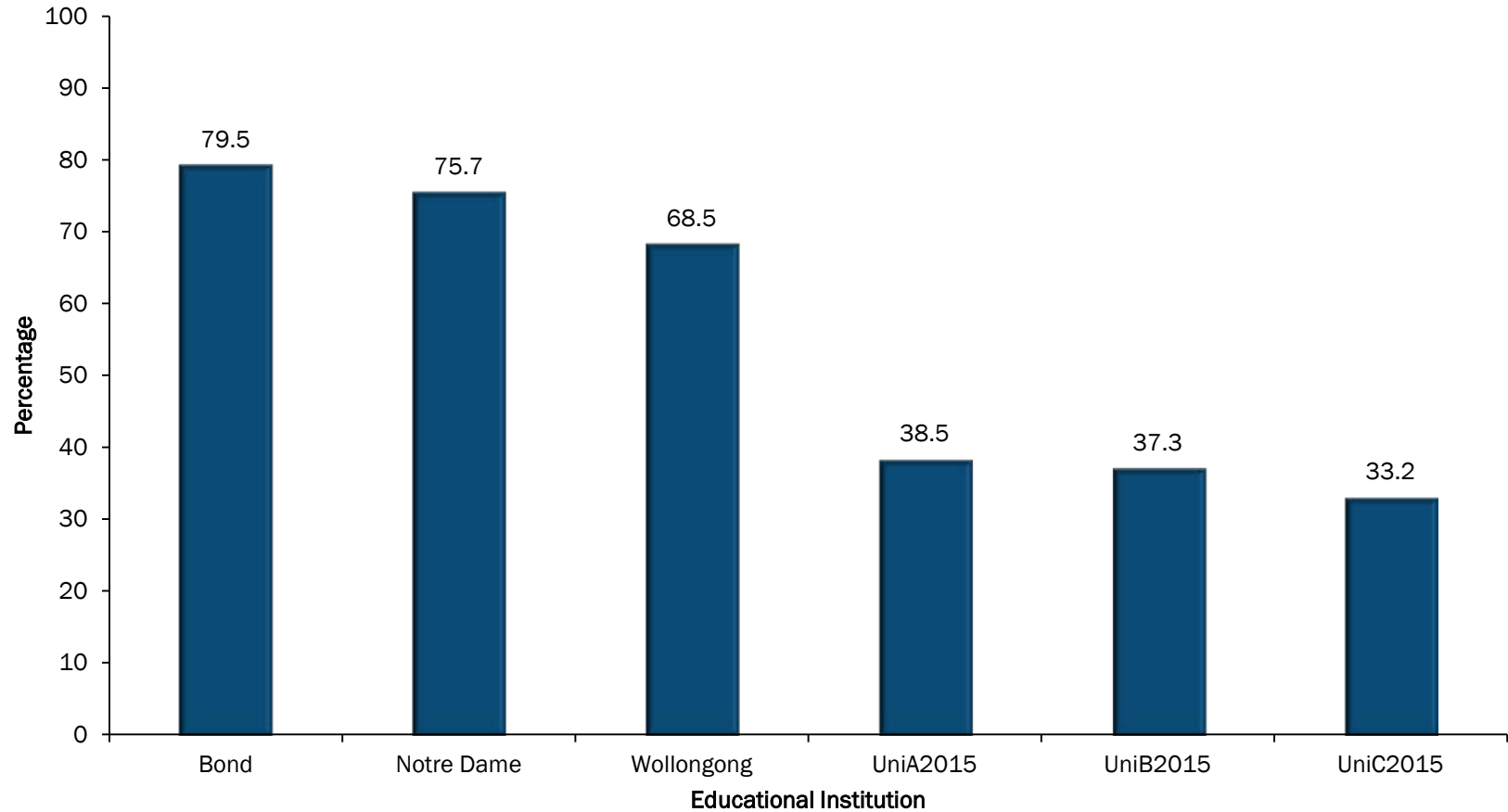
Skills Development (2013/2014 UG Data)

13
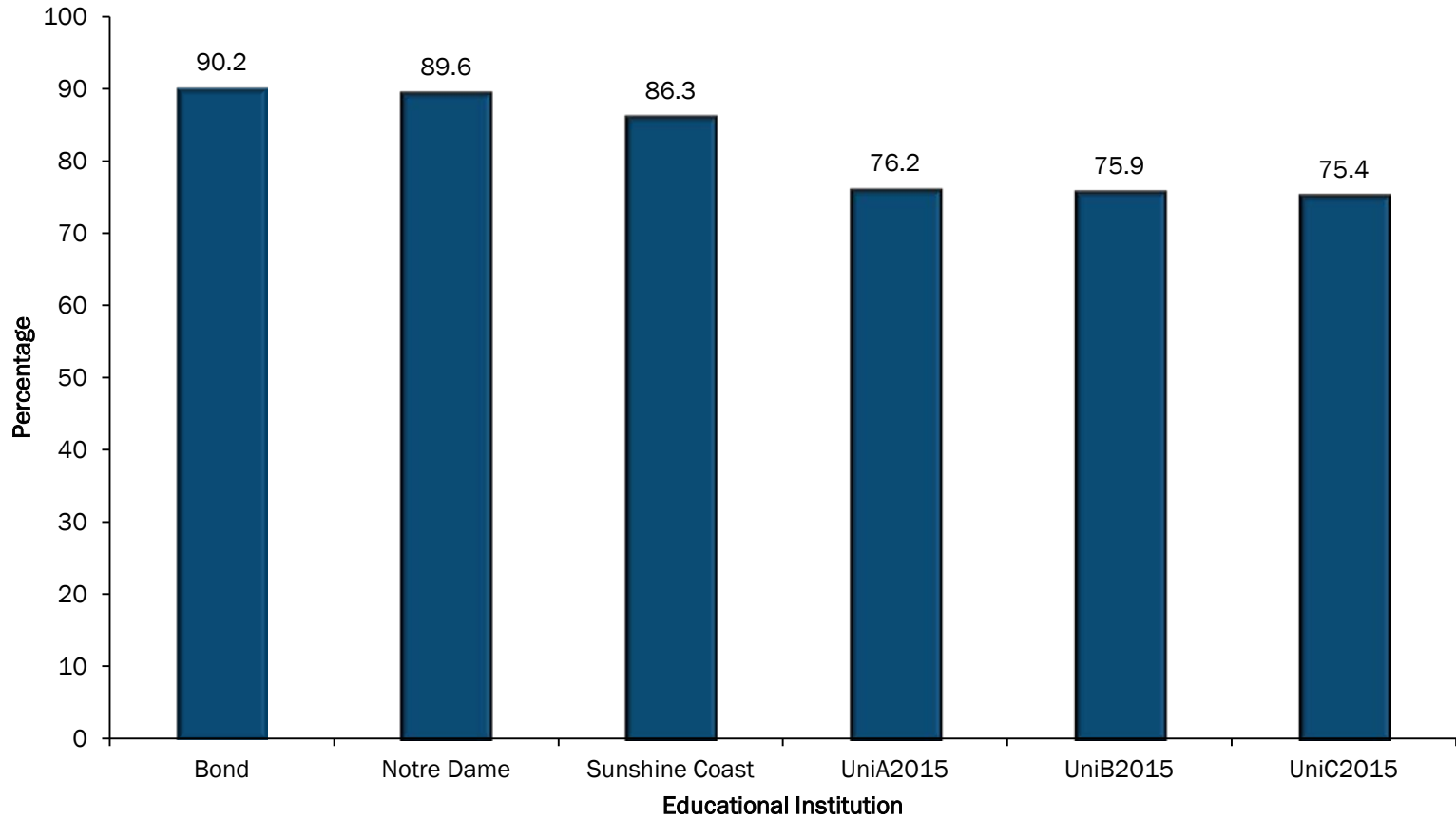
Employment Outcomes
(2013/2014 UG Data)
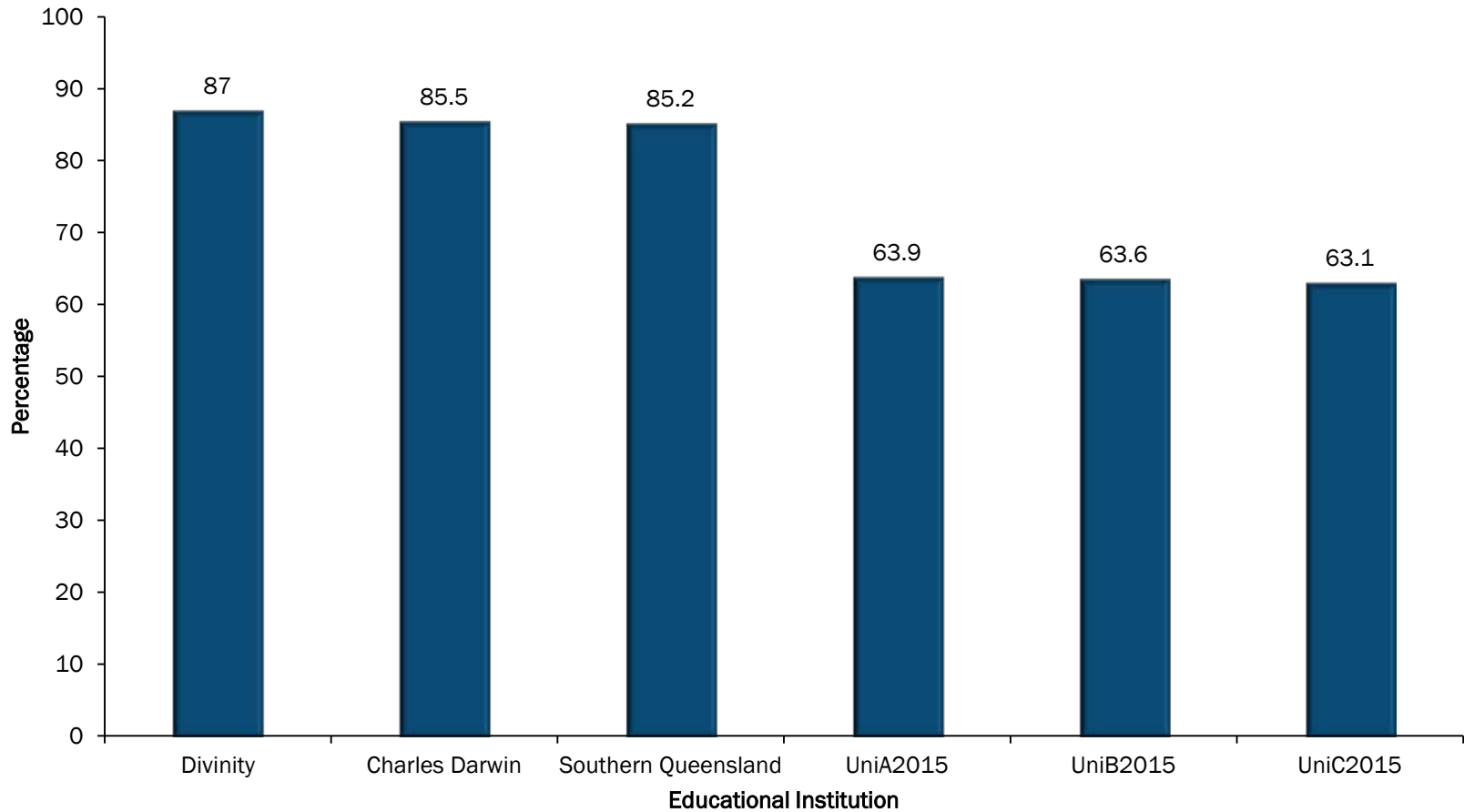
Quality Learning & Teaching Indicators (2015 Undergraduate Data)

Quality Learning & Teaching Indicators
(2015 Data)
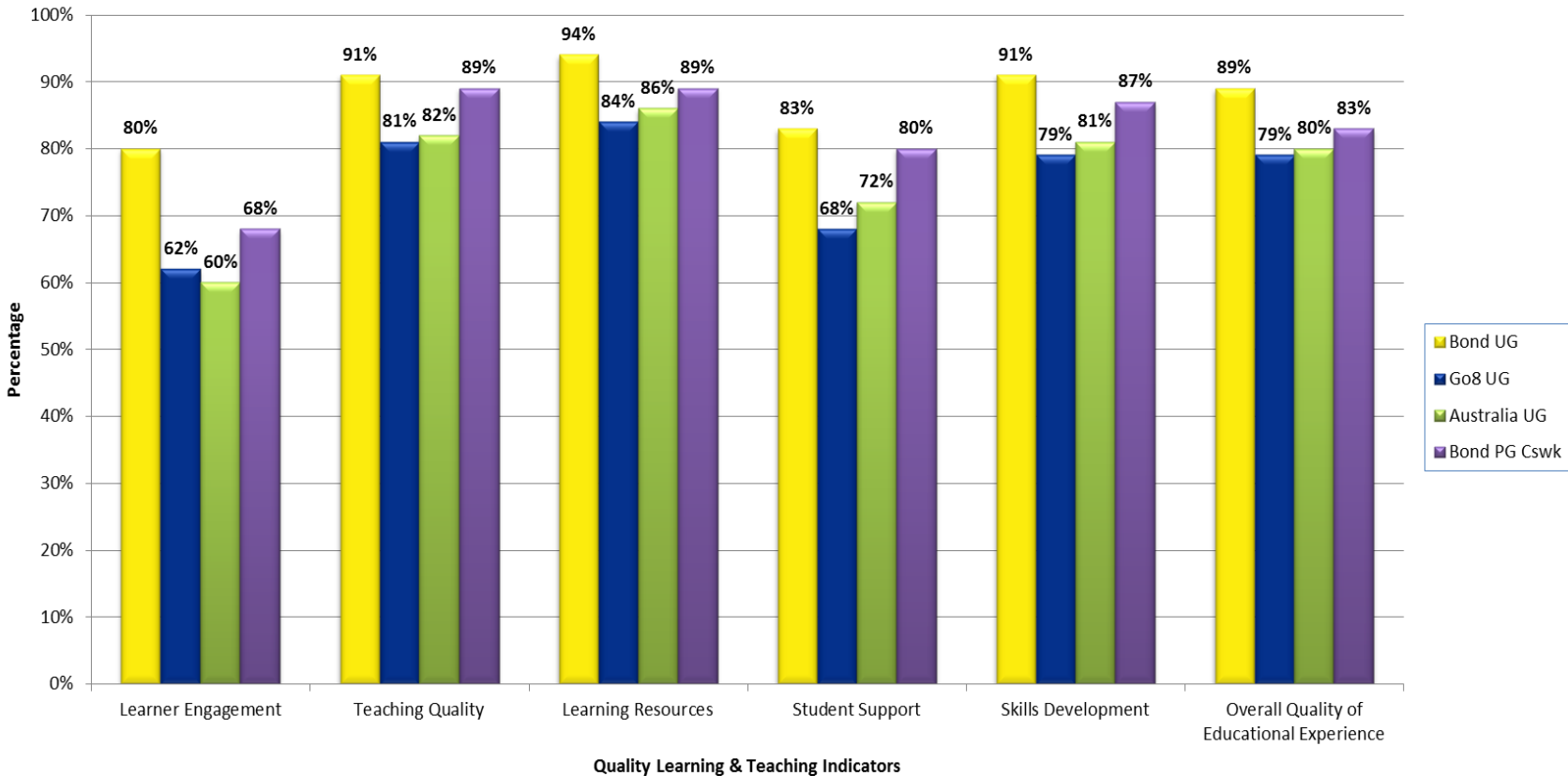
Bond PG Coursework based on 428 responses in the 2015 Student Experience Survey

Bond University Higher Degree Research Student Satisfaction Survey

Bond University Higher Degree Research Student Satisfaction
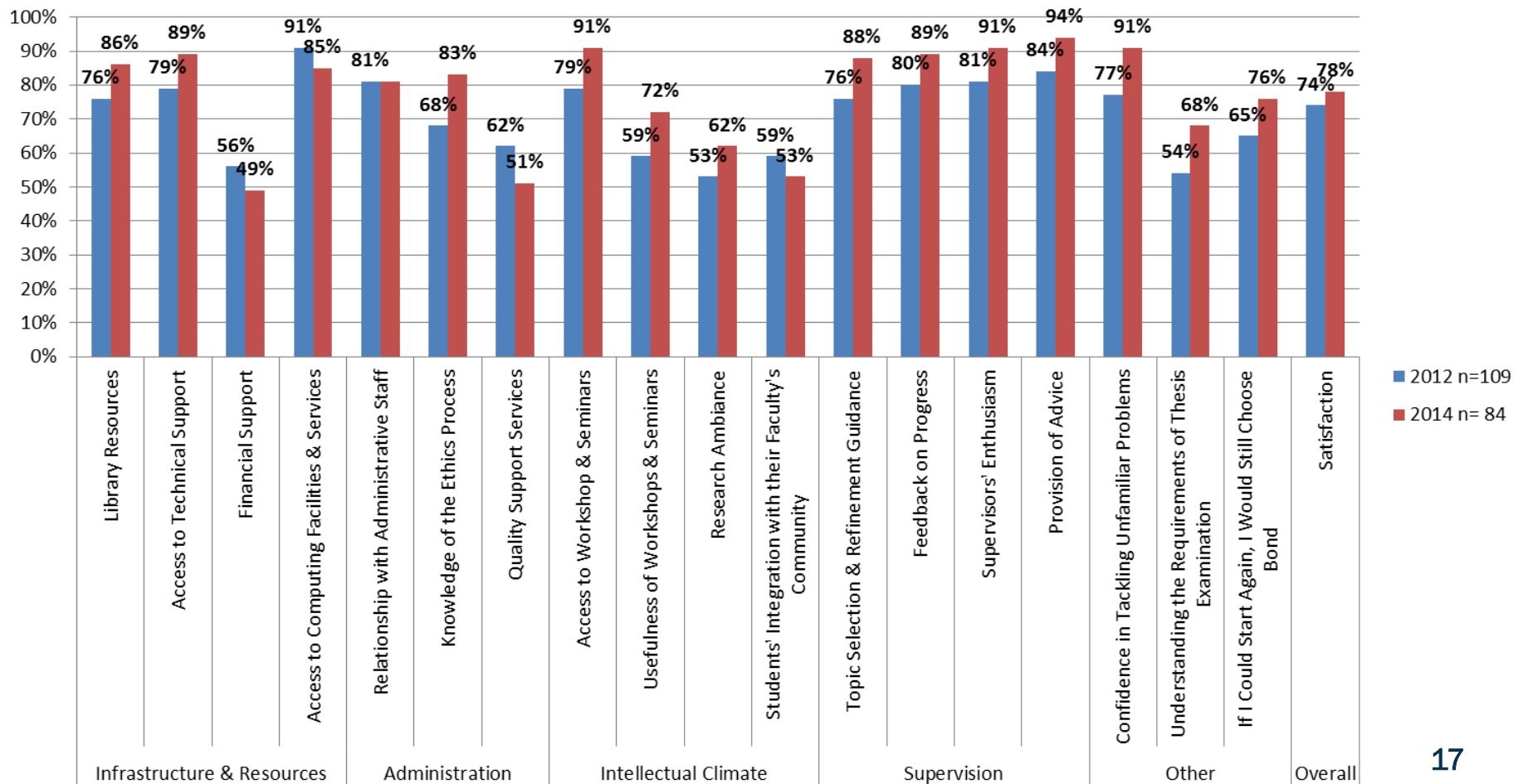
National OLT Strategic Priority Project
Postgraduate Student Experience

- Period of data collection:

  February 2015 to February 2016

- Methods of data collection (overall n =366)

  - Student Engagement Breakfasts (n = 233)

  - Interviews (n = 82 students & staff)

  - Focus Groups (n = 61 students & staff)

http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com

Research Participation

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	**Total**
No. of Breakfasts	1			2	1	1	1	1	7
Breakfasts	**29**			**69**	**28**	**32**	**31**	**34**	**223**
Interviews	5 **5**	9 **5**	5 **6**	4 **2**	6 **5**	5 **5**	6 **5**	4 **5**	44 **38** 82
No. of Focus Groups		2	1	4		1		1	9
Focus Groups		**9**	**15**	3 **30**		**2**		**2**	3 **58** 61
Total	5 **34**	9 **14**	5 **21**	7 **101**	6 **33**	5 **39**	6 **36**	4 **41**	47 **319**
Grand Total	39	23	26	108	39	44	42	45	366

n = number of staff

n = number of postgraduate students

n = number of staff and students combined

Table One: Research Participants Across Methods

Research Participation (n=366)

Total Participation in National Postgraduate Student Experience Research
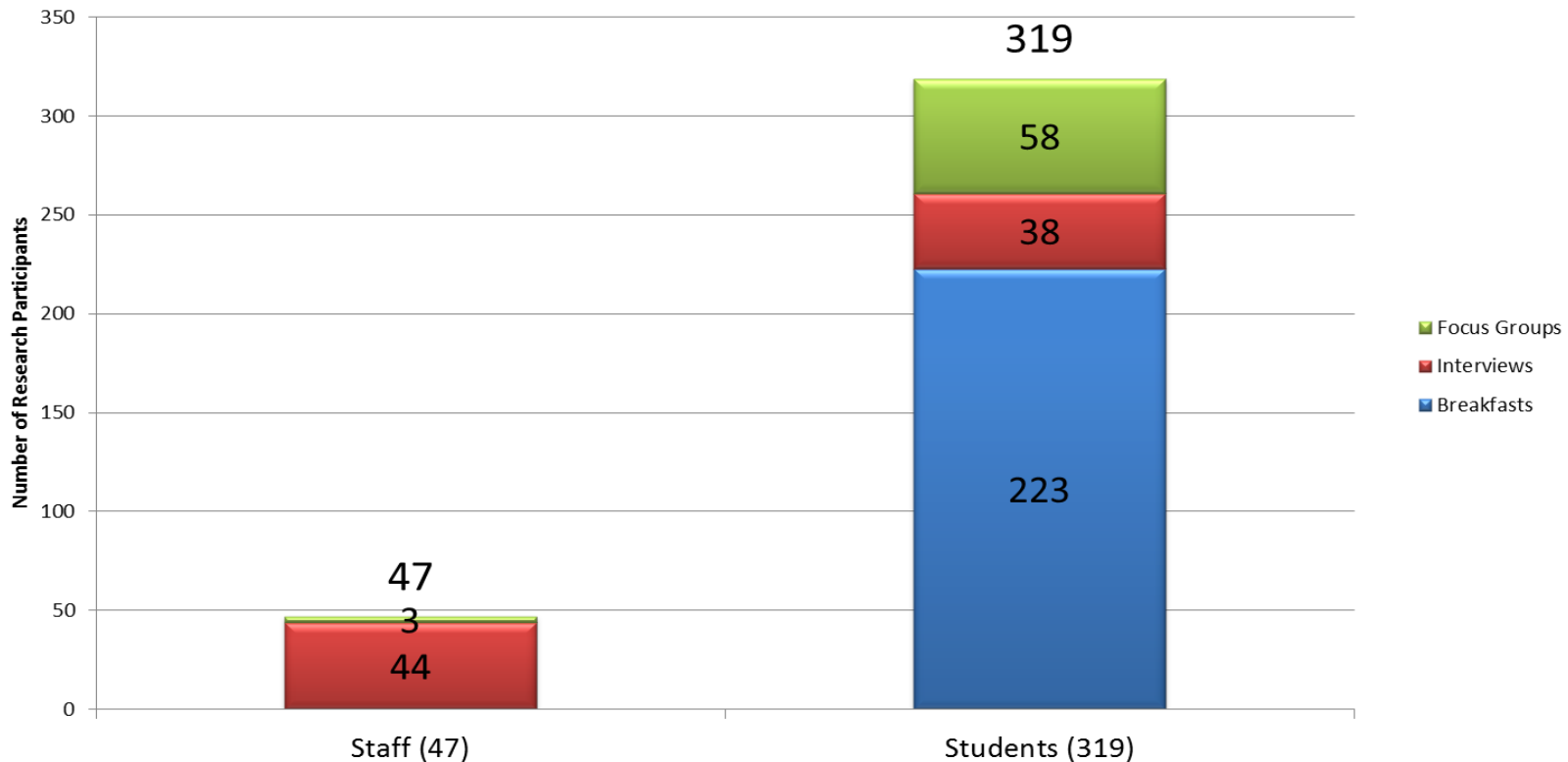
Research Participation

State-Based Participation in National Postgraduate Student Experience Research

Symposium Participation

Staff and Student Symposium Delegates

- University staff member — 63%
- Postgraduate student — 25%
- Both — 7%
- Other — 4%
- Unknown — 2%

Symposium Participation

Institution Affiliation of Symposium Delegates
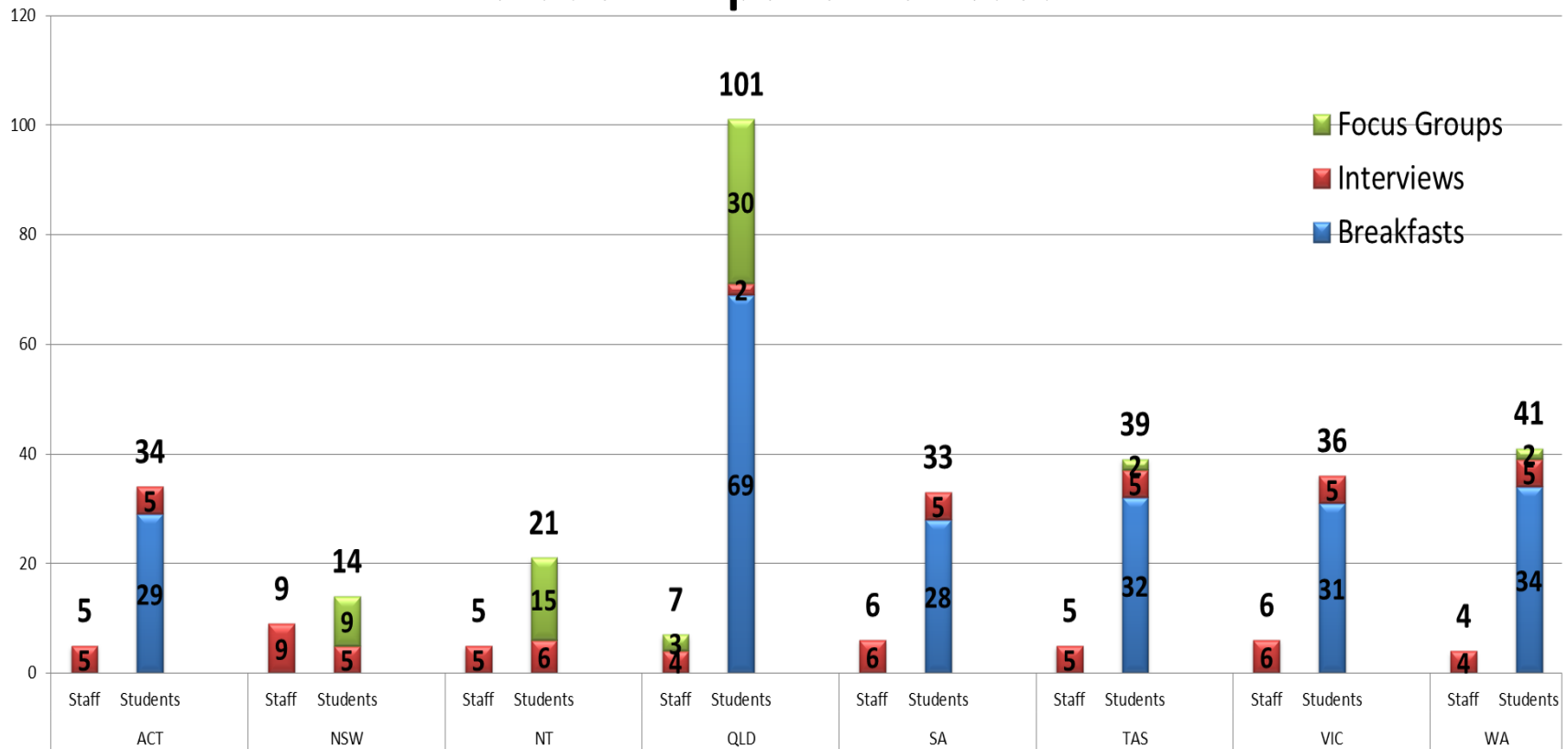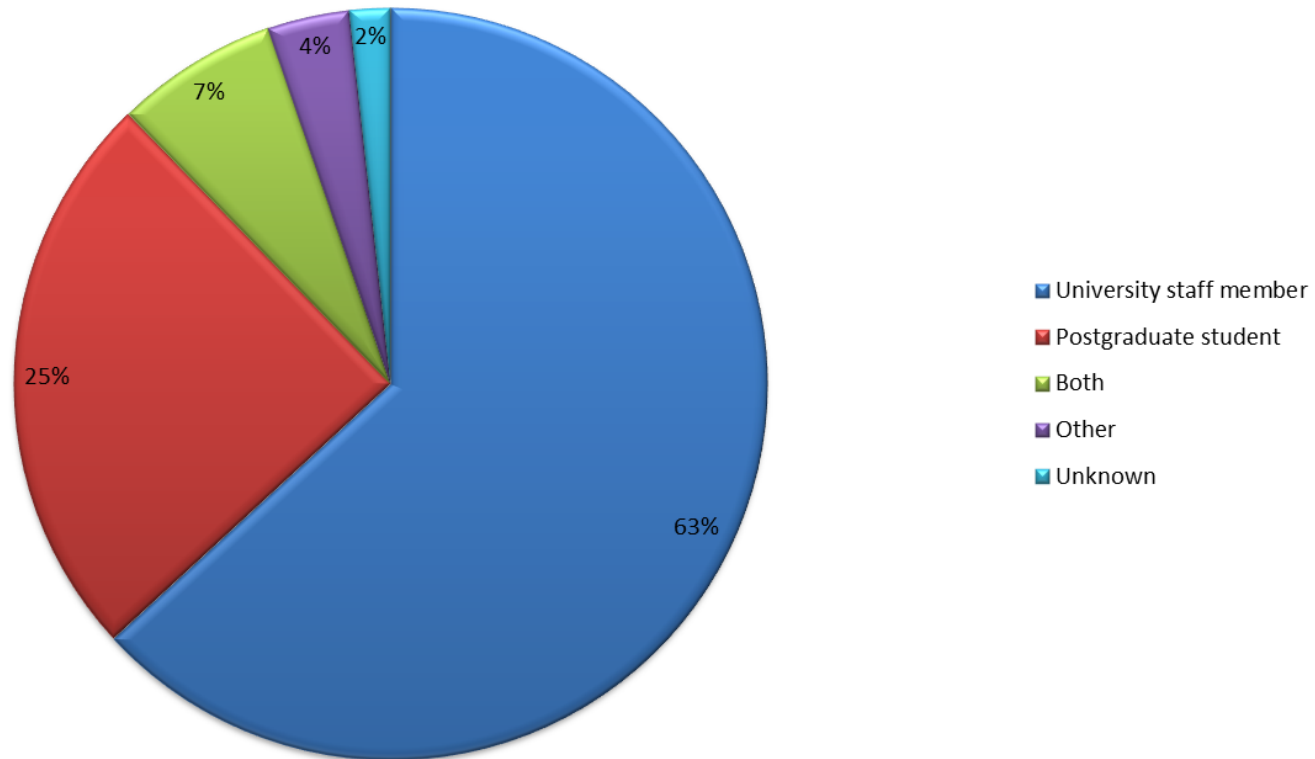

Legend:
- Bond University
- University of Southern Queensland
- Queensland University of Technology
- Griffith University
- Victoria University
- James Cook University
- Unknown
- LaTrobe University
- Monash University
- Australian Catholic University
- Australian Office for Learning and Teaching
- Central Queensland University
- Charles Sturt University
- Flinders University
- RMIT University
- University of Tasmania
- University of Technology Sydney
- Avondale College of Education

Pie chart values: 46%, 7%, 6%, 5%, 5%, 4%, 4%, 3%, 3%, 2%, 2%, 2%, 2%, 2%, 2%, 2%

Symposium Participation

Role of Staff Symposium Delegates
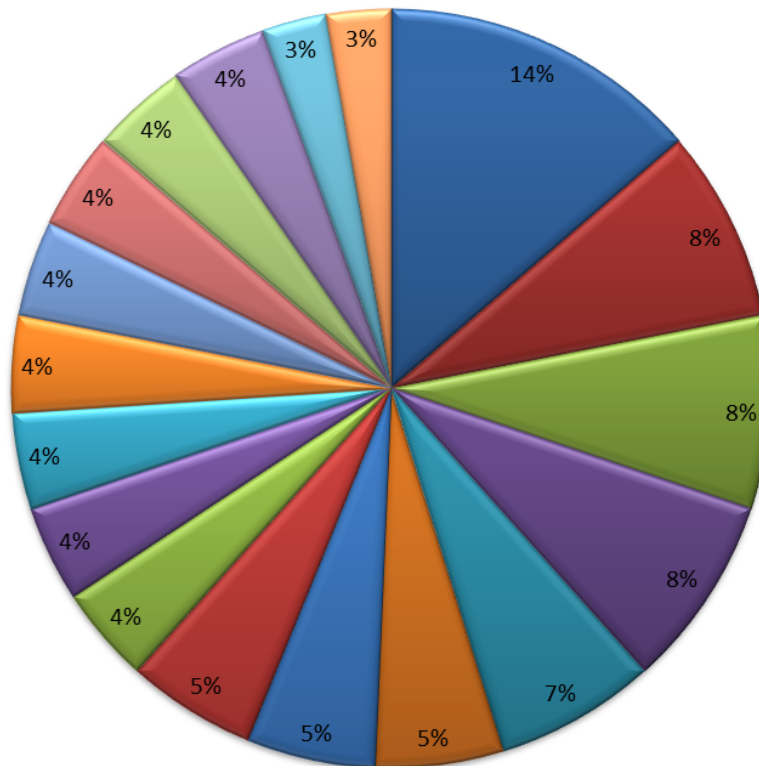
Legend:
- Teaching Fellow/ Lecturer
- Associate Dean
- Associate Professor
- Director, Learning & Teaching (inc Deputy)
- Senior Teaching Fellow/ Senior Teaching Fellow
- Assistant Professor
- Director/ Manager of Student Recruitment
- Project Coordinator/ Manager
- Learning coordinator
- Manager
- Postgraduate Career Counsellor
- Postgraduate Manager
- Pro-Vice Chancellor
- Research & Graduate Studies Officer
- Research Fellow
- Vice-Provost/ DVC
- Consultant
- Director, Research Training & Development

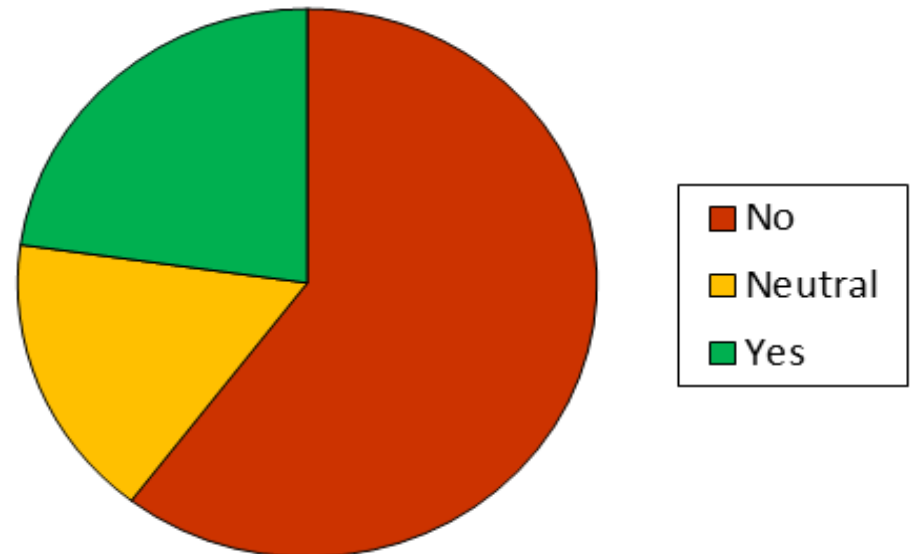# Postgraduate student employability
Optimism about graduate outcomes

Only 14% (7 people) who expressed an opinion (51 people) among interviewed postgraduate students and university staff (82 people across Australia) are optimistic that postgraduates will secure related careers upon graduation. 51% are pessimistic and the others neutral.

Legend:
- Negative
- Neutral
- Positive
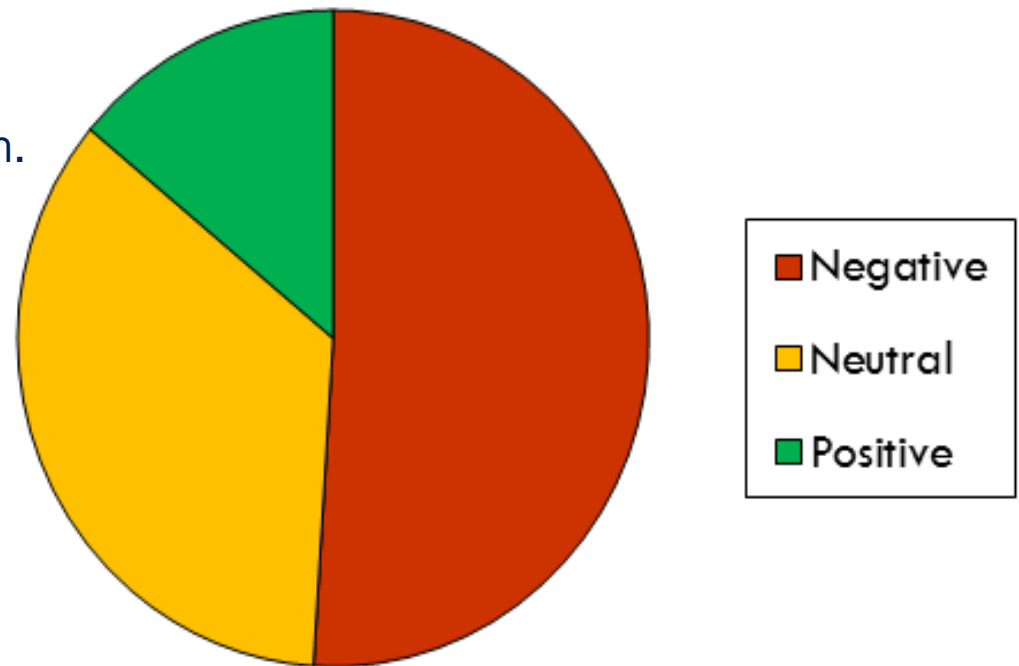
Postgraduate student employability

61% (of the 71 people who expressed an opinion) believe that Australian universities need to improve postgraduate employability supports.

Are you satisfied with postgraduate employability supports & services?

Legend:
- No
- Neutral
- Yes

Postgraduate student employment concerns

The number one expressed concern about employability was the harsh & competitive job market.

Postgraduate Student Employment Concerns
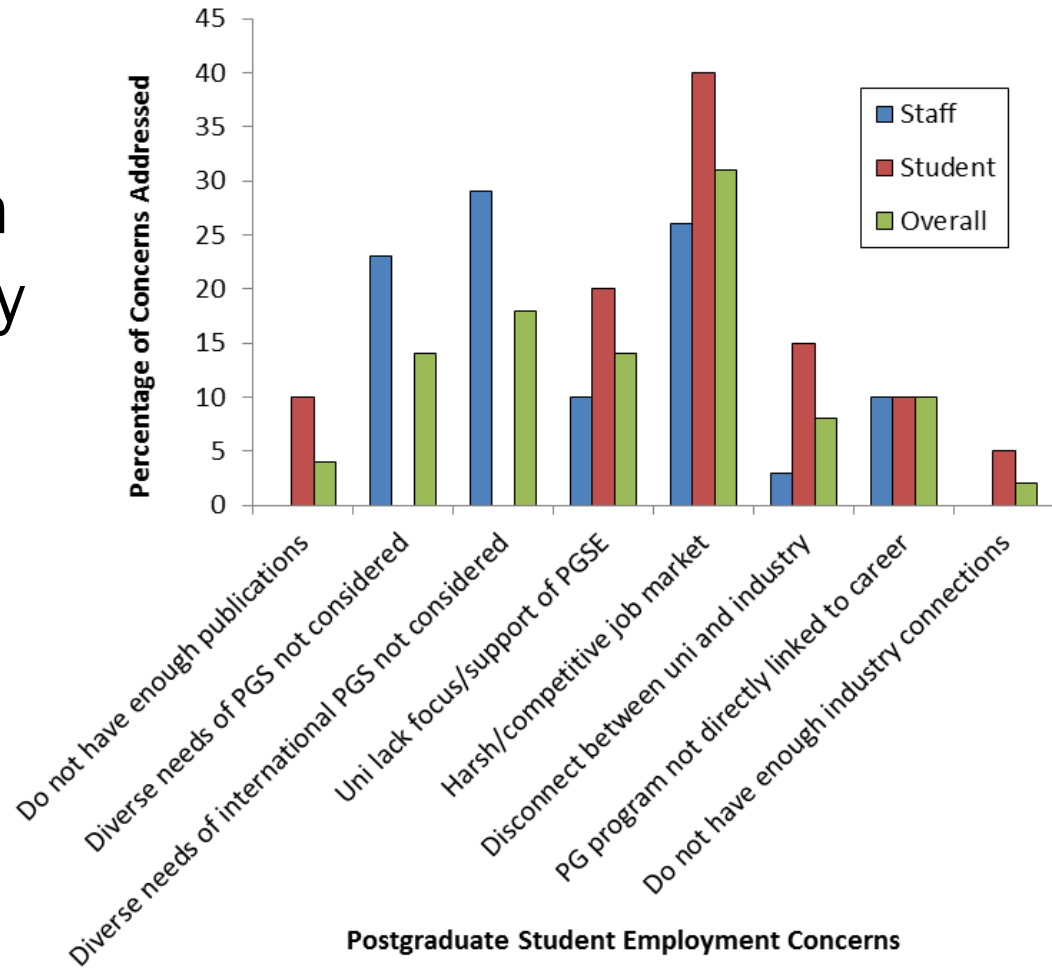
How to improve postgraduate employability

The majority of recommendations to enhance employability (37%) related to the provision of work opportunities whilst studying (embedded in curriculum and/or supported work experience and internships).
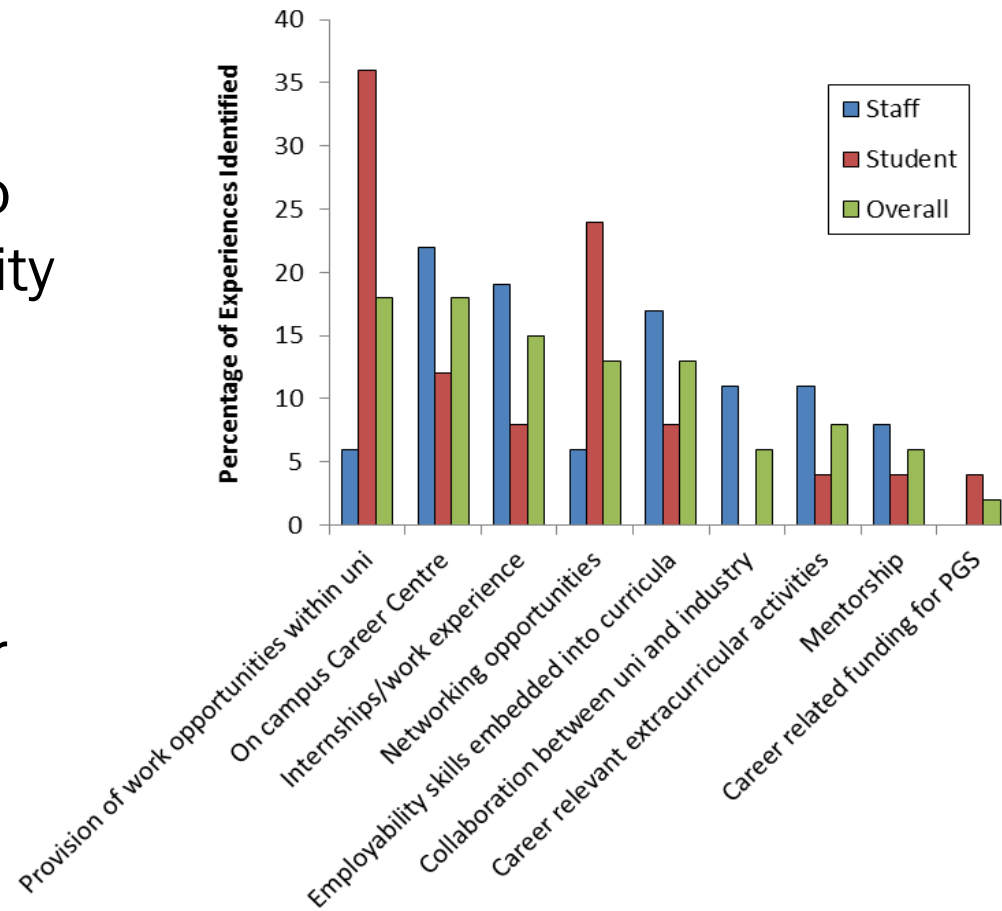
Good Practice Experiences of Support for Postgraduate Student Employment

Overly focussed on undergraduate student experience

- Staff research participant

  'We need to consciously and explicitly think about the differing support needs of the postgraduate community. It is hard because they are very diverse. They all have got different needs. We operate on the assumption that they know how to study, but somebody who has got their first degree 15 years ago hasn't ever used the internet to study. So it is not always straightforward. We do think about the student – supporting the student needs, but we probably make the mistake of thinking too much about the undergraduates.'

- Nationally – no QILT data about postgraduate students

- Yet postgraduate enrolments increasing at a higher percentage

- Recommendation to Government – Postgraduate data collection

- Recommendation to Universities – Close-the-Loop

Closing the loop

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Overly focussed on Research ... and Challenges for those Aspiring to Academic Careers

Staff research participant

'I think the PhD is desperately in need of an overhaul. As a qualification for academic work, I always found it bizarre to think that preparation for what is essentially a teaching career is the ability to lock yourself in a room for four years and never speak to anyone and produce a piece of research. We need to look at where these people might go outside of academia. The higher education sector is hung up on research at the moment and I think internally there are a lot of institutions vying for what they see as prestige positions on the research ladder. That is coming at a cost to high-quality student experience because individual academics are working more and more at their research outputs rather than improving the quality of the student experience. This trajectory of these postgraduate research students – their experience is very much focussed on becoming lead researchers but then I think the door closes for them.'
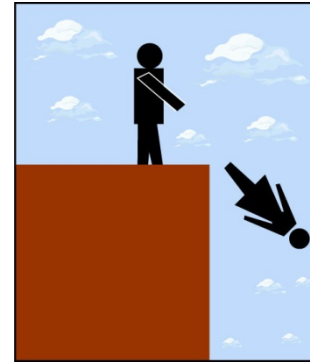
Student research participants

'I've had to make my own opportunities. There essentially was no career development that takes you from your degree into academia. Other than pushing someone off a cliff.'

'I would go anywhere where there's a permanent position. However, I've been told by the workforce out there that I'm unemployable. So I've spent 10 years perfecting a CV that's suited to academia, which essentially, I'm told that I can't even get a job answering phones with.'

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What we are all here for …

Student Research Participant

'When I boil it down, it is really about putting the postgraduate student and the welfare (intellectual welfare as well) – putting that at front and trying to support that. It is a very individualistic way of looking at it and possibly very resource intensive and not very practical. But at the end of the day, I think that is what a learning community or environment needs to do – how we support and nurture that person to get the best experience, to learn as much as they can to be the best person they can be, to ultimately contribute to society. So that is what we're all here for.'