Postgraduate Student Experience
Explanatory Factors

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

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

Beattie & James, 1997
Forsyth et al., 2009
Wells, 2008
Most Common Profile of Coursework Masters Students

- Female
- 20-29 yrs
- International

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)

Kiley (2013)
http://courseworkmasters.anu.edu.au/dissemination.htm
National Enrolment in Postgraduate Coursework Degrees (From Department of Education and Training)
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QILT (Quality Indicators for Learning & Teaching)

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

Student Experience Survey

Undergraduates Only

Institution tables and graphs from 2013-2014

University Experience Survey
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)

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Teaching Quality
(2013/2014 UG Data)

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Learner Engagement
(2013/2014 UG Data)
Skills Development
(2013/2014 UG Data)

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Employment Outcomes
(2013/2014 UG Data)

Percentage

Educational Institution

Divinity
Charles Darwin
Southern Queensland
UniA2015
UniB2015
UniC2015

87
85.5
85.2
63.9
63.6
63.1
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
• 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)
### Research Participation

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<tr>
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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

- **Staff (47):**
  - Focus Groups: 47
  - Interviews: 3
  - Breakfats: 44

- **Students (319):**
  - Focus Groups: 58
  - Interviews: 38
  - Breakfats: 223
State-Based Participation in National Postgraduate Student Experience Research

- Focus Groups
- Interviews
- Breakfasts
Symposium Participation

Institution Affiliation of Symposium Delegates

- 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
Symposium Participation

Role of Staff Symposium Delegates

- 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
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.
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?
The number one expressed concern about employability was the harsh & competitive job market.
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).
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
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.’
‘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.’