

Research Training Quality Paper - Information Sessions Consultation Questions

Consultation question 1

Should there be national minimum quality requirements for higher degrees by research? Should an institution only be eligible for funding schemes in fields where it meets minimum requirements?

Consultation question 2

Should institutions be required to provide a minimum standard of physical resources in order to receive Research Training Scheme funding?

THINK ABOUT: how to ensure students have access to the tools they need for their work

Student opportunities

- For budding researchers, broad experience is vital – exposure to a wide variety of people, sites and events
- Local and international fieldwork and presentation opportunities

Consultation question 3

Should universities providing research training be required to ensure that students have sufficient access to opportunities such as conference attendance and international study?

THINK ABOUT: How to accommodate the varying needs of different disciplines and research projects?

Supervision

- What works well; where there's room to improve
- One size doesn't fit all
- Institutional policies on student supervision

Consultation question 4

What is the best way of ensuring that PhD supervisors provide high quality support to students? Should requirements be nationally consistent?

THINK ABOUT: What are the essentials of research supervision, and what sorts of things can be tailored The research environment

- Excellence in Research for Australia – a great indicator of research performance, at the discipline level, within an institution
- But what about:
 - Maintaining currency amid rapid change
 - Research environments that change for the better (or worse)
 - Pockets of excellence below the ERA threshold
 - Emerging disciplines
- We might benefit from other indicators to fill out the picture
- We could encourage partnerships so that an institution can “get over the line”

Consultation question 5

...Should an institution be able to provide alternative evidence of a quality research environment when positive ERA results are absent (for example in an emerging area of research). If so what alternative evidence should be provided?

THINK ABOUT: In the new Excellence in Research for Australia world, how we accommodate different aspects and stages of excellence

Consultation question 6

If an institution is unable to provide robust evidence of a quality research environment, should it be able to submit evidence of arrangements, such as partnering arrangements with another institution?

THINK ABOUT: Arrangements between institutions offering research training in similar fields, and how to make these arrangements work

The research training program

- Research training – designed to impart highly specialised knowledge and expertise
- But problems (and solutions) cross subject borders
- New knowledge hits the road at the intersection of many disciplines

Consultation question 7

Should government do more to enable research training in multidisciplinary environments? What barriers are there and how might they be overcome?

THINK ABOUT: How research training has to adapt to meet the challenges of the 21st century

Broader skills

- Over half of all HDR graduates will be employed outside academia
- We know that “buyers” of research training value generic skills in addition to deep, subject-specific knowledge
- What’s crucial?
 - Problem solving
 - Communication
 - Self-management
 - Initiative and enterprise
 - Teamwork
- Institutions are taking up the challenge via innovative degree models

Consultation question 8

Should Australian higher degrees by research include broader skills training? If so, should this be through compulsory coursework or through some other mechanism?

THINK ABOUT: Preparing research students for different careers – whose job is it? And how should it work?

Other quality considerations: the APA

- Australian Postgraduate Award scheme – a stipend for research students
- APA capped at 3.5 years; RTS ends after 4 years – should they align? (at 4 years)
- Restrictions on other income earned while on an APA – remove?
- Part time research students
 - Part time HDR enrolments grew by 10% last year
 - Do we need to do a better job of support?

Consultation question 9

Should the rules associated with Australian Postgraduate Award scholarships be amended or increased in flexibility? If so, in what ways?

THINK ABOUT: Whether the APA can be made more flexible within current budget constraints; how to better accommodate part time students

Other quality considerations – Research Masters

Masters degrees by research are declining: what's behind that?

Consultation question 10

What is the role of the research masters degree in the Australian research training system? Is its decline a cause for concern?

THINK ABOUT: The decline of the research masters is a message, but what does it say? And how should we respond?

Other quality considerations – student selection and admission

This is about maintaining high standards

- Selection and admission is a matter for institutions
- National standards could improve consistency and quality
- But at the expense of flexibility:
 - In different pathways to research
 - In different requirements by discipline

Consultation question 11

Given the trend towards more diverse entry pathways for higher degree by research, how prescriptive should overlying principles be? How should institutional arrangements for student selection and admission be measured?

THINK ABOUT: Attracting, selecting and retaining students that are well-suited to a career in research

A final word

- The Research Training Scheme is 10 years old
- The market for higher degrees by research is changing
- Ideas about what research training should comprise are evolving
- The policy environment is adapting, too
- What will the next decade bring?
- And how do we position ourselves?