

Subject: FW: Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce

Sent: Thursday, 7 August 2008 1:10 PM

To: Committee, ISI (REPS)

Subject: Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to offer some brief comments/views for consideration by the Members of Parliament who are currently involved in the inquiry into research training and the research workforce.

In particular I want to offer some comments on the future of coursework doctorates (with a thesis component). I believe that there is now concern in many quarters about the quality of the graduates of PhD programs and the quality of the training they receive. The US model of PhD programs that have a substantial coursework component, including an emphasis on research training (e.g., statistics and research methods subjects), seem to produce a better product. The US programs do not assume that merely by having a prior degree with some research training (e.g., Honours in Australia) that students are adequately prepared for PhD level research.

The importance of PhD programs with a substantial coursework component (beyond the 30% taught component that is now the limit imposed on fee-exempt professional doctorates) will, I believe, loom much larger in the future given these concerns about the quality of PhD training and, in particular; the rise of qualifying Masters degrees in such areas as, for example, allied health. There will be a future demand from those holding a qualifying Masters for advanced coursework at the doctoral level plus the opportunity to train in research and undertake a doctoral thesis/dissertation of some reasonable scope. The extension of a fees exemptions to students undertaking a "taught" doctorate (substantial coursework beyond 30 per cent of the degree plus thesis will, I believe, represent an appropriate response, in part at least, to concerns about the quality of PhD programs and their graduates. As noted above, these new taught doctorates will have to provide for advanced coursework content in research methods and statistics as part of the taught component.

Best wishes

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