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Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience: Final report

Linda Crane
Bond University, Linda_Crane@bond.edu.au

Shelley Kinash
Bond university, shelley.kinash@gmail.com

Amy Bannatyne
Bond University, amy_bannatyne@bond.edu.au

Madelaine-Marie Judd
Bond University, madelaine-marie_judd@bond.edu.au

Bill Eckersley
Victoria University

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Linda Crane, Shelley Kinash, Amy Bannatyne, Madelaine-Marie Judd, Bill Eckersley, Gary Hamlin, Helen Partridge, Sarah Richardson, Harry Rolf, Ken Udas, and Ashley Stark

Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience

Final Report 2016

Lead Institution

Bond University

Project Co-Leaders

Associate Professor Linda Crane
Associate Professor Shelley Kinash

Project Managers

Amy Bannatyne – Bond University
Madelaine-Marie Judd – Bond University

Team Members and Partner Institutions

Associate Professor Gary Hamlin – Bond University
Associate Professor Bill Eckersley – Victoria University
Associate Professor Helen Partridge – University of Southern Queensland
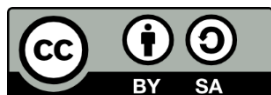Associate Professor Ken Udas – University of Southern Queensland
Dr Sarah Richardson – Australian Council for Educational Research
Harry Rolf – Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
Jim Smith – Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations

http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com

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Acknowledgements

List of Acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AGS	Australian Graduate Survey
ATSI	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
AUSSE	Australasian Survey of Student Engagement
BOND	Bond University
CAPA	Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Go8	Group of Eight Australia
HEA	Higher Education Academy (United Kingdom)
ISB	International Student Barometer
PGSE	Postgraduate Student Experience
PVC	Pro Vice-Chancellor
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
USQ	University of Southern Queensland
VU	Victoria University

Project Keywords and Definitions

Citizen Scholar is 'a student who cares not only about gaining information and generating knowledge but one that is rooted in the reality of their context, problem oriented and interested in applying their knowledge for the betterment of a society.' (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016, p. 1)

Diversity refers to implicit and explicit understanding that each student is unique. It is the notion that all postgraduate students have individual learning preferences, backgrounds, needs, and capacities, which need to be respected and valued to provide excellence and equity in higher education (Morgan, 2013).

First Year Postgraduate Experience describes totality of a student's experience with, and transition to, their higher education. Consistent with previous definitions of the FYE, which largely focused on the undergraduate context, it is acknowledged that this transition is often affected by social, cultural, and situational factors, resulting in a multiplicity of first year experiences, with no common end-point to the transition (Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2006; Kift, 2009).

Graduate Employability means that higher education alumni have developed the capacity to obtain and/or create work. Furthermore, employability means that institutions and employers have supported the student knowledge, skills, attributes, reflective disposition and identity that graduates need to succeed in the workforce (Hinchcliffe & Jolly, 2011, Holmes, 2013, Kinash et al., 2015a; Kinash et al., 2015b; Kinash et al., 2016; Knight & Yorke, 2004; Yorke, 2006; Yorke & Knight, 2006).

Loneliness is defined as a lack of contact with families (personal loneliness); loss of networks (social loneliness); separation from preferred culture or linguistic environment (cultural loneliness) (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008).

Learning Management System (LMS) is a software application or web-based technology used to plan, implement, and assess a specific learning process. Typically, a learning management system provides an educator with a way to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance. A learning management system may also provide students with the ability to use interactive features such as threaded discussions, video conferencing, and discussion forums.

Postgraduate Student Experience describes the totality of students' involvement with, and engagement in, their higher education, and the prioritisation of learning within their broader contextual environment.

Student Experience can be defined as '…a phrase that encompasses not only the academic aspects of teaching, learning and curriculum but also student lifestyle and extracurricular activities, academic advice, support and mentoring, and work experiences' (Benckendorff, Ruhanen, & Scott, 2009, p. 84).

Student Voice is conceptualised as students' feedback and perceptions about their learning as essential in determining what support needs to be offered to them (Andrade, 2006; Novera, 2004).

Transition Pedagogy is "a guiding philosophy for intentional first year curriculum design and support that carefully scaffolds and supports the first year learning experience for contemporary heterogeneous cohorts" (Kift, 2009, p. 2).

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Executive Summary

- How do postgraduates rate their student experience?
- What matters most to them about this experience?
- How do perceptions of experience vary between those in coursework versus research degrees?
- Is there agreement or dissonance between the perceptions of postgraduate students and the staff who support them?
- How can postgraduate student experience be improved?

Whereas Australia has largescale national surveys of undergraduate students, there are no equivalent regular, ongoing surveys of postgraduates. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) of the United Kingdom separately surveys research and coursework postgraduates (called Postgraduate Taught Students in the United Kingdom) and presents reports 'in the students' own words.' Australia currently has nothing equivalent and the voices of coursework postgraduate students appear to be particularly under-represented.

Team Members and Institutional Affiliations

Led by Associate Professors Linda Crane and Shelley Kinash from Bond University, a group of researchers has responded to a call from the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching and were awarded a strategic priority research grant to inquire into the postgraduate student experience from the perspective of students and the staff who support them. The other members of the research team were:

- Associate Professor Gary Hamlin, also of Bond University;
- Professor Ken Udas and Professor Helen Partridge, DVC and PVC respectively of University of Southern Queensland;
- Associate Professor Bill Eckersley of Victoria University;
- Dr Sarah Richardson of the Australian Council for Educational Research;
- Harry Rolf, followed by Jim Smith, Successive Presidents of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations;
- Professor Sally Kift, Critical Friend and DVC of James Cook University; and
- Project Managers Madelaine-Marie Judd and Amy Bannatyne.

The Evaluation Team of Helen McLean, Grace Lynch and Garry Allan, RMIT played key formative roles in assuring the impact of the project and contributing to the dissemination.

Goals and Aims

The overall goals of the research were to determine what Australian postgraduates think about their student experience and to recommend ameliorative actions to guide the strategies of higher education leaders. The specific project aims were to: (i) undertake a comprehensive analysis of the broad experiences of Australian coursework postgraduate students, and the relationship these broad experiences have to learning; and (ii) establish evidence based recommendations, including best practice guidelines, that can be used to impact and enhance Australia's postgraduate students' broad experiences.

Project Activities and Demographics of Participants

Engagement with 319 postgraduate students and 47 staff (*N* = 366) was conducted through:
- Student engagement breakfasts (*n* = 223),
- Face-to-face interviews (*n* = 82), and
- Face-to-face focus groups (*n* = 61).

In addition, secondary analysis was conducted of national surveys with over 67,000 postgraduate coursework students and compared against perspectives of undergraduates.

Students and staff participating in the research were widely (and intentionally) varied.

- Overall, 319 students participated from 26 universities and 8 states/territories.

- Among the 319 participating students, 223 were derived from the engagement breakfasts, 38 from the individual interviews, and 58 from the focus groups.

- Of the 261 students participating in the engagement breakfasts and interviews (focus group demographic information was not collected), the average student age was 35 years, the modal age was 24 years and the age range was 21 to 60.

- Sixty nine per cent of these students were female and 30.5 per cent were male (one did not disclose gender).

- The most common discipline of participating students was humanities (17%), followed by business (11 per cent), and general sciences (10 per cent); however, almost half of the students did not explicitly disclose their discipline (45 per cent).

- Over half the sample identified as being full-time students (59 per cent).

- In terms of degrees, 52 per cent were enrolled in a doctoral program and 38 per cent in a master's program. The remaining 10 per cent were enrolled in other postgraduate courses such as diplomas, self-identified as being in combined programs transitioning between master's and doctorates, or did not clearly identify their postgraduate program.

- Overall, 56 per cent identified as being enrolled in research-based programs, 27 per cent in course-based programs, and 7 per cent in mixed modes (elements of both coursework and research). An additional 9 per cent identified their programs as "other," while 1 per cent did not disclose their program.

- Overall, 47 staff participated from 26 universities and 8 states/territories.

- The most common position of participating staff was university lecturer (22 per cent), followed by professor (18 per cent), and institutional or department director (16 per cent). In total, there were 9 different position types included, including non-academic professional staff.

- There were 25 female participating staff and 22 male staff.

Key Findings

Through the course of this work, an understanding of the 'postgraduate student experience' emerged and was conceptualised to describe the totality of students' involvement with, and engagement in, their higher education, and the prioritisation of learning within their broader contextual environment. The term encompasses students' (and their supervisors'/educators') appraisal of, and engagement with, their methods of learning, affective response toward their course, interaction with the institution, sense of identity and belonging, support system (within and outside the university), and the contextual factors that assist or disrupt their progress – personally, academically, and/or professionally. The definition evolved from earlier work with research students (e.g., Leonard, Metcalfe, Becker, & Evans, 2006) to incorporate all forms of postgraduate study, whether that be research, coursework, or a mix of both. Notably, it reflects the journey of a student in multiple domains (e.g., academic, personal, professional, and social), and acknowledges the complexity and diversity of experiences cannot be synthesised into a universal definition.

Four key findings emerged and were confirmed by 107 delegates attending a national symposium in the final stage of the project.

1. The overall design concept of the postgraduate student experience is largely ignored by universities. There is a belief that overall, universities have improved the undergraduate student experience through focused inquiry, consultation and strategic action, but have not put equitable resources into understanding and improving the postgraduate student experience.

2. Postgraduates are highly diverse and the resulting complexity / multiplicity of student experiences are not sufficiently accommodated in universities.

3. Postgraduate students do not receive adequate support for their transition to postgraduate modes of study.

4. There is a pervasive assumption that postgraduates do not need career and employability supports and partially as a result (alongside a tough economic context) graduate career outcomes are unsatisfactory.

In April 2016, 107 delegates from 28 Australian universities and three national organisations (*Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching*, *Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations* and *Australian Council for Educational Research*) came together to consider the postgraduate student experience at a national symposium, which was the main dissemination event of this project. The symposium presenters were drawn from the project team, reference group, and research participants (university staff and postgraduate students). Together (and based on the research data from this project) the attending delegates created a list of strategic action recommendations for executive leaders of higher education (also available on http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com).

Action Recommendations for Executive Leaders of Higher Education

1. Create regular national forums for cross-university and cross-discipline postgraduate conversations.

2. Create tools and dissemination vehicles for national data collection on the postgraduate student experience (coursework and research considered separately and together).

3. Across the country, establish positions with responsibility and authority for coordination of postgraduate coursework programs at the school/faculty/university level as appropriate. This action requires support and training and must be valued and recognised through such means as protected time and recognition in workload/promotion criteria. This action is also intended to establish feedback/action channels for coursework students.

4. Create and disseminate a national 'value postgraduates' campaign. As part of this campaign, advance a shared understanding on a national basis, of 'postgraduate student experience.' Furthermore, establish clear and agreed indicators of postgraduate 'success'.

5. Implement supports and strategies at the university level that are customised to address postgraduate employability needs and engage a national campaign to heighten opportunities for graduates from postgraduate degrees.

6. Improve national policies and practices regarding universities as employers. Put more mechanisms into place to support PhD students in the transition from student to academic. Advocate for improved working conditions for early career academics (i.e., longer contracts, reduced workload, improved access to resources and services).

7. Make postgraduate student experience a priority within universities and nationally. Extend equitable and appropriate supports to postgraduate students (as to undergraduate students).

8. Create (and support postgraduate students to achieve and sustain) authentic governance positions (nationally and locally). Furthermore, engage an equity campaign so that ATSI students achieve governance positions that are not limited to ATSI portfolios.

9. Foster greater senses of community within universities and on a national basis so that postgraduate students have increased levels of social supports throughout their studies and into their graduate experiences.

In short, acknowledge, recognise and treat postgraduates as **Citizen Scholars** – 'students who care not only about gaining information and generating knowledge but that are rooted in the reality of their contexts, problem oriented and interested in applying their knowledge for the betterment of a society.' (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016, p.1)

Chapter 1 – Introduction

In April 2016, 107 delegates from 28 Australian universities and three national organisations (*Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching*, *Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations* and *Australian Council for Educational Research*) came together to consider postgraduate student experiences at a national symposium, which was the main dissemination event of this project (Appendix E). The symposium presenters were drawn from the project team, reference group, and research participants (university staff and postgraduate students). Throughout the presentations and the discussions that followed, there was widespread agreement on four major themes.

1. The overall design concept of the postgraduate student experience is largely ignored by universities. There is a belief that overall, universities have improved the undergraduate student experience through focussed inquiry, consultation and strategic action, but have not put equitable resources into understanding and improving the postgraduate student experience.

2. Postgraduates are highly diverse and the resulting complexity / multiplicity of student experiences are not sufficiently accommodated in universities.

3. Postgraduate students do not receive adequate support for their transition to postgraduate modes of study.

4. There is a pervasive assumption that postgraduates do not need career and employability supports and partially as a result (alongside a tough economic context) graduate career outcomes are unsatisfactory.

The symposium was the culminating event of a national research project conducted as a strategic priority of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching between February 2015 and August 2016. *Bond University* was the lead institution, with partner institutions – *University of Southern Queensland*, *Victoria University* and partner peak body organisations – *Australian Council for Educational Research* and *Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations*. The project aims were to:

(i) Undertake a comprehensive analysis of the broad experiences of Australian coursework postgraduate students, and the relationship these broad experiences have to learning; and

(ii) To establish evidence based recommendations, including best practice guidelines, that can be used to impact and enhance Australia's postgraduate students' broad experiences.

As seen in Table 1, there were a total of 366 research participants from across 26 Australian universities (319 students and 47 staff). Research interpretations and resulting recommendations were determined through this reasonably large sample, drawn from across Australia. The call for research participation was extensive, broad-based, and purposive in that the researchers were careful to involve, where possible, proportional balances of males and females, a diverse and wide range of disciplines, and the perspectives of those participating in both course- and research-based degrees.

Table 1

Research participants across methods.

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Total
No. of Breakfasts	**1**			**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	7
Breakfast participants	**29**			**69**	**28**	**32**	**31**	**34**	**223**
Interview participants	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 Group participants		**9**	**15**	3 **30**		**2**		**2**	3 **58** *61*
Total participants	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

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The number of students enrolled in postgraduate degrees within Australia continues to increase (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2014; Graduate Careers Australia, 2015; Pearson, Evans, & Macauley, 2008; Smith, 2002; Watson, Johnson, & Walker, 2005). In 2014, the number of enrolled postgraduate students 'increased by 8.4 per cent to 376,055 while undergraduate students increased by 2.9 per cent to 952,280 (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2014). Compared to the number of Australian postgraduate students in 1997 (Coulthard, 2000), the number doubled by 2014. A number of variables have been postulated to explain this increase, including: labour market shifts requiring graduate up-skilling; increased life expectancy; alterations to government policies and; twenty first century social and technological advancement (Beattie & James, 1997; Forsyth et al., 2009; Wells, 2008).

A defining feature of the twenty-first century postgraduate student is the sheer diversity of this cohort (Cluett & Skene, 2006; Watson et al., 2005). Diversity is expanding alongside an increase in international students who are completing their postgraduate degrees within Australian universities (Denson, Dalton, & Zhang, 2009; Leder & Forgasz, 2004; Lin-Stephens, Uesi, & Doherty, 2015; Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011; Edwards, 2011). In particular, coursework postgraduate students are difficult to categorise, constituting a range in age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Tones, Fraser, Elder, & White, 2009). Higher education institutions are thereby challenged to grapple with the identity and resultant support services that are required for this diverse, yet distinct, cohort.

In contrast to research higher degrees, coursework postgraduate programs are often professionally focused, and conducted over a relatively short period of time to maximise efficiency (Cluett & Skene, 2006). In common with research students, postgraduate coursework students may be employed on a full-time or part-time basis, have families to care for, or other time-intensive commitments (Cluett & Skene; Edwards, 2011; Beattie & James, 1997). These factors can impact the expectations that postgraduate coursework students may have of the institution, the services the institution provides, and/or the students' perceptions of what the student experience should entail. Research pertaining to the postgraduate coursework student experience remains limited, with the focus of published research largely placed on the experiences and expectations of postgraduate research students (Beattie & James, 1997; John & Denicolo, 2013; Pearson et al., 2008; Trigwell & Dunbar-Goddet, 2005; Walsh & Tucker, 2011). Consequently, there is little known about the postgraduate coursework cohort including: their experiences, expectations, or perceptions of what the postgraduate student experience involves (Edwards, 2011; Palmer, 2010).

A key indicator to measure quality standards within higher education is the perceived student experience (Kember & Leung, 2005; Zeng & Webster, 2010). Through the course of this work, an understanding of the 'postgraduate student experience' emerged and was conceptualised to describe the totality of students' involvement with, and engagement in, their higher education, and the prioritisation of learning within their broader contextual

environment. The term encompasses students' (and their supervisors'/educators') appraisal of, and engagement with, their methods of learning, affective response toward their course, interaction with the institution, sense of identity and belonging, support system (within and outside the university), and the contextual factors that assist or disrupt their progress – personally, academically, and/or professionally. The definition evolved from earlier work with research students (e.g., Leonard, Metcalfe, Becker, & Evans, 2006) to incorporate all forms of postgraduate study, whether that be research, coursework, or a mix of both. Notably, it reflects the journey of a student in multiple domains (e.g., academic, personal, professional, and social), and acknowledges the complexity and diversity of experiences cannot be synthesised into a universal definition.

Discussion of the student experience has become prominent alongside the growing dominant discourse that higher education is a commodity within the global market (Douglas, McClelland, & Davies, 2008; Lindsay, Breen, & Jenkins, 2002; Singh & Armstrong, 2006). As noted by Staddon and Standish (2012), universities are businesses wherein a quality student experience, and thereby perceived value for money, is fundamental to continuance. This differing perspective creates a potential tension with the traditional view of universities that is important when considering responsibilities and roles in providing opportunities for a quality experience for students.

Chapter 3 – Research Project Activities

The current project focused on 8 key research questions, Questions 1 to 6 were taken directly from the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching call for research on the 21st century student experience, which the team interpreted from a postgraduate perspective. Questions 7 and 8 were added by the team during the proposal planning phase to reflect discussions and perceptions of the unique challenges of the postgraduate student experience in these domains.

1. How can universities keep up with the ever-changing demands of a diverse student population?

2. How can universities offer flexibility and innovation in student services for: the application process; enrolment; student support study assistance; the IT environment; learning and teaching online; and assessment?

3. Learning experience versus student experience – how can the learning experience contribute to, or detract from, the overall student experience?

4. What is the most valued part of a student's experience: is it bandwidth and how material is given to students, or is it the way extra-curricular activities are shaped? Or other?

5. What is valuable about the on-campus experience? In this new educational age, how can we translate a positive campus experience into a positive online experience?

6. Students' sense of 'belonging' and their engagement in academic study have been identified as key contributors to student success—how can universities ensure that off-campus students still feel as if they belong to the university community?

7. What are the contextual factors that affect the postgraduate student experience? Specifically, what are the disciplinary differences in postgraduate experience and between coursework and research experiences and between online/distance and on campus? What are the differences between experiences at Go8, research intensive, regional and other types of universities?

8. How is career development related to, and an impact factor in, the postgraduate student experience? What should universities do to support the emerging career development needs of postgraduate students and how should the curriculum be modified to address graduate employability?

Project Participants and Demographics

Prior to project commencement, primary ethical approval was obtained from the human research ethics committee at the lead institution (RO1917), with gatekeeper approval obtained from partner institutions and participating institutional data collection sites.

Engagement with a total of 319 postgraduate students and 47 staff ($N = 366$) was conducted through: student engagement breakfasts ($n = 223$), face-to-face interviews ($n = 82$), and face-to-face focus groups ($n = 61$). Staff and students participating in the research were widely varied. Overall, 319 students participated from 26 universities and 8 states/territories. Among the 319 participating students, 223 were derived from the engagement breakfasts, 38 from the individual interviews, and 58 from the focus groups. Of the 261 students participating in the engagement breakfasts and interviews (focus group demographic information was not collected), the average student age was 35 years, the modal age was 24 years and the age range was 21 to 60. Sixty nine per cent of these students were female and 30.5 per cent were male (one did not disclose gender). The most common discipline of participating students was humanities (17 per cent), followed by business (11 per cent), and general sciences (10 per cent); however, almost half of the students did not explicitly disclose their discipline (45 per cent). Over half the sample identified as being full-time students (59 per cent). In terms of degrees, 52 per cent were enrolled in a doctoral program and 38 per cent in a master's program. Fifty-six per cent identified as being enrolled in research-based programs, 27 per cent in course-based programs and 7 per cent in mixed modes (elements of both course and research). An additional 9 per cent identified their programs as "other," while 1 per cent did not disclose their program. Overall, 47 staff participated from 26 universities and 8 states/territories. The most common position of participating staff was university lecturer (22 per cent), followed by professor (18 per cent), and institutional or department director (16 per cent). In total, there were 9 different position types included, including non-academic professional staff. There were 25 female participating staff and 22 male staff.

Project activities were managed in three phases that were progressive, in that themes from the first approach were used as probes in the second and so on into the third.
1. Secondary Analysis of National Surveys
2. Student Engagement Breakfasts
3. Interviews and Focus Groups

Phase 1 – Secondary Analysis of National Surveys

Secondary analysis was conducted on the results from three surveys by the team member under the employ of ACER. The surveys were the Australian Graduate Survey (AGS), the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE), and the International Student Barometer (ISB).

The approach to analysis was first to consider the data in each data set for each of the eight research questions previously listed. Then data was analysed at the macro scale, with findings regarding the postgraduate coursework student experience compared with findings on the undergraduate student experience. The next step was to further analyse what appeared to be significant differences and to consider contrasts between potentially unique cohorts of postgraduate coursework students.

Table 2

Overview of the Surveys used in the Secondary Analysis.

Survey	Owner	Year	PG coursework students included	Total students included
AGS	Department of Education	2013	47,487	138,712
AUSSE	Australian Council for Educational Research	2010	8,344	34,293
ISB	Department of Education	2012	11,973	36,493

Phase 2 – Student Engagement Breakfasts

Seven student engagement breakfasts were held in six of eight States/Territories (two breakfasts were held in Queensland because two of the three partner institutions in the research were based in this State). Notably, breakfasts were advertised in every State/Territory; however, recruitment did not derive sufficient registration numbers to warrant breakfasts in one State and one Territory. Focus groups were subsequently purposefully recruited in these States/Territories to assure distributive data collection in the national research. Participants were identified / recruited through multiple methods:

1) Targeted contact with students facilitated by the postgraduate association team member;
2) Direct invitations to senior administrators in the relevant universities;
3) Broad based calls for student participants in the relevant institutions; and
4) Invitations issued through the team members' networks and professional associations.

Participants were targeted to ensure a diverse range of experiences with course and research-based postgraduate degrees, on-campus, online and mixed-mode study, and professionally and non-professionally focused courses. One of the breakfasts was held outside of a capital city in a regional community. The average student attendance across the six breakfasts was 32. Each breakfast was facilitated by two project team members. Five key questions were posed at each of the engagement breakfasts.

- *What do the words 'student experience' mean to you?*
- *What are the most valuable and/or key components of the postgraduate student experience?*
- *What is well-done by your university?*
- *What is not well-done by your university?*
- *What strategies do you suggest to improve the postgraduate student experience?*

A variety of facilitation strategies and process approaches were used to generate rich, recorded content. These included small group round-table discussions generating paper-based word clouds, sticky-note brainstorming and classifying, and whole-of-group brainstorming and synthesis. Within each breakfast session, themes from table group discussions were shared and whole-group discussion was used to ensure the take home messages had broad ownership and authenticity across the group. At small group tables (ranging from four to seven students per table and four to seven tables per breakfast for a total of 39 tables across the seven breakfasts), participants self-generated word clouds using coloured markers on poster paper. The students were encouraged to illustrate emphasis through use of colour and size. Two members of the research team independently analysed each of the word clouds, identifying primary, secondary and tertiary themes, and the relationships between them. The Project Manager then reconciled the analyses, sending the word cloud out to another team member when there was less than 80 per cent agreement between the analyses. The primary research methodology at this stage of the project was action research, with the postgraduate student stakeholders actively engaged in the change process (Carson & Sumara, 1997; Smith, Willms, & Johnson, 1997).

Phase 3 – Interviews and Focus Groups

A total of 82 interviews (44 staff and 38 students) were conducted by the Project Leaders and Project Manager. A minimum of six interviews (range 6 to 14) were conducted in each of eight States / Territories. The staff interviews were conducted with higher education teaching academics, executive, and other leaders. Students and staff were each asked nine research questions (see Appendices B & C).

Probes included additional follow-up questions and questions based on the emerging sub-themes from the analysis of existing surveys and the student engagement breakfasts. Each interview was scheduled for one hour and was completed face-to-face. Each set of State/Territory interviews were conducted over two days. Participants were identified / recruited through the same methods as described for the student engagement breakfasts, in addition to following up referrals from the engagement breakfasts. Participants were targeted to ensure a diverse range of university experiences including course and research-based postgraduate degrees, on-campus, online and mixed-mode study, and professionally and non-professionally focused courses. Interviews were fully audio-recorded and transcribed, with the transcriptions subsequently analysed by team members and research assistants until concordance of theme identification was reached.

Applying the narrative methodology approach of Shaddock (2014), each transcript was independently analysed by three project team members, inserting interpretive data onto a thematic proforma. Serving as a Research Consultant, the ACER team member collated, aggregated, and validated the three independent analyses. If there was less than 80 per cent agreement, the Project Manager sought subsequent analyses until 80 per cent agreement was reached. SPSS software was used to derive demographic statistics and to analyse comparison of responses between groupings of research participants. The overall methodology for this stage of the project was comparative case study, using the approach of Dowell and Bach (2012) and Yin (2014). The study is also design-based research as it collected and described naturalistic higher education experiences (Kelly, Lesh, & Baek, 2008).

There were a total of nine focus groups conducted. Eight were comprised of postgraduate students and the other was comprised of staff. Two of the focus groups were conducted in the State and the Territory where recruitment did not result in sufficient registrations to allow the engagement breakfast method to produce maximal benefit. Two of the focus groups were held with groups of students who were studying together in coursework postgraduate degrees, to ensure that this mode of experience was well-represented in the research. As described previously, among the students participating in the engagement breakfasts or interviews, 56 per cent identified as being enrolled in research-based programs, 27 per cent in course-based programs and 7 per cent in mixed modes (elements of both course and research). Because there is a paucity of research literature written about postgraduate coursework experiences, focus groups were an opportunity to bound inquiry to this realm of experience. The other focus groups were comprised of small groups of research participants who felt their experiences and perspectives would be best shared together (rather than via one-to-one interviews) to encourage richer data collection and the emergence of additional themes based on experience sharing and group provocations.

Each of the focus groups was facilitated by one of the Project Leaders and/or the Project Manager. The facilitator ensured all participants were engaged and invited to speak. The facilitator followed a semi-structured interview guide, which provided structure, yet also allowed the focus group conversation to be participant-directed. On occasions when dialogue moved too off-topic, the facilitator would return the focus to the particular question. All of the prompts were derived from themes arising in the student engagement breakfasts. Two audio-recorders were used to ensure all comments were captured. The recordings were fully transcribed. A narrative analysis software tool (NVivo) was used for the thematic analysis, allowing identification of key words and themes from the transcripts.

Chapter 4 – Results

Sentiment and Satisfaction

The key research findings were that postgraduate students and the staff who support them are dissatisfied with the student experience and believe that universities should improve services and supports. Secondary analysis of national surveys showed that postgraduate students and graduates are less satisfied than are undergraduate students.

National survey results indicate that postgraduate coursework students:

- are *less satisfied* with their educational experience than undergraduate students;
- feel *less supported* by their institution to succeed academically than undergraduate students;
- are *less satisfied* with enrolment processes than postgraduate research students;
- feel *less challenged* by examinations than undergraduate students;
- are called on to demonstrate higher order thinking more than undergraduate students;
- have *equally limited engagement* with teaching staff as undergraduate students;
- are *more motivated* by their studies than undergraduate students;
- feel *under less pressure* in their courses than undergraduate students;
- are *less interested* and *less likely to engage* in extra-curricular activities than undergraduate students;
- feel *less supported* by the university community if they study online than on campus;
- are *more active* in preparing for careers than undergraduate students; and
- experience *less improvement* in their generic skills than undergraduate students.

At the engagement breakfasts, students were asked to create manual word-clouds to depict what *student experience* means to them. A meta-cloud was created to aggregate the words used by the students across breakfasts. As seen in Figure 1, the result was a highly emotive depiction.

Figure 1. Word-Cloud Depicting What Student Experience Means to Postgraduates.

The words that are depicted in the largest font were emphasised by the greatest number of participating students. These terms largely depict sentiment that can be interpreted as negative – *Stress*, *Challenging* and *Uncertainty,* although the word *Challenging* was used as both a negative and positive descriptor. Notably, positive sentiment was also expressed in terms such as *Networking* and *Fun*. As seen in Figure 2, students were specifically asked what components of their student experience are NOT well-done by their universities.

Figure 2. Word-Cloud Depicting What Postgraduates Believe is NOT Done Well by Universities.

The three themes that emerged in response were – *Student supports, Financial support* and *Supervision*. When probed further, the primary *missing* student supports from the perspective of postgraduate students were in the context of employability, transition to postgraduate study and support for learning, socialisation and networking. Probing financial support, students indicated a belief that scholarships and awards such as travel bursaries had declined. Notably, 61 per cent of student engagement breakfasts were in research-based programs. Among this population, supervision emerged as a concern.

While focus group participants discussed many and varied positive characteristics, services and supports of postgraduate student experience, they also offered numerous features that were in need of improvement. Focus group participants were purposively selected to ensure the postgraduate coursework student experience was strongly represented in this research, because in most publications regarding postgraduate student experience, degrees by research are prioritised. Across focus groups, these coursework postgraduate students emphasised experiential elements associated with taking university classes. Overall, students tended to believe that their student experience had declined over time and, where it remained positive, the experience was inconsistent (patchy). Students commented about support services and personnel being reduced so that previously provided services (for example, personalised subject advisors / selection assistance, and postgraduate lounges) were no longer available, and systems were more cumbersome because key staff roles were 'made redundant'. Quality appeared to be most variable when considering academic staff as educators. For every focus group participant who mentioned a *passionate* educator who had, for example, made efforts to make student introductions to a well-developed professional network, there were multiple who stated they often had the opposite experience. Students reported many of their educators appeared to be passing time, rather than truly believing in postgraduate learning and making the experience outstanding.

Interviewed students and staff were asked to rate postgraduate student supports on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from one (*low*) to five (*high*). As seen in Figure 3, notably, there was very little difference between the mean rating as indicated by students (*M* = 3.50) and staff (*M* = 3.30). In other words, students and staff gave the postgraduate student experience an overall score of less than 70 per cent (mediocre). When asked for their rating rationale, both students and staff commented there were positive elements, but the experience was inconsistent and could be improved in many aspects. The primary grievance from students was staff-related. Specifically, coursework students reported many educators and administrative staff were not as dedicated and passionate as they could be. For research students, supervisors were often perceived to be ineffective and/or uninspiring. Staff felt that although efforts are increasing, as awareness of the needs of postgraduate students grows, there is still opportunity for substantial improvement.
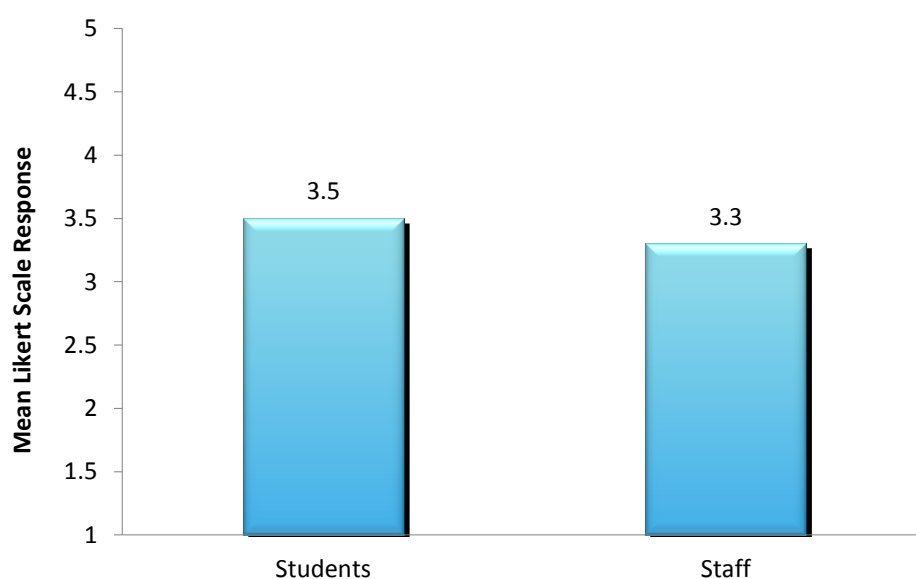
Figure 3. Bar Chart Depicting Students' and Staff Persons' Mean Rating of Postgraduate Student Supports.

Another area that garnered frequent mentions by participants was employability services and supports. Only 14 per cent (7 people) who expressed an opinion (51 people) among interviewed postgraduate students and staff (82 people across Australia) were optimistic that postgraduates will secure related careers upon graduation. Fifty-one per cent were pessimistic and the others were neutral. Furthermore, 61 per cent (of the 71 who expressed an opinion) believed Australian universities need to improve postgraduate employability supports. The 17 interviewed PhD students did not feel universities effectively support the transition from postgraduate student to early career academic. The majority of recommendations to enhance employability (37 per cent) related to the provision of work opportunities whilst studying (embedded in curriculum and/or supported work experience/internships). Analysis of focus groups revealed career development and employability experiences and recommendations for improvements consistently emerged as primary themes.

Chapter 5 – Meaning and Implications

This section of the final report aggregates the data and summarises what emerged from the data in response to each of the questions proposed in the project application.

1. **How can universities keep up with the ever-changing demands of a diverse student population?**

    Many postgraduate students and staff raised the topic of change in the context of postgraduate studies. Change was most often discussed in relation to career relevance and digital evolution. Many research participants commented that careers and expectations are rapidly evolving and commended programs, which are able to responsively change content and pedagogical processes. A number of participants compared postgraduate to undergraduate programs, indicating an expectation that the former be more agile both because smaller size increases capacity for change and because postgraduate programs tend to be more specialised thus necessitating shifts to accommodate contextual evolutions. For example, a staff person said, '*The degree's experiences are very much tailored to particular markets and you certainly cannot afford to do that with undergraduates where your structures have to apply for the whole university and with electives that can be dipped into and out of*.' There were two frequently occurring responses to the question of how universities can keep up, informing descriptions of good practice in this area. First, students commended programs which applied constructivist pedagogies, consulting students on their backgrounds, experiences and goals. An illustrative student quote was, '*With constructivist thoughts about learning … every student is an individual who has constructed our own learning and our different ways from our different experiences … potentially providing them with opportunities to personalise it and bring a bit more of themselves into the experience*.' Second, students also commended programs which were closely aligned with discipline-based industry, inviting employers to regularly peer review content and learning activities, and to guest lecture.

    'I suppose in simplistic terms, we have to provide them with the student experience of the future, not the teaching experience of the past and that means using all of the devices we can including good use of technology, more importantly though, well designed and well delivered curriculum to help them to be able to access and progress their education postgraduate experience.' (Interviewed staff person)

2. **How can universities offer flexibility and innovation in student services for: the application process; enrolment; student support study assistance; the IT environment; learning and teaching online; and assessment?**

    In the context of student services, there were four frequently occurring terms used by both postgraduate students and staff – ease, online, national and flexibility. Students and staff said that many processes are unnecessarily cumbersome and complex. They commended universities which accomplished ease of processes (particularly of an administrative nature). Students compared how easy it is to book a flight and make online purchases, compared to the complexity of navigating university application and

enrolment. Many students commented on the complexity of making changes to registration or navigating paperwork for progress reports. The good practice recommendation in this regard was to contract efficient online services to make administrative processes easy so that students can focus their energy on intellectual / academic complexity.

At each of the student engagement breakfasts, students expressed surprise when they learned of the significant variability between the experiences and student services between universities. Students felt there should be a national program and national standards, guidelines, and expectations. Students were surprised that application, enrolment, and other such processes were widely varied and inconsistent between universities, and often between faculties and programs within the same university. At the breakfasts students compared and contrasted postgraduate access to study assistance; scholarship and travel assistance availability; and technology resources and supports. Many students commented they should be considered Australia's postgraduate students rather than belonging to a given university, and that national alignment would improve the overall consistency, efficiency, and transferability of student services and supports.

Many students commented they did not currently perceive or experience postgraduate student services as flexible. For example, three students who used the word flexible said, '*Flexibility – more alignment with very clearly identified professional skills,*' '*Providing students with a rich educational experience in ways that maximizes their ways to be flexible to do the degrees while they are working or to do the degrees while they are juggling two small children and a whole lot of stuff which is your typical experience of postgraduate study,*' and '*Absolutely critical for them as opposed to undergraduates is flexibility … for having a really deep interactive experience with a bunch of postgraduates.*' A good practice recommendation in the context of flexibility was to create a personalised experience whereby the individual needs and contexts of postgraduates are known and accommodated to create a learning experience which works for students. Universities which were particularly commended for a flexible approach had professional staff coordinators in place to listen to the students and provide personalised supports.

'*I think it is important that postgraduate students also have that access to support and feel like they are not just a number. That at a minimum, someone at the University cares about what is happening to them and wants them to do well and wants to know that they are going okay. And flexibility, I think it is not just about going to a class, getting assignments and doing that. Like choosing what specialization they want to take or how they want to do that and study or how they want to access that material. I think that is important. They are not just a pencil in a box, they want to be a bit special, they want to be the red pencil*.*'* (Interviewed staff person)

3. **Learning experience versus student experience—how can the learning experience contribute to, or detract from, the overall student experience?**

Overall, students and staff emphasised that postgraduates are at universities to *learn*. While social, extra-curricular, digital and spatial components of the experience can contribute to their overall satisfaction and outcomes, the onus is on focussed learning. An illustrative quote from a staff person was, *'I think for the majority, the learning is the number one experience and the social experience is very much what they make it. Overall, the main thing is the learning and that is the only thing that would really keep you going*.' One of the postgraduates gave an amusing account of his maturational process. He said that when he was an undergraduate, university was mostly about meeting girls, whom he considered conquests. As a postgraduate, he said that he is married and wants to learn, including from female students. Students and staff emphasised the importance of quality learning experiences, particularly emphasising the importance of good teaching and good supervision. A student who had not had a quality experience said, '*The leadership within the university is fantastic and they are very well organised. They are inspiring people. If you have a problem, they can solve it. But the teachers are just average. A lot of the teachers have been doing the one thing for a long time and they have become comfortable and you don't get the enthusiasm. The content is the same that it was years ago*.' A number of staff said that the learning experience was particularly critical for international students because most had made so many sacrifices to become a postgraduate. '*Well I always think first of the learning experience because of the international students who have invested. They have often dragged their families over. It can be quite a traumatic experience, cultural shift and trying to find schools for the kids sometimes or trying to find accommodation, but they are coming because they really want to learn*.' Throughout the project, students and staff defined the postgraduate student experience as an intellectual enterprise whereby they have access to people, content, and activities that will support them to learn. As a point of good practice it is therefore imperative that, as much as possible, universities acknowledge holistic needs of postgraduate students while preferencing their learning needs with appropriate supports.

4. **What is the most valued part of a student's experience: is it bandwidth and how material is given, or is it the way extra-curricular activities are shaped? Or other?**

At the engagement breakfasts, students were asked to create word-clouds to depict the key components of their postgraduate student experience. A meta word-cloud combined the primary themes across all student respondents, as seen Figure 4 on the following page.

Figure 4. Word-Cloud Depicting What Postgraduates Consider to be Key Components of their Postgraduate Student Experience.

It appears that what matters most to postgraduate students are the basic components of their educational experience. For students in research-based programs, it is the quality of supervision, and for students in course-based programs, it is quality assessment. Financial support also emerged as a salient theme. When interviewed students were asked a similar question, the most frequently used word was – support. When probed, many students said they wanted more support for research and/or employability. A staff person said, '*because of the nature of being a postgraduate – their age and therefore their maturity – in terms of their readiness to engage with learning at a particular level is going to be different. And so a lot of students would say, "look, I have done all of that. I know exactly what I need. My time is very, very precious because I am looking after a family and trying to hold down a job. I am doing this for a very focused reason and it is about learning these professional skills." They are far more focused and they have got more life experience and they are more mature so I think they come to learn. They are not looking to have a social life here particularly*.' In regard to good practice, universities were commended when they had efficient support services (particularly of an administrative nature) in place for postgraduate students.

5. **What is valuable about the on-campus experience? In this new educational age, how can we translate a positive campus experience into a positive online experience?**

Among the project participants, there was a strong preference for face-to-face postgraduate student experience. Notably, despite recruitment attempts, very few online students participated in the research. The team surmised that the reason for this absence is that the same factors that make online learning a preferred option for some students also likely limits them from participating in extra-to-load research activities. Those participants who stated a strong preference for on-campus postgraduate experiences said that robust and often spontaneous conversations are a core component of higher-level learning. For example, one student said, '*I guess what students lose in the long run [from studying online] is that sense of "student life." We are already seeing campus culture really suffering.*' A staff person said, '*The thing about face-to-face learning is you can put a lecturer in a lecture theatre and the students will come out of the lecture theatre and stand around the water cooler and they will talk to each other. That will just happen. That will not happen online.*'

In the case of research students, those whose work is predominantly off-campus also felt the isolation, an experience that is often compounded by the individual nature of their research. Although postgraduate students value the social aspects of learning, they acknowledge the challenges of organising opportunities at times/venues that suit the majority given their busy lives and so place these components of their experience at a lower priority. Regarding good practice, project participants recommended 'building virtual water coolers' for online learners so that they had a virtual space and place for spontaneous conversations that are not bounded to particular subjects, curriculum, or assessment, or perceived to be overseen by a university educator.

6. **Students' sense of 'belonging' and their engagement in academic study have been identified as key contributors to student success—how can universities ensure that off-campus students still feel as if they belong to the university community?**

Students, particularly those who were studying online, were mostly of the opinion that their universities did little to create a sense of 'belonging.' For example, one student said, '*A sense of connection to the university for distance students – there really isn't anything at all. The only visibility was when I came to work at the campus, but from an online perspective there was almost none*.' Another student commented that the highly engaged enrolment supports set-up the expectation that the university would provide equivalent learning supports. However, this was not the case. The student described feeling 'disengaged' and said, '*Apart from helping direct you to what to do and when to do it, there didn't seem to be a lot of support*.' An illustrative quote from a staff person was, '*I think we underestimated how much the postgraduate students actually wanted face-to-face contact to get established and started. There is an indication in what we are getting as feedback that they are okay once they feel as though they "belong" to something that they will do an online course or participate in other things like self-managing projects. But they really want to belong to something that helps them commit to their studies*.'

Good practice recommendations came from two universities, both of whom separately labelled their initiatives – '*belongingness projects'.* One described a postgraduate student lounge with group-work spaces, vending machines, a microwave and a sink. The lounge was described as 'heavily used after-hours' and on weekends. The staff person said that the space had '*kept postgraduate students in their studies because of the people that they have met and also it has offered opportunities for employment. We know some people have been employed out of just the conversations in that space*.' The second belongingness project was a formal four-year initiative to implement school-wide welcome sessions. The interviewed staff person said, '*Our postgraduate students reported that those welcome sessions is actually what connected them far more easily into the school. We engage students in those welcome sessions, basically student run, so they are talking to postgraduate students at those sessions. We solve lots of housing problems, legal problems, it is amazing all of the different problems we solve at those sessions*.'

7. **What are the contextual factors that affect the postgraduate student experience? Specifically, what are the disciplinary differences in postgraduate experiences and between coursework and research experiences and between online/distance and on campus? What are the differences between experiences at Go8, research intensive, regional and other types of universities?**

Staff and students emphasised the diversity of postgraduate students and the complexities these varied profiles and roles create. Several staff and students described the postgraduate student role as messy. A staff person said, '*In a way, there is this nice, neat divide of undergraduates. We have them and then the world has them. But postgraduate is messier. Usually we are sharing them with industry and I think we need to sit down and actually talk together about those experiences. We need to not skirt around the fact that we are mostly designing courses for people who are working*.'

A large number of postgraduate students explained that they were simultaneously working and studying at the same universities, and that this introduced another layer of role complexity. An illustrative student quote was, '*I find it difficult to know which day of the week I am someone's colleague and peer as opposed to when I am their student and they are my supervisor. I found it has been a constant battle for me.*' She added a good practice recommendation that, '*I think there would be value in having a workshop to discuss that you are going to have to go through this journey where you are going to be a student, but you are also going to be someone's peer and how to sort of approach the situation.*'

Regardless of the discipline, whether they were studying online or face-to-face, whether they were enrolled in coursework or research, and which particular university they were attending, students and staff were consistent in conveying that in the context of good practice, a quality postgraduate student experience focuses on learning, is personalised and respectful of the students' needs and expectations, provides opportunities for social interaction and networking, is supported by dedicated educators and/or supervisors, and is efficient and well-organised.

8. **How is career development related to, and an impact factor in, the postgraduate student experience? What should universities do to support the emerging career development needs of postgraduate students and how should the curriculum be modified to address graduate employability?**

A substantive theme across the project (shared by both students and staff members) was that postgraduates have employability needs, but universities tend to assume that they do not. When universities do include postgraduates in employability initiatives, these services and supports do not appear to meet the particular needs of postgraduate students. For example, one of the engagement breakfast participants noted he was forced to resign from a high-level paid position to complete a required unpaid internship in an entry-level position. Other students added they had ceased attending their on-campus career centres and career fairs because all of the positions and employers were invited and/or appropriate for graduates from undergraduate degrees.

An illustrative example from a student was, '*A lot of students feel like when they go to the career centre, it is no different from talking to a careers counsellor in high school, … There is no actual direction for them. No way to exercise what they want to get to from the university.*'

Another student contextualised this need for research students. *'I think it is very important that research students get counselled in a more direct way to tell them what they need to do. Australia is not going to be the biggest industrial country in the world, but we can be the biggest country in research in terms of knowledge production'.* Students placed the onus of responsibility for improving employability on the staff with whom they are directly involved on a day-to-day basis as their educators and/or supervisors. Students expressed that employability needs to be thoughtfully embedded in the everyday curriculum, assessment and/or research training and supervision.

Good practice was identified wherein university staff persons were knowledgeable about industry trends and specific employment options and opportunities. Furthermore, students wanted to have personalised conversations and career counselling with staff who knew them and could help shape their futures. An illustrative student comment was:

'I feel that there is a service that they should be doing, that it is part of their role to say, "Here are the opportunities in your field. Here is what it means to be in this career or to use this knowledge elsewhere in life." I think that is a failing across postgrad. This has always been something that I feel really let down on actually, especially when I first started the degree and I felt that disconnection. I thought what would solve this is a bit of discussion about, "Hey what am I doing within this discipline and where can I go with it?" There has always been an assumption by staff that I am just at uni for my own entertainment really. There has never been any thought that I would appreciate career guidance and so on.'

Another student provided a clear call to action. *'I would love some extra support in this field to tell me exactly what are my options and do I really have to do something extra. What can I do to reach my goal or objectives or make my aspirations come true in the end.'*

Chapter 6 – Outcomes/Deliverables

Project website: http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com/

Table 3

*Outcomes/*Deliverables at Project-End

Output	Number
Final Report	1
Journal Papers	7
Case Studies	3
Good Practice Guide	1
Conference Presentations and/or Papers	14
Workshops	4

Journal papers to be completed and submitted for publication consideration in 2016 (7)
- Career development and employability of postgraduate students;
- Australian postgraduate perceptions of the student experience;
- A review of the literature and Australian national survey results about the postgraduate student experience;
- Diversity and profiles of postgraduate students;
- Postgraduate student service needs and perceptions;
- Tiering and belonging of postgraduate students;
- Postgraduate student diversity

Case Studies (3)

Eckersley, B., Crane, L., Kinash, S., Bannatyne, A., Judd, M-M., Hamlin, G., Partridge, H., Richardson, S., Rolf, H., & Udas, K. (2017). *Australian national research on postgraduate student experiences: Case presentations of postgraduate student diversity.* Sydney, Australia: Australian Government Office for Learning.

Hamlin, G., Crane, L., Kinash, S., Bannatyne, A., Judd, M-M., Eckersley, B., Partridge, H., Richardson, S., Rolf, H., & Udas, K. (2017). *Australian national research on postgraduate student experiences: Case presentations of the first year postgraduate student experience.* Sydney, Australia: Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

Kinash, S., Crane, L., Bannatyne, A., Judd, M-M., Eckersley, B., Hamlin, G., Partridge, H., Richardson, S., Rolf, H., & Udas, K. (2017). *Australian national research on postgraduate student experiences: Case presentations of postgraduate career development and employability.* Sydney, Australia: Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

Good Practice Guide (1)
- Part I – Supporting a quality postgraduate student experience
- Part II – Good practice for coursework postgraduate students
- Part III – Good practice for research postgraduate students

Conference Presentations and/or Papers (14)

Kinash, S. (2016, December). *Graduate employability exemplar.* Showcase presentation to Wharton QS Stars Reimagine Education Summit, Philadelphia, **USA**.

Kinash, S. (2016, October). *Stimulating employability through blended learning.* Blended Learning 2016 & Innovation in Assessment & Credentials Summit, IQPC, Sydney, NSW.

Kinash, S. (2016, October). *Inspiring university personnel to improve the student experience and graduate employability.* Invited **Keynote** to the National Tertiary Learning and Teaching Conference. October, Bay of Plenty, **New Zealand**.

Kinash, S. (2016, September). *Developments in the Arts: Standards and substance.* Invited speaker to the Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities 2016 Conference, Hobart, TAS.

Kinash, S. (2016, August). *Building bridges: Connecting discipline learning with employability and innovation.* Invited **Keynote** to University of Adelaide, Festival of Learning, Adelaide, SA.

Kinash, S., Crane, L., Hamlin, G., Kift, S., & Judd, M-M. (2016, July). *Student and staff perceptions on first year postgraduate experiences.* Showcase paper presented at Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Annual Conference: The Shape of Higher Education, Perth, WA.

Kinash, S. (2016, July). *Discrepant perspectives in international student employability.* Learning and Research Excellence in Australia & India Symposium, New Delhi, **India**.

Kinash, S., & Crane, L. (2016, July). *Employers' perspective on graduate employability.* The Future of Education Conference, Florence, **Italy**.

Kinash, S. (2016, June). *Assessment and employability.* Embedding employability into teaching and learning. Criterion Conference, Melbourne, VIC.

Kinash, S. (2016, April). *Graduate employability panel presentation.* Australian Government Office for Learning & Teaching National Conference: Learning and Teaching 2030, Melbourne, VIC.

Crane, L., & Hamlin, G. (2015, November). *Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience.* Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations Annual General Meeting: Brisbane, QLD.

Kinash. S. (2015, November). *Enhancing the postgraduate experience*. Presentation at the Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development Bi-Annual Conference. Adelaide, SA.

Lynch, G., Corrin, L., Kelly, P., Varnham, S., Readman, K., Crane, L., Kinash, S., & Male, S. (2015, July). *The 21st century student experience.* Invited panel sponsored by Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching at the HERDSA 2015 Annual Conference, Learning for life and work in a complex world. July 9, Melbourne, VIC.

Kinash, S. (2015, March). *Redesigning the student experience to centre around students' employment needs.* Strategy for International Student Growth: Delivering sustainable growth in international student recruitment conference. March 29-30, Melbourne, VIC.

Kinash, S. (2015, March). *Developing a personalised learning experience to overcome the crisis of graduate employability*. Reshaping the Student Experience: Adapting to a consumer-driven deregulated market conference. March 25-26, Melbourne, VIC.

Kinash, S. (2014, July). **_Keynote Address_** _- Rehabilitating elephants: Higher education futures Australia & Workshop A: How to develop a personalised learning experience._ Innovations in personalised learning: Reconceptualising institutional strategy to drive student success, Criterion conference, July 29-30, Melbourne, VIC.

Workshops (4)

Kinash, S. (2016, September). _Stimulating learning and teaching scholarship._ Invited workshop to University of Sunshine Coast – Centre for Support and Advancement of Learning and Teaching, Maroochydore, QLD.

Kinash, S. (2016, August). _Meeting the needs of employers workshop._ Graduate employability and industry partnerships forum, Aventedge, Sydney, NSW.

Crane, L., & Hamlin, G. (2016, June). _Coursework postgraduate experience SIG._ Special Interest Group Workshop at Students Transitions Attrition Retention and Success Conference. Perth, WA.

Kinash, S. (2016, June). _Training the trainer to embed employability workshop._ Embedding employability into teaching and learning. Criterion Conference, Melbourne, VIC.

Chapter 7 – Impact

Table 4

Project Impact

Changes at:	Project completion	6 months post completion	12 months post completion	24 months post-completion
(1) Team members	Team members established as ongoing postgraduate student experience research network.	Team members invited to lead postgraduate student initiatives in own institutions.	Team members invited to lead postgraduate student initiatives in other institutions.	Extended research to apply for an additional student experience project grant.
(2) Immediate students/ graduates	Heightened awareness of postgraduate student experience strategies through attending national symposium and workshops.	Higher proportion of students accessing improved postgraduate university services.	Improved quality of first year experience for postgraduate students.	Higher rates of graduate employment 4 months post-graduation for postgraduates.
(3) Spreading the word	7 journal papers (in progress), 1 final report; 1 infographic; 3 case studies, 3 good practice guides, 14 conference presentations and/or published conference proceedings, 4 invited workshops.	8 journal papers (in progress/under review), 1 final report; 1 infographic; 3 published case studies, 3 published good practice guides, 18 conference presentations and/or published conference proceedings, 6 invited	4 published journal papers, 8 journal papers (in progress or under review); 1 final report; 1 infographic; 3 published case studies, 3 published good practice guides, 22 conference presentations and/or published conference	8 published journal papers, 2 journal papers (in progress or under review); 1 final report; 1 infographic; 3 published case studies, 3 published good practice guides, 25 conference presentations and/or published conference

			proceedings, 8 invited workshops.	proceedings, 10 invited workshops.
(4) Narrow opportunistic adoption	Masters students from partner institutions met doctoral supervisors at national symposium.	Two other Bond University academics awarded project grants and fellowships to research aspects of student experience.	Bond University disseminating student experience research to future and enrolled students through TUMBLR.	Project outcomes used to strategically develop whole-of-institution approach to improving postgraduate student experience.
(5) Narrow systemic adoption	Enabling actions added to partner institutions' strategic plans to advance postgraduate student experience.	Case studies used for student and staff professional development in partner institutions.	Strategies for improving the postgraduate student experience applied in all faculties through academic development.	Postgraduate employability made explicit to students at the postgraduate subject level through 100 new subject introductory videos.
(6) Broad opportunistic adoption	Research reported by CAPA applied to make improvements to the postgraduate student experience across the country. Project Leader invited to apply the project outcomes to Australian Catholic University Office of Student Success onsite review.	Networks and connections made at National Symposium developed into academic careers for PGs. Delegate at National Symposium set-up LinkedIn Group on the postgraduate experience and invited keynote speaker, J. Arvanitakis and Project Leaders to co-moderate the group.	Non-partner institutions reported project results and recommend-ations on their university webpages.	Department of Education requested report on postgraduate perspectives to advance their research initiatives. New Zealand consortium invited Project Leader as conference keynote speaker.

	New Zealand consortium invited Project Leader as conference keynote speaker. Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) Women's Equity Officer asked for permission to present project resources at National Organisation of Women Student Associations (NOWSA) 2016 conference.			
(7) Broad systemic adoption	107 delegates from 28 universities attended national symposium and thereby accessed research results. 366 research participants inspired to reflect on improving the postgraduate student experience.	Follow-up reports indicated national symposium delegates implementing 6-month goals. Special Interest Group on Coursework Postgraduate Student Experience continues beyond the Students Transitions Achievement Retention & Success (STARS) Conference.	Extension project (alternate funding) commenced.	Universities across Australia using an embedded whole-of-university approach to improving postgraduate student experience.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Certification by Deputy Vice-Chancellor (or equivalent)

I certify that all parts of the final report for this OLT grant provide an accurate representation of the implementation, impact and findings of the project, and that the report is of publishable quality.

Professor Keitha Dunstan

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

Signature: ....   Date: ...12/12/16...

Appendix B

SP14-4599 – Bond University
Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience

Background

The aim of this project was to establish evidence based recommendations including best practice guidelines that impact and enhance the experience of postgraduate students in Australian universities. Students' perceptions of their experience along with the relationship of these experiences to learning were examined. The study also drew on the perceptions of other stakeholders including higher education leaders, academics and staff to understand the phenomena.

The intended deliverables of the project were all achieved and include:
- Case studies that depicted the experience of postgraduate students in Australian universities
- Good practice guides that provided guidelines, examples and recommendations for students, academics and university leaders
- Project website
- National student experience symposium
- Journal articles/ conference presentations

The project was allocated an evaluator from the independent evaluation team commissioned by the OLT for Strategic Commissioned Projects. The role of the evaluator was to conduct formative evaluation activities throughout the life of the project as well as form summative judgements about the overall merit of the project at its conclusion.

The guiding focus of the formative evaluation was to ensure that the project's aims and outcomes were being achieved with the upmost impact and would be delivered within budget on time. The evaluative activities are outlined in more detail in the following sections.

The summative evaluation that forms the content of this report has been guided by the following questions:

- Was the project managed and conducted in ways that contributed to project success?
- Did the project achieve its stated outcomes?
- Did the project achieve as much impact as it should have?
- How could the processes associated with the project be improved and replicated?

Evaluation Reflections

This project team and the evaluation team were first introduced at the OLT Evaluation workshop in March 2015 for all 2014 Strategic Commissioned Projects. The *Twenty-first century student experience* cluster area was comprised of four project teams and included this project led by Bond University, Associate Professor Linda Crane and Associate Professor Shelley Kinash.

It was evident very early on that the *Engaging postgraduate students* project team included active and enthusiastic members who had clear and achievable project goals and strategies. At the outset, the project was particularly well advanced in the research process having already gained ethics approval for the data collection phase prior to the OLT workshop in March. It is to be noted that a key strength of this project was the strong leadership of the project co-leads who are highly experienced researchers in their fields and had worked together on a previous OLT Strategic Commissioned Project in 2013. The team was also supported by a committed and experienced project manager, Madelaine-Marie Judd, who was extremely thorough in all aspects of managing the project. Also testament to Ms Judd's strong organisational skills and attention to detail was the smooth hand over and transition of the project manager's role when she left the project in April 2015. That competence was maintained by Amy Bannatyne who managed the project through the final stages of completion.

Formative Evaluation Strategies

In order to determine that the project's aims were achieved and outcomes were delivered, formative and summative evaluation strategies were conducted by the evaluator and the evaluation team throughout the research. The evaluator was provided with access to the project team's shared document space on Dropbox and included in all project team communications. The evaluation team members participated in various communications of the project, including virtual and face-to-face project meetings, project emails, reference group meetings and inter-cluster meetings. During the project lifecycle, the evaluation team provided ongoing advice and feedback for progress reports, development of frameworks, analysis of data and development and refinement of resources.

Project Management

It has well known that effective project management practice incorporates principles that:
- Identify project requirements
- Establish clear and achievable outcomes
- Balance the competing demands for quality, scope, time and cost
- Manage the expectations of various stakeholders
- Adapt plans to overcome challenges

This project clearly evidenced these project management principles. In particular, the project was tightly managed with clearly defined outcomes and deliverables, realistic timelines and flexibility to fine tune and make adjustments to accommodate challenges. A wide range of stakeholder groups were involved in the project as sources of data and in project advisory roles. The formal Reference Group was comprised of local and international academics of high repute and was provided with extensive opportunities to provide feedback. The team was also proactive in making links and forming collaborations with other project teams in the *Twenty-first century student experience* cluster of 2014 Strategic Commissioned Projects. The combined experience of the co-leaders and project manager from working together on an earlier OLT project was also an obvious asset and strength in their abilities to keep the project performing on scope, time and to high quality.

Achievement of Outcomes

This project has successfully tapped into the postgraduate experience by exploring that student journey in academic, personal, professional, and social domains. It has given a new voice to contemporary postgraduate students in Australia and the broad range of issues that they face in their experiences relating to their study and learning. It has raised awareness that there is significant misalignment in the perspectives held by students, academics and university leaders of the needs and support that contribute to satisfying student experiences.

A significant finding from the project is that the postgraduate student experience is largely ignored and not as well understood as the undergraduate student experience. This project also determined that the postgraduate cohort is highly diverse and the variance of their experiences is not sufficiently met by universities. Postgraduate students do not receive sufficient support in their transition to study and neither is their expectation for career and employability support met. Overall, there appear to be wide gaps in the perspectives of students, academics and university leaders in managing the expectations and needs of postgraduate students in their higher education experience.

These findings emerged from engagement with 366 participants from across all stakeholder groups, including 319 postgraduate students and 47 university staff. Participants were involved in engagement breakfasts (n=223), in-depth interviews (n=82) and focus groups (n=61) from 26 universities across all Australian states. In addition, national survey data of 67, 000 postgraduate coursework students was analysed and compared against undergraduate perspectives.

While there are 319 student participants, it is interesting to note that 56% identified as research postgraduate, 27% clearly as coursework postgraduate and 17% as a combination of research and coursework. While the original focus of the research investigation was on

coursework students, the project was able to accommodate this phenomenon and incorporate, as further evidence, that the coursework postgraduate is a hidden and difficult cohort to access.

Impact

The project achieved the intended deliverables.

Outcomes	Frequency
Project Symposium	1
Website	1
Case Studies	3
Good Practice Guide	1
Journal Papers	7
Conference Presentations	14
Workshops	4
Final Report	1

At all times in the development of the project artefacts, the imperative for ensuring the maximum impact of these resources across the sector was a top priority for the team.

A two-day national symposium was held in April 2016 as a key dissemination event and was a striking success with over 107 delegates from 28 Australian universities including participants from the stakeholder groups of students, academics and higher education leaders. The symposium also resulted in a list of strategic actions for university leaders for improving the postgraduate experience.

A website was established early in the project and provides access to a wide range of resources and communication networking opportunities relevant to the project. To date the website has logged 2,366 website visits from 1,561 individuals with 4,726 page views. Three case studies were developed. The case studies are thematically based to preserve the voice and integrity of complexity that were raised in the perspectives offered by students.

One best practice guide was produced in three sections that address the overall postgraduate experience as well as coursework and research. The guide also includes recommendations for future practice. While the intended audience for the best practice guide is broad and includes all stakeholders, the layout provides a coherent whole and

distinctively addresses and delivers the issues relevant to the specific targets of students, academics and university leaders.

Seven journal articles were published by the end of the project, and another seven are to be completed and submitted. The conference presentations were conducted at conferences both in Australia and internationally. A number of workshops were also delivered in Australia.

Dissemination also occurred through the informal networking that emerged through the reference group and linking engaged peers who expressed interest in the evolving work of the project.

Summary

The project activities ensured that a large number of stakeholders (students, academics and university leaders) were not only consulted in developing the findings, but were also engaged with the critical question of how to progress the experience of postgraduate students.

This project was conducted in a professional and collegial spirit that was enhanced by the experience, respect and willingness of the team to engage with and learn from others. The relationships that have been formed during this project through the networking required of participants are an asset and key strength that should also contribute to ensuring the project's future impact.

Helen McLean

Appendix C

Engagement Breakfast Table Prompts

Activity 1

- What do the words ***student experience*** mean to you?
  - o Construct a group 'wordle', plus individual comments on the Dropbox cards if you wish.

Activity 2

- What do you see as being the key functional and operational components of your experience (e.g., lectures, assessments, student associations).
  - o Construct a group 'wordle'.

Activity 3

- Think about how aspects of what you value are being addressed at your institution.
  - o Of these, which are being *well done* and which are being *not so well done*

Activity 4

- *Part A* – discuss what is valuable about an on-campus experience.
  - o How does this differ to an off-campus experience?
- *Part B* – discuss how a sense of community can be enhanced for off-campus students.
  - o Create a list to highlight the key issues from your discussions in Activity 4a & 4b

Activity 5

- Each participant should offer one or two strategies and/or recommendations to improve the student experience.
  - o Create a 'wordle' highlighting the most important of these after discussing the ideas.

Activity 6

- Please remember to use the Dropbox cards to tell us anything else about postgraduate student experience that you think will helpful.

Thank you!

Appendix D

OLT Commissioned Postgraduate Student Experience Interview Questions
Student Version

1. Tell me about your university and your postgraduate degree.
   Prompts: coursework, research, online / F2F

   Why did you choose this university? This degree?
   What are the strengths of and needed improvements to your postgraduate degree program?

2. Tell me about your university's
   a. application process
   b. enrolment process
   c. student supports (have you used any and if so, what was the experience like for you?)
   d. study assistance supports (have you used any and if so, what was the experience like for you?)
   e. IT environment
   f. online resources and interaction
   g. assessment

   Do you consider any of these to be particularly flexible? Innovative?
   Overall, how do you rate student services at your university? (On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being high)

3. This research project is in response to a call from the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching about the postgraduate student experience. When I say the words "postgraduate student experience" what comes to mind? In other words what does this term mean to you?

4. Could you please draw me a picture of your/the postgraduate student experience (through your university). Perhaps you would like to show the spaces/places where you engage/learn/interact. Or 'a day in your life' as a postgraduate student. Or what it's like to be a postgraduate student / what matters to you about this experience.

5. Do you think that there are things that make you unique as a postgraduate student? If so, what particular needs does this create? Does your university address / meet these needs? How?

6. Using your drawing as reference, to what extent is your depicted experience about LEARNING and to what extent about other things? e.g. clubs, sports, societies, social events. Tell me about the balance.

7. What do you value most about that experience? What is most important to you? Non-negotiable? Prompts: WiFi, online resources, library, campus life

8. In that experience, what is the relationship between online and on-campus? What is the balance between the time you spend ON line and ON campus? Does this affect your feeling of "belonging"? What does the university do about this?

9. What are your plans for after graduation? Do you think your university has adequately prepared you for / supported you in - these plans? Need for improvement? Additional supports?

10. Is there anything else you would like to say about your postgraduate student experience?

Appendix E

OLT Commissioned Postgraduate Student Experience Interview Questions
STAFF Version

1. Tell me about your university and your university's postgraduate degrees.
   Prompts: coursework, research, online / F2F
   What is your role with postgraduate students? With how many students and how many programs are you involved?
   What are the strengths of and needed improvements to your postgraduate degree programs?

2. Tell me about your university's
   a. application process
   b. enrolment process
   c. student supports
   d. study assistance supports
   e. IT environment
   f. online resources and interaction
   g. assessment

   Do you consider any of these to be particularly flexible? Innovative?
   Overall, how do you rate student services at your university? (On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being high.)

3. This research project is in response to a call from the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching about the postgraduate student experience. When I say the words "postgraduate student experience" what comes to mind? In other words what does this term mean to you?

4. Could you please draw me a picture of the postgraduate student experience (through your university). Perhaps you would like to show the spaces/places where students engage/learn/interact. Or 'a day in students' lives' as postgraduate students. Or what it's like to be a postgraduate student / what matters to about this experience.

5. Do you think that there are things that make your postgraduate students unique? If so, what particular needs does this create? Does your university address / meet these needs? How?

6. Using your drawing as reference, to what extent is your depicted experience about LEARNING and to what extent about other things? e.g. clubs, sports, societies, social events. Tell me about the balance.

7. What do you (and what do you think your students) value most about that experience? What is most important to you and your students? Non-negotiable? Prompts: WiFi, online resources, library, campus life

8. In that experience, what is the relationship between online and on-campus? What is the balance between the time your students spend ON line and ON campus? Does this affect their feeling of "belonging"? What does the university do about this?

9. Do you think your university adequately prepares students for / supports them in – plans for after graduation (i.e. further study, lifelong learning, employment)? Need for improvement? Additional supports?

10. Is there anything else you would like to say about your university's postgraduate student experience?

Appendix F

RO1917 Focus Group Question Set

1. This research project is in response to a call from the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching about the postgraduate student experience. When I say the words "postgraduate student experience" what comes to mind? In other words what does this term mean to you?

   Probe: A number of the groups at "breakfast" session to date have identified a "tension" between the feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed, and the feelings of being empowered and encouraged by the degree of self-direction required. Do you have any experiences or feelings in this regard?

2. Australian postgraduate students are extremely diverse. For example postgraduate students vary with respect to: first in family, social economic status, Aboriginal or Torres Strait islanders and age. Do you have any comments on how support may be structured to support those diverse needs?

   Probe: To what degree should your university provide support to postgraduate students? What are some key examples of supports that are imperative for the success of postgraduate students?

   Probe: How can/should universities balance the need for postgraduate students to be self-directed learners whilst ensuring students receive adequate academic supports?

3. Do you feel that you have enough opportunities to engage with your university? For example, teaching staff, research supervisors, social events and student associations.

4. How is the quality of administration in your institutions? Is it adequately organised? For example, admissions, enrolment.

   Probe: A frequent occuring survey comment was that students are customers and should be treated as such. Do you consider yourselves customers? If so, are you properly treated as customers?

5. What do you value most about that experience? What is most important to you? Non-negotiable? Prompts: WiFi, online resources, library, campus life.

6. Are you given adequate opportunity to use higher order thinking - like analysis and critique - in your assessment tasks?

7. Do you receive adequate support for your career development?

    Probe: Do you receive adequate support to develop your generic skills - things like communication and team work - in your postgraduate programs?

    Probe: Is there a good balance between generic and discipline-specific skills to support development of your employability?

    Probe: Do you receive adequate careers support at your institutions? What kinds of support are extended to you? Are supports more oriented to undergraduate students or are they appropriate to meet your postgraduate needs?

Appendix G

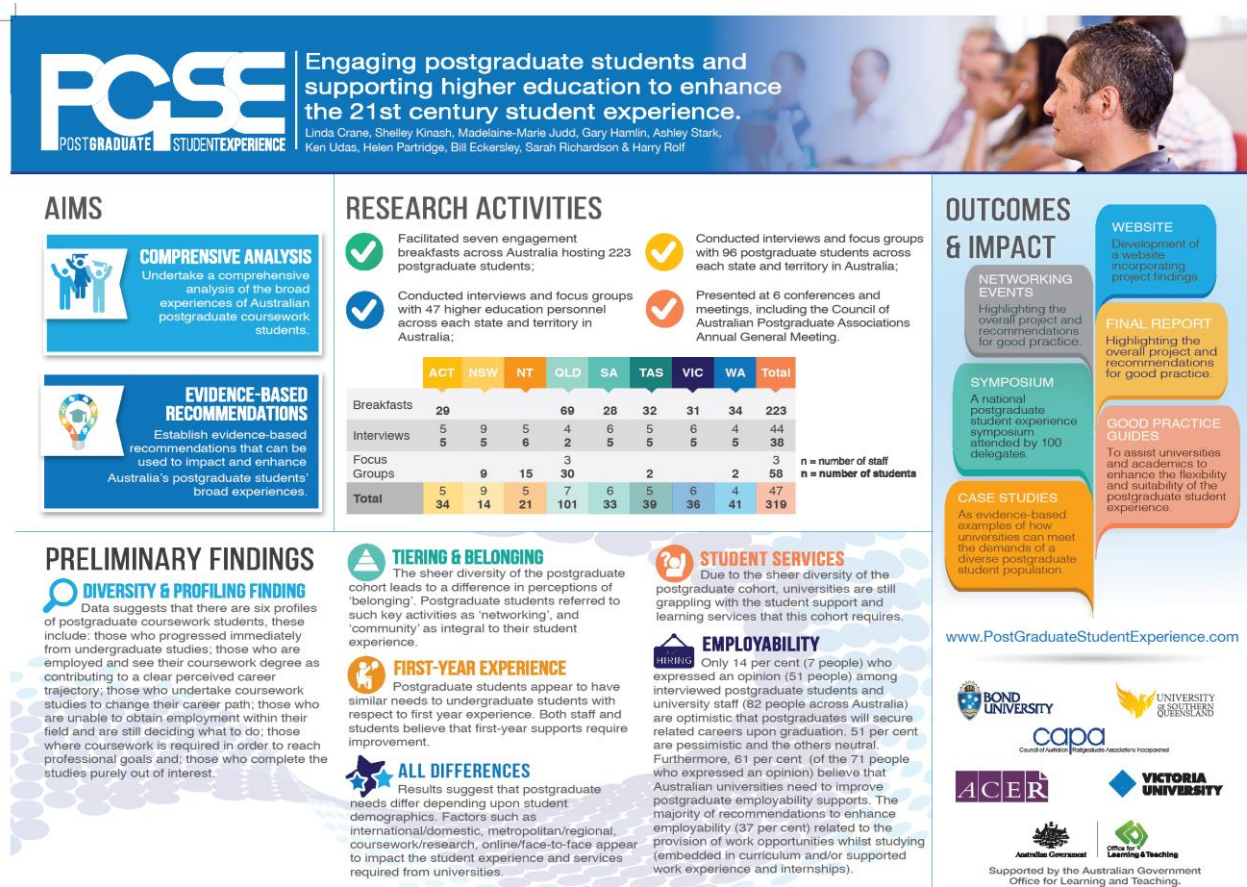**2016 National Postgraduate Student Experience Symposium Program**

SYMPOSIUM DATES & SCHEDULE

THURSDAY 7 APRIL 2016 - DAY ONE

12:00PM - 12:30PM SYMPOSIUM REGISTRATION
Light lunch provided for registered delegates.

12:30PM - 12:55PM WELCOME ADDRESS

12:55PM - 1:40PM KEYNOTE ADDRESS "SUCCESS, ACHIEVEMENT & FUTURES."
Chair - Assoc Prof Linda Crane (Associate Dean, Learning & Teaching, Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine, Bond University)
Professor James Arvanitakis (Dean of Graduate Studies, Western Sydney University)

1:40PM - 2PM POSTER SESSION

2:00PM - 2:30PM PRESENTATION "WHAT DOES THE DATA TELL US ABOUT THE POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE?"
ACER Representative

2:40PM - 3.40PM PRESENTATION OF OLT STRATEGIC PRIORITY PROJECTS
Chair - Ms Helen McLean (Senior Advisor, RMIT University; Evaluator, Office for Learning and Teaching)
Assoc Prof Linda Crane (Associate Dean, Learning & Teaching, Bond University)
Assoc Prof Sally Male (Senior Research Fellow, University of Western Australia)
Professor Sally Varnham (Professor of Law, University of Technology Sydney)

3:50PM - 4:35PM KEYNOTE ADDRESS "PERSONALISED POSTGRADUATE LEARNING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED APPROACHES."
Chair - Assoc Prof Linda Crane (Associate Dean, Learning & Teaching, Bond University)
Professor Ken Udas (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic Services, University of Southern Queensland)

4:45PM - 5:45PM POSTGRADUATE STUDENT PANEL
Chair - Ms Madelaine-Marie Judd (Project Manager, Bond University)
Ms Elissa Roper (University of Divinity)
Ms Ghada Saad (Victoria University)
Mr Harry Rolf (University of Tasmania)
Mr Jim Smith
Ms Sadie Heckenberg

5:45PM - 6:30PM EDUCATOR PANEL
Chair - Assoc Prof Gary Hamlin (Associate Dean, Student Affairs & Service Quality, Bond University)
Assoc Prof Barrie Todhunter (Associate Professor Project Management, University of Southern Queensland)
Ms Josephine Hook (Senior Educational Designer, Monash University)
Assoc Prof Bill Eckersley (Director, Learning & Teaching, Victoria University)
Dr Kate Davis (Lecturer, Queensland University of Technology)

6:30M - 9:00PM DINNER AND PRESENTATION

FRIDAY 8 APRIL 2016 - DAY TWO

8:15AM - 9:00AM BREAKFAST
Including overview of day one and welcome to day two.

9AM - 9:45M KEYNOTE ADDRESS "THE FIRST YEAR POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE."
Chair - Assoc Prof Linda Crane (Associate Dean, Learning & Teaching, Bond University)
Professor Sally Kift (Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, James Cook University)

10:00AM - 12:00PM BREAK OUT SESSIONS
'Demystifying your thesis' - Professor Ron Adams (Professorial Research Fellow, Victoria University)
'UPGRADE for coursework students' - Assoc Prof Barrie Todhunter (Assoc Prof Project Management, University of Southern Queensland)

12:00PM - 12:30PM LUNCH

12:30PM - 1:15PM KEYNOTE ADDRESS "UK PERSPECTIVE ON THE POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE: ACCESS, FUNDING AND EMPLOYABILITY."
Chair - Assoc Prof Linda Crane (Associate Dean, Learning & Teaching, Bond University)
Professor Anthony Smith (Vice-Provost, Education & Student Affairs, University College London)

1:25PM - 2:25PM LEADERSHIP PANEL
Chair - Professor Helen Partridge (Pro Vice-Chancellor, Scholarly Information & Learning Services, University of Southern Queensland)
Professor Keitha Dunstan (Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning & Teaching, Bond University)
Professor Selma Alliex (Pro Vice-Chancellor, The University of Notre Dame)
Assoc Prof Jonathan Powles (Director, Teaching & Learning, University of Canberra)
Professor Sally Kift (Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, James Cook University)

2:30PM - 2:45PM PRACTICAL GOAL SETTING
Assoc Prof Shelley Kinash (Director, Learning & Teaching, Bond University)

2:45PM - 3PM CLOSING
Dr Grace Lynch (Consultant, RMIT University; Evaluator, Office for Learning and Teaching)

Changes may occur. Please consult the PGSE website for updates:
http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com

Appendix H

Project Poster from the 2016 National Postgraduate Student Experience Symposium

Appendix I

Report on 2016 National Postgraduate Student Experience Symposium

On April 7-8th, 2016, the Bond University Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) hosted a National Postgraduate Student Experience (PGSE) Symposium. The Symposium Chairs were Associate Professor Shelley Kinash and Associate Professor Linda Crane. The Symposium was a dissemination/impact outcome of their national research through a competitive research grant awarded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. In total, 107 delegates of the 114 registrants attended the Symposium for an attendance rate of over 93 per cent. Notably, this exceeded the registration target of 100 delegates. Of the 107 delegates, 72 were university staff members, and 21 identified as postgraduate students. The delegates represented a total of 28 different Australian universities, as well as organizations such as the Australian Council for Educational Research, the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA), the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate Association, and the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

The National PGSE Symposium featured a number of notable keynote speakers, renowned for their learning and teaching impact both domestically and internationally. These keynote speakers included Professor James Arvanitakis, Dean of the Graduate Research School and Head of the Academy at Western Sydney University; Professor Ken Udas, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic Services, and CIO at the University of Southern Queensland; Professor Sally Kift, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic at James Cook University; and Professor Anthony Smith, Vice-Provost, Education and Student Affairs at University College London. The distinguished dinner speaker was Professor Keitha Dunstan, Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching at Bond University, and the conference was opened by Professor Tim Brailsford, Vice-Chancellor and President of Bond University. In total, 61 evaluation forms were received (57% response rate).

Delegates were asked to rate speakers on a scale of 1 to 4 based on how knowledgeable they were, how prepared they were and how responsive they were to questions. Average ratings exceeded 3.6 out of 4 across all three categories. A total of 13 peer-reviewed posters were presented by staff and postgraduate students. These posters addressed the unique challenges faced by students and good practice approaches, including variations in learning styles, difficulties establishing a postgraduate community, employability outcomes, and the inherently diverse nature of the postgraduate student cohort. Over the course of the symposium, three panels of distinguished postgraduate staff and students were held to discuss these challenges, and to allow for symposium delegates to participate in the discussions inspired by the panellists.

Across both days more than 90 per cent of delegates who completed evaluation forms reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the sessions offered and the overall event. On average, the sessions were perceived to be comprehensive (average rating of 3.5 out of 4 across all sessions), easy to understand (average rating of 3.6 out of 4 across all sessions), and relevant to the topic of the postgraduate student experience (average rating of 3.5 out of 4 across all sessions). Frequently-occurring terms used to describe the Symposium's various sessions included *informative*, *knowledgeable*, *illuminating*, *well-organised*, *thought-provoking*, and *energising*.

Feedback on the overall experience of the symposium also yielded statements of positivity, inspiration and sustainable impact. As the event's overall aim was to inspire sustainable impact, one of the most meaningful comments was, "*Liked best – Shelley Kinash's closing challenge to put outcomes forward.*" Other particularly meaningful comments were, "*Thank you for caring about the current situation and the future situation for students. We thank you!*" and "*Feel very energised and excited by the presentations. I've been texting and Face-timing my colleagues all day.*"

In addition to completing evaluation forms, numerous delegates sent emails after the event, committing to follow-up actions. Illustrative comments were, "*congratulations to you all for an informative and provocative event*" and "*thank you for organising such an invigorating conference and drawing attention to postgrads.*" One academic from Bond University wrote, "*Bond's OLT is one of the best parts about teaching at Bond. Great team and very helpful to someone like me that teaches so many Bond students.*" A postgraduate student from Bond University stated that "*the event was very well organised, all presentations were of high standard, and I felt proud to be a Bond university student.*"