



## Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor

30 May 2008

Clerk Assistant (Committees)  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
**CANBERRA ACT 2600**

Email: [committee.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:committee.reps@aph.gov.au)

Dear Secretary,

**RE: Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities**

Please find attached the University of Ballarat's submission for the 'Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities'.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Wayne Robinson'.

**Professor Wayne Robinson,  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Ballarat**

Contact Details:

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## Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor

### **University of Ballarat Submission to Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australia Universities**

Our submission focuses on three specific areas that relate to the terms of reference. The areas of focus are those which have particular relevance to the University of Ballarat and other regional universities. However their significance is by no means confined to regional universities.

The submission has three components:

- Research training as a staff development activity
- The varied nature of research students
- Marketing the concept of higher degrees by research

#### **Research training as a staff development activity**

Research training in universities is not confined to higher degrees by research. While undertaking a higher degree by research is one form of research training, it is often quite narrow and does not necessarily provide skills for collaborative and large-scale research. A higher degree has a dual purpose – the production of new knowledge as well as research training – and so additional research training is almost always necessary, even if not always available or undertaken. Such training, offered by universities to their staff, may be undertaken prior to, concurrently with, or (most commonly) after completing a doctorate. In some cases academic staff without a doctorate may undertake such training.

The following are examples of such training at the University of Ballarat.

#### Early Career Researcher Development Program

A number of challenges face early career researchers as they begin to forge their own scholarly identities as independent researchers. The ECR Development Program at the University of Ballarat provides participants with strategic guidance to develop their research careers and navigate the competing demands of their first academic appointments. The semester-long Program consists of a series of 12 workshops and seminars, during which participants are exposed to a variety of perspectives on building a research career from a number of senior academics. Each participant is allocated a senior researcher as Mentor. During the Program, participants discuss the challenges they face as ECRs, develop a roadmap based on the four pillars of building strategic knowledge, forging scholarly identity, developing relationships, and harnessing resources, define their research area, build a personal development plan for the next two to three years, and develop an application for an ECR Starter Grant of up to \$10,000.

The ECR Development Program has been run annually at the University of Ballarat since 2002, during which time it has assisted more than 60 ECRs to become productive researchers. One of the many benefits resulting from the Program is the cultivation of networks from disciplines across the University.

### Emerging Research Leaders Program

Researchers often find themselves in positions where they are expected to provide research leadership but receive little in the way of leadership training. The Emerging Research Leaders Program at the University of Ballarat is being developed to target researchers who are usually more than 5 years out of their PhD and are already, or are expected to be soon, leading research teams, and who are recognised for their research leadership potential. It is planned that the Program will be run every two years, commencing in 2009.

The first phase of the Program will consist of a number of seminars and workshops on topics including management and leadership, building a researcher group, and collaboration with industry. Participants will engage in 'action learning' and discuss their experiences as they apply aspects of the Program. Leadership study visits are proposed as part of the second phase of the Program, the purpose of which is to provide each participant with the opportunity to visit a number of nationally or internationally prominent researchers to study aspects of research leadership.

At UB, as at many other universities, there are also more traditional development programs for HDR students and research supervisors, and we applaud national efforts to improve and regularise such programs.

### **The varied nature of research students**

It is often assumed that students undertaking higher degrees by research are young people that have recently completed undergraduate degrees, which have been undertaken immediately after school-leaving. In fact the profile of HDR students is quite varied. For example at the University of Ballarat, the majority of HDR students is mature-aged. The breakdown of our 2008 enrolled students is as follows:

| <b>Age group</b> | <b>Percentage of HDR students</b> |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 20-29            | 22%                               |
| 30-39            | 21%                               |
| 40-49            | 31%                               |
| 50-59            | 22%                               |
| 60-69            | 3%                                |
| 70-79            | 0.01%                             |

The varied nature of students affects the availability of HDR graduates for the research workforce. For example, mature students who are undertaking doctorates part-time will often have established careers and will not necessarily wish to enter a career in a university or another research setting. This does not mean that they will not utilise their research skills in non-research workplaces, or indeed in the wider community, but it does affect the pipeline of potential career researchers. However there may be a possibility of making research careers more attractive to such professionals, or developing other ways to retain their research expertise, for example through secondment schemes.

## **Marketing the concept of higher degrees by research**

While accepting that not all HDR students will enter the research workforce, greater numbers of HDR students are likely to augment the research workforce. There has been a long term trend in Australia, as in other countries, to widen participation in undergraduate education, but this has not necessarily extended to higher degrees by research. A regional university like the University of Ballarat faces particular challenges in this respect but more generally the challenge is faced by all universities.

In the United States, a decline in domestic HDR student numbers has led to a marketing campaign by the Council of Graduate Schools to advertise research degrees to minority groups. The aim is to promote the concept of graduate education as a public good. The Australian government has very successfully undertaken such campaigns with regard to Australian Apprenticeships. It is suggested that a similar campaign targeted particularly, but not only, to groups that have not traditionally undertaken research degrees, might be successful in attracting new cohorts to research careers. Commensurate increases in funded places would be necessary, and increases in stipends or other financial assistance would make participation easier for many potential research, students particularly people from regional areas and disadvantaged groups.

30 May 2008