HDR Candidature Management Project:
Improving the first year research experience
(2005)

Final Report

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HDR Candidature Management Project:
Improving the first year research experience (2005)

Executive Summary

This study was initiated by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) as part of initiatives in and more effective Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidature management.

The aim was to repeat the 2003 and 2004 studies exploring the quality of the first semester first year research experience at Macquarie University and to gauge the effectiveness of key changes in HDR policy and practice from the student perspective.

In 2005, 56% of the first semester commencing HDR student cohort participated in the study. Overall, participants commented very positively on most or all aspects of their candidature during the first semester of their first year. There are numerous suggestions for “fine-tuning” and ideas for the University and Divisions to further enhance the student research experience.

This final report incorporates the feedback provided by Macquarie University’s Higher Degree Research Committee and recommendations for action.

Overview of Findings

General Findings
1. There is evidence of a strengthened HDR client focus at Macquarie University.
2. Overall support for HDR students is very good, though targeted support to specific groups (e.g. part-time, staff as students, international) is limited.

Supervision Matters
3. The majority of students take great care in the selection of their principal supervisor.
4. Prior experience at Macquarie, personal knowledge of their supervisor and the departmental research reputation remain the principal reasons for undertaking HDR here.
5. The majority of students express satisfaction with their supervisory relationship.
6. The allocation, role and expectations of associate and other supervisors are unclear to students.
7. A number of students commence their HDR not knowing that their principal supervisor at that time will be away (e.g. OSP). While nearly always supervision is well covered, students express disappointment that they had not been told.
8. Many Divisions are seen by students not to have a research culture that is inclusive of HDR students.
9. While not stated by students as directly as in 2004, supervisor workload appears to still be an issue in need of attention.

Resources and Skill Support
10. Only in a few Divisions do all HDR students undertaking their research on campus get an allocated space with secure storage facilities for data. Where a practice of ‘hot desks’ exists they do not seem to be sufficient to meet demand and on a daily basis many full-time students find that available space has been taken, while after hours building and room access is restrictive. Further, where there is a practice of shared ‘hot desks’ there
are also insufficient lockable data storage facilities to meet the University's requirements for research.

11. There is concern about the maintenance and age of equipment in a number of experimental fields.

12. University IT policy continues to be problematic for students in terms of: technical support for students’ own IT equipment, software licensing, email and the number of required passwords.

13. The Library focus on HDR students in terms of holdings, appropriate research space and availability of courses has gaps.

14. The availability of scholarships is a key reason for being able to undertake HDR.

15. All commencing HDR students are aware of financial support for their research. However, accessing this funding is difficult for a large number of students and Divisional guidelines and practices for approval, distribution and reimbursement need clarifying and streamlining to meet research student needs.

16. Students voiced strong concern about the service and prices of STA Travel on campus. Students commented that the University’s funding allocation is insufficient to meet STA prices and other associated travel costs.

Commencement Programs

17. The Central Commencement Program is valued, though its timing in late February excludes students who commence later (and they are required to complete the online program).

18. Overall, Divisional Commencement Programs do not sufficiently address supervision expectations, practices and research processes as well as funding processes.

19. Where there are also Departmental Commencement Programs within a Division, there can be great variation in addressing important departmental specific research and supervision needs, and in some instances mechanisms for the allocation of funding.

Communication and Organisational Issues

20. A number of students, in particular part-time students, say that they were not informed prior to commencement of regular attendance requirements, creating employment difficulties.

21. The departmental fragmentation in some Divisions creates communication barriers and perceptions of a lack of transparency.

22. Many HDR administrative practices in Divisions are seen by students to be time consuming with a large number of forms to complete.

23. Students undertaking interdisciplinary research, or venturing into ‘innovative’ research areas, perceive the University as lacking the flexibility characteristic of their undergraduate experience. The two key issues raised are inter-departmental and inter-Divisional communication and resource sharing.

Institutional Responses

Overall

1. Maintain the strengthening of an HDR-client focus at all levels of operation, including opportunity for student feedback. (Dean HDR; HDRU; Deans of Division)

2. Develop more targeted support for specific categories of HDR student. (HDRU; Deans of Division)
Supervision Matters

3. Inform students at the time of application of regular attendance requirements and times. Such information should be available both in Divisions and through HDRU (e.g. website links). *(HDRU; Deans of Division)*

4. Draw attention to the allocation, role and expectation of associate and other supervisor/s. *(Dean HDR; Deans of Division)*

5. Inform students prior to enrolment of known supervisor absence on their commencement. *(Deans of Division)*

6. Divisions and Departments, particularly those in humanities and social science fields, should examine their research practices to ensure HDR student inclusivity. *(Deans of Division)*

7. Monitor supervisor workload and reward structures within Divisions. *(Deans of Division)*

Resources and Skill Support

8. Access to dedicated space with computers and printers, lockable data storage facilities, and flexible hours of building and room access should be ensured. *(Deans of Division)*

9. Examine the University’s IT policy to ensure flexibility, ease of access and support for HDR students. *(Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research); Dean HDR)*

10. Examine research space for HDR students in the Library and access to Library courses for part-time HDR students. *(Librarian; Dean HDR)*

11. Maintain, and if possible, increase the number of University HDR scholarships available. *(Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research))*

12. Continue to refine Divisional allocation of HDR research funding, ensuring relevance for HDR student needs and timeframes as well as ease of access. *(Deans of Division)*

13. Review the requirement to use STA Travel on campus to ensure competitive prices and client focus. *(Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research))*

14. Ensure adequate resources when accepting students in new and emerging fields of research. *(Deans of Division)*

Commencement Programs

15. Continue to review the Central Commencement Program and its timing and also include a brief outline of University IT policy and travel policy as applicable to HDR students. *(Dean HDR)*

16. Divisional Commencement Programs should ensure adequate coverage of research processes, supervisory expectations and practices, as well as funding processes. *(Deans of Division)*

Communication and Organisational Issues

17. Examine administrative and communication practices within Divisions to remove fragmentation and perceptions of lack of transparency and consistency. *(Deans of Division)*

18. Examine administrative practices and requirements for students at Departmental, Divisional and University level to ensure efficiency and minimise double handling. *(HDRU; Deans of Division)*

19. Consider the introduction of an annual or biannual meeting between HDRU and Divisional administrative staff with HDR responsibility to examine improvements in administrative procedures, in particular when new policies and practices are introduced. *(HDRU)*

20. Examine barriers to interdisciplinary research and communication within the University and resource availability in ‘emerging’ fields. *(Dean HDR; Deans of Division)*
HDR Candidature Management Project:
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1. Introduction

During 2003, and particularly from 2004, Macquarie University instituted many new policies to improve the management of HDR candidature. Of particular importance to commencing HDR students are the Commencement Program initiated in 2004, policies on progression, progress monitoring and the closer management of completion.

In 2003 and 2004 studies were undertaken of the commencing cohort of HDR students to explore the quality of their first year experience and ease of transition into HDR at Macquarie University. The 2003 study provided a baseline for measuring change in subsequent years. Findings and recommendations from the 2003 and 2004 studies highlighted areas for quality improvement and included the following:

1. Improved HDR client service focus within the University and the Divisions;
2. More specific information at, or prior to, commencement;
3. More specific costing of research in more expensive fields of study on commencement of HDR;
4. Targeted support for different types of HDR students;
5. Clarification of mutual expectations of supervision and supervisor workload management;
6. Transparent decision making within Divisions for the allocation of resources.

Feedback has been that the conduct of the focus group sessions not only provides students with opportunity for discussion and reflection on their commencing research experiences, but that it has also had a noticeable and immediate change effect for students.

2. Aims and Outcomes of the Study

To examine the transition into postgraduate research and the quality of the first year research experience at Macquarie. Specifically:

1. To investigate the 2005 beginning HDR student cohort’s experiences in commencing their research degree and their satisfaction with support and guidance provided by the University, Division, Department and Supervisor;
2. To compare their experiences with those of the 2003 and 2004 cohort studies in order to ascertain changes in perceived experiences.;
3. To compare the 2005 experiences in relation to institutional policies adopted since 2003;
4. To provide recommendations to the HDRC for the continued improvement of the first year research degree experience at Macquarie University;
5. To provide Divisions with specific feedback;
6. To provide a baseline for the University to measure change in student experience and satisfaction in subsequent years.
3. Approach

The study included HDR students enrolled in research Masters, PhD and non-fee paying professional doctorates who were enrolled in Semester 1 2005.

A total of 168 students were invited to participate through a letter of invitation from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research). Email and phone follow-up ascertained student availability to participate.

In total, 94 students participated. This represented 56% of the population. Their participation was spread as follows:

- Focus Group = 77 participants;
- Individual Interview = 4 participants;
- Email Survey = 13 participants.

Participation of 56% in 2005 compares favourably with previous studies, 63% and 46% in 2004 and 2003 respectively.

Participation patterns for the 2005 cohort differed somewhat from the 2003 and 2004 cohorts, as more students were proactive in contacting us to schedule a session, as well as being more likely to participate in a focus group than take up the other options of an individual interview or email survey.

In addition to the interview participation, all students were asked to complete a structured survey. The aim of the survey was to provide feedback on key changes and follow-up on issues arising in the previous studies. In total, 93 of the 94 students completed the survey.
Finally, to allow for a more complete understanding of issues raised in the sessions, follow-up interviews were also conducted with Divisional/Departmental Postgraduate Coordinators and Administrators in Humanities, GSM, EFS and SCMP.

4. Profile of Cohort and Participants

The 2005 semester one commencing student cohort profile differed slightly from that of 2004. Firstly, there were more students enrolled this year than last, although numbers were still not as strong as in 2003 (168 as opposed to 152 or 178, see Chart 1). Secondly, the downward trend in percentage of part-time students and Masters students has continued. Both have seen reductions from one-third of the cohort to one-fifth. The proportion of female students enrolled remained steady at 54%.

Overall, 56% of the 2005 cohort participated in the study. All Divisions presented over 40% participation, with participation ranging from 40-100%. The profile of HDR students in EFS changed markedly both in terms of numbers and in profile. The Law Division doubled its HDR intake in 2005, while the populations of ELS, ICS, Humanities, and SCMP have remained stable.

Analysis shows that there is no bias in the sample, with proportions of each group relatively even. For instance, 56% of both part-time and full-time students participated; 56% of the PhD and 57% of Masters populations participated. However female students were slightly more represented with 60% participation, as opposed to 51% of their male counterparts. The participation rate of international students has risen steadily since 2003, with 46% taking part this year.

The survey revealed that of the Masters participants, 40% (n=8) indicated that they were enrolled in a Masters by personal choice and the remainder because they were required to do so by their Department/Division. This is the reverse of 2004.

5. Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings below make comparison with the 2003 and 2004 findings, highlighting trends and drawing attention to similarities and differences over the three years.

The organization of the findings are presented in five key areas:

1. Student reasons for undertaking HDR
2. Supervision matters
3. Resource and skill support
4. Commencement Programs
5. Communication and Organisational Issues

Where there are differences between fields of study or Division, type of enrolment, and type of student, these are highlighted.

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1 Terminology may vary across the University, with Associate Deans (Research) and HDR Managers becoming the more common terms.
5.1 Why HDR and why study at Macquarie University

Students were asked what it was that attracted them to HDR and why they chose to study at Macquarie University. Participants often gave more than one reason.

When asked why they chose to undertake HDR, in order of frequency, participants stated (one or more of the following) that they:

1. Enjoyed undertaking research or had a specific interest they wished to pursue;
2. Were hoping to pursue an academic career;
3. Believed HDR would assist their (non-academic) career prospects.

More students in 2005, compared with the previous two years, cited a desire for an academic career as influencing their reasons for undertaking HDR.

The five most frequently mentioned reasons for choosing Macquarie University for their HDR, were that:

1. They had known a particular academic, either through previous, usually Honours, supervision or through their reputation in their field (48 students cf 55 in 2004);
2. They had undertaken previous study here at Macquarie (47 students cf 36 in 2004);
3. The prestige of the Division, Department or Research Centre attracted them (41 students cf with 35 in 2004);
4. They had received a scholarship to study here (19 students cf 34 in 2004);
5. They were attracted by the academically open nature of Macquarie (19 students cf with 14 in 2004).

The importance of receiving a scholarship was not as frequently cited as last year. However, student comments during the focus group sessions reinforced the importance of scholarships. For most, HDR would not be conceivable without this financial support.

Student responses in 2005 again reinforce that for Macquarie, successful past learning experiences, especially Honours, play a major role in student decision-making. Further, the reputation of individual staff, research centres and the overall research reputation of the University are important.

Other reasons participants gave for choosing to enrol at Macquarie University included:

6. The location of Macquarie suited them;
7. They like Macquarie;
8. They liked the support that was evident in their early dealings with Macquarie.

5.2 Supervision Matters

5.2.1 Selection and Allocation of Supervisor

I shopped around a bit, met a few different potential supervisors at different unis and did a big web search just finding out who was teaching what and where. So I chose Macquarie because I really like the supervisor that I found here ... [D505]
The quote above illustrates the care that a large number of students take about the selection of their supervisor. As with the previous years, this attention to initial supervisor selection stands out. Local and international students described careful web and publication searching, seeking the views of other students and meeting with their intended supervisor prior to making a final decision to enrol. Those with previous research experience, e.g. Honours, in particular seem aware of the importance of the supervisory relationship and how crucial it is to have someone that they can work with and keep them motivated and on track.

The survey indicated that 78% (n=73) of the students had personally selected their principal supervisor, while 12 students had their principal supervisor allocated by their department or recommended by another person connected with their chosen department. All students who had their supervisor allocated are in humanities and social science fields.

In addition, 80% (n=74) had one or more associate, co- or adjunct supervisors. However, only in a few instances did students spend as much time selecting their additional supervisors. The science fields were most typical of student involvement in selection of additional supervisors, while most other students had their other/additional supervisors selected by their main supervisor or by the Department.

While most students appeared satisfied with their additional supervisors, a number commented that they would have preferred to have at least some involvement or consultation in the allocation of additional supervisors. Students who were presented with a ‘fait accompli’ in relation to their additional supervisors and were dissatisfied with this process have described situations where they were caught between ‘competition’ or personality clashes of their supervisors.

Still of some concern is that one fifth of the students (n=20), compared with one third in 2004, did not have an additional supervisor. Several students were concerned about this, while in some instances, often the science fields, selection of additional supervisors was pending given closer refinement of their research topic. Students in two Divisions were more likely not to have additional supervisors, while in a third Division a number of students were unsure about whether they had additional supervisors. Follow-up interviews show that in some Divisions there were unresolved workload issues as well as perceptions of whether formal rewards lay in teaching or research.

5.2.2 Student-supervisor Contact

My supervisor is very busy at the School. We have actually been low maintenance for each other but it has been quality not quantity. So access has been fine, support has been very strategic ... [I205]

I can talk to my supervisor every day, my co-supervisor is in my lab and other researchers are always around. [J105]

These student comments are typical of a large number of students participating in the study.

Very clear in all three studies has been that the amount of time students spend with their supervisor varies and that practices, needs and individual situations differ considerably, often dependent on field of study, and importantly, mode of study. Students living at some
distance from the university are also more likely to appreciate a flexible approach to contact.

Also clear from each of the studies is that mode of contact with their supervisor/s involves face-to-face, phone and email contact. There is a combination of informal and formal meetings, though this combination occurs more frequently where HDR students are well integrated into the Department’s / Division’s research climate.

This year the survey specifically asked students about their satisfaction with the amount of supervisor contact. In the survey, 68% of students (n=63) maintained that they were always able to see their supervisor when needed. Only 8 students maintained that they either could not or found it difficult to see their supervisor. Of these 8 students, 5 had personally selected their supervisor. Further, discussions showed that only half of these 8 students expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of their supervisory guidance.

The survey also asked students whether the time with their supervisor was sufficient for their current needs and provided an opportunity for students to indicate the amount of additional time that they may require. Only 4 students replied that the time with their supervisor was not sufficient and another 9 thought that it was only sometimes sufficient. The majority of the students i.e. 86% (n=79) maintained that it was always or mostly sufficient.

The 13 students who indicated that their contact time was insufficient spanned 7 Divisions and included both students who had personally selected their supervisor and those who had supervisors allocated. Just over half of these 13 students also discussed, during the focus group meetings, dissatisfaction with the level of guidance received.

Only 17 students completing the survey elected to comment on the amount of time needed. There was either reluctance to be specific, or it was difficult to specify an amount of time. From the comments it is difficult to discern a pattern and views ranged from half an hour per month to 2 hours a week. During discussions with students it was also not possible to elicit more specific time allocations, with students varying greatly in their stated needs.

While a formula for ‘right’ amount of contact is perhaps elusive, what is clear from students is that meetings should be regular, feedback prompt and meaningful, and, that students allow supervisors sufficient time for receipt and comment on material. Also clear from the student comments is that some students require or prefer more supervisor direction than others.

Students’ comments during discussion, as in 2004, often refer to the large workload and constant time pressures on their supervisors. For a few students this was a difficulty. The academic workload situation may also inhibit students from wishing to specify a set amount of contact time. Nevertheless, the majority of students state that they are happy with their supervision.

One irritation for a number of students, as in 2004, is that on commencement of their HDR they found that their principal supervisor was on leave for some months and that they had not known about this. They were thus surprised to find that they would be supervised by someone else, not necessarily someone that they had even met before. This situation, where students are unaware of their supervisor’s absence, was more likely to occur in humanities and social science fields, with science students usually aware of their supervisor
movements and absences. It is important to note that in nearly all such situations, supervision quality was maintained and most students expressed satisfaction with their progress. It would however, seem a common courtesy for supervisors to inform commencing students of their intended absence.

The student views on supervisor contact, and the next section on supervisor guidance, reinforce the importance of care in supervisor selection and the importance of student awareness of the research process.

5.2.3 Supervisor Guidance

My relationship with my supervisor is the best thing. [N205]

I am really happy with the research side of things. [D405]

These quotes do not represent isolated experiences. They are representative of the high level of satisfaction the majority of students express about their research and interaction with their supervisor.

The majority of students in 2005 were happy with the level of supervisor guidance and interaction they were receiving. This reflects also comments in the 2003 and 2004 studies that, for many students, undertaking their research degree at Macquarie was exceeding their initial expectations and that they were really enjoying their research.

Clear student-supervisor communication forms the core of a good supervisory relationship. For a small number of students such communication took a while to establish itself and often needed the assistance of other Departmental academic staff.

There was also a small group of students who felt that they required far greater direction and assistance from their supervisor. No specific pattern could be discerned for this group of students.

From discussions with students, 18 commented on areas of dissatisfaction with the level of guidance provided. Again, there was no set pattern evident, but comments ranged from wanting more specific advice and feedback, desiring a more hands-on supervision approach, and, issues connected with researching in an emerging field.

In 2005, as in the previous two studies, a handful of students (about 5%) were extremely dissatisfied with the quality of their commencing research experience. Not all of these students were dissatisfied with supervision – resource issues and problems with interdisciplinary / ‘innovative’ research formed the other main reasons.

Only around 3% of students expressed strong dissatisfaction with supervision in terms of both guidance and level of contact. For these students the supervision issue was leading to decisions to withdraw or to seek another supervisor. The latter course was seen as emotionally draining and a step which would leave them extremely vulnerable given the power differentials within a Department, Division, or even the University. Thus, for this small group of students, the decision was to try to cope with the now unsatisfactory supervision situation, trying to ‘manage the supervisor’, in order to get their doctorate
without ‘making waves’, while for others it was a decision to abandon their research degree, either here at Macquarie or altogether.

Supporting the high level of satisfaction with supervision are the results of the survey where 85% of students maintain that they have a clear idea of what they expect of their principal supervisor and 70% believe that their principal supervisor also has a clear idea of what they expect of him/her. These results are similar to the 2004 results of 82% and 65% respectively. In 2005, 10% were not sure about supervisory expectations.

There is however a strong contrast between principal supervisor expectations and expectations regarding associate, co- and adjunct supervisors. Only one third of students have a clear idea of what to expect of these supervisors or think that the other supervisors have a clear idea of what the students are expecting of them. Given University policy on the allocation of more than one supervisor, this would appear to be a priority area for clarification and discussion through, for example, pre-enrolment information and Central and Divisional Commencement Programs. Based on student comments in the focus groups, few Divisional Commencement Programs tackled supervision questions, other than perhaps basic ‘technical’ matters such as identification of the Departmental or Divisional Postgraduate Co-ordinator.

5.2.4 Knowing What’s Required: understanding the research process

With Honours, people know that you haven’t done any research before so they scaffold you through the process, with Masters I don’t think the scaffolding was there as much. Again there was probably some idea that if you are doing your Masters then you have already done stuff before and then with the PhD it is even more so, ‘oh well if you have done a Masters we don’t have to help you much with the PhD, you can just go on and do it yourself’. But it is like, ‘well, I might need a bit more help sometimes’. [P505]

The notion of “scaffolding” as discussed by this student is a useful one to assist the University when designing support and guidance to HDR students. Certainly students in 2005, as in the previous two years, entering with Honours or similar past research experience feel relatively confident – even if at times daunted at the scale of the undertaking that lies before them. Students without such a background, and many of those who are Masters HDR students, are not always as strongly confident in the comments they make. And there is certainly variation among students in the amount of guidance they feel that they need or desire.

The time and care that the majority of students demonstrated in selecting their supervisors reflects their prior experience and also knowledge about the research process. However, as the student quoted above described, it is easy for others to assume knowledge. In general, students indicated that detail about the supervision and the research process was not necessarily tackled in Divisional/Departmental Commencement Programs. However, students were certainly appreciative of the commencement and research preparation courses now available in some Divisions. In particular, students from Humanities, ELS and ICS commented positively on the support received from the various offerings in these Divisions.
The half-yearly research preparation courses available in the science fields received particularly favourable comment as a way of guiding and “fast-tracking” students in the development of their proposals and planning for their research. Similarly, the formal requirement to present and defend a detailed research proposal and plan was assisted by this process.

Students commented positively on the HDR Candidature Management Plans made available to them in 2005. The broad framework of what was expected by what timeframe was useful and reassuring as a guide in monitoring their own progress as well as helping to plan their research.

Certainly, the very strong response by students on the clarity of their own expectations of their principal supervisor and vice-versa reinforce that students feel prepared for their HDR and have an understanding of the research process. However, where they do not exist, consideration could be given to developing research support programs similar to those working successfully in some Divisions, given the strongly favourable student comment.

5.2.5 Progress monitoring and completion

In 2005, as in the 2004 study, the majority of students (87%) indicated that they had clear Divisional guidelines on completion expectations. However, 11% claim that their Department or Division has not addressed completion times.

There were numerous comments in the focus group about students feeling stress about the tight completion times. Half the doctoral students were expecting to complete within three years and just under one third were expecting a four year completion. Students undertaking the DPsych in particular commented on their workload. These students, as well as students with fieldwork elements, found the timeframes tight.

Concern about completion time appears to be overall stronger in 2005. Two situations in particular have created greater stress in relation to completion. The first is the increased difficulty in relation to space and physical resources in 2005 (see also section 5.3.1). Students who had experienced several months of difficulty in getting a desk or workable computer commented that if the University or Division could not adequately resource them, then this was not without implications for their ability to complete.

The second situation was the length of time in gaining ethics approval (see also section 5.5.1 Research Office section). A number of students complained about the complexities and complications of the ethics process and frustrations with repeated modifications required to their application. They pointed out that the uncertainty of when approval would be granted was already creating delays for them in data collection. This was particularly the case where field work or surveying was required at a particular time of the year.

The mid-year review was found to be helpful. Students felt that it helped them focus on their research and, at the time of this study, they felt comfortable with the direction they needed to take and the knowledge of what to do. In particular, students in ELS and ICS felt that the six month preparation course they were required to take had really guided them through the process.
5.2.6 Research Climate

It seems like the problem in some Departments is the fact that the academics’ research doesn’t rely on the students, as it does in our Department. They probably do a lot of their own research, whereas in our Division it is all reliant on the students. ... So we are majorly important to them. We become a central part of the Department. [J105]

Students in some Divisions clearly see themselves as an integral part of their Department. This perception is particularly strong in ICS, ELS and the Psychology Department. Student comments, consistent with their counterparts in the previous two years, show that they are part of their Department from the beginning and feel included in all aspects of the Department except of course, the administrative and management components. This contrasts strongly with many of the other Divisions, where students do not share these views. However, from the 2005 comments, it appears that divisional fragmentation results in different departmental experiences for students. The contrast between Departments in some Divisions appears particularly marked. The comments of a poor research climate raised in 2005 mirror those of students in the past years.

Perceptions of exclusion can come from what students see as petty administrative rules or practices e.g. restrictions in access to stationery. On a more intellectual level, it is the lack of academic staff who attend student presentations or the feeling that HDR students are not genuinely included in the Departmental/Divisional seminar program.

A new situation arising in 2005 is the expansion of HDR students in some Divisions. Fast growth like this clearly places challenges on existing research support and infrastructure. While students are quite understanding of the situation, care needs to be taken to emphasize inclusivity as HDR student participation increases.

Finally, a key component contributing to the research climate is not just the interaction between HDR students and academic staff and the life of the department, but also the existence of a peer group where students can easily mingle and interact with other HDR students at different stages. The support students say they receive from each other is an important consideration for each Division.

At an institutional level, students comment that the Central Commencement Program (CCP) makes them feel supported from the beginning and part of a broader research environment. The involvement of, and contact with, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Dean, Higher Degree Research is also important.

However, as in the past studies, the small group of students who identify themselves as undertaking interdisciplinary research commented that they did not perceive that the University’s research climate was particularly conducive for interdisciplinary research. They maintain that it is easy to do interdisciplinary study at undergraduate level, but that it is not easy to undertake interdisciplinary research. They maintain that there are: communication, resource and funding barriers which operate to inhibit successful interdisciplinary research across Departments and Divisions (see also discussion section 5.5.1). Discussions with Postgraduate Coordinators (PGCs) also raised ideological barriers among some academics.
5.3 Resource and Skill Support

Overall, 54% of students maintain that they have adequate resources to undertake their research. Around one third of students are unsure whether the resources are sufficient to meet their research needs and 17% believe that the resources are not adequate. Students who are unsure about their resource level or who maintain that the resource level is not adequate come from all Divisions, with Divisional level ranges from 33%-75%.

5.3.1 Availability of Physical and Technical Resources

The difference between the promise and the reality ... They should just translate some of the rhetoric into reality. [F505]

A little shelf would be nice, or something that we could just stick stuff on during the day. That would be good. [H205]

I have never discovered how you get a draw of a filing cabinet .... It would be fantastic to have a dedicated desk and computer. Somewhere to secure things would be brilliant. [B405]

I don’t think that the lab and office conditions are good enough, it is pretty crowded. There is the problem of quiet space to work in. There is a lot of noisy discussion. [C305]

Many other students are complaining about the state of the equipment amongst themselves. There is also no-one to look after and maintain the equipment, which is in need of repair. There are some students who have waited three months for a machine to be fixed but it still isn’t working. [C305]

I found the microscopes to be too basic for my needs. I was stunned at the poor equipment and how basic it was. [0205]

They don’t have enough computers. I have my own laptop, I would be more than happy to be able to come in and plug it in but there is nothing I can connect it to. There is not even an outlet or a space or anything. [K105]

I have got data, I am meant to have a locked filing cabinet. There are four of us, there are two cabinets and one key, so it is just not there. I could probably go and hassle someone, but I don’t have time for that. There are things like that that you would assume that as a researcher you would need to lock your data away and that may be part of your ethical requirements but that should be provided without you having to go and chase people for those sorts of things. [M205]

... and the same goes for desk allocation. They are just constantly fighting for desks for people. So I feel like I didn’t really even get off the ground for three months because I had nowhere to park myself, I had no access to printers ... It has held things up quite a bit ... [M205]

The IT system has been a challenge for me. There are three systems and three different passwords and it is all a bit confusing ... [O105]
The quotes above are just a small illustration of the frustrations and difficulties students have experienced in their initial months of HDR. The messages that students are sending are not new compared with their 2003 and 2004 counterparts, however, the physical resource issue in 2005 was a major theme in nearly every focus group session. In part the comments reflect the particular space pressure this year within the University.

Very few Divisions were exempt from these issues. In terms of space and desk allocation, students in ELS, ICS, Psychology and SCMP were more likely to have a dedicated work space, though compared with the previous studies there appears to be increased desk and space pressure in these areas too. The survey responses were identical to those of 2004 except that there has been an increase in the number of students saying that they have no allocated space. One third of students are in this situation.

A further consideration in a number of Divisions, where shared rooms and ‘hot desk’ situations prevail, is that access for HDR students is office hours Monday to Friday. After hours access appears rare. The particular difficulties for part-time students are self evident.

There is also frustration with the lack of shelving, filing cabinet space and printer access.

The concern with aging, out-of-date and poorly maintained equipment in the science fields has continued this year, including some surprise about the quality of equipment in some high profile research centres. Further, access to equipment for students involved in interdisciplinary research and hence working across Divisions and Departments has been frustrating, resulting in considerations of HDR withdrawal in a small number of instances.

Improvements in 2005 include the more ready availability of photocopying, paper, printers and basic consumables in a few Divisions.

The University’s IT policy needs attention in relation to:

1. Technical support to students providing their own laptops
2. Use of University-licensed software on student-owned laptops

Further, changes to IT policy for 2005 have resulted in confusion, frustration and poor communication on the use of the ‘@students.mq.edu.au’ email and also in the number of passwords required by the library for access to the different databases and services.

Student comments have made clear that the various resource support issues have resulted in research delays for them and in some instances place them in direct contravention of the University’s own ethical guidelines and approvals for data storage. Students sitting on stools to work or placed in particularly cramped spaces could raise OH&H issues.

5.3.2 Skill Development

Again in 2005, the majority of HDR student felt themselves well supported within the university in terms of acquisition of skills. A fundamental part is the level of research preparation and skill on entry and here, careful selection and matching of research expertise is fundamental. The overall satisfaction that students express on this particular aspect has been discussed earlier (see section 5.2.3 Supervisor Guidance).
A key part for many students is also the acquisition of career skills through the opportunity to teach. In 2003, the teaching load of some students was an issue in terms of time for their own research. This did not arise as a particular issue in 2004. However, this year a small number of students again raised the difficulty of juggling teaching workload and personal research, although all are positive about the long-term benefits of the experience as well as their ability to ultimately balance competing demands. Other students commented only on the value they found in having some teaching experience. There were no comments that pressure was exerted on students to teach large amounts, although clearly a number of students found the career preparation within the discipline valuable and also very enjoyable.

The majority of the students also found that where new skills were needed for their research, this was being met through various avenues available such as the supervisor, the broader department, or connection with researchers elsewhere. This was not always the case for students in some humanities and social science fields. In some cases the problem was that students were unable to undertake or audit research methods courses when they needed this support. In other cases the dilemma was the need to learn new languages in a short period of time, requiring more than one coursework unit per semester, and, in a very small number, the need to quickly learn more content knowledge as a result of moving into a different research area. Within the science fields there were comments that students found it difficult to learn to use specific equipment because there was no one allocated to provide such training.

The issue of support for quantitative research was raised by several students who seemed unaware of the statistical support available to HDR students since mid-2004. A second issue, not large in overall terms but perhaps representative of students in certain areas within the University, is the need for support with qualitative research. Social science students across several Divisions commented that their fields were now incorporating more qualitative research yet this was not sufficiently supported through the academic skill base in their Departments/Divisions.

The value of the Divisional/Departmental certificate research preparation courses was discussed earlier (see Section 5.2.4). Of particular value to students was the way these courses were tailored to individual HDR student needs and support in completion of a detailed research proposal within six months. The same value was expressed about the fortnightly seminar series running in some Divisions.

### 5.3.3 Skill Development and Resources through the Library

Macquarie University has always been proud of the quality of its library. The importance of a large and comprehensive library has been highlighted in past studies with the high level of HDR student satisfaction expressed. This has continued in the 2005 study.

The major strength of the library expressed by HDR students is the quality and helpfulness of the liaison librarians. Library services and holdings are also seen as effective and solid.

There are, however, increasing signs of fragility in some areas and students continue to be critical about the availability – but not the quality – of library courses. In 2005 again students maintained that there were not enough Endnote courses to meet demand. A major
issue for part-time students is that these courses do not seem to be available after hours or on weekends.

There were again comments about the recency of materials, books and journals available in some fields. Students in a number of Divisions, including in areas seen as research strengths in the University, could not obtain recent book publications or maintained that key journals in the field were not held.

Since 2003 there have been comments about the number and availability of study rooms for HDR students and about noise levels in the surrounding areas.

There was particular annoyance in 2005 about the number of passwords required for access to online library services and materials and the use of the ‘@students’ email (see also section 5.3.1).

5.3.4 Financial Support

I have no idea how much money we’ve got and no idea how to access it. The situation in my Division is that it is really opaque, the most efficient word you get is “ask your supervisor” and your supervisor says “Uh... I don’t know”. The impression you get is that nobody wants to let you know how much money you can access just in case you apply for it and spend it all. Honest. That sounds a bit cynical but... [A605]

I think the fact that we have some specific Divisional money available is fantastic. Maybe a bit difficult to access but it is good. I can see the logistic problems but knowing that there is money is fantastic. [B405]

There is this big headline of “Money Available” then you go through the fine print and it is just not worth it. [L605]

I agree totally, it is like ‘forget it I will be finished by the time I get it’ the money is too hard to get. [L105]

We only get a limited amount and they say we must go through STA here and they give us such inflated prices. ... Their first question is always “is this Macquarie travel?” and if you say yes they just charge whatever they want. [D105]

It has just been so hard because we can only use the STA on campus. They are so much more expensive than any other, even any other STA in Sydney.... and they won’t price match, so my $2500 will be exceeded before I have paid for my trip and travel insurance now. [E205]

The real challenge of this research will be: where is the funding going to come from and the coordination of the multidisciplinary nature of the project? [O205]

The second major theme during the Focus Group discussions was the issue of accessing the funding available to students. The Central Commencement Program had explained the student financial support available for their research and this was reinforced in most Divisional Commencement Programs. The issue for students though was finding out
exactly how much money was available, for what purposes it could be used, and, how to proceed in accessing the funding. Just over half of the participants stated in the survey that they did not know or were unsure about their Department’s / Division’s funding provisions for their research costs.

While some Divisions had specified categories of areas for which money was available students either found that making this happen was difficult or that their actual needs were not covered in the guidelines and there was little flexibility in accommodating this.

From follow-up interviews with PGCs in some areas, it is clear that they and their Divisions are aware of student comments and that they are streamlining guidelines for 2006.

As in the previous two studies students commented on the, to them, convoluted procedures for re-claiming even small amounts of money for their research expenses. For fieldwork students this can be particularly frustrating. In general their Divisions provided support in the procedure but students continue to feel that it is unnecessarily time consuming.

A growing need for a small group of students across several Divisions appears to be the costs of interdisciplinary research spanning more than one Division and the ease of costing and easily administering these research areas. Further, students in emerging areas of research noted that funding seemed to be inadequate.

A major issue in 2005 was the need for students to use the Macquarie University STA for travel associated with their HDR. The strong complaint from students is that STA was charging them premium rates compared with other STA and travel agencies. Students commented that the high prices they have been charged by STA have left them out of pocket to meet the remaining costs associated with their travel such as accommodation, insurance and conference fees. In addition, comments about a lack of client service were strong. The requirement on students to use the campus STA should be examined in the light of the poor experiences related by such a large number of students.

Another issue, but one raised in past studies, is the wish by a number of students to use the funding available to them to purchase a laptop. Students argue that it gives them flexibility, and their research portability. For some students it is the single major research cost. It seems however that few students are able to purchase a laptop. The reasons provided to students are unclear and seem to vary across Divisions. Related to this is that many students would be happy to supply their own laptop but are then caught in the vicious cycle of technical support and software licensing.

To assist Divisions in their fine-tuning for 2006, among the questions that students need answered are:

- Can the funding for this year be carried over to the second year when I know that I will need more money?
- Can unspent money from this year be carried over?
- Is funding for the first year based on 12 months, 10 months or less?
- Why does only travel count when in the first year there are no travel needs?
- Why can’t claiming the funding be flexible to meet the needs of the research?
- Why can’t money be claimed retrospectively?
- Why can’t the money be used on a laptop when this is a great need and brings flexibility into research?
5.4 Commencement Programs

The University and also the Divisional Commencement Programs were good. The info packs were comprehensive and I felt supported as a scholar ... [0405]

I felt that [the CCP] made it very clear that we were part of the wider university research family, Jim Piper made that very explicit, as did the Dean, HDR, so I thought it was great... [P505]

5.4.1 University

Participants offered positive comments regarding the Central Commencement Program (CCP), indicating that it was a worthwhile experience and gave a good overview for their HDR degrees here at Macquarie. In particular students value the support offered on their HDR commencement and the connection to a broader research community (see also section 5.2.6 Research Climate).

Some participants offered more critical feedback on the CCP in relation to the length of the program and its timing. On the latter perhaps the CCP could be held a little later to pick up those students commencing in March/April.

While 85% of students attended either the February or July CCP, only 4% of the remaining students accessed the CCP online. Thus, 10% indicated that they did not take part in the CCP. Some students relayed that the access to the CCP online was not always reliable. Fine-tuning for 2006 should resolve this.

5.4.2 Division/Department Commencement Programs

They told you the bare minimum [at the DCP] I have to say... [A5]

I was not told about the compulsory sessions before enrolment. I found out 2 days before ... so I had to try to get leave from work with 2 days notice... [L1]

Across the Divisions and Departments there seems to be considerable variation in the content of the Commencement Programs offered. In 2005, 10% of students say that they have not attended a Divisional/Departmental CP and 5% maintain that no program was offered. These students spanned four Divisions and from other comments, it is clear that there were DCPs on offer. In a few instances the explanation may rest with divisional fragmentation and the variability of departmental programs.

Key issues raised by students are that:
- The information offered at the DCP is not specific enough for their needs;
- DCP should address in more detail supervision practices in the Division, research process, role expectations;
- Information presented in the DCP does not differ significantly from that given at the CCP in some Departments / Divisions;
- There was insufficient information on how to access research funding and what the money could be used for.
Based on student comments the variability in the DCP appears to stem from differences across Departments in Divisions, reflecting divisional fragmentation. However, there are moves in some Divisions to only offer Divisional programs in 2006 and this may result in greater consistency.

One third of the students say that they either were not, or are unsure that they were, fully informed of compulsory attendance requirements prior to commencement. For part-time students it often becomes problematic with their full-time employment requirements, particularly when compulsory attendance requirements entail fortnightly or weekly meetings. Only in ACES, GSM and ICS did students say that they were fully informed. The content and support provided by these regular meetings are highly valued by students, the issue is simply one of early communication of requirements.

5.5 Communication and Organisational Issues

I found the Macquarie staff very helpful and supportive ... very communicative. It made me feel that, both at the HDRU and Divisional level, Macquarie would be more supportive in the PhD process. I always felt that I knew what was happening with my candidature. Compared with other unis who say “we will get back to you in January, don’t call us”. [A605]

I have been made to feel very welcome and supported in my Division, the Department and Macquarie. Generally, people are bending over backwards to be supportive. I have been made to feel very welcome and supported in my Division, the Department and MU. [B405]

I found that MU actually wanted to meet me. All the other universities, they wanted to do everything through application and they didn’t want to know what or who you were and when the people from the Division and my supervisor that I now have said “Look come in and talk to us” that really impressed me because everybody else saw you as a number. [E105]

I was impressed that the Uni wanted our feedback. I got the letter and then didn’t respond and then I got the phone call. Wow! I was amazed. [J205]

Thank you so much for letting us vent, because it’s so hard to do that within the Department. [J305]

5.5.1 University

The quotes above are just a sample of the type of comments that arose during discussions with students. This is the first year that such comments were made spontaneously by so many students and may be indicative of a move organisationally to develop a strong client-focus as recommended in the previous two reports. Certainly many students:

- were appreciative of the personal attention they received through their application process and subsequent commencement;
- commented on helpfulness from individual academics, the Department / Division staff, and, HDRU;
• appreciated support mechanisms such as the Commencement Programs;
• commented positively on the framework provided through the required reporting and planning for their research and the progress guide provided through the Candidature Management Plans; and,
• valued the opportunity for feedback through this study, particularly since the feedback opportunity was outside of their Department or Division.

In overall terms, students are happy with the environment and support provided by the University for their research studies.

However, as in previous years, there were comments about the amount of paperwork and “red-tape” encountered in relation to some administrative matters, in particular the financial reimbursement system (See also Section 5.3.4). Other comments related to Ethics requirements (see below) and the cumbersome email system (see Section 3.5.1).

The communication of compulsory attendance requirements (raised in the section above) is an issue that needs to be addressed both in the Divisions and the HDRU at the time of student enquiry. Perhaps web links could also be used to provide this information.

One important area for attention for the University is that of the organisational and administrative issues associated with inter-disciplinary research. The number of students in 2005, and also in 2003 (see Report p.18) and 2004 (see Report p.7), undertaking interdisciplinary research is relatively small however, student comments over the three years have been consistent. Students in these situations have commented on the need to be able to organisationally facilitate information and exchange of ideas across Departments and Divisions. The interdisciplinary research has often involved a humanities/social science-type Division and a science Division, though in other instances it spans different Departments within the same Division. Specific issues raised by students are:

• Degree of willingness to share resources (e.g. equipment, databases) across Departments and Divisions
• The (lack of) existence of communication across Departments and Divisions
• The appropriateness and currency of equipment and Library holdings to support interdisciplinary research.

The difficulties and frustrations for a number of these students have led some to contemplate withdrawing from their HDR or moving to another university. Many similar issues were raised by students in this and previous years in emerging fields of research.

Although the number of students identifying themselves as undertaking interdisciplinary research, or research in emerging fields, has been small in number each year, collectively the three year picture shows the same issues of resourcing and communication. Thus, it may be worth taking a closer look at these specific areas to identify changes to assist the University fulfil its goals successfully.

**Higher Degree Research Unit (HDRU)**

A particularly encouraging development in this year’s study has been the number of students who have commented positively on the support and help received from the University’s administrative areas, in particular, the HDRU.
Many of the positive comments related to HDR enquiry and application processes. Less favourable comments related to staff pressures, turn-over and consistency of information.

The survey asked students specific questions on enrolment and the HDRU website. These are discussed below.

**Enrolment processes**

In terms of the enrolment process, responses on the ease of enrolment are similar to those in 2004, although with slightly more students in 2005 likely to find the process ‘Average’ (2005 = 35% cf 2004 = 30%) rather than ‘Easy’ (2005 = 56% cf 2004 = 63%). A recurring theme again was the difficulties for students who combined coursework with their research degree. Other students maintained that they found their undergraduate enrolment easier.

**HDRU Website and overall student information needs**

In 2005, 80% of students had accessed the HDRU website. Overall students found the website helpful but difficult to use. In particular there were comments on the difficulty of locating forms, overall confusion in finding information and insufficient information on requirements, due dates, compulsory attendance requirements, and that it did not support the needs of specific categories of students such as part-time students. The HDRU has an ongoing focus on web development and this is a priority consideration for them.

**Research Office (RO)**

The main comments arising in 2005, as in previous years, for the Research Office relate to gaining Ethics approval. Students in 2005 who needed to undertake an Ethics application were strongly of the view that the process is too long, too complex and too time consuming.

Of particular irritation to students is that they maintain that the Ethics Committee does not raise all of its concerns on receipt of the initial application but that there can be several iterations necessary to address the continued issues raised by the committee. Several students commented that at the time of the focus groups (August/September) they still had not obtained their approval and were now in the situation that commencement of their data collection was jeopardised due to availability of participants, animals, or seasonal changes relating to field work. The next available time for data collection for these students is in a year’s time. Their clear frustrations and the pressure they feel for completions in these instances are obvious.

It may be useful for Divisional Commencement Programs to include more specific Ethics support for HDR students undertaking this type of research and working more proactively with their Ethics Representative in terms of research time frames imposed on students.

**5.5.2 Division**

Student comments on administrative and academic support within their Divisions were highly favourable. 82% of students knew who their Divisional PGC was, and two-thirds of students had already had contact with this person.
One important organisational issue for many Divisions relates to the development and maintenance of the research culture (see Section 5.2.6). Of an organisational and administrative nature here are the ease of building and room access and overall inclusivity in departmental and divisional communications and seminars.

Another important issue in many Divisions is the internal fragmentation resulting in differences in support across the Departments. Many of these are administrative in nature and lead to student frustrations with the administration of forms, reimbursements and IT support. Of a more academic nature are the perceived barriers within a Division to support inter-disciplinary research (see also above section 5.5.1).

In some Divisions the strong inequity perceived by students in previous years in space allocation continued. Another area where fragmentation continues to show itself is in the maintenance and technical support for equipment.

Discussions with PGCs in 2004 and 2005 indicate that Divisions are aware of these administrative issues and that their Divisions continue to move to a divisional rather than a departmental approach.

Another divisional issue is the quality of Departmental Commencement Programs compared with the Divisional one and the need to ensure appropriate coverage of fundamental administrative and supervision support issues. For the majority of Divisions in 2005, streamlining the guidelines for financial support of student research, introduced in 2004, is a key issue. Student comments on frustration and lack of transparency have been highlighted (see Section 5.3.4). All Divisional PGCs interviewed appear to be aware of student issues and were working towards resolving these for 2006.

6. Concluding Comments

Particularly noteworthy in the 2005 study is the strengthened HDR client focus at all levels within the University. Further, the high level of satisfaction with supervision again stands out, as does the care involved with supervisor selection for the majority of students. The importance of successful past learning experiences at the University was again reinforced.

There are however areas for continued improvement. These include the early communication of compulsory attendance requirements, more targeted support for different categories of HDR student, and further efforts in relation to physical resource (including equipment) support.

There are also areas for fine-tuning, in particular the DCPs, funding policy and distribution at divisional level, the high pricing and client focus of the campus STA Travel and consistency of University IT policy for HDR students.
7. Appendices

7.1 Letter of Invitation from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

«AddressBlock»

«GreetingLine»

Over the past few years, Macquarie University has introduced a number of improvements for Higher Degree Research (HDR) students, including the development of a Commencement Program for new research students. These changes were the result of planning for HDR students which included student consultation through an annual focus group study.

To continue to better understand the experiences and views of commencing research students, and the effect on them of the University’s policy changes, we will be undertaking a number of focus group interviews with students enrolled for the first time at Macquarie University in 2005, in either a research masters or a doctorate.

I am writing to invite you to participate in one of these focus groups. Each focus group will take approximately one hour.

The University is interested in your views on all aspects of your research experience at Macquarie during your first year. I would like to encourage you to take part and to feel free to be open with your views and suggestions. No comments that you make will be attributed to you as an individual.

The focus groups will be conducted by Ruth Neumann, Higher Education Policy Officer of the University. A series of focus group sessions has been planned for mid-August to mid-September. The groups will be small (6-8 students) and the sessions will be held during both day and evening for maximum convenience.

If you are interested in taking part in a focus group, please reply to Ruth. She will arrange a time and obtain your agreement to participate. Should you prefer to have an individual interview, please advise Ruth. She can be contacted on 02 9850 6403 or by emailing highered@vc.mq.edu.au.

All participants in the focus groups will receive a report of the findings. If you would like to look at the report from 2004 consultations with commencing research students, please go to ‘Articles of Interest’ in the ‘Current Students’ section of the HDRU website - [http://www.ro.mq.edu.au/HDRU/current.htm](http://www.ro.mq.edu.au/HDRU/current.htm) - and select ‘Higher Degree Research Candidature Management Project’.

I hope that you will be able to make time in your schedule to participate and help to improve the research environment for postgraduate students at Macquarie University.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Piper
Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
7.2 Focus Group Interview Schedule

HDR Candidature Management Project: Improving the first year research experience

Focus Group Questions

AIM: To explore the transition into postgraduate research with a view to improving the first year student experience and the University’s management of HDR education.

1. You have all started on a PhD/Masters this year, what attracted you to enrol in a research degree at Macquarie University?

2. You have been involved in your research for around 6 months so far. What has been the best part for you so far? What’s worked really well for you?

3. In the past few months, since you started your research, what has gone differently from your expectations? What challenges have you come up against?

4. Looking back, what would you do differently before enrolling in a PhD/Masters? Do you think that you could have been better prepared? How?

5. What do you think the major hurdles will be for you for the next 2 or so years? And how can the University help?

6. Well, from our discussion today, what wouldn’t you like to see changed? And what needs to be changed?

Areas to probe:
- Supervisor selection
- Topic development
- Departmental / Divisional support and climate
- University support and climate (including administrative support RO / HDRU)
- Infrastructure
- Skill gaps
- Understanding what’s required of a research degree
7.3 Postgraduate Coordinator Interview Schedule

HDR Candidature Management Project: Improving the first year research experience

Questions to Divisional / Departmental Postgraduate Coordinators

Questions:

1. Firstly can you outline your role within the Division/Department?
   a. What issues do you have to deal with?
   b. Personal workload

2. How would you describe the Divisional/Departmental interface?

3. How would you describe the Divisional/University interface?

4. Are there any particular issues in relation to those 1st year enrolled HDR that appear different to those of students in later years?

5. What works particularly well? What doesn’t work so well and how could it be improved?

Areas to probe:

- Orientation program
- Peer support
- Fortnightly seminars
- Enrolment process
- Resources
- $ for research costs
7.4 Charts

7.4.1 Profile of Participation Rate by Division 2005

The participation rate for all students by Division was generally slightly lower this year than in 2004, with 40% (cf 56% in 2004) or higher of students from every Division participating via one avenue or another.

7.4.2 Profile of PhD and Masters Students Participation Rates 2005

100% participation was realised for three divisional Masters populations (i.e. EFS, MGSM, LINP) with an overall rate of 57%. Participation of PhD students from ELS, LAW and LINP all showed a decrease from 2004, as did the overall rate i.e. 56% cf 64% in 2004.
7.4.3 Profile of PhD Students in 2005 Cohort

PhD participation rates were lower overall than those for 2004, especially for ELS, LAW, LINP and SCMP; although participation increased among PhD students in HUM and GSM.

7.4.4 Profile of Masters Students in 2005 Cohort

In EFS, GSM and LINP 100% participation of Masters students was realised. The smaller divisional populations had higher participation rates, ELS and ICS with the largest populations yielded the lowest numbers of participation.
7.4.5 Profile of Full-time and Part-time Students Participation Rates 2005

Participation rates of both full-time and part-time students were 56%. EFS, ICS and LINP showed drops in part-time participation, while GSM and HUM both showed increases in participation of full and part-time students.

7.4.6 Profile of Full-time Students in 2005 Cohort

For all Divisions there was over 40% participation of full-time students in the study. There was a significant increase in the full-time population in EFS, while ELS, LINP and SCMP showed significant decreases in participation.
7.4.7 Profile of Part-Time Students in 2005 Cohort

Humanities and GSM showed 100% part-time participation, a marked increase for HUM (cf 55% in 2004). Part-time participation for LINP and ICS both decreased.

7.4.8 Profile of Gender Participation Rates 2005

GSM had the highest participation rates for both genders at 100%. Women in most Divisions, excepting ELS and SCMP, realised higher participation rates than their male counterparts. Overall, females had a 60% and males had 51% participation rate.
In both 2004 and 2005 there are more females than males undertaking HDR study. Overall, males’ participation decreased this year (i.e. 51% cf 64% in 2004), with drops in LINP, ELS and ICS.

### 7.4.10 Profile of Female Students in 2005 Cohort

The number of females enrolled in an HDR this year increased by the same number as the males i.e. n = 8. However, the overall participation rate of females was 60%, higher than for their male counterparts, (cf 2004 where it was lower than males).
## 7.5 MQ HDR Questionnaire Results 2005

NB. More than one response per question may have been given; The first figure is the number of responses to that answer; the second figure is the number of responses expressed as a percentage of total questionnaire sample (n=93); from Q13 onwards n=92.

1. Is your (main) supervisor:
   - a. Personally selected = 73 = 78%
   - b. Previous supervisor = 14 = 15%
   - c. Department/Division allocated = 12 = 13%
   - d. Don’t yet have one = 0 = 0%
   - e. Other = 3 = 3%

2. Do you also have one or more associate supervisor/s, co-supervisor/s or adjunct supervisor/s?
   - a. Yes = 74 = 80%
   - b. No = 16 = 17%
   - c. Not sure = 3 = 3%

3. a) Do you have a clear idea of what you expect from your main supervisor?
   - a. Yes = 79 = 85%
   - b. No = 10 = 11%
   - c. Not sure = 4 = 4%

   b) Do you have a clear idea of what you expect from your other supervisor/s?
   - a. Yes = 33 = 35%
   - b. No = 23 = 25%
   - c. Not sure = 26 = 28%

4. a) Do you think your main supervisor has a clear idea of what you expect of him/her?
   - a. Yes = 66 = 71%
   - b. No = 11 = 12%
   - c. Not sure = 15 = 16%

   b) Do you think your other supervisor/s have a clear idea of what you expect of them?
   - a. Yes = 32 = 34%
   - b. No = 18 = 19%
   - c. Not sure = 30 = 32%

5. How did you find the 2005 enrolment process?
   - a. Easy = 52 = 56%
   - b. Average = 33 = 35%
   - c. Difficult = 8 = 9%

6. Did you attend a Macquarie University Central Commencement Program (CCP) in:
   - a. February 2005 = 68 = 73%
   - b. July 2005 = 11 = 12%
   - c. No, completed Online
     - (i) Yes = 4 = 4%
     - (ii) No = 9 = 10%

7. Did you also attend a Divisional/Departmental Commencement Program in 2005?
   - a. Yes = 79 = 85%
   - b. No = 9 = 10%
   - c. None offered = 5 = 5%

8. Do you know who the Postgraduate Coordinator for your Division/Department is?
   - a. Yes = 77 = 83%
   - b. No = 6 = 6%
   - c. Not sure = 10 = 11%
9. Have you had any contact with your Postgraduate Coordinator?
   a. Yes = 63 = 68%
   b. No = 8 = 9%
   c. Have not needed to = 22 = 24%

10. Have you completed a research proposal?
    a. Yes, before commencement = 68 = 73%
    b. Yes, since commencement = 22 = 24%
    c. No = 7 = 8%

11. Does your research proposal involve costing of your research project?
    a. Yes = 12 = 13%
    b. No = 65 = 70%
    c. Not sure = 10 = 11%
    d. Not applicable = 7 = 8%

12. Do you have adequate resources to undertake your research?
    a. Yes = 50 = 54%
    b. No = 16 = 17%
    c. Not sure = 27 = 29%

13. Do you have an allocated space (eg. desk, office, lab) to work in your department?
    a. Yes (i) Does meet needs = 52 = 57%
       (ii) Does NOT meet needs = 10 = 11%
    b. No = 30 = 33%

14. Are you undertaking a research Masters/PhD?
    a. PhD = 74 = 80%
    b. Masters (i) enc’d/req’d by Div = 12 = 13%
       (ii) student chose to do = 8 = 9%

15. How long do you expect you will need to complete? [FTE = full-time equivalent]
    a. 4 years(FTE) for PhD = 27 = 29%
    b. 3 years(FTE) for PhD = 48 = 52%
    c. 3 years(FTE) for Masters = 2 = 2%
    d. 2 years(FTE) for Masters = 15 = 16%

16. Is this completion time in line with your Department’s/Division’s expectations?
    a. Yes = 80 = 87%
    b. No = 2 = 2%
    c. Hasn’t been discussed = 10 = 11%

17. Do you access the Higher Degree Research Unit website for candidature and/or scholarship information?
    a. Yes = 74 = 80%
    b. No = 18 = 20%

18. Were you fully informed on HDR attendance requirements prior to commencement?
    a. Yes = 62 = 67%
    b. No = 15 = 16%
    c. Not sure = 16 = 17%

19. Are you able to see your supervisor/s when you need to?
    a. Yes, Always = 63 = 68%
    b. Sometimes = 22 = 24%
    c. It is difficult = 6 = 7%
    d. No = 2 = 2%
20. a) Is the time you have with your supervisor/s sufficient for your current needs?

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<td>Sometimes</td>
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21. Do you have clear information about your department’s funding provisions for your research costs?

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