What are the options for a doctorate after completing my Coursework Masters?

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C/w Masters data

- From 2003-2009 a 36% increase in C/w Masters enrolments—domestic and international (14% decrease in Research Masters and 26% increase in doctoral enrolments)  
  (DEEWR, 2011)
- Domestic-only has increased about 84% from 2000-2010  
  (DEEWR, 2011)

Significance in Australia

- Tuition for domestic students
  - Undergraduate degrees partially funded by Govt and by student
  - Postgraduate coursework degrees fully funded by student (employer) not the Govt
  - Research degrees (must be ≥66% research) fully funded by the Govt through the Research Training Scheme

Aim of project

- First class Honours degree (an additional year of research training & research at the undergraduate level)
- Research Masters/MPhil
- Project looked at a pathway gaining more traction: the coursework masters
- What does this mean for doctoral entry?
- What can we learn from Prof Docs?

Research vs. Coursework (DEEWR, 2010)

C/w Masters Students’ Interest in PhD

(Background data by the Postgraduate Survey of Student Engagement, POSSE)
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C/w Masters students by Age 2004-2009

C/w enrolment by gender

C/w Masters Data

- Data suggest that:
  - 20-29 age are likely to be international students
  - 30-39 age are likely to be domestic students
  - International students (45%) are more likely to be interested in undertaking a research degree than domestic students (37%)
  - Female enrolments have increased significantly since 2004, male enrolments decreased

National Research Student Survey
(Edwards, Bexley & Richardson, 2011)

- In the year prior to commencing a doctorate
  - 56% of respondents had been employed (45% FT, 9.5% PT/Casual)
  - Almost 21% had been undertaking Honours
  - 16% C/w postgraduate study

As Palmer (2011) suggests

“Among other things this suggests that the number of research candidates with prior coursework postgraduate qualifications is substantially higher than that [16%] and these would in many cases have informed selection decisions for admission to the research degree, if not be the principal basis for admission” (p.3)

HDR (PhD and Prof Doc) data

- Mean age at commencement 33 years
- 40% undertaking doctorate part-time (increased by 10% in 2010)
- Given these data what might this mean for doctoral entry?
- What can we learn from Prof Docs?
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Introduction of coursework in PhD
• Formal award coursework being introduced into the PhD in various Australian universities
• Rate of interest increasing rapidly
• Wide range of curriculum, still in flux
• What might all this mean for doctoral entry? And
• What can we learn from Prof Docs?

Research Design
• Across four universities interviews with:
  – 35 PhD students who entered with C/w Masters
  – 21 supervisors of candidates who entered with C/w Masters
  – 18 conveners of C/w Masters programs where graduates are known to go onto a PhD

Initial Findings from interviews
• Students generally positive about C/w Masters as preparation for PhD; supervisors less positive
• Supervisor and coordinator view was that C/w Masters as pathway to PhD was (still) exception rather than rule
• Trend to greater integration of work, education and research

Initial Findings from interviews cont.
• Increasing diversity (across universities and disciplines)
• Program types, other than conventional programs
• Candidate selection
• Student support
• Future directions

Program types
• Increased flexibility re entry and choice:
  – combining existing programs (e.g. joint M/PhD)
  – designing new programs (e.g. four year PhD)
  – ‘Packaged student offers’, incorporating flexible doctoral pathways
  – Accredited exit points (e.g. Graduate Diplomas)
  – ‘Professional’ and ‘Practice’ doctorates
  – C/w Masters that allow choice part way through

Candidate selection
• In addition to H1 equivalence
  – Substantial C/w M project at HD plus GPA
  – International Masters generally considered to have sufficient research component
  – International students majority PhDs with C/w M
  – High achieving and mature age
  – Declining in Honours degrees in some disciplines
  – International students + Visas make two year Masters attractive
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Student and supervisor support

• Not all universities allowed access to research support for C/w Masters students but recent positive developments
• Peer and supervisor support identified as most important for student completion
• P/T students tend not to use support services
• Most universities don’t require ‘qualified’ supervisors at the C/w M level

What does this mean for pathways?

• Flexibility?
• Curriculum?
• Student selection?
• Supervisor development?
• Exit strategies?

Preliminary Conclusion

• Variation by university and discipline
• Evidence to suggest that a C/w masters is a pathway to a PhD/Prof Doc for:
  – international students and/or
  – older domestic students from the professions
• What might this mean for PhD/Prof Doc:

Questions

• What can the Prof Doc experience and curriculum offer to the issue of different entry AND the introduction of coursework into the Australian PhD?
• What might these developments mean for the Prof Doc in Australia?

Dr Margaret Kiley: The Australian National University

•Department of Education Science and Training (2011). Consultation paper: The allocation and funding of Commonwealth Supported places. Canberra: DEEWR.

Disclaimer

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