Honours degrees are the Cinderella programs of Australian higher education. They fall between undergraduate and research degrees. They do not fit readily in quality assurance processes for coursework or research programs and are mostly ignored by research in higher education (AVCC, 1990, 1991, 1992; Kiley et al., in press). These problems might not be significant if it were not for the fact that the First Class Honours degree is the gold standard of undergraduate education. It is the most commonly cited entry requirement into the PhD and essential for most postgraduate scholarships (Bourke et al., 2006). Whilst holding the status of a gold standard it is not fully understood and the extraordinarily diverse range of practices covered by Honours programmes are generally unacknowledged. This 90 minute symposium explores the initial scoping of Honours programs across Australia.

Margaret Kiley will provide an overview of the research questions to be investigated in this Carrick project on the scope and purpose of Australian Honours programs. Robert Cantwell will report on the difficulties encountered in using DEST data to gain an accurate statistical picture of Honours. David Boud will outline some implications of our initial findings for policy, particularly with regard to the use of Honours as research training and as a selection measure for entry into the doctorate. Catherine Manathunga will explore recent policy developments in Honours programs, using the University of Queensland as a case study. Participants will be engaged in interactive activities designed to facilitate active participation.

References available on request.