Problematising diversity in doctoral education and the implications and for policy and practice

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Although there is general agreement that diversity is a feature of doctoral education in Australia, there are various forms and levels of diversity, many of which are not captured by analyses that rely on categories for analysing the doctoral education population that are those commonly used in education at the undergraduate level, such as sex, age, mode of study, type of enrolment, citizenship, and Broad Field of Study, etc. These categories primarily reflect concerns to do with funding and issues of participation and equity. Our analysis of data from a national survey of doctoral students carried out in 2005 as part of a Linkage Grant project “Reconceptualising the doctoral experience”, suggests that not all of these categories are relevant to critical concerns for doctoral education. Nor do analyses at a macro-level represent the particularity of the doctoral experience. They can mask the reality of a highly variable student population, and one that is not necessarily represented accurately or helpfully by ascribing group identities.

In this symposium a series of short presentations on issues in data collection and analysis will be raised concerning: the extent of individual candidate variation; measures of enrolment status; international candidate diversity; transference of employment and doctoral related capabilities; and the significance of responses to ‘others, please specify’.

The following plenary discussion will be opened by two discussants, the President of CAPA and a member of the DDOGS, focusing on the implications for policy and practice, and the challenges for government and institutional policy makers.