Should Publication Be A Compulsory Component Of Australian HDR Programs?

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Publications and grants are Universities’ benchmarks for successful research. Since postgraduate students account for a significant proportion of University research, perhaps as much as 70%, an increase in Higher Degree by Research (HDR) publication rates should equate to a significant increase in University publication rates. This paper presents data from a pilot study and suggests that publication of HDR research should be incorporated into University policy, such that publication becomes a requirement of completing a postgraduate research degree.

The publication experiences and expectations of 20 HDR students and 13 supervisors working within agriculture based science disciplines were investigated. Student responses indicated awareness that publication was both expected and highly valued, and appreciation of the associated personal and career benefits. However, students and supervisors both agreed that students lacked the academic writing skills with which to meet publication expectations.

In the pilot study, more than 55% of students and 60% of supervisors agreed that publication should be a doctoral requirement. The arguments against such a requirement largely concerned the existing time constraints on HDR students, the unpublishable nature of some research and the possibility of embargoes. This paper will include suggested policy provisions to overcome these concerns.

Universities could facilitate HDR publication by providing greater support and mentoring to students; particularly since Universities stand to benefit from increased publication, financially and in reputation. Therefore, incentive schemes aimed at encouraging postgraduate students to publish their doctoral research will also be discussed.