

## **GUIDELINES ON PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES**

**RESOLVED AB07/25  
APPROVED AT ACADEMIC BOARD MEETING 1 MAY 2007**

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### ***RESOLVED AB07/25***

That the Academic Board endorse part (i) of Resolution AB99/44, as set out below, and that a change be made to part (ii), as follows:

- (i) The document "Guidelines on Professional Doctorates", prepared by the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies in Australian Universities, as outlining the minimum standards required in any proposal submitted to the Committee on Research for the introduction of a professional doctoral program;
- (ii) That in any proposal for the introduction of a professional doctorate a clear and unambiguous academic case has to be made as to why the same program aims and objectives could not be met by a PhD program with concurrent prescription of coursework. [File: 990983].

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### ***Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies***

Guidelines: Professional Doctorates

#### ***Preamble<sup>1</sup>***

At least thirty Australian universities now offer doctorates which are described as professional or research-coursework in nature. These span at least nineteen areas of study and most have two-thirds or more research, although some have lesser proportions of research, the lowest being seventeen per cent. Most students are part-time, many of whom are also off-campus for all or part of their study.

The term 'professional doctorate' is taken to mean a program of research and advanced study which enables the candidate to make a significant contribution to knowledge and practice in their professional context. In so doing, the candidate may also contribute more generally to scholarship within a discipline or field of study.

Professional doctorates have been developed to provide opportunities for advanced professional development and applied research training that are particularly focused on a profession and its practice. The students are generally mature-age working people who are undertaking their program, at least partly, as a form of professional development. Although, the PhD programs at some Australian universities may allow much of what professional doctorate students require, there are generally important

differences manifest in entry requirements, research focus, absence of coursework, and examination procedures which deter or prevent the type of students who pursue professional doctorates.

As the number of professional doctorates has expanded in Australia, so has the diversity of requirements and conditions under which they are offered. Whilst the new-found flexibility for achieving a doctorate has many positive attributes, there are also concerns being raised about the quality and substance of some of the new professional doctorates. These concerns are around matters of entry requirements, advanced standing, program length, lack of research, standard of coursework, and examination procedures.

The following guidelines are recommended by Australian Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies for universities to use in the establishment, accreditation and evaluation of the professional doctorate programs.

### ***Guidelines***

#### ***Applicants***

- Applicants should normally hold a good honours degree or Masters degree, with at least one third research methodology and research practice, relevant to their intended field of study. Evidence of recent professional expertise should be taken into account.

#### ***Programs***

- Professional doctorate programs should normally be of three years full-time equivalent and structured in a part-time or 'sandwich' form to facilitate workplace-focused research activity.
- In programs where candidates are not normally required to have had substantial professional experience and/or be currently employed in their profession, then the program itself should involve substantial professional practice.
- Professional doctorate programs should have a minimum of one year full-time equivalent of research (using DEETYA definitions of research and coursework).
- All coursework should be of an advanced postgraduate level and be sequenced to ensure an appropriate depth of knowledge, understanding, analysis and skills is achieved in the field of intended research. Coursework may incorporate professional placements, research training elements, workplace-focused research activities, etc.
- Prior to commencement of research candidates would have completed sufficient research training to undertake the research competently and ethically.
- Professional doctorate students should be required to apply their research and study to problems, issues or other matters of substance which produce significant benefits in professional practice.
- Supervision and teaching should be undertaken principally by persons with continuing professional or research experience in the candidate's field.

### **Examination**

- The research outcomes (thesis, dissertation, portfolio, exhibition, exegesis etc) from professional doctorates should be examined by at least two appropriately qualified and experienced people who are independent of the awarding university.
- Examiners should be fully informed of the nature of the doctoral program concerned and be cognisant of the proportion of the program to be assessed through the material they examine.
- The successful professional doctorate candidate should be adjudged, through examination, to have made a significant contribution to knowledge and/or practice in their profession.

### **Outcomes**

- The successful professional doctorate candidate should demonstrate in the substance and presentation of their research, together with any other coursework assessment, that they have, in relation to their field:
  - a broad practical knowledge;
  - a critical understanding of the literature, theories, methodologies and/or debates;
  - good presentation and communication skills;
  - sound work practices and collaborative skills
  - good research skills, ethics and practices.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The details and arguments summarised here are derived from the following: Evans, T D 1997 Flexible doctoral research: emerging issues in professional doctorate programs. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 19. 2. pp. 174-182; Grichting, W 1997 Professional doctorates in Australia. A paper presented to the Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies meeting. Mt Eliza. October; Joneling, S.B. 1996 Professional doctorates in Australian Universities. A paper presented at the Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies, Adelaide, April; Pearson, M & Ford, L. 1997 *Open and Flexible PhD study and Research*. Canberra: DEETYA; Trigwell, K, Shannon, T & Maurizi, R. 1997 *Research-coursework Doctoral Programs in Australian Universities*. Canberra: DEETYA.

<sup>2</sup>These criteria are partly derived from, Clark, J. 1996 Postgraduate skills: a view from industry. A paper presented at the Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies. Adelaide. April.

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