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Mr Dom English
Group Manager
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Australian Government Department of Education and Training

By email: CGS@education.edu.au

Dear Mr English,

Consultation Paper on the reallocation of Commonwealth-Supported Places for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate courses, released November 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Department's proposed [new framework for the allocation of Commonwealth supported places for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate courses](#) ('designated CSPs').

Our attached submission addresses the key issues we see arising from the reform proposals set out in the Consultation Paper.

For the benefit of our staff, students and other stakeholders interested in these matters – but not familiar with the detail of the Government's reform plans – we have included at **Appendix B** a one-page summary of the key proposed changes.

Appendix C provides extracts from the Australian Council of Learned Academies' report on the Research Training System completed in 2016, which remain relevant to discussions about the future framework for allocating designated CSPs to support postgraduate courses.

We look forward to continuing this important discussion with you, colleagues in the Department and other stakeholders over the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Pip Pattison AO

Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education

Appendix A The University of Sydney's submission in response to the Department of Education and Training's: *Consultation Paper on the reallocation of Commonwealth supported places for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate courses*

Appendix B Summary of the proposed changes to designated CSP allocations

Appendix C Extracts from the Australian Council of Learned Academies' Review of the Research Training System report, April 2016

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Appendix A

The University of Sydney's submission in response to the Department of Education and Training's [Consultation Paper on the reallocation of Commonwealth supported places for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate courses](#), released November 2018

Executive summary

The University of Sydney:

1. Welcomes this consultation process and strongly supports the policy objective of ensuring future Government investments in enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate Commonwealth Supported Places ('designated CSPs') are made according to a robust framework underpinned by rational criteria and processes that are clear, regular and applied transparently.
2. Believes that the proposed 2020 start-date for the planned new framework is unrealistic given the lead-time providers require to meet external registration and advertising requirements and to communicate clearly and accurately with students.
3. Urges the Department to ensure coherence in the outcome of this process with the many other current overlapping consultations (Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy, Performance-based funding for non-designated CSPs, AQF Review, Provider Category Standards Review, medical CSP redistributions, National Review of Nursing Education etc).
4. Supports on simplicity grounds, the proposed five per cent annual reduction in existing providers' allocations of designated CSPs to establish a national pool for transparent reallocation but raises some concerns about the design and arbitrary nature of this proposal.
5. Seeks maximum consistency across the three course levels (enabling, sub-bachelor, and postgraduate) in the criteria that will guide decision-making about which courses will be eligibility for designated CSPs and recommends that the reallocation criteria emphasise outcomes measures over inputs.
6. Stresses the vital importance of any new designated CSP allocation framework:
 - accommodating future growth in demand for tertiary-level qualifications arising from population growth and the economy's increasing demands for workers with high-level skills and qualifications;
 - ensuring that existing and new providers not already delivering courses with designated CSPs, can compete for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate CSPs from the national pool;
 - encouraging and supporting life-long learning for all Australians regardless of their social or economic situation, and including for nationally significant research qualifications and other areas where traditional notions of professional registration are not relevant;
 - promoting and supporting educational innovation and diversity in the missions, curriculum offerings and approaches to education of Australian higher education providers;
 - helping to build foreign language proficiency across the Australian population; and
 - allowing flexibility for future governments to target support to student groups, industries and regions with special needs.

We discuss these issues below and conclude by answering the Consultation Paper's specific questions. We look forward to engaging with the Department and other stakeholders about these issues over the coming months.

Key issues from The University of Sydney's perspective

1. Support for the policy objective

The objective of ensuring there is a robust rationale and framework governing future Australian Government investments in enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate Commonwealth-Supported Places ('designated CSPs') is strongly supported. The longstanding policy uncertainty and *ad hoc* decisions taken by successive governments described in the Consultation Paper have made planning and advising our faculties and schools very challenging. We would welcome an outcome that ensures future allocations of designated CSPs occur according to transparent criteria and clear processes. This would allow us to manage our course offerings much more efficiently. We agree that the proposed new framework needs to be flexible enough to enable future governments to respond to changing demands and priorities. However, this flexibility needs to balance providers' needs for policy certainty and for reasonable time to adjust to any changes to their designated CSP profiles.

2. Timing issues for implementation and ongoing review

We strongly support an 'evolutionary' approach for making the shift to the proposed new framework. Gradual implementation of any reallocation of existing designated CSPs will be essential to soften the impact on students by giving providers time to adjust their course offerings supported with designated CSPs. However, the proposal that the new framework will commence in the 2020 grant year is unrealistic. At the University of Sydney, for example, the normal deadline for the submission of new course proposals is 18 months before the proposed start date for the course – meaning July 2018 for courses to start in 2020. These long lead-times are needed to ensure our internal (and in some case external accreditation) reviews are completed in time to meet strict deadlines for registering and advertising new course offerings through bodies such as the NSW Universities' Admissions Centre (UAC).

These lead-times have implications for the timing of the ongoing process of review the Department proposes would be built into the new framework. We agree that these reviews should be conducted in alignment with the Commonwealth's funding agreements with universities (currently three-yearly). We recommend that they are timed to ensure providers can be made aware of any relevant changes to policy and process at least 18 months before the changes commence. Otherwise, it is very likely that reallocated places will not be utilised in at least the first year intended by the Department. It is also vital that providers have enough time to communicate clearly and accurately with students and potential students about any changes to CSP funding arrangements and to ensure that all students are treated fairly.

3. Policy coherence, reducing complexity and the allocation of new designated CSPs

We note that this consultation on the future allocation of designated CSPs is occurring alongside other policy discussions, the outcomes of which are highly relevant to this process. The concurrent processes of most relevance are the development of a [National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy](#), the development of separate redistribution arrangements for medical CSPs to unlock places to support the establishment of the Murray-Darling Medical Schools' Network (MDMS), the [Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework \(AQF\)](#), the development of a [new Performance-based Funding Scheme](#) for non-designated CSPs, the Review of the [Higher Education Provider Category Standards](#) and the [National Review of Nursing Education](#). For example, the AQF review is considering options for incorporating shorter-form qualifications with the AQF, the Regional Expert Education Advisory Group is considering a range of targeted approaches to improve tertiary education access and outcomes in regional areas, while the Department is developing a separate approach to performance funding to be applied in relation to universities non-designated CSPs. We urge the Department to seek to ensure coherence, consistency and simplicity in the outcomes of these overlapping reviews.

The Consultation Paper is focused on how to reallocate existing designated CSPs in an environment where no additional funding support for such places is expected in the foreseeable future. The paper does not address the question of how the Government will make decisions about the allocation of new funding for designated and non-designated CSPs – for example to support rapid population growth in a region or to help address a critical skills shortage in an area of national priority. Ideally, the proposed frameworks for designated and non-designated CSPs would be brought together to deliver simplicity, consistency and clarity about the process by which the Government will make decisions about any new investments in CSPs.

4. The proposed five per cent annual reduction in providers' existing designated CSP allocations

With some significant reservations outlined below, we support the proposed application of a five per cent annual reduction in existing providers' funding for designated CSPs to establish a national reallocation pool. We recommend that this occurs on a trial basis for three years from 2021 initially, with the operation of the arrangement to be reviewed within this timeframe.

We appreciate the challenge the Department faces in seeking to transition the sector to a new way of allocating designated CSPs. The simplicity of the proposed application of a five per cent annual reduction to establish a 'national reallocation pool' is acknowledged. Nevertheless, we are concerned about the proposed approach for unlocking existing CSPs allocations for redistribution under the new framework for reasons including the following:

- Providers with existing allocations of designated CSPs obtained these places under the policies and processes of successive Australian governments designed to address identified educational, skills and workforce priorities on each occasion. Invariably, these funding decisions were made based on detailed business cases and after lengthy negotiations between providers and the Government in the context of the funding agreements. Other allocation decisions were taken through competitive processes established periodically by governments to address identified educational and workforce priorities.
- In some recent cases – for example the funding arrangements secured by the University of Melbourne and the University of Western Australia to support their respective curriculum innovations – they forewent their rights to participate in the demand-driven system of funding for bachelor degree CSPs.
- The proposed universal reduction in existing allocations would have no regard for a university's utilisation of its designated CSP allocation, nor for its relative performance in delivering outcomes for students supported by these places.
- The financial impact on a provider of a five per cent reduction will vary widely depending on the Commonwealth Grant Scheme clusters in which the CSPs sit. For example, we are puzzled by why the Department has preferred a uniform reduction in places, rather than a consistent reduction in existing providers' maximum grant amounts for designated CSPs.
- Many details will need to be worked through with providers. For example, how will deferred designated CSPs be accommodated under the proposed reallocation framework?

5. The proposed reallocation criteria for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate designated CSPs

Across the three course levels, it will be important to achieve maximum consistency in the criteria and processes by which the designated CSPs are reallocated. The Consultation Paper suggests that *the profile of commencing students, provider performance appropriate to the level of study, utilisation of places and student demand* will generally be appropriate.

Data on levels of demand for a course, the profile of commencing students and the utilisation by providers' of existing CSP allocations can provide important contextual information. However, the new allocation framework should emphasise outcomes rather than inputs. Outcome measures such as attrition, completions, the profile of graduates, transition to further tertiary-level, employment outcomes, addressing skills and workforce shortages, and delivering social, economic or cultural benefits for communities are strongly preferred. Of course, across all course levels, the new framework will need to ensure that existing providers not already delivering courses with designated CSPs, as well as new providers, can compete for places from the national pool.

Enabling courses

We support the proposed principle for the allocation of designated places to support enabling courses – *places will be allocated to universities that achieve high standards of academic preparation and strong student outcomes*. We agree that the unique characteristics of enabling courses warrant a somewhat different approach to the allocation of CSPs to support them. We agree too that the allocation criteria for enabling courses should – for existing providers – emphasise: *the profile of the target student group and rates of student progression to further study at tertiary level*. CSP places for enabling courses are crucial for supporting a diverse range of students and would enable us to attract students who have already attempted to gain admission to the University through our alternative entry programs. We are not convinced of the relevance of *existing utilisation* of places or *innovative teaching models* as criteria for the distribution of these places. Inclusion of such metrics could create perverse behaviours, such as providers lowering entry standards to maximise utilisation of places or pursuing innovative delivery models for their own sakes. Ensuring the new framework promotes and fosters innovation is important, but as discussed below the merits of the implemented or desired provider innovations should be assessed as part of the regular funding agreement negotiations.

Sub-bachelor courses

The proposed principle for the allocation of designated CSPs for sub-bachelor courses is supported, subject to the inclusion of the following suggested edit to accommodate Diplomas of Languages studied concurrently as outlined at p.12 of the Consultation Paper:

'Sub-bachelor courses — priority will be given to courses that focus on industry needs and/or fully articulate into a bachelor degree **and/or courses such as Diplomas of Languages undertaken concurrently with other tertiary studies.**'

We support the proposed prioritisation of sub-bachelor courses that articulate fully to bachelor-level study or are cognate diplomas such as the Diploma of Languages that is often studied concurrently. We do not support the proposal that students may only receive a sub-bachelor CSP for a Diploma of Languages if they are enrolled concurrently in a bachelor degree program with the same provider. Students studying with providers that do not offer language courses and postgraduate students at the same provider can benefit greatly from studying a Diploma of Languages with a CSP. Moreover, the requirement would seem to work against efficiency by discouraging providers to collaborate over the delivery of language programs.

Postgraduate courses

We agree it is important that the Government continues to support the delivery of postgraduate qualifications where these are necessary for entry to a profession, to support rapid retraining in areas of workforce shortage, or to meet other national priorities. The criteria proposed in the Consultation Paper for reallocation of postgraduate places are: *the course delivers significant community benefit; or the qualification is a minimum requirement for registration to practise with a recognised professional regulatory body; or the qualification is the shortest possible pathway to a professional qualification; or the qualification meets an identified skills need*.

Other criteria proposed for consideration are: *existing utilisation of places; student satisfaction; graduate employment outcomes; representation of equity groups; and national significance.*

We are concerned about the potential for '*minimum requirement for professional registration*' or '*shortest possible pathway to professional registration*' tests to be applied prescriptively. The framework will need to allow the Department to take into account the additional skills that graduates of professional postgraduate programs acquire and changes in the entry points and career paths available within professions.

The postgraduate CSP profile adjustment criteria currently applied to universities (*professional entry or skills shortage or national interest*) remain valid and useful reference points for developing rational and transparent allocation criteria. Considering these along the Consultation Paper's proposals we propose the following list of factors to be considered in the context of funding agreement negotiations with providers to determine which of their current and proposed new courses may be eligible for funding support from the national pool:

Community benefit: evidence that the course will deliver a significant community benefit; and/or

Workforce shortage: evidence that the course will address a recognised skills/workforce shortage, or predicted future shortage at a local, regional or national level; and

Professional requirement or national priority: the course is, or is moving towards being accepted as an entry-level qualification for professional registration by the relevant regulatory body; or for courses that do not lead graduates directly to registration in a profession, the course is of national significance (i.e. fosters high-level skills relevant to Australia's research and innovation needs, national interests or cultural development); and

Low private returns: evidence that the private rates of return for typical graduates of the course (or a significant subgroup of graduates) are relatively low; and/or

Low full-fee demand: evidence that there is relatively low demand for full-fee places from domestic students (our [Master of Nursing \(Graduate Entry\)](#) is one good example); and/or

Equity focus: commitment from the provider that the designated places for the course will be targeted at students from one or more equity groups (low-SES; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; Rural, Regional and Remote; Disability, Non-English speaking background). One example is the University of Sydney's commitment to courses like our [Graduate Diploma in Indigenous Health Promotion](#), which is a targeted program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers addressing an acute labour shortage. These students would not be able to do the degree without CSPs and the course clearly meets our recommended eligibility criteria.

6. Supporting life-long learning

Given the rapidly changing nature of work, it is vital that the new framework for allocating designated CSPs provides a safety-net ensuring that all Australians can update their knowledge and skills throughout their lives.

The current arrangements for the allocation of these places were designed for an era when a linear approach to qualification attainment – structured around standard study pathways for entry to recognised professions – was the norm. While many traditional professions remain relevant today, the forces of globalisation and technological change are placing pressure on workers to update and renew their skills to remain competitive.

Even in the traditional professions, employers increasingly expect staff to have specialised skills and knowledge in addition to their mandatory professional qualifications. Many millions of existing jobs in Australia are expected to be made obsolete within the next 10-15 years, while millions of new employment opportunities will be created in industries and roles that have never existed before.¹ With time, some of these will emerge as professions, and the AQF and our total framework for financing tertiary education will need to evolve with these trends.

People with existing tertiary qualifications and the confidence and/or financial means to pay for or take on debt for full fees to support their lifelong learning should continue to do so. The tertiary education financing system should encourage all citizens to invest in their further education through improved tax incentives, access to loan support and other measures. However, it is critical that graduates who are unemployed or underemployed, or who for other reasons do not have the financial resources to support further study, are not prevented from accessing designated CSPs simply because their preferred course of study would not lead directly to registration in a recognised profession. We look forward to engaging with the Department and stakeholders further to determine how this issue can be addressed effectively in the proposed new framework.

7. Supporting educational innovation

Australia's higher education sector is regularly criticised for a lack of provider diversity compared to other countries.² The current [Review of the Provider Category Standards](#) is the latest formal process to examine these issues. We struggle to see how the proposed uniform framework for reallocating designated CSPs will serve to encourage providers to pursue innovation in their course offerings. The proposal appears to penalise providers that have introduced major innovations to their educational strategies, course structures and offerings over the last decade. As discussed above, the designated CSP reform plans seems based on a view of tertiary education that is gradually being made obsolete by the changing nature of work and tertiary education.

It will therefore be critical that the Government's future approach to the allocation of designated and un-designated (bachelor degree) places allows it to continue supporting innovative models, whether established already or proposed by providers in the future. The obvious mechanism through which this could occur is the funding agreement renegotiation process. One curriculum innovation for which we will continue to seek the Government's support, is to offer 1-2 year research-track masters courses with designated CSPs in line with key recommendations of the Australian Council of Learned Academies' (ACOLA) review of the Research Training System completed in 2016. Here we note that the Government supported ACOLA's recommendations on this issue and that funding through the designated CSP allocation system would be the most logical way to implement this important reform. We have included at **Appendix C** relevant extracts from the ACOLA report and look forward to discussing this matter further with the Department and other stakeholders.

8. Supporting students, industries and regions with special needs

Finally, we offer our strong support for the suggestions in the Consultation Paper that the proposed new framework for allocating designated CSPs will need to have flexibility built into it to allow the Government to target support towards new strategic priorities as they arise. These could relate to addressing the challenges faced by specific groups of students/potential students, specific industries or regions impacted by population growth or demographic change, economic disruption, natural disasters and other major events.

¹ CEDA (June 2015) [Australia's future workforce](#), p.8

² <https://www.nousgroup.com/insights/diversity-australian-tertiary-education/>

We recommend that the processes and principles guiding these decisions are clear and applied transparently and fairly to all providers.

Answers to the Consultation Paper's specific questions

Should geographic representation be a consideration in the distribution of places?

Yes. See our key issues 5 and 8 above.

What is the minimum viable allocation for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate places?

There is no universal minimum allocation as this depends on a range of course and provider specific factors including cost of delivery, student mix (CSP, domestic or international full-fee) and the availability of other funding to support the delivery of each course.

How often should places be re-distributed? Should this vary for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate places?

Places should be re-distributed every three years in line with the funding agreements. There should be maximum consistency in the reallocation process for all three course levels. The proposed regular reviews should be completed on cycles that ensure the outcomes are known at least 18 months before the beginning of the next round of three year funding agreements.

What proportion of places should be reallocated? Should this vary for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate places?

See our key issue 4 above.

What are stakeholders' views on the allocation criteria suggested above? Are there other criteria which should be considered?

See our key issue 5 above.

How should criteria be configured to ensure that institutions do not become locked 'locked out' of the future reallocations, especially where they have limited track record in delivery?

See our key issue 5 above. Any Table A higher education providers and potentially other registered non-University providers, which demonstrate the capacity to deliver a course that meets the criteria for designated CSPs support, should be able to compete for places from the national pool through a transparent process run through the funding agreement negotiations.

Appendix B

University of Sydney's summary of the key reforms proposed by the Department of Education and Training in its [Consultation Paper on the reallocation of Commonwealth supported places for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate courses](#), released November 2018

The proposed new framework for allocating designated CSPs

- From 2020, the current arrangements for the distribution of Commonwealth supported places for enabling, sub-bachelor and postgraduate courses ('designated places') will be replaced by a robust, rational and clear policy framework, which will be implemented gradually through a regular transparent process for allocating these places and for reviewing the framework's operation.
- A fixed annual reduction (possibly 5 per cent) would be applied to all providers' current (previous year's) allocations of commencing designated CSPs, with these places to be reallocated from a 'national pool' based on transparent published criteria.
- The reallocation of these places will most likely occur in alignment with the process for renewal of universities' funding agreements with the Commonwealth.
- The proposed new framework will not apply to the allocation of medical places, which will continue to be allocated separately.
- The new reallocation framework will need to be flexible to ensure that the Government retains the capacity to respond to changing demands and priorities.

The allocation of designated CSPs for enabling courses

- Enabling places will be allocated to universities that achieve high standards of academic preparation and strong student outcomes.
- The criteria proposed for reallocation of enabling places are: *student progression to further study at tertiary level; existing utilisation of places; profile of commencing students; innovative teaching models.*

The allocation of designated CSPs for sub-bachelor courses

- Priority for the allocation of sub-bachelor places will be given to courses that focus on industry needs and/or fully articulate to a bachelor degree, or are only open to students who are concurrently enrolled in a bachelor degree program at the same institution (for example, Diploma of Languages programs).
- The criteria proposed for reallocation of sub-bachelor places are: *course addresses industry needs; existing utilisation of places; completions and transition further study at tertiary level; attrition; demonstrated demand; demonstrated need.*

The allocation of designated CSPs for postgraduate courses

- Postgraduate places will be allocated to providers on criteria informed by professional requirements and community benefit.
- The revised postgraduate designated CSP allocations which commenced in 2018 will remain in place until the proposed new framework commences.
- The criteria proposed for reallocation of postgraduate places are: *the course delivers significant community benefit; or the qualification is a minimum requirement for registration to practise with a recognised professional regulatory body; or the qualification is the shortest possible pathway to a professional qualification; or the qualification meets an identified skills need. Other criteria proposed are: existing utilisation of places; student satisfaction; graduate employment outcomes; representation of equity groups.*

Section 2

Better preparing candidates for HDR training

2.1 Introduction

The traditional pathway to undertaking a Research Doctorate in Australia has been the completion of a 3-year undergraduate Bachelor degree followed by a 1-year Honours program. The Honours program usually comprises both coursework modules and the completion of a research dissertation, although this varies between disciplines. Although it is the most accepted route to a Research Doctorate this is changing, with an increasing number of candidates undertaking postgraduate education or entering the workforce prior to embarking on HDR training.

To meet the changing needs and backgrounds of prospective candidates, there is growing demand to establish alternative entry pathways to HDR training. The Review received numerous suggestions on ways to enhance preparatory training. There is particular interest in developing a for-purpose HDR training coursework Masters degree, but regulatory and funding barriers make this route difficult to establish at a national scale.

This section explores the different entry pathways to HDR training, issues associated with them, existing and potential responses to develop new entry pathways, and the barriers that need to be overcome to develop responses on a national scale.

2.2 Entry pathways to HDR training

2.2.1 The Australian Bachelor Honours degree

The Australian Honours program rapidly became the primary pathway to HDR training (Manathunga et al., 2012). However, the

number of students undertaking Honours has been steadily declining, and the proportion of candidates using Honours as their entry qualification for a Research Doctorate is also declining (Kiley, 2015). In 2011, 52 per cent of commencing HDR candidates used a Bachelor degree with Honours as the basis for admission to HDR training, whereas 43 per cent used a postgraduate qualification (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, 2011a).

Despite this slow decline, the Bachelor Honours degree will continue to remain the most accepted pathway to HDR training unless a desire to develop alternative entry pathways is combined with wider regulatory change. The Honours degree endures as the primary pathway to HDR training due to its funding status, receiving financial support from the Australian Government. Universities receive funding through Commonwealth Supported Places and from students who have access to HECS-HELP and FEE-HELP support to cover their tuition contribution. It is challenging for universities to develop financially viable alternative pathways owing to the absence of financial support for domestic candidates in alternative programs.

It is important to differentiate between different types of Bachelor Honours degrees. There is a distinction between *Honours programs* (such as the Australian four year Bachelor Honours degree) and programs that are *awarded with Honours* (such as those awarded in England and Wales, Ireland, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore) (Manathunga et al., 2012, p. 10).

The traditional Australian Bachelor Honours degree is usually an additional fourth year of undergraduate education for those who have completed a 3-year Bachelor degree program (Australian Qualifications Framework Council,

2013). It is this degree that has traditionally been seen as a pathway to HDR training in Australia. There are also Bachelor Honours degrees that are embedded in a Bachelor degree, sometimes as an additional year (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013). This approach often occurs in professional degrees, and such programs are sometimes referred to as integrated Honours. On completion of a Bachelor Honours degree graduates should have “advanced knowledge of the underlying principles and concepts in one or more disciplines and knowledge of research principles and methods.” (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013, p. 16).

Bachelor degrees awarded with Honours, such as those in England and Wales, are usually 3-year programs where Honours is awarded to signify a particular level of achievement. This has also been the case in the past in Australia within some disciplines and at some institutions where an Honours degree has been awarded to indicate a superior level of achievement. Within the England and Wales system, most Bachelor degrees are now awarded with Honours. This situation is in sharp contrast to Australia where approximately 162,000 Bachelor pass degrees were awarded in 2014, but only approximately 14,000 Bachelor Honours degrees were awarded (Department of Education and Training, 2015a).

2.2.2 Coursework Masters

The data shows there is a slow but steady increase in the number of candidates who are entering HDR training after completing a coursework Masters degree rather than a Bachelor Honours degree (Kiley and Cumming, 2014), and in part this is because a coursework Masters degree is no longer regarded as a terminal degree (Kiley, 2015). The increasing requirement for a research component within coursework Masters degrees is said to have improved their status as a valid entry pathway. A number of submissions to this Review point to coursework Masters programs with a 25–33 per cent research component as a potentially acceptable entry pathway (Queensland University

of Technology, 2015; Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, 2015; Dean of Creative Industries, Queensland University of Technology, 2015).

2.2.3 Research Masters

The Research Masters degree has the potential to be an alternative entry pathway for those lacking the first-class Honours degree that many universities favour. University of Queensland (2015) suggested that as the Research Masters entry requirements were typically lower compared to Research Doctorate entry requirements, using Research Masters as a pathway could help those from non-traditional backgrounds and those with industry experience to enrol in a research degree. A broad definition of industry is taken in this report and includes businesses, governments, government business enterprises, non-government organisations, not-for-profit groups and community organisations. Research Australia (2015) suggested that a Research Masters degree would better prepare potential Research Doctorate candidates. Candidates that showed aptitude and excelled in this program could potentially upgrade to a Research Doctorate during their Research Masters candidature.

2.2.4 The US HDR training model

The virtues of the US Research Doctorate model were recognised in many submissions, which extolled the resultant quality and the broad and deep knowledge of graduates from this system. In particular, the coursework approach and the incorporation of teaching and research into the degree were highlighted as positive aspects (Flinders University, 2015). This model usually requires attainment at a Masters level degree before enrolment in Doctoral studies (Western Sydney University, 2015). The length of time for HDR completion is much greater than other HDR training systems around the world, ranging from an average of 6.5 years in the physical sciences to 11.7 years in education (National Science Foundation, 2013), a feature that is seen as a disadvantage.

2.2.5 The Bologna model

A qualifications framework has been adopted within the European Higher Education Area, and has led to the introduction of a three-cycle system of successive degrees: Bachelor, Masters and Doctorate (European Commission, 2016). The increasing adherence to this framework across Europe means that in most European research training systems, the typical pathway to Research Doctorate involves completing a 3–4-year Bachelor and a 1–2-year Masters degree. The Research Doctorate itself is expected to take 3–4 years to complete. This framework is frequently referred to as the Bologna process or Bologna model. Although there are many different ways in which the degree programs themselves are structured, it is now very common for a Masters degree to be the standard entry pathway to a Research Doctorate in Europe.

2.2.6 Post-Roberts review model

Following the Roberts (2002) review, the UK has taken steps to build specialist coursework Masters degree programs that are specifically designed as entry pathways to a Research Doctorate. Flexible funding arrangements are in place allowing tuition fee subsidies and stipends to be awarded to candidates to undertake both a Masters degree and a Research Doctorate.

2.2.7 Summary

There are a variety of different entry pathway models in use both within Australia and overseas. Nevertheless, the Australian Honours degree continues to be the traditional or default entry pathway, particularly for those moving straight through the system from a Bachelor degree. Entry pathways to HDR training overseas, and increasingly in Australia, are making use of a Masters degree to prepare candidates.

2.3 Issues with current entry pathways to HDR training in the Australian research training system

2.3.1 Adequacy of Honours in preparing candidates for HDR training

There are concerns expressed within the sector that the current Australian Honours model is not necessarily the best way to prepare candidates for HDR training. The University of Wollongong (2015) expressed concern that the current approach is breaking down. Concerns tend to centre on the relatively short duration and lack of breadth and disciplinary depth of the Honours program, leading to candidates being underprepared for HDR training compared with those trained overseas, as illustrated by this comment from the Australian National University.

“...Honours programs encompassing only one year of HDR training may not equip students with enough prior knowledge.”

Australian National University (2015, p. 9)

Although described as a 1-year program, the amount of time spent by the candidate on the program is typically less than this. The program usually begins in late February and must be completed by early November because of the need to determine recipients of APA scholarships and other scholarship selection considerations for those wishing to pursue HDR training the following year. Thus, the Honours degree program is usually only 8–9 months in length. The shortness of the program is of concern to many Australian universities. James Cook University (2015) described Honours as increasingly inadequate as preparation for entry into the Research Doctorate. Flinders University (2015) echoed a similar concern, stating that in some disciplines, Honours provides inadequate time to train candidates for higher degree study and develop a wider skill base. In particular, stakeholders raised concerns that candidates do not receive adequate methodological training, especially in quantitative methods and data analysis.

2.3.2 International recognition of the Honours degree

The Australian Honours degree and its place in a globally connected world needs to be considered from the perspective of international candidates coming to Australia and Australian candidates going overseas. Many graduates from Australian universities (both domestic and international candidates) will seek employment for all or part of their career outside Australia. This is problematic for Australian Honours graduates, as Kiley et al. (2009) point out—the qualification is highly valued within Australia but not well understood overseas.

The impacts of a lack of global recognition are persistently raised by stakeholders and relate to two main areas:

- Australian candidates are uncompetitive for overseas HDR opportunities
- Difficulties are created in the recruitment of international candidates to the Australian research training system

Impact of the lack of recognition of Honours by overseas institutions

There are concerns that the lack of international recognition of the Australian Honours degree is harming candidates at the highest level when applying for prestigious scholarships or places at elite universities overseas (James Cook University, 2015; Giles, 2015). The Innovative Research Universities (2015) state that there are

issues relating to the international portability of the Honours program. The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) expresses similar concerns:

“International institutions do not always recognise an Honours program as a research preliminary program in the same way that a Masters program is considered. This can limit students that wish to enter HDR training in a different country’s institution.”

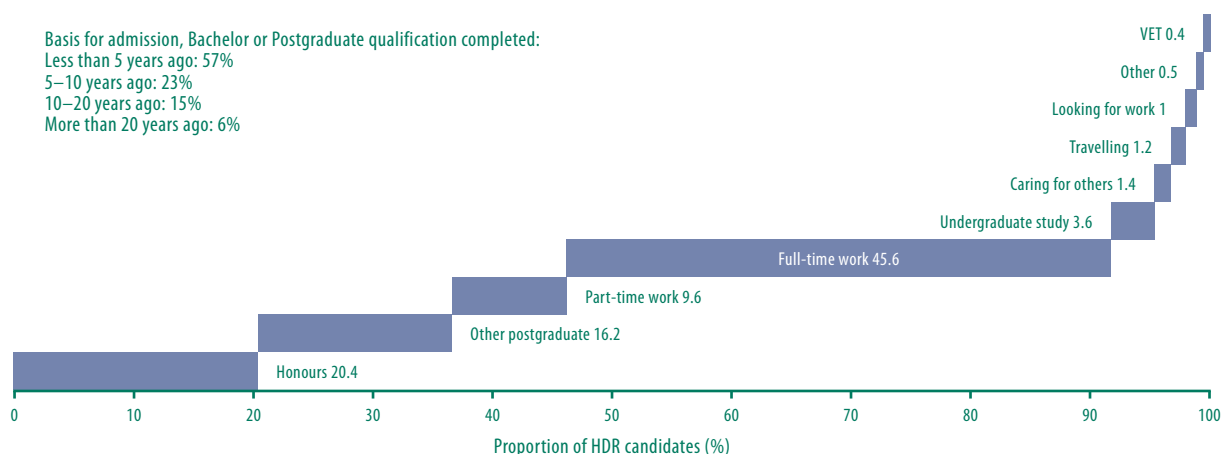
Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (2015, p. 10)

Impact of Honours on the competitiveness of Australia’s HDR training system

The potential impact of the lack of international recognition of the Australian Honours system on recruiting international HDR candidates is also of concern to the university sector. International candidates are an important part of the research system in Australia, providing expertise in many fields where there is a domestic recruitment deficiency, and valuable income for universities to reinvest in education and research. The international HDR training market is very competitive, and deficiencies that undermine the competitiveness of the system should be addressed.

A particular concern relates to recruiting international HDR candidates that have already completed a coursework Masters degree but without a substantial research component. In such cases, the prospective candidate may need to undertake further preparatory training before

Figure 7: Main activity of HDR candidates the year before beginning a research degree, showing the large number of candidates entering HDR training with past work experience



Reproduced from Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (2011a).

commencing HDR training, and within Australia this training would often be at the undergraduate Honours level.

From the sponsor's perspective, there is reluctance to fund a qualification at a lower level than has already been achieved by the prospective candidate (Flinders University, 2015). If the candidate pursued HDR training in other research systems and needed additional preparatory training he or she would enrol in a Masters degree, an outcome which would be seen as more desirable for the sponsor and the candidate.

2.3.3 Changing demographics and not adequately recognising work experience

Completing high school, a Bachelor degree, a Bachelor Honours degree and a research degree in succession is no longer the typical route taken by most HDR graduates, with many candidates choosing to undertake research training later in life. About 60 per cent of candidates are aged over 30, with 27 per cent over 40 and 13 per cent over 50 (Department of Education and Training, 2015h). As Figure 7 shows, more than half of all HDR candidates were undertaking work (full or part time) as their main activity prior to commencing HDR training, and more than one-fifth of HDR candidates completed their bachelor or postgraduate qualification more than 10 years prior to starting their HDR training. This shows that a large proportion of candidates are coming to HDR training with substantial work experience.

The perception that APAs are generally awarded to prospective candidates with a first-class Honours degree is said by many stakeholders to be suppressing further demand for HDR training from those with substantial relevant work experience, but lacking this academic qualification. This perception exists despite many universities changing their assessment criteria to ensure adequate weighting is given to work experience. This is a particular problem for some older HDR candidates looking to return to university to undertake

HDR training. These candidates sometimes have substantial knowledge gained through their work experience, which could adequately substitute any perceived academic shortcomings, particularly when the prospective candidate might have undertaken their undergraduate education some time ago.

During consultations with stakeholders, there appeared to be some confusion as to whether Australian universities can substitute work experience for academic qualifications when making decisions about APA scholarships. The *Commonwealth Scholarships Guidelines (Research) 2012* state that:

"...universities may award an APA to an applicant that does not hold a Bachelor Degree with First Class Honours, if the university deems that the applicant has attained equivalent qualifications and experience to merit selection."

Department of Education and Training (2015d)

Some participants had interpreted this to mean academic qualifications and academic experience, while others considered that it meant academic qualifications and work experience. Even where stakeholders were aware of flexibility within the funding rules, participants at some of the public forums expressed their frustration that APA scholarships are routinely only awarded to applicants with a first class Honours degree or academic equivalent such as coursework Masters degree, and those with substantial relevant work experience were often overlooked.

2.3.4 Current limitations for coursework Masters entry pathways

Although numbers are increasing, a wider uptake of a coursework Masters degree as an entry pathway is prevented by the absence of funding support. There are only a limited number of Commonwealth supported places available for such programs, and the current RTS funding requirement for a two-thirds-research component makes coursework programs ineligible for RTS funding.

As coursework Masters degrees are not funded entry pathways for HDR training, they are not usually structured to provide the preparatory training for an HDR degree. Such courses usually attract tuition fees and are often designed for professionals looking to improve their technical skills, as distinct from research skills. As a number of stakeholders stated at public forums, for a coursework Masters degree to be an effective entry pathway to HDR training it needs to have a HDR training focus, including a substantial research component.

2.3.5 Lack of enthusiasm for a Research Masters degree

Despite a Research Masters degree being an existing pathway, the data suggests that candidates and universities are not making use of it. Owing to the declining number of HDR candidates commencing a Research Masters degree each year (Figure 1), and the reluctance of many institutions to award places, the degree has limited use as an entry pathway for HDR training. Candidates now rarely enrol in a Research Masters degree and then upgrade their candidature to a Research Doctorate after 1 or 2 years (Kiley, 2015). Universities are choosing to apply the finite HDR training funding they receive through the block grants to Research Doctorate candidates.

The AQF requirement for the degree to be made up of a two-thirds research component also limits the capacity of the Research Masters degree to provide the structured learning required for a robust entry pathway to a Research Doctorate.

Despite the overall decline, there is a great deal of variation in the disciplines in which Research Masters degrees are offered. University of Melbourne (2015) points out that 42 per cent of completions within the Creative Arts are Research Masters, but for other disciplines Research Masters completions represent only 10–20 per cent of HDR completions. Any moves away from supporting Research Masters needs to recognise the impact on individual disciplines.

2.3.6 Difficulties of the US model—lengthy timeframe to deliver thorough training

The length of time taken to complete a Research Doctorate in the US is significantly longer than in Australia. Allowing for a greater amount of time to undertake a Research Doctorate means that candidates could be better prepared for employment (University of Sydney, 2015), although this claim is disputed (RMIT University, 2015), and it is noted that the system has high drop-out rates (Kiley, 2015). On the other hand, the shorter timeframe of the Australian system over the US model is seen as a positive distinguishing feature of the Australian system, and makes the system more attractive to international HDR candidates.

2.3.7 Summary

There are concerns within the sector that the Australian Honours degree, the traditional entry pathway into HDR training, is not adequately preparing candidates for a research degree. Furthermore, the lack of international recognition of this qualification is potentially harming the Australian research training system, as well as limiting outstanding Australian candidates from pursuing HDR training opportunities overseas. There has been a shift in the demographics of HDR candidates, with many candidates coming to training later in life and with substantial work experience. Demand from such candidates might be even higher if relevant work experience was more readily taken into account when places and scholarships are allocated. Following global trends, an increased number of candidates are using a coursework Masters as an entry pathway to HDR training. The uptake of this pathway is suppressed by a lack of funding support in comparison to the Australian Government funded Honours pathway, and such programs are not always designed with future HDR training in mind. The Research Masters degree has diminished in significance in Australia and is not frequently used as an entry pathway for

HDR training. While the North American model is acknowledged as producing high quality HDR graduates, there are questions regarding its effectiveness and efficiency in terms of the high number of graduates who do not complete, and the increased cost and time to complete.

2.4 Developing entry pathways with improved preparatory training

This section looks at how some stakeholders have been responding to concerns relating to the preparedness of candidates for HDR training. It then explores how entry pathways and HDR training might be restructured more generally to meet the changing needs of all stakeholders.

2.4.1 Existing responses to improve preparatory training

Despite regulatory and funding constraints, the desire to better prepare candidates for HDR training is high. Some institutions have developed alternative entry pathways with improved preparatory training models compared to the Honours pathway. Examples include candidates undertaking a graduate certificate in research methods or a newly developed dedicated Masters degree that focuses on improving research skills.

Lengthening the Research Doctorate

Like many other institutions, the University of Wollongong has recognised that candidates are starting HDR training underprepared. Instead of providing improved preparatory training prior to commencing candidature, the University of Wollongong has introduced a 4-year Research Doctorate program, which includes 1 year of coursework (University of Wollongong, 2015).

Graduate diplomas in research methods

An alternative Graduate Diploma entry pathway to HDR training has been developed by some universities. For example at Flinders University, candidates undertake a Graduate Diploma in Research Methods. The Diploma provides them

with research methodology skills for undertaking a substantial research project and to gain entry into the Research Doctorate program (Flinders University, 2015). Similarly, Griffith University now offers a Graduate Diploma of Research Studies containing a 50 per cent research component as a pathway to HDR programs (Griffith University, 2015).

Coursework Masters degree

To enhance the coursework Masters degree as an entry pathway to HDR training, some universities have moved to introduce or strengthen the research component of the program. This has enabled the coursework Masters degree to be seen as an entry pathway to HDR training, rather than as a terminal degree. This approach is more appealing than Honours to international candidates or potential candidates with substantial work experience.

Two-year hybrid Master of Research degree

Perhaps the most innovative newly developed entry pathway model is that at Macquarie University. In 2013, Macquarie University adopted a 2-year Master of Research degree as its standard pathway for admission to HDR training. Macquarie University has overcome regulatory and funding barriers by offering the program as a hybrid degree, combining a Bachelor of Philosophy (BPhil)/Master of Research (MRes).

In Year 1, domestic students are enrolled in the Bachelor of Philosophy (BPhil) as a Commonwealth supported student and are liable for student contribution amounts which can be deferred through the HECS-HELP scheme if they are eligible. In Year 2, domestic students are enrolled in the Master of Research (MRes).

Macquarie University (2015b)

The first year of the hybrid degree is funded through Commonwealth supported places, in a similar way to a standard Honours program. The second year of the degree is funded through the Research Training System block grant. The careful use of these funding programs allows Macquarie University to offer a higher level program to domestic candidates without any up-front fees, in contrast with most coursework Masters programs.

One of the advantages of the Macquarie University approach is that it provides multiple exit pathways. Candidates can leave with a Bachelor of Philosophy degree if they wish to exit the program after 1 year. For those who do not wish to pursue a Research Doctorate after the 2-year program, they leave with an enhanced qualification that recognises the research skills they have gained. This approach allows candidates to progressively develop their research skills, and provides them with a longer opportunity to better determine their level of interest and suitability for HDR training. The program also provides a pathway into research careers that do not require a Research Doctorate but do require postgraduate HDR training.

The use of the different funding schemes introduces specific compliance requirements for the hybrid program and places limitations on the way Macquarie University can structure the degree (Macquarie University, 2015b). For example, as the second year of the program is funded through the RTS block grant it must have at least a two-thirds research component, thereby restricting the amount of coursework that can be undertaken in the second year.

A summary of the program is provided in Box 3.

Box 3: Summary of the Masters of Research program at Macquarie University

Year 1 units are advanced undergraduate coursework including study of research frontiers in the discipline

- 6x4 credit point units of advanced disciplinary content
- 1x4 credit point Research Communications unit
- 1x4 credit point Research Frontiers unit where candidates survey the key ground-breaking and innovative research issues in their field

Year 2 units are at the Masters postgraduate program level specialising in research preparation and experience in a specific research topic at the sub-discipline level.

The Year 2 program is based around five core activities:

- Research Frontiers
- Literature Review
- Research Methods
- Research Planning
- Thesis (20,000 words) based on a small research project

Source: Macquarie University (2015a).

2.4.2 Potential responses

Research training coursework Masters degree

A key component of HDR training is the need to develop a broad range of high level methodological skills. A criticism of the Honours approach is that candidates specialise in a particular research area at too early a stage, leading to a narrow range of methodological skills and disciplinary knowledge. This means that candidates are not necessarily developing the broader skills needed to succeed across a range of research projects. Developing a more rounded set of research skills will allow candidates to pursue a wider range of future HDR training opportunities.

There was enthusiasm during the public consultations for developing a specialist HDR training coursework Masters degree. Consultations have revealed there is support for an entry pathway model that enhances disciplinary knowledge and research methods skills, which includes an assessable thesis component. The degree would allow graduates to develop their research skills at a level of proficiency suitable for many careers, while significantly enhancing their research skills if they wish to pursue further HDR training. Typical comments included:

"Entry pathways need to incorporate an independently-conducted capstone research project plus research methods training appropriate to the discipline."

Australian National University (2015, p. 9)

"...Australian universities need to put greater emphasis on high order disciplinary knowledge in HDR programs."

Macquarie University (2015b, p. 6)

A number of potential models were outlined in the written submissions and explored with participants during the public consultation phase. The most favoured approach for a new entry pathway to HDR training is the development of a for purpose 2-year HDR training coursework Masters degree. A similar approach is outlined in the written submission from University of Sydney (2015). This program would be made up of three major components

with a suggested one-third weighting for each. The first component would be high-level coursework disciplinary training, the second would be coursework research methods training, and the final component would be a research project assessable through the production of a research output, such as a dissertation. In addition to these academic components, there might also be an opportunity to integrate broader transferable skills development and industry placements within the program (see Section 4 and Section 6 respectively).

A number of participants state that a Masters level entry pathway is advantageous, as it aligns with the internationally recognised Bologna model of the Bachelor-Masters-Research Doctorate progression (see European Commission, 2016). This approach would overcome the significant barrier of international competitiveness associated with the traditional Honours approach. These advantages are outlined by the University of Tasmania (2015).

"In regard to the pathways a student takes through their higher education career, a better structure for this would mirror the Bologna model: a three to four year undergraduate degree followed by a one to two-years Masters degree followed by a three year PhD degree. This 3+2+3 model would enable the development of broad-based research skills during the Masters degree years and would ensure that all students entering the PhD are well-trained."

University of Tasmania (2015, p. 7)

A similar sentiment is echoed by the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (2015) who, along with others, agree that candidates would be better prepared for Research Doctorate training, and therefore should require less time to complete their thesis.

"The Bologna model is essentially a 3+2+3 model. By the time the students finish their Masters degree they should be aware of the requirements of the PhD. Ideally this model would discourage students unsure about their projects from enrolling and also reduce the amount of time needed to complete the thesis."

Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (2015, p. 8)

Comparing preparatory training models

The Review compared four HDR training models that could be employed: the traditional (Honours) model, the Macquarie model introduced at Macquarie University, a new model proposed by the University of Sydney, and a new model developed by the Expert Working Group. Each of these models has advantages but the newly proposed model in Table 8 was favoured during stakeholder consultations as it offers HDR candidates enhanced preparatory training, and presents a new entry pathway for candidates with valuable work experience.

Multiple or a single approach to preparatory training

Most submissions favoured retaining multiple entry pathways to provide a greater diversity of ways for candidates to access HDR training, and allow universities the flexibility to offer their preferred pathway programs without funding disadvantages.

Table 5: Summary of the traditional model

Stage	Undergraduate education	Initial HDR training component	Research training
Component	Bachelors Honours degree, with Honours year acting as initial HDR training		Research Doctorate
Length		4 years	3–4 years
Course funding		CSP + HECS	RTS
Student support	Youth allowance, Austudy payment (Austudy), Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (ABSTUDY)		APA/IPRS for 3–3.5 years

Table 6: Macquarie model

Stage	Undergraduate education	Initial HDR training component	Research training
Component	Bachelors degree	Hybrid BPhil and Research Masters degree	Research Doctorate
Length	3 years	2 years (with exit point after 1 year)	3 years
Funding	CSP + HECS	Hybrid Year 1 – CSP + HECS Year 2 – RTS	RTS + APA/IPRS
Student support	Youth allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY	Univeristy scholarship	APA/IPRS 3–3.5 years

Table 7: Proposed model from University of Sydney (2015)

Stage	Undergraduate education	Initial HDR training component	Research training
Component	3-year Bachelors degree	Research track intensive Masters degree	Research Doctorate
Length	3 years	1–2 years	3.5–4 years
Funding	CSP + HECS	CSP + HECS FEE-HELP	RTS + APA/IPRS
Student support	Youth allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY	Youth allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY	APA/IPRS scholarship

Table 8: Preferred model emerging from consultations with stakeholders

Stage	Undergraduate education	Initial HDR training component	Research training
Component	3-year Bachelors degree	Research training coursework Masters degree	Research Doctorate
Length	3 years	2 years	3 years
Funding	CSP + HECS	CSP + HECS FEE-HELP	Research training block grant
Student support	Youth allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY	Youth allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY	Scholarship

2.4.3 Identifying and overcoming barriers

The three main barriers to developing alternative entry pathways with enhanced preparatory training are resistance, regulatory hurdles, and funding.

Resistance to change

Although the consultations revealed a significant desire for change from some stakeholders, many still passionately support the Australian Honours degree. Furthermore, within some disciplines Honours degrees form part of the training required for professional accreditation. Some stakeholders stated that although a move to increase the range of entry pathways should be pursued, particularly those that enhance preparatory training, flexibility should be maintained without mandating a one-size-fits-all approach. Multiple stakeholders commented that providing the opportunity to offer an enhanced entry pathway would be enough, and cultural resistance would soon fall away. The following is typical of many comments heard at stakeholder interviews and at public forum events.

Our experience has been when we made changes to our entry pathways there was some resistance, and so we allowed people to choose to keep doing things the same way in their discipline, or to take up the revised program. Within a year resistance had died away and nearly everybody had moved to the revised program as they could see it was working better for students.

Stakeholder interview

In addition, some stakeholders stated that decisions regarding entry pathways should be left to universities. Universities strongly defend their autonomy and there is a level of resistance in imposing a one-size-fits-all model across all institutions.

A move towards a Masters entry pathway was seen as the most feasible way of improving preparatory training and addressing candidate concerns about starting a Research Doctorate

underprepared. This approach also has the advantage of potentially lessening coursework pressure within the Research Doctorate itself (James Cook University, 2015). The area of most concern for stakeholders was centred on what the course components would be, and how the obstacles preventing its widespread uptake would be overcome.

Regulatory hurdles for developing alternative entry pathways

The major barrier to developing alternative entry pathways centres on the current inflexible funding arrangements. For example, limited funding options available for domestic candidates make it difficult to develop a sustainable HDR training coursework Masters degree. Furthermore, the absence of incentives to develop such an approach, alongside the anticipated increased costs, provides little reason for universities to migrate from an Honours pathway to a Masters pathway.

There are clear and accessible funding arrangements in place for undergraduate Honours degrees. The Australian Government provides financial support through Commonwealth supported places, and candidates make a financial contribution that can be deferred through the HECS-HELP support system. Research training degrees are currently funded through the Research Training System block grant. Only a small number of Commonwealth supported places are available for coursework Masters degrees.

Some stakeholders stated that the current two-thirds research requirement within the Australian Qualifications Framework and within the RTS block grant funding rules are inflexible and represent a barrier towards developing new entry pathways. Although this rule prevents developing alternative entry pathways with enhanced preparatory training through the RTS block grant, its removal is not the only step that is needed to enable new entry pathways.

Enabling funding flexibility for alternative entry pathways

Stakeholders in favour of an alternative Masters entry pathway stated that the content should be structured around what would best prepare candidates for HDR training, rather than what adheres to existing AQF definitions or regulatory rules. This sentiment was expressed by the Australian National University in its submission.

“Allocation of more CGS funding to research pathway degrees, and/or more flexibility in the AQF standards, would facilitate provision of necessary training to better equip research students to succeed at the PhD level.”

Australian National University (2015, p. 9)

As Macquarie University has shown, this approach to entry pathways can be developed within the existing funding envelope. However, this innovative approach would put significant pressure on the RTS budget if it were pursued by a large number of universities. Redirecting existing funding into a separate funding program for a for-purpose HDR training coursework Masters degree might be necessary to ensure the development of a financially sustainable and accessible program.

A HDR training coursework Masters degree program could be funded by allowing universities to redirect their CSP-funded Honours places to support HDR training coursework Masters degrees. If the model proposed in Table 8 is adopted, the course would be 2 years in length and additional funding would be required. Given the falling enrolments in Research Masters degrees, Australian Government support for this program could be redirected to enhance the funding available for the new HDR training coursework Masters degree. In addition to providing support in this way, the HDR training coursework Masters degree could be made more financially accessible for candidates by allowing them to access HECS-HELP to assist with making a financial contribution towards the cost of the program, in a similar way to the Honours degree.

From a candidate perspective, this would make a 2-year HDR training coursework Masters degree financially accessible. Postgraduate candidates who participated in this Review were generally supportive of this approach, as it would allow candidates to gain a greater level of preparation prior to HDR training through an accessible pathway.

2.4.4 Summary

Recognising the need to better prepare candidates for HDR training and to create alternative entry pathways suitable for a greater range of potential candidates, universities have already started to respond. This includes developing revised HDR entry pathways that include more specialist HDR training coursework such as in the form of a graduate certificate, lengthening and introducing coursework to the Research Doctorate, and developing a two-year hybrid Masters degree. After reviewing the responses and suggested models put forward during consultations, the Review favours the introduction of a 2-year HDR training coursework Masters degree. To enable this, barriers need to be overcome such as resistance to change and regulatory issues. In particular, funding flexibility needs to be provided to enable universities to offer this course to domestic candidates.

2.5 Key finding 2

Current regulatory and funding arrangements limit the development and uptake of innovative and internationally recognised entry pathways to HDR training. Flexibility in the current funding structure would allow universities to develop new accessible entry pathways which better prepare candidates for HDR training, such as a for-purpose HDR training coursework Masters degree.