Modelling Quality Experiences for Women in Research Higher Degrees

- recruitment - retention - completions

Summary report 2003

This project was funded by

MONASH University
Modelling Quality Experiences for Women in Research Higher Degrees

• recruitment • retention • completions

Summary report
2003

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Preface

This document is a summary report of the project ‘Modelling quality experiences for women in postgraduate research: recruitment, retention and completions’.

The project was undertaken in 2002 by Andrea Beel for the Monash Postgraduate Association and was funded and supported by a Higher Education Equity Program grant approved by Mr Peter Marshall, Divisonal Director, Student and Staff Services Division for the Equity and Diversity Centre.

Additional funding from the Monash Postgraduate Association and Professor Max King, Director of the Monash Research Graduate School is gratefully acknowledged.

The detailed findings of the project are published in a separate data report by Andrea Beel. This is available from the MPA website: http://www.monash.edu.au/students/mpa/

This summary report has been prepared by Fran Ferrier, Research Fellow, Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training with assistance from Maryanne Dever (Centre for Women’s Studies), Anita Harris (School of Political and Social Inquiry), Dina Galanopoulos (MPA), Margaret Heagney (Equity and Diversity Centre) and Jenny Reeder (MPA).

Comments are welcome and should be directed to Jenny Reeder, Executive Officer, Monash Postgraduate Association (jenny.reeder@adm.monash.edu.au).
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering Committee members</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format of the Report</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why this Project?</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Aims</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Arrangements</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Methodology</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mail survey</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The survey of Associate Deans (Graduate Research)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Research Workshop</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Survey</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Co-ordinators</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recruitment</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women commencing a research higher degree</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some areas of good practice</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting previous Monash students</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting women from other institutions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing information and encouragement to potential students</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing opportunities for part-time study</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some areas requiring attention</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting women into fields where they are currently under-represented</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting ‘disadvantaged’ women</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting women with families</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing information about potential supervisors</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing female mentors and role models</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusions</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing information to assist in decision making</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing encouragement to undergraduates to consider honours and postgraduate research</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing flexibility</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing additional financial support</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Models of Best Practice for Recruitment</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retention and Completion</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some areas of good practice</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre/Department Support</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas where improvements are needed</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction/orientation</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and resources</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative issues</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Factors influencing postgraduate study decisions

Table 2: Female commencing HDR students as a percentage of all commencing HDR students, Monash University, 1996-2002.

Table 3: Where survey respondents completed their previous highest academic qualification

Table 4: How respondents became aware of, and were encouraged to undertake, postgraduate studies

Table 5: Main type of living arrangement while completing the HDR

Table 6: The importance of supervision factors in the decision to undertake an HDR

Table 7: Females as a percentage of the population by faculty, students by course type and academic staff, 2001

Table 8: The importance of financial considerations in decisions to undertake postgraduate study

Table 9: Main motivations for doing a research postgraduate degree

Table 10: Respondents’ opinions of aspects of their postgraduate experience at Monash University

Table 11: Factors causing difficulties or concern during studies

Table 12: Perceptions of supervision

Table 13: Satisfaction with centre/department/school support

Table 14: Sources of income
**Acknowledgements**

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Mr Matt Randall, Administrative Officer, Special Projects, Monash Research Graduate School.

Ms Cathy Schapper, Monash University graduate


Dr Kate White, Senior Project Officer, Victoria University

All the Associate Deans (Graduate Research) and Postgraduate Research Co-ordinators at Monash University who returned completed surveys.

All the HDR women postgraduates at Monash University who participated in the survey.

All the HDR women postgraduates at Monash University who participated in the *Women in Research* workshops.

**Steering Committee members**

Ms Andrea Beel, Project Officer, Monash Postgraduate Association

Dr Maryanne Dever, Director, Centre for Women’s Studies and Gender Research

Ms Frances Ferrier, Research Fellow, Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, Faculty of Education

Ms Dina Galanopoulos, Project Officer, Monash Postgraduate Association

Dr Anita Harris, Lecturer, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts

Ms Margaret Heagney, Co-ordinator Student Equity Unit, Equity and Diversity Centre, Student and Staff Services

Ms Jenny Reeder, Executive Officer, Monash Postgraduate Association

Ms Savitha Sivanandan, PhD student, Faculty of Law

Mr Gordon Stephen, Data Analyst, Planning and Academic Affairs, Administration

Ms Christine White, PhD student, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences
Format of the Report

The aim of this report is to present the major findings of a project on the experiences of women in research higher degrees at Monash University, that focussed on recruitment, retention and completions. It identifies some areas of ‘good’ and ‘best practice’ by the university and some other areas where further effort is needed. It also makes suggestions for action to improve existing practice.

As a summary report, the document does not provide detailed results of all the project activities. These are available in a separate data report available from the Monash Postgraduate Association.

The first section explains the reasons for the study, its aims, arrangements and methodology. The following two sections deal more specifically with the issues of recruitment, retention and completion. They consider:

• What the literature tells us about the issue, including effective approaches.
• Areas where our research suggests that Monash University is already demonstrating good practice but indicates further efforts could lead to best practice.
• Areas that our research suggests require special attention.
• Some conclusions indicating where the University could direct its efforts to improve current patterns of recruitment, retention and completion.

A final section offers some specific options for action by the University that would advance progress toward best practice. Importantly, if they were initiated, many of these suggested activities would assist many males as well as females in research higher degrees.

An insert sheet contains information for distribution to all supervisors offering a quick-check summary of services and support relevant to women undertaking higher research degrees at Monash University.
Introduction

Why this Project?

Not very long ago women were substantially under-represented in research higher degrees in Australia. In 1975 only 19 per cent of PhD students and 23 per cent of Masters students in Australian universities were female. Even in the late 1990s men still outnumbered women in research higher degrees. Women who did choose to enrol in postgraduate study tended to be concentrated in coursework programs at graduate/postgraduate certificate and diploma levels (Ferrier 2000).

In 2001, however, women were 52 per cent of all postgraduates enrolled in a higher degree by research at Monash University. This turnaround is a significant one that has been achieved remarkably quickly. It suggests that many people in higher education institutions, the community and governments, including many women, have worked hard to encourage women’s participation and to make it possible.

In the face of such success why did the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) decide that an investigation was needed into the recruitment, retention and completion of women in postgraduate research degrees at Monash University? And why did the University choose to support it? There are a number of reasons.

Firstly, the project is part of a broader strategy of Monash University, and of the MPA, to improve the quality of the experience for all of its students. This is both an end in itself and reflects the University’s commitment to the society it is a part of and particularly to those within its community.

Secondly, the success of the University in increasing enrolments by women in postgraduate research has been achieved not merely as a flow-on of expanded enrolments at undergraduate level, but due to some innovative thinking, planning and action by many people from different levels and areas of the University – eg the MPA itself, departments, faculties, campuses, administration. The MPA saw the project as a way to identify and highlight some of the best practices that have been developed and adopted at Monash and elsewhere so that others in the University (and outside it) might learn about them – and perhaps consider using or adapting them.

Thirdly, the MPA recognised that enrolling women in postgraduate research is only part of the story. Now that the University is more successful in recruiting women into postgraduate research what steps were necessary to ensure that these women enjoyed their postgraduate work? How could it assist them to complete their research successfully and gain the objectives they were seeking? How could the university help women to manage the demands of postgraduate research with those of paid work and family life (among others) so that they could continue with their research?

Fourthly, the MPA and Monash University are committed to improving participation in the University for those who are recognised to be ‘disadvantaged’. Thus an important question to consider when thinking about women in postgraduate research is what can be done to ensure that all women graduates, and not merely those who are ‘advantaged’ in some way, have the opportunity to enter and complete postgraduate research successfully?

Finally, the MPA sought to build on the work it had undertaken previously to assist women in postgraduate research. In particular, it wanted to follow up a comprehensive study, Improving Women’s Participation in Research Higher Degrees (White, 1996) that it had conducted in 1996. This work had noted an increase in women’s participation, but had also identified a range of factors affecting the quality of women’s postgraduate research experience. They included:
• Financial difficulties
• Lack of role models and mentors
• Supervision difficulties
• The inflexibility of the institution or departments within it
• The response of Monash to women returning to study
• Unsupportive environment
• Community attitudes
• Response of Monash to life experience of postgraduates
• Cumulative effect

The MPA hoped to identify strategies developed since this study was completed that had been successful in countering some of these factors and to disseminate knowledge about them more widely in the University.

In addition, the MPA noted that in the six years following this study the higher education environment in Australia had changed substantially and the conditions for higher degrees by research had altered. For example:

• Maximum periods of candidacy for research higher degrees had been reduced.
• New quality measures for supervision and research training had been introduced.
• The importance of higher degree completion rates to the University’s overall research budget had increased.

Thus it would be timely to examine new conditions for postgraduate research work at Monash University.

**Project Aims**

The primary objective of this project has been to identify strategies for improving the quality of experience for women undertaking research higher degrees at Monash University.

More specifically, the project has aimed to identify ‘best practice’ ways of assisting Monash University to meet the needs of each of its female research postgraduates.

The project has thus sought to investigate, determine and highlight issues in relation to women:

• Gaining access to higher degree research opportunities
• Finding and selecting a suitable research supervisor and department
• Developing and sustaining a healthy, productive supervisor/postgradute partnership
• Completing a research higher degree with high levels of satisfaction

The project reflects the aims and objectives of the *Monash Research and Research Training Management Plan* which has the following goals:

• Attracting high quality students to Monash’s research training programs.
• Improving research completion rates and times.
• Enhancing the quality of the research training environment.
• Ensuring continuous improvement in supervision and the research training environment.
The project also reflects the commitments by the University to ‘promoting equal opportunity in Education’ and to ‘being fair, equitable and sensitive to the diverse needs of its students … in all its policies and practices’ as outlined in the *Monash University Global Equal Opportunity Policy*.

**Project Arrangements**

The project was conducted during 2002 with funding from Monash University through the Higher Education Equity Program, as well as contributions from the Monash Postgraduate Association and Professor Max King, Director of the Monash Research Graduate School. It was managed by the Monash Postgraduate Association, which appointed Researcher Ms Andrea Beel to conduct the work. The MPA also established a steering committee to assist the Researcher. Its members were:

- Dr Maryanne Dever, Director, Centre for Women’s Studies and Gender Research
- Ms Fran Ferrier, Research Fellow, Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training,
- Ms Dina Galanopoulos, Project Officer, Monash Postgraduate Association
- Dr Anita Harris, Lecturer, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts
- Ms Margaret Heagney, Co-ordinator Student Equity Unit, Equity and Diversity Centre, Student and Staff Services
- Ms Jenny Reeder, Executive Officer, Monash Postgraduate Association
- Ms Savitha Sivanandan, PhD student, Faculty of Law
- Mr Gordon Stephen, Data Analyst, Planning and Academic Affairs, Administration
- Ms Christine White, PhD student, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

**Project Methodology**

The project methodology was developed in discussions between the Researcher and the Steering Committee. It comprised four major project tasks:

- A mail survey of a sample of female research higher degree postgraduates.
- A survey of Associate Deans (Research) at Monash University.
- A Workshop on Women in Research for Monash staff and students.
- A brief literature survey.

**The mail survey**

The purpose of the survey was to collect information from women currently enrolled in a research higher degree at Monash, or who had recently completed or withdrawn from enrolment, about:

- Their enrolment status
- The factors motivating their participation in postgraduate research.
- Their experience and satisfaction with their research work.
- The reasons for their withdrawal.

The survey included both multiple choice and open-ended questions. It asked respondents for information and comments about many different aspects of their
postgraduate work, including supervision arrangements, departmental support, social support, the interaction of personal responsibilities and the demands of their research work, any particular difficulties they had experienced or improvements they would like to see.

The survey was mailed to 553 recipients:

- A sample of 250 currently enrolled postgraduate women chosen at random by the University.
- All women who had submitted and passed in the previous financial year (159)
- All women who had withdrawn or discontinued in the previous financial year (144)

A total of 190 usable responses were received, giving an overall response rate of 34%. The response rate was higher for women currently enrolled (40%) than for those who had recently completed (36%). Only 13 replies were received from 144 women who had withdrawn.

**The survey of Associate Deans (Graduate Research)**

The purpose of this survey was to identify initiatives undertaken at the Faculty Level to assist women in research higher degrees and to collect the views of Deans about other ways to improve women’s postgraduate research experience.

The survey was sent by mail to the Associate Dean with responsibility for postgraduate research in each of Monash University’s 11 faculties. In total six responded, giving an overall response rate of 55 per cent.

**Women in Research Workshop**

The workshop was conducted to enable all Monash staff and students to contribute to, and learn about, the project.

Following presentations by Dr Kate White, the Researcher who had conducted the previous MPA study and Ms Cathy Schapper, a female postgraduate who spoke on ‘Strategies for success – personal reflections on surviving a research degree’, participants engaged in small group discussions on:

- Barriers to successful postgraduate research
- Solutions and strategies for overcoming barriers
- Suggested improvements (a ‘wish list’)

Findings of the discussions were presented to the group and collected by the project Researcher.

**Literature Survey**

Project Researcher, Ms Andrea Beel, carried out a preliminary review of the literature to identify any previous similar studies. A further survey was carried out by Dr Maryanne Dever with contributions from other members of the project steering committee.

**Postgraduate Co-ordinators**

In addition to the three major activities outlined above, a form was mailed to each of the University’s 80 or so departmental Postgraduate Co-ordinators requesting their assistance in identifying examples of innovative approaches to support research higher degree postgraduates, especially women. Unfortunately only three replies were received – a response rate that is more likely to be a reflection of the workloads of the staff, rather than of a lack of innovative activities.
Recruitment

There are many factors recognised in the literature as influencing the decision a graduate makes to enter postgraduate study. Knowing what these factors are, and considering them, will assist universities to devise appropriate strategies to recruit graduates into their postgraduate programs.

Overall, research suggests that two main groups of factors influence the decision. In the first group are factors that encourage and discourage postgraduate study in general. These include the many costs and benefits (both economic and non-economic) of participation and completion. In the second are factors that affect the conditions in which the study will be conducted. Some factors within both groups are within the control of higher education institutions, though not all of them, and therefore can be manipulated or changed if the institution wants to encourage more graduates to seek entry to its programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incentives/disincentives</th>
<th>Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial rewards</td>
<td>Fees and charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment options and opportunities</td>
<td>Financial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credentialism</td>
<td>Entry and exit points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement, intellectual development and other non-financial rewards</td>
<td>Entry criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>Availability of appropriate course, supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social standing/status</td>
<td>Accessibility of course (time/mode/place)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Ferrier 2000 Table 4.12

Importantly, the factors tend to work collectively rather than individually, with the balance between them determining their influence. Thus a university that makes changes to encourage postgraduate study must take account of the way in which the financial support it makes available, for instance, is matched by the provision of programs to meet students’ needs, and the likely benefits, such as financial rewards, that students will gain through participation. A graduate will choose to enrol in a postgraduate program – and continue to completion – only while the factors combine in an appropriate mix.

Universities also need to take into account that some factors and their influence alter in response to social, economic and political change. For instance changing views of appropriate gender roles have combined with changes in employer recruitment practices and financial support available to higher degree students to alter the incentives to, and conditions of postgraduate study in recent decades (Ferrier 2000).

An important issue when considering the recruitment of women into postgraduate programs is that some factors appear to have a greater influence on women than men, and vice-versa. Several studies indicate that while men and women are motivated to postgraduate study by similar considerations, there are differences in those that influence them most strongly. A survey of Masters students (both coursework and research) at Monash University in 1992 identified professional development as the most common reason given by students for enrolling, followed by promotion/employment opportunities and interest. While results were similar for males and females the proportion of females indicating that they were influenced by interest (53%) was much higher than the...
proportion of males (40%). This difference was also evident in the results by faculty, which indicated that more students were influenced by interest in the female-dominated faculties of Arts and Education than in most other faculties (Fyfield et al 1992).

A survey of postgraduates in coursework programs at 20 institutions (Ferrier and Martin 1991) similarly found that while most students were motivated by employment or career-related reasons, women were much more likely to be motivated by interest than men. The authors suggested that this might be related to the fact that fewer of the female respondents were in full-time employment (67%) than the males (85%).

A survey of PhD candidates at the University of Melbourne (Powles 1989) noted a gender difference in the ‘sources of satisfaction’ cited by the students. More men than women cited ‘discovery’ and more women than men favoured ‘working relationships with staff and peers’.

In a study of students entering an Honours year Prestage and Lichtenberg (1996) found that for women, more than men, encouragement from a range of people, including academic staff, parents, partners, peer group and employers was important.

From her review of the relevant literature, White (1996) suggests that six factors in particular are influential in encouraging and enabling women to take up postgraduate study:

- Successful transitions into and from honours programs.
- Mentoring and encouragement both within and outside the university.
- The example of female role models.
- Flexibility that will enable the woman to combine research with her other interests and responsibilities, such as work or child-rearing.
- The availability of financial support.
- A welcoming research environment.

The literature also identifies some factors and approaches that discourage women:

- A lack of female role models
- An alienating masculine culture
- Lack of information about options, opportunities and eligibility.
- Financial considerations.

**Women commencing a research higher degree**

Since 1999 women have comprised more than 50 per cent of all commencing enrolments in higher degrees by research at Monash University. However, they are unevenly distributed across the faculties. While they make up the majority in five faculties, males outnumber them in another five. There is also a considerable gap between the highest and lowest proportions of women in a faculty (70% in Education and 14% in Engineering).

Table 2 below shows females as a percentage of commencing higher degree research (HDR) students at Monash University by faculty from 1996-2002. Faculties are listed in descending order according to the proportion of women commencing an HDR in 2002. Of particular note are the low and declining proportions of women in the faculties of Engineering and Information Technology. These contrast with growth in the proportion of women in some other faculties, particularly Art and Design, over the same period.
Comparing enrolments for 1996 and 2002 only indicates that the proportion of females has grown in five faculties (Education, Medicine, Art and Design, Law and Business and Economics) declined in another four (Arts, Pharmacy, Information Technology and Engineering) and remained unchanged in one (Science). However, examining the data for the intervening years suggests change either upwards or downwards has not necessarily occurred smoothly. For instance in Law and Pharmacy – and slightly less so in Science - the proportion of female enrolments has fluctuated substantially from year to year. Thus it cannot be assumed that 2002 enrolments levels will be sustained.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>39</td>
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<td>40</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Science</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| All               | 47   | 48   | 49   | 51   | 51   | 52   | 51   |

Why has the proportion of females commencing a higher degree research increased in some fields since 1996 and declined in others? A combination of factors within and outside the university is likely including participation in undergraduate and honours programs, specific and targeted activities by some faculties or departments to encourage women to consider undertaking research, the availability of financial support such as scholarships and employment opportunities and financial rewards in the labour market. White (1996) found variations between faculties and departments that tended to encourage or discourage female participation, such as the refusal of some departments to accept honours enrolment on a part-time basis, the availability of female role models and mentors, the research environment and different attitudes towards male and female participation.

Importantly, some of the strategies adopted by departments and faculties that have been particularly successful in recruiting women may serve as a useful model for others that have not done so well. However, there are also differences between fields that need to be taken into account and some may face greater challenges than others.

The data collected for this project support a view that Monash University is already working effectively to recruit women into research higher degrees in several ways – although there is always room for improvement. Conversely, there are also areas in which more concerted effort is required.
Some areas of good practice

**Recruiting previous Monash students**

Among the women who were surveyed for the project more than half (57%) had studied at Monash University before beginning a research higher degree. In fact a majority (53%) had obtained their previous highest qualification from the same department, centre or school in which they enrolled in a research higher degree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
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<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All</strong></td>
<td><strong>169</strong></td>
<td><strong>101</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a substantial majority of survey respondents (79%) a ‘familiar/comfortable’ environment is important or very important in their decision to undertake postgraduate study. Thus it is not surprising that many will choose to begin postgraduate research where they have studied previously. On the other hand, students who did not enjoy their previous study experience at Monash University are hardly likely to enter another program at the same institution, particularly one within the same area of the university – even if it has the appeal of familiarity. Given the plethora of postgraduate opportunities currently available in Australia and overseas they would have many other options open to them. Thus, it can be assumed that the women choosing to return to Monash to begin their postgraduate research must have been reasonably satisfied with what the university was able to offer them previously.

Another factor important to a majority of survey respondents in making their decision to undertake postgraduate study is the encouragement offered to them by the faculty or department. Eighty nine percent regarded this as important or very important. Thus it might also be conjectured from the number of returning Monash students that the university has provided them with encouragement to progress from one level of study to another.

Unfortunately, data is not available to indicate how many previous Monash students choose to take up postgraduate study at another institution. This means it is not possible to measure accurately the degree of success Monash is achieving in enrolling previous students in its postgraduate research programs. Nevertheless, the survey results do suggest that a sound basis has been established on which further success might be built.

**Recruiting women from other institutions**

In addition to recruiting a proportion of its previous students, Monash University also appears to be experiencing some success in attracting women from other institutions into its research higher degree programs. Forty-four per cent of survey respondents obtained their previous highest academic qualification from another institution, 31 per cent from another Australian university and 13 per cent from an overseas university.

The enrolment of these students at Monash suggests a number of things. Firstly, it indicates that the university’s efforts to disseminate information about opportunities it can offer to women in postgraduate research must be working reasonably effectively. Secondly, a very substantial majority of survey respondents (89%) indicated that the
research reputation of the faculty was important or very important in their decision to undertake postgraduate study. Thus the university’s success in attracting students from elsewhere is indicative of an attractive research reputation. Thirdly it suggests that the university must be providing opportunities and conditions for postgraduate research that meet the needs of some potential female students.

However, without data indicating how many graduates from other institutions consider and reject postgraduate research study at Monash, and for what reasons, the degree of effectiveness/success cannot be judged. Thus it can be concluded only that here also is a foundation on which further and continued efforts can be built.

**Providing information and encouragement to potential students**

White (1996) noted the importance of providing women with information and support that will encourage them to enter honours and postgraduate study. This is supported by the responses to a question in this project’s survey of women in HDRs at Monash that asked them to indicate how they became aware of postgraduate study opportunities and the sources of encouragement they received. Table 4 below shows responses in two groups: those within a university and other sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University sources</th>
<th>Became aware of study opportunities %</th>
<th>Encouraged to undertake studies %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General university (emails, seminars, posters, career services)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personally approached (in person, letter etc) by University academics</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individually approached by your centre/department/school (letter, email etc)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self motivated – sought out information</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed by work colleagues, professional associations etc</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed by parents, relatives or friends</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper advertisement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About two-thirds of respondents (67%) indicated that they were self-motivated in seeking out the information they needed. The most common sources they used were within the university, such as general emails, seminars, posters or career services. Academic staff were also important, as were external sources such as work colleagues or professional associations. These sources were identified by a quarter to a third of respondents.

Considering encouragement, an even larger majority of respondents (78%) indicated that they were ‘self-motivated’, but importantly, personal approaches or contacts were clearly the most significant sources both from within the university through academic staff (32%) or work colleagues and professional associations (29%). Results thus underline
the importance of providing individual encouragement to graduates and so support a continued and strengthened role for recruitment strategies based on active mentoring/sponsorship of female graduates.

For women entering postgraduate research at Monash from another institution the results provide further evidence that the university must be disseminating information about its postgraduate opportunities reasonably effectively.

For those women who were previously students at Monash the results suggest that about a third are being actively encouraged to consider postgraduate study and being provided with the information they need to make a decision. While this is a reasonable result it also suggests that further efforts might be effective, particularly in those faculties and departments where female participation is in decline.

**Providing opportunities for part-time study**

The option to enrol in a higher degree by research on a part-time basis is particularly helpful to graduates who would like to participate but who have commitments that do not allow them to enrol full-time. With a major responsibility for the care of children and other family members, women might be assumed to benefit particularly from the availability of part-time opportunities, and overall, this appears to be the case at Monash, where the proportion of higher degree research students enrolled part-time in 2002 was a little higher among females than males (49.3% compared with 47.7%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Females % part-time</th>
<th>Males % part-time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>67.7 63.8 52.0 53.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>52.5 62.6 48.0 55.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business &amp; Economics</td>
<td>66.2 51.3 62.0 59.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>70.6 83.7 71.3 90.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>15.0 30.2 30.0 36.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>61.4 57.4 45.3 50.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>82.8 65.2 80.4 76.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>21.5 26.6 24.6 29.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>39.4 15.0 26.0 28.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>31.7 23.6 22.0 35.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>46.7 49.3 42.4 47.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MPA, book2.xls

White (1996) noted that some Monash faculties or departments did not encourage part-time enrolment in honours or research higher degrees and did not disseminate information about opportunities and part-time scholarships. However, since her study part-time enrolments have risen in most faculties - suggesting that this problem has been addressed effectively to some extent.

Table 5 shows the proportion of part-time HDR enrolments by faculty and gender at Monash University in 1996 and 2002. Results make it clear that overall part-time enrolment for both men and women is almost as common in 2002 as full-time enrolment but that there are still some faculties where full-time study continues to be the dominant mode. While part-time enrolments were the majority in six of Monash’s ten faculties full-time study continued to be the dominant mode for both male and female students in
four faculties: Engineering, Pharmacy, Medicine and Science. In these faculties between one quarter and one third of HDR students are enrolled part-time, compared with half to more than two-thirds in other faculties.

When considering the appropriate number and proportion of part-time opportunities for postgraduate research it must be remembered that differences between the faculties reflect factors both inside and outside the university including employment in the field (eg opportunities, income), the availability of scholarships for full-time study, the age (life stage) of the students and patterns of progression from undergraduate study. For instance in some faculties graduates may be more likely to enter postgraduate research directly following completion of their undergraduate study, but in others a break between the two levels of study may be more common. Those taking the most direct route are likely to be younger and have fewer commitments that prevent full-time study than those who have a break after their previous study. However, the primary consideration must be to ensure that all research postgraduates at Monash (or potential postgraduates) are able to undertake research on a part-time basis if they want or need to. Already many take advantage of the opportunities provided. Perhaps others would if they were provided in faculties where they currently appear to be least common or if the quality of information on these opportunities was improved.

In 2002, the proportion of females enrolled part-time exceeded the proportion of males in three faculties Art and Design (63.8% of females were part-time compared with 53.7% of males), Arts (62.6% compared with 55.6%) and Information technology (57.4 compared with 50.4). The proportion of males was larger in the other seven faculties. Gendered patterns of employment in these fields could be one possible cause, another might be differences in the patterns of progression from undergraduate to postgraduate study between men and women. The distribution of information about part-time options and scholarships and the encouragement given to particular students may also influence choices.

Flexibility of the faculty to meet their individual needs was considered important or very important by the overwhelming majority (85%) of survey respondents when considering whether to undertake postgraduate research. While opportunities to enrol part-time are not the only form of flexibility sought they are likely to be among the most significant.

**Some areas requiring attention**

**Recruiting women into fields where they are currently under-represented**

The enrolment data presented earlier in Table 1 showed that women were under-represented among commencing research higher degree students at Monash in 2002 in five faculties: Pharmacy, Business and Economics, Science, Information Technology and Engineering.

The degree of under-representation varies and so does the need to address its causes. In Pharmacy and Business and Economics it was small in 2002, in the order of only one or two per cent. Nevertheless there is cause for concern particularly in Pharmacy where the proportion of women postgraduates is in decline and at 49 per cent in 2002 is already well below its peak of 70 per cent in 1999. The faculty is fairly small, with only 11 commencing research higher degree students in 2002. Thus proportions can be affected substantially by the enrolment decisions of only a small number of postgraduates. However, the substantial nature of the decline warrants some further investigation in case other factors are at work.
In Business and Economics the proportion of women has grown fairly steadily since 1996 and the existing under-representation is likely to disappear soon if present trends continue.

In Science, the proportion of women grew between 1996 and 2001 from 43 to 52 percent but then fell between 2001 and 2002, returning to 1996 levels. If there is no recovery in 2003 then there would be some cause for concern in this large field.

Of most concern are the levels of under-representation in Information Technology and Engineering, where women comprised less than a third of commencing postgraduates in 2002. Following a small decline the proportion of women has grown a little in Information Technology in recent years, but at 26 per cent in 2002 is still below the (small) 1996 level of 29 per cent. In Engineering the proportion of women has declined steadily since 1996, shrinking by more than a third, and appears set to go lower unless more concerted efforts are made to arrest the fall. It is worth noting that the Engineering Faculty’s Women in Engineering Project, aimed at recruiting and supporting women in undergraduate degrees, ceased operation at the end of 1996, suggesting this decline could be turned around by renewed efforts on that front.

Recruiting ‘disadvantaged’ women

The recruitment of women within groups recognised as ‘disadvantaged’ because of their under-representation in the higher education student population was not specifically considered in this project. However, previous research suggests that because these women are under-represented among all students at Monash University they are also likely to be under-represented, perhaps highly, among commencing postgraduates.

Ferrier and Heagney (1999) found that women were over-represented among Monash students in the disadvantaged groups from a ‘low socio-economic status (SES)’ or ‘rural or isolated’ background. An analysis of enrolment data for the years 1995-2000 conducted by Monash Statistical Services noted that:

• Access to higher education at Monash by people from low SES backgrounds did not improve between 1995 and 2000 and remains below the national average.

• Access to Monash for people from rural areas is low in comparison with the national figure and did not change 1995-2000.

On this basis it can be assumed with some certainty that women from low SES backgrounds and rural/isolated areas will also be under-represented among the university’s research postgraduates.

Similarly, because it is highly unlikely that the under-representation of certain groups within the undergraduate or total student population would not also occur among students in postgraduate research it can also be assumed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women would also be under-represented among research postgraduates. Data provided by the Centre for Australian and Indigenous Students showed only two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women undertaking research at Monash University in 2002.

Recruiting women with families

Less than a third of all respondents to the project survey indicate that they have children (table 5). Unfortunately no data is available to indicate whether this proportion is representative of all women of similar age. Thus it cannot be concluded with certainty that women with children are under-represented among women engaged in a research higher degree at Monash University. However, the proportion appears low when it is considered that the average age of the survey respondents is 36 years and on average they had completed nine years of full time equivalent work before they commencing
postgraduate research. It thus suggests that the University is not very well encouraging or attracting women with children into research higher degree study.

Table 5: Main type of living arrangement while completing the HDR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living arrangement</th>
<th>Survey respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived alone</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived with partner (no children)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived with partner (with children)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived with parents/family members (no children)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived with parents/family members (with children)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in a shared household</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in a University college, Halls of residence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived alone with child(ren) – single parent</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Providing information about potential supervisors

Even if a university has an excellent research reputation, well-constructed postgraduate programs and provides essential financial and personal support, a potential research student may go elsewhere if the ‘right’ supervisor is not available.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the importance of a range of supervision factors when deciding to undertake postgraduate study. Results shown in Table 6 indicate that the majority considered all to be very important with the exception of recent training in supervision. Perhaps surprisingly, students appeared to seek out supervisors who were approachable and friendly and would offer encouragement more than those with a research track record. This highlights the importance of personal qualities and thus the need for connections between a prospective student and potential supervisor during the period when postgraduate research is being considered.

Table 6: The importance of supervision factors in the decision to undertake an HDR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervision factors</th>
<th>Very Important (%)</th>
<th>Fairly Important (%)</th>
<th>Total Important (%)</th>
<th>Not Important (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approachable, friendly</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging, mentoring</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced, research track record</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible on a regular basis</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently trained in research supervision</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants in the workshop held as part of this project indicated that more information about potential supervisors provided before enrolment would assist decision-making. In particular, workshop participants asked that more detailed information about the supervision record of a particular department, centre, school or individual be made available to prospective students. They proposed that measures used to determine the annual research activity or performance be adapted and modified to enable a supervisor’s
level of ability and performance to be represented transparently and fairly. For example, measures could include:

- The number of successful postgraduate completions over the previous five years
- The number of current students
- The number of articles published by a supervisor’s postgraduates in the past five years
- An appropriate measure of the research activity/output of supervised postgraduates e.g. number of presentations given (international, national and local conferences, seminars, faculty research seminar programs etc)
- Other relevant information (eg awards for good supervision, courses attended etc).

**Providing female mentors and role models**

As already noted, a substantial majority of survey respondents indicated that encouragement from the faculty or department was important or very important in their decision to undertake postgraduate study. A similar majority also regarded the familiarity/comfort provided by the faculty as important or very important. These findings highlight the need for effective relationships between staff and students during undergraduate and honours study as a basis for promoting transition to postgraduate research.

Table 7 below shows that the proportion of female academic staff at Monash University is smaller than the proportion of female students in almost all faculties and for all course levels. This is the case even where female students form the substantial majority, such as in Arts where 71 per cent of undergraduate Arts students are female but only 45 per cent of academic staff, or in Education where 77 percent of undergraduates are female but only 54 per cent of staff. Only in the faculty of Information Technology does the proportion of female academic staff match the proportion of female undergraduates (a low 32%).

This imbalance is of concern because in reporting on her research on women postgraduates at Monash, White (1996) noted that ‘both postgraduates and academics argued that male academics often withheld information from women – such as information about how to get scholarships for research higher degrees or how to get on to various departmental committees’ (p 30).

The lack of female staff to provide information and to act as role models and mentors may thus help to explain why the proportion of female honours or higher degree research students is often considerably below the proportion of female undergraduates. Enrolment data indicate that females are more strongly represented among honours than undergraduate students in only three of Monash’s ten faculties: Education, Engineering and Science. Even in these three cases many fewer women go on to a higher degree by research.
Table 7: Females as a percentage of the population by faculty, students by course type and academic staff, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculties</th>
<th>Under graduates</th>
<th>Honours HDR</th>
<th>Commencing HDR</th>
<th>All HDR</th>
<th>Academic Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business &amp; Economics</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial support
Respondents to the project’s survey confirmed the importance of financial considerations in making decisions to enter postgraduate research. Table 8 shows that a large majority (80%) found the availability of scholarships to be important or very important in this decision, about two-third (65%) regarded opportunities for work/income as important or very important, support for conference attendance was important to 72 per cent of respondents and support for part-time study to 62 per cent.

Table 8: The importance of financial considerations in decisions to undertake postgraduate study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very important %</th>
<th>Important %</th>
<th>Not important %</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of scholarship</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/income opportunities</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for part-time study</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for conference attendance</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial support will be discussed more fully in the following section on retention and completion however it is pertinent to note here that participants in the workshop that was conducted during the project supported the provision of an increased number of part-time scholarships, more realistic living allowances, an increase in support for conference attendance and additional support to help meet the costs of research.
Conclusions

The data examined here suggest that attention is particularly needed to three aspects of the recruitment of women into research higher degrees at Monash University.

Firstly, there is a need to strengthen efforts to recruit women into areas where they are currently under-represented, particularly in Engineering and Information Technology where women comprised less than a third of commencing research higher degree students in 2002. However efforts are also required in Pharmacy, where the proportion of women has declined substantially in recent years and possibly also in Science, if female enrolments decline further or remain at 2002 levels.

Secondly more effort is required to recruit women from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly women from rural areas, from low socio-economic backgrounds and Aboriginal women. These women are currently under-represented in undergraduate as well as postgraduate programs and there has been little if any change in their participation over recent years.

Thirdly continued support is required for activities that currently support the recruitment of women into research higher degrees and that have contributed to women’s improved participation in recent years.

The data collected in this project provide some clues about the direction that these efforts could take:

1. **Providing information to assist in decision making, eg**
   About the financial support that is available
   About potential supervisors
   About the faculty/departmental support that would be available
   About flexibility to meet individual needs including options for part-time research.
   About the availability of childcare.
   About career options and rewards that might be expected on completion.

2. **Providing encouragement to undergraduates to consider honours and postgraduate research, eg**
   A comfortable and supportive environment.
   Formal and informal approaches including discussions with academic staff, letters and mentoring programs.

3. **Increasing flexibility**
   Providing opportunities and support for part-time study where they do not yet exist.
   Enabling a variety of supervision arrangements including joint supervision and external (non-Monash) supervisors.

4. **Providing additional financial support, eg**
   More part-time scholarships.
   More realistic living allowances.
   Assistance with research costs.
   Support for conference attendance.
   Opportunities for teaching, research and demonstrating.
Models of Best Practice for Recruitment

Based on the findings of this project, models of best practice for recruiting women into postgraduate research would thus incorporate the following features:

- Active encouragement of women in the latter stages of their undergraduate degree through personal contacts, letters, seminars, opportunities to ‘sample’ postgraduate research and the research environment of the department.

- Active encouragement of previous students to return to the university to further their study – particularly from staff who are likely to be familiar or known to the graduate.

- The distribution of realistic information about the potential benefits of postgraduate research in the field including career opportunities and personal development, perhaps through the example of previous students.

- The distribution of information about financial support for research higher degrees, including support for part-time study, to meet research expenses and to support conference attendance.

- Targeted information and encouragement to women in disadvantaged groups, particularly Aboriginal women and women from rural and low socio-economic backgrounds.

- Targeted information and encouragement to women with children, including information about the ability to combine research with family responsibilities and financial support focusing on the flexibility of the department/university.

- Comprehensive information about the department including its research profile, formal and informal activities to support postgraduates, opportunities for postgraduates to be employed as tutors or demonstrators, opportunities for postgraduates to interact with staff.

- Comprehensive information about potential supervisors including retention and completion of previous students and the provision of opportunities for women considering postgraduate research to meet and interact with potential supervisors while they are considering whether to enrol.
Retention and Completion

Once a woman makes a decision to undertake postgraduate research, how can the university ensure that she is able to continue, even through difficult circumstances, so that she is able ultimately to complete her work? Retention and completion are in the interests of both the student and the university. For the university a postgraduate who withdraws represents a lost opportunity to build on its body of research and to enhance its reputation. It may also mean a loss of funding. For the student, withdrawal also represents lost potential, although an experience of postgraduate research, however short, may also allow them to develop their knowledge in new ways.

In her previous study for MPA, White identified that it is often not one factor alone that causes a woman to decide against postgraduate research – or to choose to discontinue her study, but the cumulative effect of both structural and attitudinal barriers (p31). Her review of the literature points to a number of difficulties:

- **Women remain on the periphery of academic cultures and structures**: They are not invited to join informal networks and especially in the Sciences can be given research projects that are not mainstream to the discipline, or in under-resourced sections of the department.

- **Women lack support networks**: They lack confidence and see themselves as isolated. They lack peer support and role models, especially where there are few other women.

- **Women experience more supervision problems**: most supervisors are male, but women can also have problems with female supervisors.

- **Women suffer from a lack of resources**: women are often enrolled in faculties with resource limitations.

- **Women communicate differently**: the way in which women express themselves and communicate disadvantages them in a university setting.

- **Women have competing demands**: women who do not enter postgraduate research directly from undergraduate study are likely to have more, and more diverse, demands on their time and energy than men.

Maintaining the impetus that motivates the decision to undertake postgraduate research in the first place may be difficult for women who experience challenges like these during their candidature. Previous studies identify that motivations are complex. For instance, Powles (1994) identified that while individuals are motivated to participate in postgraduate study by extrinsic factors such as anticipation of higher incomes and career advancement and intrinsic factors such as intellectual engagement, the boundaries between the two are blurred with career-related influences having intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions that are often hard to distinguish. Motivations can also change during a program. Powles’ survey of PhD candidates at the University of Melbourne (Powles 1989) found that while there was overall little difference in the factors important to the students in their initial decision to enrol and the factors important to their continuation later, ‘academic aspirations’ became more important to males and fell in importance among women.

Among the women responding to the survey conducted as part of this project, intrinsic factors relating to the research itself appeared to be of primary importance, but only slightly fewer were motivated by extrinsic factors such as career advancement. Clearly, most women were motivated by a mix of the two (Table 9).
Table 9: Main motivations for doing a research postgraduate degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main motivations</th>
<th>Survey respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest in the research topic</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirst for knowledge, personal growth</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career path, future job opportunities</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A step towards an academic career</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure what else to do, no jobs around</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help others, greater good</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combine study with having a family</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Understanding this raises some challenges for the university if it wants these women to continue with their research to completion:

- Ensuring that women in research higher degrees are engaged in a topic that continues to interest them.
- Providing these women with the support that will enable them to satisfy their thirst for knowledge and to grow and develop as individuals and as leaders in their chosen field.
- Ensuring that participation in postgraduate research will provide rewards for these women, both personally and professionally, and both during and after their research.

Results of the survey highlight some ways in which the University is already working to meet these challenges and other areas in which improvements are especially needed. Table 10 below shows the opinions of survey respondents about some aspects of their experience in postgraduate research at Monash University.

Overall, there appears to be several areas where the University is demonstrating good practice, with only two aspects considered to be ‘below average’ or ‘well below average’ by 20 per cent or more of respondents:

- Providing orientation or induction programs.
- Assistance with career development.
Table 10: Respondents’ opinions of aspects of their postgraduate experience at Monash University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>_aspect of experience</th>
<th>Good or very good (%)</th>
<th>Average (%)</th>
<th>Below average or well below average (%)</th>
<th>All (%)</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of feedback from your supervisor</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research reputation of your centre/school/department</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity of feedback from your supervisor</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to scholarship funding</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Seminar Programs</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support network amongst fellow students</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to research and other training</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work opportunities (teaching, demonstrating, research assistance)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical resources (desk, computers)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to funding to attend conferences</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to computer advice/help</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to interact with academics in the field</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation or induction programs</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance with career development</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In particular, lack of career advice and assistance is the only aspect that fewer than half the respondents consider to be good or very good. However, there is still room for improvement in most other aspects that would advance progress from good to best practice. For instance:

- No aspect is identified as good or very good by more than 84 per cent of respondents.
- There are nine aspects that less than two-thirds of students consider to be good or very good.

Importantly, all the aspects that are most considered to be average, below average or well below average are well within the ability of the university to address — and many might require only small changes to improve their effectiveness. For example, career advice, orientation programs, opportunities to interact with academics, access to physical resources and computer assistance are already all provided to some degree and in some parts of the university. These aspects might only require some re-consideration, planning and renewal to ensure that they better meet the needs of women in research higher degrees.

The survey also asked respondents about any factors causing them difficulty or concern during their study (Table 11). Overall the most common concerns were time pressures in combining postgraduate research with work and/or family commitments. This result underlines the need for the University to recognise and be flexible in accommodating the needs of postgraduates facing many conflicting demands.

Financial pressures were also common, with 42 per cent of respondents indicating they were of concern to a ‘moderate or large’ extent and another 34 per cent ‘to a small extent’. This result highlights the need for realistic levels of financial support for postgraduate research.
‘Getting started’ with their research, choosing a topic, a methodology and appropriate definitions is clearly also another common area of difficulty. Altogether, more than half the respondents indicated that this was of concern either to a small extent (28%) or to a moderate or large extent (27%). This result supports the need for particular attention to the early part of a postgraduate’s candidature, ensuring that they set off on a sound footing with an interesting and well-defined topic that can be completed within the appropriate time frame.

Results also highlight some issues with the postgraduate/supervisor relationship. Though just over half the respondents (56%) did not consider this relationship to be a cause of difficulty or concern—there is still clearly much room for improvement in establishing more effective relationships. Particularly surprising is the proportion of respondents (40%) expressing concern about their supervisor’s commitment to, or knowledge of, their research area (20% to a small extent and 20% to a moderate or large extent). While a postgraduate is likely to exceed a supervisor in knowledge of a particular aspect of a field towards the end of their candidature, ensuring that they are able to obtain appropriate guidance from someone interested and knowledgeable in the field in the initial stages of their research is important in getting them off to a good start. The result thus suggests that further effort is required to ensure that each postgraduate is matched with the most appropriate supervisor/s for her chosen research area.

Results also suggest that the University needs to work harder to ensure that postgraduate women do not experience harassment, discrimination or insensitivity to cultural or language issues. While the proportion of respondents indicating that they experience difficulties in these areas is less than 20 percent, it is still too high for complacency and suggests that further attention is needed to these areas, perhaps through further staff training or similar activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty or concern</th>
<th>Not at all (%)</th>
<th>To a small extent (%)</th>
<th>To moderate or large extent (%)</th>
<th>All (%)</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time pressures – work commitments</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time pressures – family commitments</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial pressure(s)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in family circumstances</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting started eg. topic/methodology definition</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate/supervisor relationship</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor’s commitment to, knowledge of, your research area</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support/flexibility – University</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support/flexibility – work</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support/flexibility – family</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support/flexibility – friends, society etc</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment/discrimination</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of sensitivity to cultural issues</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of sensitivity to language issues</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A small number of survey respondents (15) had withdrawn from postgraduate research.
Half withdrew between six months and one year into their candidature, about a third in
the initial stage of setting a topic and framework and a further half in the ‘early stage’ of
their research. Few withdrew in the later stages. Results emphasise the importance of
the early stages of postgraduate research and support the importance of ensuring that a
woman commencing postgraduate research gets off to a ‘good start’. The most common
reason for withdrawal was time pressures due to work commitments. This highlights the
need for flexibility on the part of the University to enable its postgraduates to meet
competing demands but also suggests that further financial support may be needed if
postgraduate women are to be able to forego long hours of paid work. Forty per cent of
respondents who had withdrawn indicated that lack of access to financial support
affected their decision to a moderate or large extent. It is also important that the
University be able to furnish prospective students with an accurate impression of the
workload and time commitment involved in taking up a research degree.

Health issues were also a common difficulty among survey respondents who had
withdrawn - including the postgraduate’s own health or that of a family member. Results
further reinforce the need for the University to be flexible and supportive if it wants
these women to continue in postgraduate research through these difficulties, or to return
once they have been overcome. Providing timely and accurate information on
administrative options that provide flexibility, such as intermission, is equally important.

The women who had withdrawn were far more likely than those currently enrolled or
recently completed to report that their access to computer advice or help was below
average; that their opportunities to interact with academics in the field were well below
average; and that their department did not involve them very well, did not provide them
with adequate support through a significant personal life event, or appeared to believe
that encouraging postgraduates to participate in the research culture was not very
important. They were also more likely to be enrolled in a Masters rather than a PhD and
to have entered with a postgraduate diploma or certificate than other previous highest
qualification, suggesting that additional research training programs may need to be
provided for those entering via this pathway.

Some areas of good practice

**Supervision**

Both my supervisors have been enormously supportive
academically, professionally and personally.

Overall, echoing the words of the postgraduate above, the majority of survey
respondents appear to be ‘reasonably’ or ‘very well’ satisfied with most aspects of their
supervision, though as noted earlier, the survey indicated that there is still some room for
improvement in establishing effective ongoing postgraduate-supervisor relationships. As
Table 12 shows, the proportion of students indicating that an aspect of supervision is ‘not
very well’ provided is generally low. The one requiring most attention – indicated by
only 16 per cent of respondents - is the provision of guidance through the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12: Perceptions of supervision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your supervisor…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate concern and respect?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide support and encouragement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide you through your studies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide critical feedback?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify your individual needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire and stimulate you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modelling Quality Experiences for Women in Research Higher Degrees
The most common supervision arrangement among survey respondents involved one principal and one associate supervisor, but some respondents indicated that this was only the ‘official’ position. In practice often only one supervisor was active and useful - sometimes the official principal supervisor, other times the associate supervisor. However, there seemed to be little if any dissatisfaction with this practice as long the postgraduate was able to access the assistance that she needed from a supervisor.

Of more concern is that many respondents had experienced a range of supervision arrangements that were often the result of changes to address earlier difficulties:

*Changes in staff meant that I had a total of five supervisors*

*My previous supervisor for the first six months had some long absences because of illness…*

However, again, overall results suggested that most respondents were reasonably satisfied with the way in which these difficulties had been resolved.

Nevertheless, the project suggested a number of ways in which supervision could be further improved. For instance:

- **When students are engaged in cross-faculty research:**
  
  *As a student enrolled in one faculty with my main supervisor in another faculty I often fell ‘between two stools’…*

- **For postgraduates with family and other commitments or facing unexpected difficulties**

  ...as both of my supervisors are men I sometimes feel they don’t understand the demands on my time and the importance of keeping appointments at scheduled times/days...

  *Felt supervisor was incredibly ambitious and intolerant of a significant personal experience I had… It was awful being told that students who can’t do a PhD in 3 years are a burden on the ‘system’…*

- **When supervisors lack skills or expertise in the field:**

  *It would have been useful to have a consortium of people to advise on my research. My supervisor does not have sufficient knowledge of my area of research*

- **When a supervisor is too ‘hands off’:**

  *Although I may have resented it at the time, I know I would have benefited from more rigorous supervision…. less autonomy and less self reliance… i.e. stricter deadlines, sharper focus and recognition (from the experts) as to when I was floundering, in isolation and confusion (& procrastination/aimlessness).*

- **When supervisors display inflexible attitudes:**

  *I am a student who always planned to finish in three years. I have a supervisor who is of the ‘old school’ and doesn’t approve/understand so gives me no help.*

- **When supervisors act unethically:**

  *…he was the source of problems (lack of support/flexibility, harassment/discrimination*
• When a supervisor lacks or loses interest
  
  *Industrial supervisor difficult to contact and lost considerable interest as project progressed – provides some intellectual support – nothing else

  My first supervisor became problematic and unavailable, ie. no email/phone response when away

• When personality clashes create conflict
  
  My main struggle with my supervisor developed when I spoke (argued) convincingly with her about my project. She was unable to tell me why my projects were not good but seemed to feel threatened by my strong opinions.

• For external postgraduates.

  These students were more likely than internal postgraduates to report that their supervisors did not identify their individual needs very well or did not cater to their individual needs very well.

  One survey respondent who had completed her research made a comment that reflects very badly on supervision at Monash:

  *I credit my graduation largely to my eight months study overseas and continuing support from supervisors there. Only there did I find the academic environment I required – in terms of rigorous disciplined supervision & research environment, and extensive research knowledge expertise and groups in my area of study*

Participants in the project workshop highlighted some ways in which they believed that existing supervision arrangements could be improved:

• More female supervisors
• Supervisors should be required to obtain and participate in compulsory on-going training
• Supervisors should be ‘accredited’ using transparent and agreed criteria to demonstrate that they have the skills, ability and commitment
• Supervisors should be held accountable for their professional (or lack thereof) conduct in order to protect the interests of research postgraduates and the reputation of Monash University

**Centre/Department Support**

  *My department made me feel that my work was important and valued. Encouraged and supported me in giving conference papers and writing articles.*

Overall, a large majority of the women responding to the project survey indicated that their department, centre or school provides them with support in a number of ways. As Table 13 shows, 79 per cent were satisfied with the overall level of support and an even greater majority (85 per cent) indicated that they felt academically stimulated. Smaller majorities felt practically or emotionally supported, involved, valued and acknowledged.
Table 13: Satisfaction with centre/department/school support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Reasonably or very well(%)</th>
<th>Not very well (%)</th>
<th>All (%)</th>
<th>No. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied overall do/did you feel?</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How academically stimulated do/did you feel?</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How practically supported do/did you feel?</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How involved do/did you feel?</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How emotionally supported do/did you feel?</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How valued do/did you feel?</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How acknowledged do/did you feel?</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, results also suggest a need for further effort with a quarter to a third of respondents indicating that they were not very well involved in the department, valued, acknowledged or emotionally supported.

Responses to the project survey and discussions in the project workshop expressed enthusiasm for opportunities to meet and talk with other postgraduates and staff as a way of exchanging ideas, of overcoming the loneliness and isolation of research, of gaining additional guidance or insights from staff other than supervisors and of indicating that the University values and respects its women in postgraduate research.

The five Associate Deans Research surveyed for the project all indicated that their faculty offered a program of seminars for postgraduates and staff – and most other faculties are likely to offer something similar. Their efforts were welcomed by the survey respondents, with more than two thirds (70%) indicating that they were satisfied with the research seminar program and 61 per cent also reporting that their access to research and other training was good or very good.

An example of good practice in providing a range of opportunities for interaction between postgraduates, and postgraduates and staff is the program of activities offered by the Centre for Women’s Studies, in the Faculty of Arts. This program, which has many postgraduate participants includes:

- A research program of meetings every three weeks discussing issues including general research management and professional development and thesis work.
- Professional development workshops on CV writing, publishing and career issues.
- A Director’s Morning Tea held frequently as a social gathering.
- A program of fortnightly research seminars for staff and postgraduates.

In addition, the Centre provides a website for interaction and undertakes regular ‘email outs’ to its postgraduates.

Nevertheless, there were a number of ways in which the postgraduate women participating in the project indicated that existing opportunities for interaction could be improved. Firstly, enjoying the opportunities that were available, respondents were enthusiastic in wanting more of them, or opportunities where none currently exist:

- More in depth postgraduate colloquia – opportunities for discussing own research with other academics.
- Not enough interdepartmental presentation of work from PhD students.
- My department seems to have very little support for post grads
as a group besides the organisation of seminars. They could provide a more unified student environment, i.e. a faculty/department postgrad student group or social activity.

More coherence across and within faculties, communication, information exchange, more variation in times/days for optional seminars/workshops, more facilitation and encouragement to exchange ideas

Secondly, some women, particularly those with work and family commitments, indicated that they had difficulty in finding out about these activities – and in attending them – and sought some change in the way they were organised and advertised:

*I would prefer approximately six weeks notice of seminars/presentations so that I can adequately/appropriately arrange time off from work…*  

*For part-time research students scheduling of lectures out of work hours would have helped. I was unable to attend as many of the statistics lectures as I would have liked*  

*Posting up of seminar, lectures and other information so that women juggling work and family commitments can still follow study program and seminars etc*

An important aspect of these opportunities was showing the postgraduate women that the department, faculty and university, valued and respected them. Though many women participating in the project indicated that this was done well, sometimes this was missing:

*The department really needed to promote a postgraduate research culture – felt as though no-one had time for this (partly this is up to students too)*

Three respondents indicated difficulties that they believed were due to sexist attitudes:

*Academics in the department generally had a sexist attitude. They encouraged a ‘boys club’ culture. Whilst my supervisor encouraged my studies, other academics in the department were very discouraging/negative.*  

*They have no full time female academics – it is just a big competitive boys club*  

*To find support/colleagues I had to seek out sympathetic female academic staff*

One respondent had experienced a lack of understanding and assistance from her department when she encountered some difficult circumstances that required special support and attention:

*My department was extremely unsupportive after a serious … accident during field work which was horrifying … My supervisor had to fight to get some of my field gear replaced. I was treated as if I was the biggest pain because I had caused some paper work for them – …*

In the project workshop participants expressed a view that postgraduates make a very substantial contribution to their department’s research effort and should be more widely acknowledged and valued for it. Some were unhappy with being treated, and referred to, as ‘second class’ citizens and excluded from University activities because they were not
staff members. Participants suggested that to improve the postgraduate research culture across the University there needed to be:

- A dedicated postgraduate research web page containing:
  - Useful information
  - Useful links to other relevant sites
  - Links to a newsgroup, chat group

- Mechanisms to encourage and enable active support and cross faculty interactions

- Mechanisms to encourage and enable further opportunities for formal and informal mentoring

- Mechanisms to encourage the development of positive research cultures at the centre, departments or school level.

**Areas where improvements are needed**

**Induction/orientation**

As one student put it:

*A proper/structured induction by the department outlining procedures, facilities and services available, would start students off on a much firmer footing.*

In response to a question asking about their orientation or induction at Monash only half the women responding the project’s survey (52%) indicated that it was very good or good. Forty seven per cent described it as average, below or well below average. This suggests there is a strong need for urgent attention to the important commencing phase in a postgraduate’s candidature.

The lack of induction programs was sometimes keenly felt:

*(I) did not cope with adjustment from undergraduate study to independent postgraduate research on a personal or financial level. Did not understand what was expected of me on a practical level. I needed a more supportive/sympathetic environment during the first year of candidature.*

*I felt like I was jumping in at the deep end. I needed some direction*

One survey respondent offered some specific suggestions:

*Better or even some induction re: how the school works, who to talk to. Important subjects that weren’t covered: Intellectual Property, ‘gift’ authorship, access to conference funding, engagement with industry. I had to seek out my own information on these topics.*

Workshop participants also suggested two improvements in particular:

- Induction programs at the centre, department or school level (in addition to the university, or faculty where many programs are currently conducted)

- Distribution of an ‘induction pack’ containing information such as hints on publishing, research planning and candidature progression.

While many project participants focused on the practical aspects of postgraduate research in addressing orientation/induction issues, some also expressed concern about academic aspects such as finding a suitable topic and supervisor,
Greater assistance with developing/finding a ‘do-able’ research project at the beginning and greater assistance/consideration of matching research area to supervisor.

More substantial meeting/orientation with supervisor to ensure direction was well founded from outset

Did not cope with adjustment from undergraduate study to independent postgraduate research on a personal or financial level. Did not understand what was expected of me on a practical level. I needed a more supportive/sympathetic environment during the first year of candidature

A survey respondent entering Monash University from another university also suggested that more could be done to welcome women like herself on their arrival:

The school, although quite large, seemed to have few postgrad students who have not been undergraduates in the school. I had the feeling that, not having been an undergraduate there, I could never be fully accepted.

Financial support

All participants in the project consistently raised issues concerned with financial support for women in postgraduate research. For instance, survey respondents indicated that the availability of scholarships and opportunities for paid teaching and demonstrating in the University were important in their decision to enter postgraduate research. They also indicated that the same issues created difficulties that led to withdrawal from the research. Associate Deans of Research identified the availability of part-time scholarships as one of the factors most likely to encourage more women to enter postgraduate research. Workshop participants noted many financial stresses on postgraduate women, including funding to attend conferences and to cover the costs of research.

Indicative of the inadequacy of current scholarships, a large majority (82%) of survey respondents are in paid employment—most of them outside Monash University—though more than two-thirds (68%) receive a scholarship. Others draw on their savings or families for support (Table 14).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of income</th>
<th>Survey respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>116 (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment outside Monash</td>
<td>76 (44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment at Monash</td>
<td>65 (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own savings</td>
<td>29 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported by family</td>
<td>27 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government benefit</td>
<td>7 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit, loan, credit card</td>
<td>3 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private income/own business</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflecting their success in making appropriate financial arrangements the majority of survey respondents indicated that their access to scholarship funding was very good or good (70%). More than half also reported good or very good access to work opportunities such as teaching, demonstrating or research assistance (59%). However,
an important question that the survey results do not address is how many other women turned away because they were unable to obtain similar support. As one survey respondent who had recently withdrawn put it:

_I withdrew early, never started study – due to a lack of resources. Give me a scholarship!_

In the project workshop participants indicated that there was a need for

- More scholarships overall.
- More part time flexible scholarships, eg. with options to intermit
- More realistic living allowances.
- Additional funds (over and above currently offered central funds) to assist with research costs such as field trips.
- Additional funds (over and above currently offered central funds) to assist with conference attendance.
- Increased employment opportunities within centres, departments or schools.
- More paid leave (from employers).
- More assistance (fee relief) for international students.

These views were echoed in the comments of survey respondents. In addition, several expressed frustration with the lack of funds available to support research generally in the University, as well as their own work specifically:

_I was aware that my school and supervisors were themselves unsupported – that is, lacking financial support and resources – this in turn limited the extent to which their research students were supported_

_Please more funding for research – our lab will not be able to afford even the most basic necessities for research next year, e.g. gloves because we have no funding coming in from the University. We have to compete for grant money of which there is little._

Some criticised the inadequate length and value of the scholarship they had received:

_Please financial support until thesis was submitted. Three and a half years is unreasonably short to completion of a PhD thesis (with experimental component!)._

_Could not survive on scholarship as single mature age student with a mortgage and consistent employment history prior to commencing PhD. Also need financial support for conference attendance – accommodation, entry fee etc_

One noted difficulties in applying for external funding support:

_Funding is hard to access – need help with writing applications. Without prior receipt of scholarships, not yet published, seems impossible to obtain funds_
Facilities and resources
Respondents to the project survey raised a number of issues relating to the resources, facilities and support that the University provides them.

Assistance with career development - More than a quarter of survey respondents (29%) indicated that career advice or assistance was below or well below average. This is of special concern because almost half of those enrolled full-time and 28 per cent of those enrolled part time indicated that a career path was very important to them. One respondent expressed disappointment about the lack of attention to her career intentions:

My career aspirations are of no concern to anyone (except my main supervisor). I have never been asked once about my future plans ...

Physical Resources – 18 per cent of survey respondents indicated that their access to physical resources such as desks and computers was below average or well below average. One commented that she would have liked a desk before she was six months into her research. Another pleaded for office space for every PhD student and improved photocopying facilities. Another indicated that the needs of postgraduates had been overlooked in planning a new facility:

At the moment not every research student has their own writing up area. This was due to the mismanagement in planning the new facility. Due to funding cuts there has also been a reduction of infrastructure resources.

Access to computer advice/help: 18 per cent of survey respondents indicated that their access to physical resources (e.g. desks and computers etc) was below average or well below average. In addition 18% were not satisfied with their access to computer advice/help. Survey respondents who indicated that they had withdrawn from their research were also far more likely than those currently enrolled or recently completed to report that their access to computer advice or help was ‘below average’.

Project workshop participants also suggested that there was a need for more computers and for increased access times.

Administrative issues
A small number of respondents commented unfavourably on the University’s administrative processes. One pleaded for fewer ‘administration/bureaucratic obstacles’. Two noted the slowness of administrative responses,

Some administrative processes are inhibitingly slow and created time pressures, e.g. approval of initial application for candidature and processing of scholarship.

I had an enormous problem with getting research funds from my grant money reimbursed to me – which made life incredibly difficult and stressful. Funds that were granted to me for fieldwork travel took up to 8 weeks to come to me.

Two noted obstructive or unhelpful actions by some staff,

If I asked to get grant funds upfront before I left on my fieldwork, they would make it so difficult and I would end up in tears! Too stressful!!

Most administrative staff in the department treat students with disdain in my case being obstructive and unhelpful re: reimbursement of money, getting academics to return phone calls, processing paper work.
An important issue raised by one respondent was the need for an administrative process that would allow students to report privately on the performance of their supervisor,

*I think there is an inherent problem with the annual reports. I have problems with my supervisor but can’t write them down due to concerns about negative repercussions (because she has to read and sign off). Also she has lied on them about her involvement and I have consented due to the above… So I believe students should have the opportunity for a safer more anonymous feedback mechanism, e.g. all students compelled to give feedback about their supervisor (if shared amongst several students) anonymously’.*

Conclusions

To improve the retention of women in research higher degrees, and to assist them to complete their work, the findings of this project indicate that the University must pay further attention to aspects of postgraduate research within five main areas:

1. Enabling a commencing postgraduate to ‘make a good start’.
2. Ensuring that all postgraduates have the resources and support they need to conduct their research effectively and within required time limits.
3. Providing all postgraduates with opportunities to participate in activities that will add value to their postgraduate research.
4. Providing postgraduates with information and advice about opportunities that will follow completion of their research.
5. Ensuring that the University and its faculties, departments, centres and schools maintain a flexible approach that will accommodate individual needs and circumstances.

Already the University is moving toward best practice in some of these areas, but the project findings indicate that further attention is needed in some other aspects, particularly:

**Enabling a commencing postgraduate to ‘make a good start’:**

- **Supervision** – ensuring that each postgraduate is matched with the most appropriate supervisor/s from the commencement of their research so that time is not lost through lack of appropriate guidance or in having to seek or make changes in supervision arrangements.

- **Induction/orientation** – providing each postgraduate, whether on or off campus, new to Monash or a previous student, with an introduction to postgraduate research at Monash University that will ensure they know what is required of them, what they can expect from their supervisor/s, department or centre, faculty and the university and where to go for advice and assistance.

- **Topic setting** – ensuring that the research topic each postgraduate chooses can be completed within the required timeframe and can be supported by the university with appropriate facilities, resources and supervision.

**Ensuring that postgraduates have the resources and support they need to conduct their research effectively and within time constraints.**

- **Financial support** – providing assistance sufficient to ensure that women in research higher degrees can conduct their research without the financial pressures that divert their attention and inhibit their progress.
• **Research support** – providing women in research higher degrees with help to meet the costs of conducting their research. Providing these women with access to relevant advice and assistance from a range of sources including academic staff other than the supervisor/s and experts in the field outside the university.

• **Facilities and resources** – providing postgraduate women with the facilities and equipment they need to conduct their research and to take part in the life of the University including office space, desks, computer facilities and advice, access to libraries and other data collections.

• **Personal support** – ensuring that the university offers assistance, support and advice that will help women in research higher degrees to overcome any personal or unforeseen difficulties that might arise during their research. Ensuring that the women can conduct their research in a supportive and encouraging environment, without harassment and with respect for their rights.

Providing all postgraduates with opportunities to participate in activities that will add value to their postgraduate research

• **Department/faculty/university activities** – Welcoming all postgraduate (fulltime/part time, on or off campus) as valued and respected members of the academic community, providing opportunities for them to meet academic staff within and outside their field, to present their research and to hear about the work of other postgraduates and staff.

• **Professional activities** – providing opportunities and assistance for postgraduates to attend and contribute to conferences and other professional activities within and outside the university.

• **Social activities** – providing opportunities for postgraduates and staff to meet and interact informally

Providing postgraduates with information and advice about post-completion opportunities

• **Career advice and guidance** – provide women in research higher degrees with realistic information about the career options that will be available to them once they have completed their research.

Ensuring a flexible approach to individual needs and circumstances

Ensuring that flexibility to accommodate individual needs and circumstances is maintained as far as possible at all levels of the University and is sufficient to allow women to conduct and complete postgraduate research while also meeting work and family commitments.

Models of Best Practice for Retention and Completion

Based on the findings of previous studies and this project, best practice models for ensuring that the University retains women in research higher degrees and assists them to complete their research in a timely fashion will incorporate:

Attention to the needs of postgraduate women as researchers.

Attention to their needs as individuals with commitments outside their research.

Attention to their career needs and goals.

Respect for them as valued members of the university community with much to contribute.

They would thus:
• Ensure that the women have defined goals from the beginning of their research and clearly understand what they need to do and when.
• Support and encourage them so that they remain motivated and able to conduct their research.
• Endeavour to ensure that they do not suffer from isolation, financial or time pressures, unfair treatment, disrespect or harassment.
• Provide them with access to the advice and guidance, and the facilities and resources that they need to conduct and complete their research within required time limits.
• Encourage and support them to be active and involved members of the community of postgraduates and of university staff and students.
• Demonstrate respect for their work, their commitments outside the university and their individual circumstances.
• Support and assist them to overcome any difficulties that they encounter that have the potential to affect their ability to continue with their research.
Improving existing practice: some options for action

This report has highlighted some ways in which Monash University is already demonstrating good practice in recruiting and retaining women in research higher degrees and assisting them to complete their research in a timely fashion. It has also indicated some areas where further attention or effort is required. The report has also, based on the project findings, identified some features that would characterise best practice.

In this last section the report considers what specific steps the University might take to improve existing practice, offers some examples of best practice and identifies those sections of the University best positioned to take appropriate action.

Best Practice: Recruitment of women into research higher degrees

Encouragement and support

• Actively encouraging women in the latter stages of their undergraduate degree through personal contacts, letters, seminars, opportunities to ‘sample’ postgraduate research and the research environment of the department.

Example: In 2003 the Arts Faculty at Monash University ran a program called What next? where information on the possibilities for further study was mailed to all final year undergraduates and honours students. This was followed by a session which allowed interested students to speak with relevant groups and individuals within the Arts Faculty and wider university community.

• Supporting targeted programs providing information and support to women undertaking undergraduate degrees in non-traditional areas.

Example: The School of Engineering and Mathematics at Edith Cowan University offers enrolling female students a scholarship of $1,500, with students receiving $100 on the completion of each unit, up to a maximum of 15 units.

Example: In 2004, the Information Technology Faculty at Monash University in conjunction with iGATE Australia, will offer $5000 scholarships to two female undergraduates in the IT Faculty, to “actively encourage more women to pursue careers in IT”.
Website: infotech.monash.edu/news/igate.html

Example: From 1995 to 1998 the Department of Computer Science at the University of Melbourne ran an informal mentor scheme linking later year undergraduate women with first year undergraduate women in an effort to encourage more women to remain in Computer Science beyond first year. The scheme was later replaced by a Faculty level mentoring scheme. Website: ww.cs.mu.oz.au/info/ms/old.html

Example: During 1995 and 1996 The Engineering Faculty at Monash University ran a Women in Engineering Project which comprised a mentoring scheme for undergraduate women to link first year students to later year students, active participation in an Australia-wide women in engineering forum, seminars with women speakers from industry, social events, a women’s newsletter and monitoring of female enrolments in engineering.
• Expanding active mentoring of all senior female undergraduates to encourage them to consider a research higher degree.

Example: The University of Western Australia runs a series of seminars for women honours students with the aim of encouraging women to consider enrolling in a higher degree, particularly in those disciplines where women are significantly under-represented in postgraduate studies. Website: www.admin.uwa.edu.au/reg/Equity/Postgrad99-2001.htm#2.2.2

• Actively encouraging previous students to return to the university to further their study – particularly through staff who are likely to be familiar or known to the graduate. (Action: MRGS, Transition Program, centres/depts/schools, individual academics, supervisors)

• Supporting targeted programs and other forms of encouragement to women in disadvantaged groups, particularly Aboriginal women and women from rural and low socio-economic backgrounds. (Action: MRGS, faculties, Equity and Diversity, LLS, CAIS, Marketing)

Example: The University of Melbourne offers up to four postgraduate scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who have been offered a place in a postgraduate degree on any campus of the University, and up to ten Postgraduate Equity Scholarships. Website: www.services.unimelb.edu.au/cie/scholarships/index.html

Example: The University of Queensland provides family/carer rooms on the Ipswich and St Lucia campuses, as well as in the Duhig Library and Queensland Bioscience Precinct. These rooms provide computing facilities, play equipment and kitchens and bathrooms, allowing students and staff to combine study and work activities with family responsibilities. Website: www.uq.edu.au/gender_equity/childcare.html#Famrm

Example: The Australian National University offers flexibility in on-campus requirements for research postgraduates. The minimum attendance requirement is based on supervision appropriate for the individual candidate and access to resources. Thus, postgraduates do not necessarily have to make a geographical move to undertake postgraduate research. Website: www.anu.edu.au

Example: A regular playgroup for Monash University students with children is run and supported by Family and Childcare Services, Monash chaplains, Monash International, Monash Postgraduate Association and the Monash Uniting Church (Clayton North community). The majority of the users are postgraduates, who use the opportunity to combat isolation by forming social networks with other postgraduates at Monash.

Example: The Work Life Family policy adopted by Monash University for staff, provides an excellent example of the type of flexibility and acknowledgement of the responsibilities of women that could be reflected in policies relating to postgraduate research.
**Providing clear, comprehensive and accurate information**

- Distributing realistic information about the potential benefits of postgraduate research in the field including opportunities for career and personal development, with examples of the experience of previous students.
  
  *(Action: Alumni, MRGS, Monash University Employment and Careers, Monash International, faculties, centres/depts/schools)*

Example: The Research Graduate School at Monash University runs a student-centred presentation on Open Day, where current students provide a personal perspective on the postgraduate research experience to prospective students.

- Distributing comprehensive information about the department including its research profile, formal and informal activities to support postgraduates, opportunities for postgraduates to be employed as tutors or demonstrators, opportunities for postgraduates to interact with staff.

  *(Action: MRGS, faculties, centres/depts/schools)*

- Distributing comprehensive information about potential supervisors including retention and completion of previous students and the provision of opportunities for women considering postgraduate research to meet and interact with potential supervisors while they are considering whether to enrol.

  *(Action: faculties, centres/depts/schools)*

Example: The Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research at Monash University maintains an informative and comprehensive website aimed at prospective research students. Website: [www.arts.monash.edu/ws/postgraduate/index.html](http://www.arts.monash.edu/ws/postgraduate/index.html)

**Financial support**

- Distributing information about financial support for research higher degrees, including support for part-time study and funding for research expenses and conference attendance.

  *(Action: Marketing, MRGS, faculties, centres/depts/school)*

Example: The Australian National University offers three bursaries of $5000 each to women postgraduates to assist women to undertake and complete higher degrees by research at ANU

Website: [www.anu.edu.au/graduate/scholarships/displayScholarship.php?key_id=56](http://www.anu.edu.au/graduate/scholarships/displayScholarship.php?key_id=56)

- Increasing the number of scholarships available to support part-time study for a research higher degree.

- Increasing the value of the living allowance of scholarships.

  *(Action: Central university, MRGS)*

- Providing additional opportunities for women in research higher degrees to be employed within the University.

  *(Action: faculties, centres/depts/schools)*
**Best Practice: Retention and Completions**

*Encouragement and support*

- Supporting and encouraging women in research higher degrees so that they will remain motivated and will be able to continue their research.
- Recognising the specific needs of postgraduate women as individuals with commitments outside their research.

  *(Action: MRGS, MPA, centres/depts/schools, individual academics/supv)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example: The University of Western Australia has incorporated equity issues in relation to women postgraduates within key policy documents.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Lulea Technical University in Sweden runs an all-female cross-disciplinary research centre that supports women undertaking research, particularly in non-traditional areas. This enables women who might otherwise be isolated to participate in group mentoring and professional development activities directly related to building future academic careers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: The Faculty of Science at Monash University offers a grant to women academics on maternity leave that can be used to employ a research assistant to continue the research work during the leave period. This scheme aims to attract and retain women academics in the sciences, but also will assist in ensuring the availability of female supervisors and mentors for women undertaking postgraduate research in those areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: The Monash Postgraduate Association and the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations conduct ongoing research investigating the specific needs of women postgraduates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: The University of Western Australia runs an annual workshop for women postgraduates with the aim of developing skills and providing information about resources to assist women in the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate studies. Website: <a href="http://www.admin.uwa.edu.au/reg/Equity/Postgrad99-2001.htm#2.2.2">www.admin.uwa.edu.au/reg/Equity/Postgrad99-2001.htm#2.2.2</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: The Faculty of Economics and Commerce, Teaching and Learning Unit at the University of Melbourne offers a program in which new postgraduates are formally mentored by later year postgraduates. Website: online-tutor.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/post_mentee.pdf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Demonstrating respect for the work of women in research higher degrees, their commitments outside the university and their individual circumstances.

  *(Action: MRGS, faculties, centres/depts/schools, supervisors)*

- Ensuring that women in research higher degrees do not suffer from isolation, unfair treatment, disrespect or harassment and do not experience stressful or debilitating financial or time pressures.
- Supporting and assisting women in research higher degrees to overcome any difficulties that they encounter that have the potential to affect their ability to continue with their research.

  *(Action: MPA, Counselling, Equity and Diversity Centre, faculties, centres/depts/schools, supervisors)*

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Example: The Monash Postgraduate Association runs regular cross-faculty postgraduate social events and forums on all campuses of Monash University, aimed at strengthening postgraduate community links and providing opportunities for postgraduates to raise issues of concern.

Creating an academic community

- Encouraging and supporting women in research higher degrees to be active and involved members of the community of postgraduates and of university staff and students.
  
  (Action: MPA, Equity and Diversity Centre, MRGS, Transition Program, faculties, centres/depts/schools, supervisors)

Example: The Research Graduate School at Monash University runs the ExPERT seminar series on generic skills for postgraduates on Clayton campus.

Example: The Equity and Diversity Centre at Monash University runs a ‘Women in Research’ seminar series open to both staff and postgraduates.

- Supporting an annual research conference for research postgraduates and staff within each faculty.
- Encouraging and supporting active seminar programs for research postgraduates and staff in all faculties, including evening and weekend activities.
  
  (Action: Transition Program, faculties, centres/depts/schools, supervisors)

Example: The Faculty of Arts at Monash University runs a regular seminar series for research postgraduates in the faculty called Tricks of the Trade. Website: www.arts.monash.edu.au/research/training/2003/tricks_sem2.html

- Encouraging and supporting opportunities for postgraduate researchers to meet and interact informally with each other and academic staff.

Example: The Centre for Women’s Studies and Gender Research at Monash University runs regular ‘Director’s morning teas’ where postgraduate researchers and staff can meet informally.

- Providing training for research postgraduates in presentation skills, time management, negotiation skills and assertiveness.
  
  (Action: MRGS, LLSCounselling, faculties, centres/depts/schools)

- Developing of programs to address the career needs and goals of women researchers.
  
  (Action: MONSEACS, MRGS, faculties, centres/depts/schools)

Providing clear, comprehensive and accurate information

- Providing induction/orientation programs at the faculty and department levels as well as university-wide. Distributing induction ‘packs’ of information.
  
  (Action: MPA, MRGS, Transition Program, LLS, faculties, centres/depts/schools)

- Establish a dedicated webpage of general information for research postgraduates including important University contacts and services.
  
  (Action: MRGS, faculties, centres/depts/schools)
Example: The School of Chemistry at Monash University runs a homepage for Graduate Students that has clear, comprehensive and targeted information for postgraduates.
Website: www.chem.monash.edu.au/studentweb/graduates

Supervision
- Ensuring that women commencing a research higher degree have defined goals from the beginning and clearly understand what they need to do and when.
- Providing women research postgraduates with access to the advice and guidance that they need to conduct and complete their research within required time limits.
  (Action: centres/depts/schools, supervisors)
- ‘Accrediting’ supervisors using transparent and agreed criteria to demonstrate that they have appropriate skills, ability and commitment.
Example: The Arts Faculty at Monash University requires new and existing academics to meet set criteria before being accredited as supervisors.
Example: The Research Graduate School at Monash University requires all new supervisors to undertake a structured supervisor training program.
- Establishing a process for postgraduates to provide private feedback on supervisor performance.
  (Action: MRGS, faculties, centres/depts/schools)
- Providing additional training for staff in gender and culture inclusiveness and cross-cultural communication, including within supervision training programs.
  (Action: Equity, CAIS, Monash International, faculties)

Facilities and resources
- Providing women in research higher degrees with access to the facilities and resources that they need to conduct and complete their research within required time limits.
  (Action: MRGS, libraries, faculties, centres/depts/schools, supervisors)
Example: The Law and Pharmacy libraries at Monash University provide 24 hours a day, seven days a week access for PhD candidates in their respective faculties.
Example: The Research Graduate School on Monash University’s Clayton campus provides 24 hours a day, seven days a week swipe card access to study and computing facilities for research postgraduates.
- Streamlining administrative processes to ensure minimum delays in reimbursing expenses incurred by postgraduates in conducting their research.
  (Action: MRGS, faculties, centres/depts/schools)
- Increasing the number of computers available for use by postgraduate researchers and access times for their use. Providing additional forms of computer advice/assistance.
  (Action: MRGS, faculties, centres/depts/schools)
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