Chapter 11
The Temporal Disciplining of Doctoral Research in the Neoliberal Academy:
Winners and Losers in the Timely Completion

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ABSTRACT

The neoliberal agenda in higher education has led to expectations and targets of market-likeness in student enrolment and completion demographics through the widening participation agenda. However, the reality is that disadvantaged groups such as students with a disability and Indigenous students are still underrepresented, particularly in advanced research degrees. This disadvantage is compounded by the temporal disciplining imposed by bureaucratically-defined completion deadlines. Taking Australia as a paradigmatic case, this chapter explores the temporal disciplining of doctoral research in the broader context of neoTaylorism and the projectification of research. It argues that a care-inspired slowness is needed to counterbalance the harms created by the managerialist push for 'timely' completion.

INTRODUCTION

A doctorate is the highest degree awarded in academia. It is the minimum standard for entry into an academic career and continues to attract a degree of status and prestige for holders. As a result, there have been calls to address historical underrepresentation (McGee, et al. 2016) and to increase diversity in doctoral candidates beyond the typical profile of "a high-achieving young male from a privileged

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7379-2.ch011

background" (Skakni, 2018a, p.197). Paradoxically, this shift has occurred within a climate of managerialism in higher education and a backdrop of change in the purpose of the PhD from one of intellectual development and growth and the development of new knowledge toward viewing the PhD as a tool for enhancing employability (Barnacle, Schmidt & Cuthbert, 2019; Cuthbert & Molla, 2015a; Mowbray & Halse, 2010; Molla & Cuthbert, 2019). This is achieved through the projectification of research as limited in time, scope, and content (Ylijoki, 2016; Torka, 2018), an "overweening preoccupation with efficiency" (Gronn, 1982, p.18), and "context of pressurised performativity" (Green & Bowden, 2012, p.66).

It has been argued that capitalism depends on how people use and conceptualize time (Walker, 2009). In the neoliberal university "[t]ime is disciplined by various workload models, procedures, processes, policies, practices and tools. The underpinning assumption is that time is quantifiable, standardised and linear—imply that measuring time is not only possible and desirable but is an essential part of what makes the neoliberal university 'tick'" (Gannon & Taylor, 2020, p.2). It is therefore not surprising that doctoral research has attracted measurement. There is a basic project management tenet that quality, cost, and time are three sides of an equilateral triangle, and that emphasis on one or more of these will necessarily impact the others (Azar, Militaru & Mattar, 2016; Bowen et al., 2012; Kuutila et al., 2020), however, what is typically missing from this understanding is a recognition of the negative consequences on the wellbeing of those involved in the project, when any of these parameters shift. Indeed, Jones and Cheuk (2021) argue that outside of the specific realms of equity policies, research policy may contribute to the erasure of difference by simply ignoring its existence.

In this chapter, Australia is taken as a paradigmatic case (Pavlich, 2010) of this phenomenon because it exposes the structural violence inherent in the intersection of two key policy platforms: the Widening Participation agenda, which seeks to increase the participation of targeted equity group members in higher education, and the policy push for timely completions. The chapter commences by considering the application and impact of the widening participation agenda in doctoral education in Australia and the extent to which this has been met for doctoral completions. It then describes the current policy environment for doctoral completion and the impact of funding arrangements and ideological framing of the 'problem' of timely completion. It then exposes the potential conflict between the desire to deliver a graduate profile that reflects the diversity of the population and the push for timely completion which does not provide for accommodation of this diversity. In addition to exploring the impacts on doctoral students, we also consider the potential impacts on academic supervisors who are caught in the middle of trying to support their students and trying to meet and manage institutional performance expectations. However, rather than focusing on the need to provide counselling, mental health, and other support services (which we do not dispute are also required), this chapter instead focuses on how the systems created by universities are complicit in creating this harm. In doing so we are not calling for additional interventions post-harm but instead, challenge the systems that cause harm and argues that a care-inspired slowness is needed to counterbalance the harms created by the managerialist push for 'timely' completion.

THE DOCTORAL POLICY LANDSCAPE

Since the 1980s, neoliberal managerialism has become entrenched in higher education policy and practice in countries as diverse as India (Kumar, 2019), South Africa (Adams, 2006), United Arab Emirates (Ajayan & Balasubramanian, 2020), the United Kingdom (Deem & Brehony, 2005), and the Netherlands and Sweden (Teelken, 2012). Across all post-school education, including in doctoral programs,

these ideas include treating higher education as a business coupled with widespread cost-cutting, and a narrow focus on employability rather than learning as the outcome of higher education (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2017; Owler, 2010). This has been exacerbated by institutional responses to the COVID-19 global pandemic (Watermeyer, et al. 2021).

In the past, a PhD was a seen as research apprenticeship in which the doctoral candidate was expected to learn, under the guidance of more experienced researchers, how to conduct "a successful independent research project" (Bowden & Green, 2014, p.357; Torka, 2018). Cuthbert and Molla (2015b) suggest that dominance of efficiency concerns has shifted to include a focus on graduate skills and for enhancing employability to not only be part of the PhD processes but for it to become the purpose of the PhD. This push toward employability has been driven largely by stakeholders that arguably sit outside the PhD process such as government and industry who view skills as the "summative product of the PhD" (Mowbray & Halse, 2010, p.653). Arguably, however, a potential benefit arising from this increased market focus has been an expectation that the student population become more diverse (Bowl, 2018; McCraig, Bowl, & Highes, 2018). Widening participation in higher education has been posited as a way to resolve social inequality, although the contradictions and tensions between discourses of diversity and neoliberal marketisation have been noted (Leaney & Mwale, 2021).

Widening Participation in Doctoral Education

Since the 1990s, Australian government policy through the widening participation agenda has sought to improve the proportional representation of designated equity groups in higher education. The explicit goal of the widening participation agenda is to increase the participation of students from these underrepresented social groups to levels that reflect their representation in the broader Australian population (Gale & Parker, 2013). This effort has largely focused on widening participation in undergraduate education with less research and practice focus on the postgraduate research space.

The Australian Government nominated six groups as targets for equity planning in higher education to remediate their historic exclusion and disadvantage: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, students from regional and remote areas of Australia, students living with a disability, and students from non-English speaking backgrounds. As shown in Table 1, specific targets were set for each equity group based on achieving proportional representation based on census data (Department of Employment, Education & Training, 1990).

Unfortunately, despite 30 years of work in this space, almost all Australian universities have failed to meet these targets with outcomes decreasing the higher the level of study (Grant-Smith, Irmer & Mayes, 2020). As a result, there has been an emphasis in recent years on further improving the participation of Indigenous students (e.g., Behrendt et al., 2012) and students from a low socioeconomic background (Bradley et al., 2008). However, focussing on the example of students from a low socioeconomic background, rather than investing in improving these outcomes the original widening participation target of 25 per cent for these students (Department of Employment, Education & Training, 1990) was revised downwards to 20 per cent by 2020 as a recommendation of the Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008).

Furthermore, while there has been a tranche of research focusing on the widening participation agenda and equity in higher education, many studies do not distinguish between undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts (e.g., Shah & Nair, 2013; Singh & Mountford-Zimdars, 2016) and those that do tend to focus on the undergraduate cohort (e.g., Palmer, Bexley & James, 2011; Testa & Egan, 2014). Some Australian research does focus on postgraduate students, and the support required to sustain their

Table 1. Targets for equity group representation as a percentage of the total student population (Department of Employment, Education & Training, 1990)

Equity Group	Definition	Target
Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander students	Students who self-report as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student to their higher education provider, either at the time of their enrolment or during their studies. A student who: is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent; identifies as an Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person, and is accepted as such by the community in which s/he lives or has lived. Also referred to as Indigenous students.	2.2%
students from a low SES background	Socio-economic status (SES) is assigned to students based on the socio-economic status of the ABS statistical area (SA1)/postcode in which they reside. Low SES students come from the bottom 25 per cent of Australian SA1s in a national ranking.	25.0%
students with a disability	Students who self-report disability to their higher education provider, either at the time of their enrolment or during their studies.	8.0%
students from non-English speaking backgrounds	A domestic student (any student who is: an Australian citizen; an Australian permanent resident including holders of all categories of permanent residency visas, including humanitarian visas; or a New Zealand citizen) who arrived in Australia less than 10 years before the year in which the data were collected, and who comes from a home where a language other than English is spoken. Also referred to as students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.	4.66%
students from regional areas of Australia	Students from regional Australia are defined as having a permanent home address in an SA1/ postcode area that is classified as remote using historic MCEETYA classifications and the Australian Statistical Geography Standard.	23.32%
students from remote areas of Australia	Students from remote areas are defined as having a permanent home address in an SA1/postcode area that is classified as remote.	0.6%

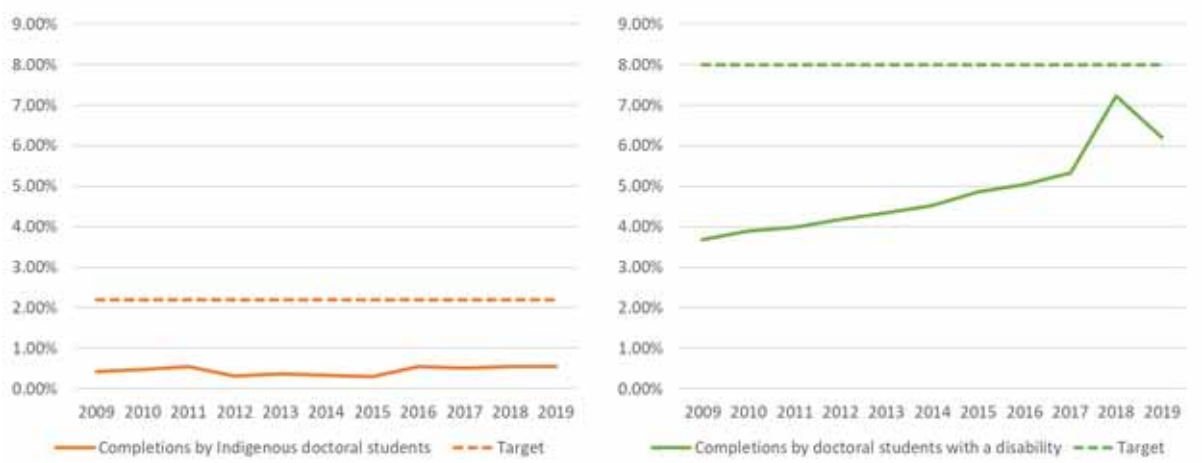
participation in higher education (e.g., Grant-Smith & Gillett-Swan, 2017; Grant-Smith, Gillett-Swan, & Chapman, 2017; Manathunga, 2017), however, relative to undergraduate representation, there has been significantly less scholarly and policy focus on the extent to which the widening participation agenda has been achieved at the postgraduate level (Gale & Parker 2013). Equity outcomes are not routinely reported at the postgraduate level; instead, reporting is typically done at the aggregate (all students) level (e.g., Pitman, 2017). Despite this, Gale and Parker (2013) suggest that there is reliable evidence to suggest that inequalities are more severe at the postgraduate level, particularly for research degrees.

The success of the widening participation agenda requires more than increasing the enrolment of members of equity groups in higher education. There have been calls to include consideration of student (non)completion outcomes (Archer 2007) and a greater understanding of how equity group students can be supported to participate and succeed in terms of completion and labour market outcomes (Vignoles & Murray 2016). Completion is concerned with the number of students in an equity group who complete a program of study in a given year as a percentage of completions by all domestic students. For example, Figure 1 compares completions for Indigenous doctoral students and doctoral students with a disability against equity targets for the decade 2009-2019, showing both well below targets.

The 'Problem' of PhD Non-Completion and Long Time-to-Completion

Universities have adopted a managerialist approach to doctoral research driven by efficiency imperatives, concerns about PhD attrition rates and the need to prove public monies used to support universities have been well spent. Long time to completion has become a proxy measure for these concerns and

Figure 1. Completions by Indigenous doctoral students and doctoral students with a disability as a proportion of all graduating doctoral students, 2009-2019 (Department of Education, Skills & Employment, 2020a)



non-adherence to milestones a 'problem' to be managed (Owler, 2010). As capitalism seeps further into academic governments, higher education institutions and other stakeholders "demand efficiency and productivity, and favour 'countables' such as research output, completions and competencies" (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013).

Under public (e.g., the government in the form of block funding) and private (e.g., industry co-funded scholarships) funding regimes universities are responsible for ensuring the timely and predictable completion of doctorates (Torka, 2018). Although the theoretical duration of a doctoral program in Australia is three years full-time, the actual enrolment time is typically longer. Indeed, research has shown that in Australia the median completion time for doctoral students is consistently around five years, with overseas students having a slightly faster completion time than domestic students (Torka, 2020). Despite this, in the Australian higher education system 'timely completion' of a PhD is defined as three years. This definition is reinforced by the award of competitive doctoral scholarships which typically provide funding for a period limited to three years, sometimes with the possibility of an additional six-month extension at the discretion of the granting university.

The policy push for timely completion is enshrined in the research block funding arrangements for Australian universities. Research block grants, allocated on a calendar year, are provided to Australian higher education institutions using a complex formula based on these timeframes and which financially reward universities for the successful timely completion of higher degree by research students (Department of Education, Skills & Employment, 2020b). Weightings are applied based on the degree level (Masters or Doctorate), the degree cost (high or low), and characteristics of the student undertaking the degree (though this is limited to Indigeneity or domestic/international status). Under the funding formula, these weightings change the relative value of completion to a university. For example, completions by Indigenous students are weighted at twice the value of non-Indigenous student completions to provide a financial incentive to institutions to boost the number of Indigenous students completing higher degrees by research. These weighted premiums are designed to incentivize the enrollment of students

with marginalized identities (Li, 2019). Here we can begin to see tensions between desires to increase the number and timeliness of PhD completions and a recognition that there is structural and systematic disadvantage within the system that requires policy intervention to support members of certain equity groups to meet these aspirations.

These incentives go some way to recognizing that research students from identified equity groups have lower rates of completion than their peers (Grant-Smith, Irmer & Mayes, 2020), but the expectation of timely completion fails to account for this reality. Some research identifies quite commonsense reasons for long completion such as extenuating personal circumstances, practical setbacks associated with data collection or change in supervisor (van de Schoot, et al., 2013). However, these are often not recognized by university systems as legitimate reasons for seeking an extension, particularly in relation to scholarships. This is perhaps because decisions regarding candidature timeframes are driven by concerns beyond the individual student. Delayed or non-completion can result in a loss of valuable time and resources invested in the candidate and a loss of institutional competitive advantage (van de Schoot, et al., 2013). PhD students play a vitally important role in the neoliberal university as producers of research; it has been estimated that PhD students provide more than half of the research conducted by universities (Barry et al., 2018). Numbers of successful PhD completions is also a metric against which university performance is assessed in global ranking systems (van de Schoot, et al., 2013). These factors conspire to privilege the churn of PhD students to get them off the books and to free up resources and places.

TENSIONS BETWEEN WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND TIMELY COMPLETION

Policy supporting performance funding of universities for student performance can have unintended perverse consequences. These include more narrow and selective admission practices which can result in a decline in minority admissions (Birdsall, 2018). As a result, a narrow focus on timely completion metrics can result in a focus on outputs rather than substantive contributions to student and broader social outcomes. Indeed Li (2019) found that tying institutional funding to such metrics can lead to increased stratification where minority students are disproportionally enrolled in less selective institutions due to elite institutions seeking to attract the more academically qualified equity students.

Australian universities can be categorized based on research intensity, age, and whether they are a pre-1987 or post-1987 university, the latter largely having been formed by redesignating former colleges of advanced education (Moodie, 2009, 2010). Based on shared characteristics there are four active collaborative university groupings within the Australian tertiary sector. *Group of Eight* members are elite institutions akin to Russell Group universities in the United Kingdom and Ivy League universities in the United States of America which command the largest market share of all postgraduate students and research funding. *Australian Technology Network* universities are young, were typically established as technical institutes in capital cities and designated as universities post-1987 and emphasize their 'real world' orientation and industry partnerships. *Regional Universities Network* is an alliance of regionally headquartered universities with a comparatively small postgraduate student base. The fourth grouping, *Innovative Research Universities,* is comprised of universities founded in the 1960s and 1970s to expand and reform tertiary education in Australia.

Each Australian university group has a specific history, priorities and emphases which are shared within the group and shape how the widening participation agenda manifests within groups and across the higher education sector more generally. An example can be seen in the achievement of targets for

Indigenous students. Tracing commencements and completions of Indigenous students between 2004 and 2008, Pechenkina, Kowal and Paradies (2011, p.63) identified a "dual system" in which some universities have high commencement numbers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students while others, often Group of Eight universities, have high completion rates. They speculate that high numbers of completions at Group of Eight universities may in part follow on from their recruitment of higher-performing students, due to entry requirements, along with higher staff to student ratios given the smaller numbers of enrolments and higher numbers of Indigenous students in research programs. Grant-Smith, Irmer and Mayes (2020), focussing on the period 2006 to 2016, suggest this pattern does not hold when proportional representation is taken into consideration and that the comparatively poor performance of the elite Group of Eight universities is concerning given the overall size of their student cohort.

Further segmenting data potentially provides greater insights into different patterns of results for sub-populations. However, segmentation of the data results in smaller cell sizes which increases the proportion of cells that have a cell size of less than five, which, cannot be reported as a condition of access to this data set. We utilized an assumption of two as the sum of the cells was closest to the actual sample size provided for larger groupings. Table 2 in the Appendix shows doctoral research completions by the university attended and university group for the year 2016. Due to low overall enrolments, non-aligned private universities are only reported at an aggregate level.

Although no university grouping achieved the 2.2 per cent representation target for Indigenous students a small number of individual universities did, though none were elite institutions and most were located in regional locations. No university or grouping achieved the revised target for students from a low SES background, although those with the highest proportional representation were all located in regional areas, while students with a disability had poor proportional representation relative to targets across all university groups. Thus, despite the historic non-achievement of widening participation targets, there any many within the higher education bureaucracy who continue to actively support a narrow definition of timely completion. However, the narrow timeframes for timely completion assume that students will experience no additional challenges as a result of their equity status. Furthermore, both the widening participation agenda and the push to timely completion fail to apply an intersectional understanding of disadvantage with both taking an individualized approach where the onus is on the student to meet expected milestones within set timeframes. As a result, these two policy agendas—widening participation and timely completion—are perhaps in tension with each other and may also negative impact achievement for equity students.

IMPACTS OF THE PRESSURE FOR TIMELY COMPLETION

The time pressure caused by the unrealistic or arbitrary completion deadlines typically associated with the timely completion agenda may be multiplied for students from groups that are already disadvantaged (Torka, 2020). A decontextualized push for timely completion, regardless of discipline and personal characteristics, risks increasing these differences. Thus, although there is general agreement that an extended study timeframe may increase the risk of non-completion (Spronken-Smith, Cameron, & Quigg, 2018), the ideal of timely completion is shaped by neither discipline nor student needs. There have been concerns since the mid-1990s regarding possible impacts on research quality as a result of reducing the duration of scholarships to three years and imposing a maximum period of extension of a further six months. For example, members of the ANU Graduate Degrees Working Party (1996, p.2)

received concerns that "in some disciplines and on some topics this time limit is incompatible with the University's expectation that doctoral students will produce a thesis at the highest international standard". Concerns were also raised regarding impacts not only "on the nature and quality" of research but also on "the amount of stress experienced by the students" (p. 2).

Impact on Psychological and Financial Wellbeing

The time and financial commitment required to complete a PhD makes it incredibly high stakes and even without temporal stressors doctoral programs are academically and mentally rigorous. As a result, PhD students have a high risk of developing mental health problems. A pre-COVID study found one in two PhD students experiences psychological distress and that a startling one in three is at risk of developing a psychiatric disorder (Levecque et al., 2017). The high levels of stress experienced by doctoral students are exacerbated by several factors including supervisory relationships, lack of transparency of institutional processes, workload, role conflict, financial insecurity, and uncertain career prospects (Deem, 2020; Mackie & Bates, 2019). Each of these factors can be further exacerbated by the push for timely completion. As financial stress and mental health are two of the key reasons that many PhD students do not finish their degree (Bekova, 2021; Horta, Cattenco & Meoli, 2019), it highly likely that the push to complete a higher research degree within an arbitrary and perhaps unreasonably short time frame is likely to have further impact on their mental health. While research has shown that while motivations for undertaking a PhD are varied (Skakni, 2018a,b) for some students from a disadvantaged background may feel a heightened sense of responsibility to service marginalized peoples and society (McGee et al., 2016) and to achieve on behalf of their communities can make the pressures on them to succeed even greater. Similarly, for students whose research is "a project of the self" the sense of failure and distress that can occur when failing to meet milestones can be significant (Watts, 2008).

Financial insecurity is one of the most significant stressors for PhD students (Grady et al., 2014). We argue that the push for timely completion exacerbates as the same completion timeframes are set for full-time students receiving a living stipend as those who are self-funded and therefore more likely to have had to undertake either academic (teaching, tutoring, research assistant) or non-academic paid work to support their studies. Most part-time students are self-funded as stipends and scholarships are typically reserved for full-time students and not all doctoral programs are welcoming of part-time students (Garner & Gopaul, 2012). There is mounting evidence that many supervisors are unwilling to take on part-time doctoral students due to their longer completion time, higher risk of non-completion (Watts, 2008) and perceived lack of commitment relative to full-time students (Curran, 1987). This can act to further disadvantaging and disenfranchising doctoral candidates who need to study part-time as a result of work or caring commitments.

Impact on Workload and Role Conflict

Expectations of a PhD candidate have changed as a result of the neoliberalisation of higher education which has seen a marked reduction in the number of post-doctoral or publication scholarships available, which used to provide the 'breathing space' at the end of the PhD candidature to write up the research as publications. This, combined with the ongoing casualisation of the workforce in higher education means that graduates have to come to the job market already established as published researchers with real-world work experience. In addition to publishing extensively during their research candidature

(Lei & Hu, 2019), candidates are also expected to complete internships to improve their employability (Valencia-Forrester, 2019). These expectations are in addition to the actual planning, conduct and write up of their research. Combined with constrained completion timeframes it is likely this development will only assist those with the capacity to take advantage of additional extra-curricular opportunities. These are unlikely to be students from equity groups and may further disadvantage them in the constricting post-doctoral labor market.

It is increasingly difficult to prioritize self-care in higher education environments and individuals (academics and students alike) are expected to self-sacrifice to meet their goals (Bryan & Blackman, 2019). Take for example the expectation that doctoral candidates make the completion of their thesis the number one priority in their life. Evidence of this can be seen in the lack of consideration of diversity in the arbitrary definition of the timeframe of the timely completion. As work–family–study conflict has been found to lead to stress in doctoral students (Levecque et al., 2017), it could also be argued that ideal of the timely completion assumes that PhD candidates do not have the encumbrance of caring for children or older parents and can work weekends and well into the night, prioritizing their doctoral studies above all else. However, this assumption does not reflect the characteristics of the contemporary doctoral cohort. Across OECD countries the median age at entry to doctoral programs is 29 on average with 60% of entrants aged between 26 and 37 years old; in Australia, the average of a student starting a doctoral program is 30 (OECD, 2019). This would suggest that it is highly likely that these students have dependents (either children or elderly parents, or both), and financial responsibilities such as mortgages which may require them to take on paid work during their doctorate.

Impact on Supervisors and Supervisory Relationships

The supervisory relationship is important in supporting or hindering doctoral completions and the possibility of timely completion (Manathunga, 2005). However, the increasing casualization of the academic workforce at the same time that enrolments in doctoral programs have increased has not only increased competition for graduates for a limited number of academic roles but has also increased workload pressures on the remaining academic supervisors (Robertson & Fyffe, 2019). Increasing enrolments in doctoral programs result in increased pressure on both doctoral candidates and supervisors (Ryan, Baik & Larcombe, 2021). Academic supervisors may feel pushed to "churn" through their PhD students, pressing them to complete quickly so that the next cohort can be put through. This results in a lack of care for the individual (Bowden & Green, 2014) as supervisors find they can't give each doctoral candidate the time they deserve to fully explore their ideas and to grow as individual thinkers.

The push toward timely completion results in supervisors becoming caught in the middle of trying to support their students and trying to meet and manage institutional performance expectations. Supervisors are at the frontline of dealing with the impacts on quality in terms of corner-cutting created by speed over consideration. Supervisors also have to exert considerable emotion work to support them through a sometimes uncaring bureaucracy ill-equipped to deal with personal tragedy and calls for compassion.

The push to push more students through more quickly detrimentally impacts supervisors' ability to perform other academic roles such as their own research and publishing, as well as diligently discharge required service and teaching responsibilities. This risks academics becoming (pre)occupied "not with the production and transmission of knowledge for social good but with becoming calculable, a commodity that can be measured by research exercise activities and student evaluations of teaching and satisfaction" (Page, 2020, p.586). This has seen some supervisors resort to the somewhat questionable,

and possibly unethical practice, of requiring that their students include them on all research publications regardless of their level of personal contribution to the development of the output (Martin, 2013), or the unquestionably unethical practice of 'ghost authoring', stealing the work of their students and publishing it as their own (Krook, 2018).

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Generosity, Kindness and Compassion in the Doctoral Bureaucracy

Fitzpatrick (2021) argues that more generosity is required in higher education to develop more open, responsive, and positive relationships, value collaboration over competition, and emphasize community over individualism. Generosity in this context also involves creating the space (and time) for "lingering with the ideas that are in front of us rather than continually pressing forward to where we want to go" (Fitzpatrick, 2021, p. 4).

However, just as managers in the neoliberal university rarely have a complete understanding of the impacts of decisions on workers (Sims, 2019), champions of the timely completion are rarely supervising academics, often do not hold a PhD themselves and have limited direct experience of the practice of higher degree research. Closed decision-making and poor procedural communications have been identified as problematic for doctoral candidates (Barry et al., 2018; Levecque et al., 2017). Training is required for *all* staff who engage with doctoral candidates, not just supervisors, to better understand, empathize with and respond to their needs (Hargreaves et al., 2017).

Some institutions have done better than others in supporting their doctoral students. For example, during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Melbourne elected to automatically extend candidature and stipends from three to three and a half years for students approaching the three-year mark without having to engage in the burdensome process of extension application (Le, 2021). It should be noted, however, that most other Australian universities elected to adopt a process where requests should be considered within existing policy provisions and application processes on a case-by-case basis (Le, 2021). Similarly, the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Climate Extremes based in the University of New South Wales elected to provide bridging funds after thesis submission for their PhD students once they had exhausted other financial supports. The scholarships required a tangible outcome to be prepared such as preparing a journal article from their thesis and were a recognition that these students were completing at a time of significant employment uncertainty and were typically not eligible for government support or able to return home as a result of border closures (Hart, 2020).

There are other examples, however, where bureaucratic structures, even those ostensibly designed to support equity students, have caused more harm. Stephanie Hannam-Swain (2018), a doctoral student with a disability, discusses her experiences of how university bureaucracy and red-tape can work to create unnecessary delays and extra work for students with a disability seeking to access available support. She also notes how the need to fit in medical appointments and other assessments required to receive or continue to receive supports all reduce the time available to work on her PhD but that there is little recognition of the impact of these impositions.

Making Space (and Time) for Doctoral Work and Supervision

The "selective admissions myth" which suggests that if the right students are selected at admission that attrition will be low and based on student choice not to continue places the burden of responsibility directly on students for failure to complete (or to complete on time) rather than on any structural or institutional constraints or contributions to this outcome (Rodwell & Neumann, 2008, p.66). Doctoral wellness is a similarly responsibilized process where students are counselled to practice self-care and where all responsibilities are foisted on students and supervisors allowing the institutions to adopt a position of all care and no responsibility. However, not all doctoral students have the same experience of stress. Hargreaves et al. (2017) found that female doctoral candidates have lower levels of wellbeing than their male peers and that a decline in wellbeing can be observed over time with later-stage students having lower levels of wellbeing. Some research focuses on the factors that enable PhD completion while maintaining wellness or resilience (Sverdlik et al., 2018) including through self-care (Driscoll, Leigh & Zamin, 2020) and the adoption of a completion mindset by both students and supervisors (Green & Bowden, 2012).

Wellbeing has become a personal responsibility focusing on health interventions such as positive psychology meditation, mindfulness, and relaxation (Barry et al., 2018; Burkhart, 2014; Kearns, Gardiner & Marshall, 2008; Marais et al., 2018). These kinds of approaches have tacit complicity in approaches that blame the 'victim' for being insufficiently robust, resilient, or organized and do not adequately recognize the structural violence of the doctoral system generally and the push for timely completion more specifically. Even Wright's (2016) idea that counselling should be routinely available for any PhD student at risk of non-completion exposes the instrumental approach which privileges institutional outcomes (completions) as the measure of need and success rather than individual student (or even supervisor) wellbeing.

The simplest solution to the problem of timely completion for students is to modify the expectations of what is achievable given the individual circumstances of each student (Bowden & Green 2014; Valencia-Forrester 2019). However, in the absence of a significant policy change, there are limits to the range of responses available to supervisors and students to achieve this without the support of the doctoral bureaucracy. What does need to change, however, are assumptions that doctoral students and their supervisors are at fault for not meeting completion deadlines through a combination of inefficiency and incompetence. The intellectual labor of doctoral work takes time and requires "having time and space to think, to consider new ideas, to link notions from various disciplines, to consider contrastic data in order to 'see' something new" (Green & Bowden, 2012, p.71).

A slowed approach to the PhD is crystallizing across higher education internationally (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Peseta, 2017; Ulmer, 2017). We likewise advocate, in so far as is possible a pushing back on temporal disciplining by going slow as "a way of resisting the temporal logics of neoliberalism" (Gill, 2018, p. 99). We do recognize that the choice to slow down is a constrained one that many doctoral candidates are powerless to make or to make without significant financial and/or career penalties. For this reason, slowing down supervision and study cannot be an individual act; "slow scholarship cannot just be about making individual lives better, but must also be about re-making the university" (Mountz et al., 2015) and a rejection of the sociodicy of competence in which greater production in minimum time is equated with a greater perception of merit (Walker, 2009). A continued focus on "fast supervision" (Green & Usher, 2003) focussed on timely completion above all else risks harm to current students and

their supervisors and may even impact prospective students as these imperatives shape decisions about which students are likely to achieve a calculated return on supervisory investment.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Ryan, Baik and Larcombe (2021) suggest that research students are most likely to benefit from a whole of institution approach to their wellbeing and from an academic research culture that values *all* of its members. Certainly, some supervisors can be neglectful or lacking in interpersonal skills, while others may freeride on their students work. But most supervisors are likely managing the best they can in an environment where their performance is based on student numbers, student publications and timely completions. This places pressure and stress on both students and supervisors with potentially negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing. Indeed, supervisors themselves are a high risk for conditions such as anxiety and depression (Urbina-Garcia, 2020). Further research is required on this in the same vein that research has considered the impacts of supervising work-integrated learning placements on both students and staff and demonstrated that the wellbeing of each is deeply connected in a Mobius configuration (Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2020).

Future research is also needed into practical ways that underserved students in research higher degrees can be helped not only to start and complete their studies but also to thrive in the process. Doctoral candidates need to be asked what support they require and the key sources of stress (Ryan, Baik & Larcombe, 2021). However, it is imperative they are asked what they need in a way that does not suggest that they have failed in some way – failure to meet an unfair standard should not be seen as failure. Indeed, it could be argued that in some respects the system has created and reinforces an arbitrary standard that sets them up to fail.

CONCLUSION

Doctoral students matter and make enormous contributions to their institutions. It has been estimated that PhD students provide more than half (Barry, et al., 2018) of the research conducted and one-third of the publication output of universities (Larivière, 2012). Despite this, the neoliberal agenda in higher education has not resulted in better outcomes for PhD students from historically disadvantaged groups in Australia and arguably this has been compounded by the global shift for research degrees to be achieved in a timely fashion (Aina, 2015; Shariff et al., 2015). It is important to acknowledge the impact of neoliberal choices and influences in higher education, particularly on students from equity groups beyond those at an undergraduate level. By examining the reasons behind decisions such as the push for timely completion, the sector will be able to make more informed decisions about its practices and ensure that inclusivity does not stop at enrolment. In this way, more students could be winners rather than losers in their achievement of a higher education and future employability.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research builds on data collection funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Doctoral Degree: Includes Doctoral of Philosophy (PhD) and professional doctorates (e.g., Doctor of Education).

Managerialism: A belief that the methods of professional managers are valuable, and sees society as constructed by the actions of organizations.

Neoliberalism: A belief that competition is at the heart of all decisions, and that the market should be allowed to determine all choices.

PhD: The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree is usually the highest academic qualification in a field, usually achieved through extensive research on a specific topic.

Timely Completion: The expectation that a doctoral degree will be completed within a predetermined period as determined by the government, university, or other funding body. In Australia completing a doctorate by research within three years is considered timely completion.

APPENDIX

Table 2. Doctoral research completions by select equity group membership, 2016 (DET, 2018)

	All students	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students		Students from a low SES background		Students with a disability	
	N	N	%	n	%	n	%
ATN Total	**1187**	**8**	**0.7%**	**48**	**4.0%**	**18**	**1.5%**
Curtin University	261	<5	0.8%	8	3.1%	<5	0.8%
Queensland University of Technology	303	0	0.0%	13	4.3%	5	1.7%
RMIT University	246	<5	0.8%	6	2.4%	6	2.4%
University of South Australia	199	<5	1.0%	19	9.5%	5	2.5%
University of Technology Sydney	178	<5	1.1%	2	1.1%	0	0.0%
Go8 Total	**4465**	**12**	**0.3%**	**115**	**2.6%**	**108**	**2.4%**
Monash University	716	<5	0.3%	22	3.1%	17	2.4%
Australian National University	371	0	0.0%	6	1.6%	14	3.8%
University of Adelaide	333	0	0.0%	7	2.1%	9	2.7%
University of Melbourne	755	<5	0.3%	19	2.5%	18	2.4%
University of Queensland	731	<5	0.3%	19	2.6%	8	1.1%
University of Sydney	679	<5	0.3%	24	3.5%	26	3.8%
University of Western Australia	349	<5	0.6%	8	2.3%	9	2.6%
University of New South Wales	531	<5	0.4%	10	1.9%	7	1.3%
IRU Total	**1092**	**10**	**0.9%**	**44**	**4.0%**	**28**	**2.6%**
Charles Darwin University	32	<5	6.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Flinders University	172	0	0.0%	9	5.2%	5	2.9%
Griffith University	333	<5	0.6%	10	3.0%	10	3.0%
James Cook University	134	<5	1.5%	2	1.5%	<5	1.5%
La Trobe University	181	<5	1.1%	6	3.3%	7	3.9%
Murdoch University	110	<5	1.8%	6	5.5%	<5	1.8%
University of Western Sydney	130	0	0.0%	11	8.5%	<5	1.5%
Non-Aligned Total	**1780**	**17**	**1.0%**	**83**	**4.7%**	**47**	**2.6%**
Australian Catholic University	57	<5	3.5%	<5	3.5%	<5	3.5%
Charles Sturt University	99	<5	2.0%	<5	2.0%	<5	2.0%
Deakin University	259	<5	0.8%	15	5.8%	5	1.9%
Edith Cowan University	67	0	0.0%	<5	3.0%	<5	3.0%
Macquarie University	284	0	0.0%	<5	0.7%	5	1.8%
Swinburne University of Technology	121	<5	1.7%	<5	1.7%	<5	1.7%
University of Canberra	65	<5	3.1%	0	0.0%	<5	3.1%
University of Newcastle	228	5	2.2%	15	6.6%	8	3.5%
University of Tasmania	198	0	0.0%	16	8.1%	5	2.5%
University of Wooloongong	235	<5	0.9%	12	5.1%	10	4.3%
Victoria University	118	0	0.0%	9	7.6%	<5	1.7%
Bond University	23	0	0.0%	<5	8.7%	<5	8.7%
University of Divinity	18	0	0.0%	<5	11.1%	0	0.0%
University of Notre Dame Australia	8	0	0.0%	<5	25.0%	0	0.0%
RUN Total	**359**	**6**	**1.7%**	**28**	**7.8%**	**6**	**1.7%**
Central Queensland University	57	<5	3.5%	6	10.5%	0	0.0%
Federation University of Australia	24	0	0.0%	<5	8.3%	0	0.0%
Southern Cross University	60	<5	3.3%	<5	3.3%	<5	3.3%
University of New England	111	0	0.0%	11	9.9%	<5	1.8%
University of Southern Queensland	79	<5	2.5%	<5	2.5%	<5	2.5%
University of the Sunshine Coast	28	0	0.0%	5	17.9%	0	0.0%
Grand Total	**8883**	**53**	**0.6%**	**318**	**3.6%**	**207**	**2.3%**