

Optimising HDR completions: times | rates | strategies?

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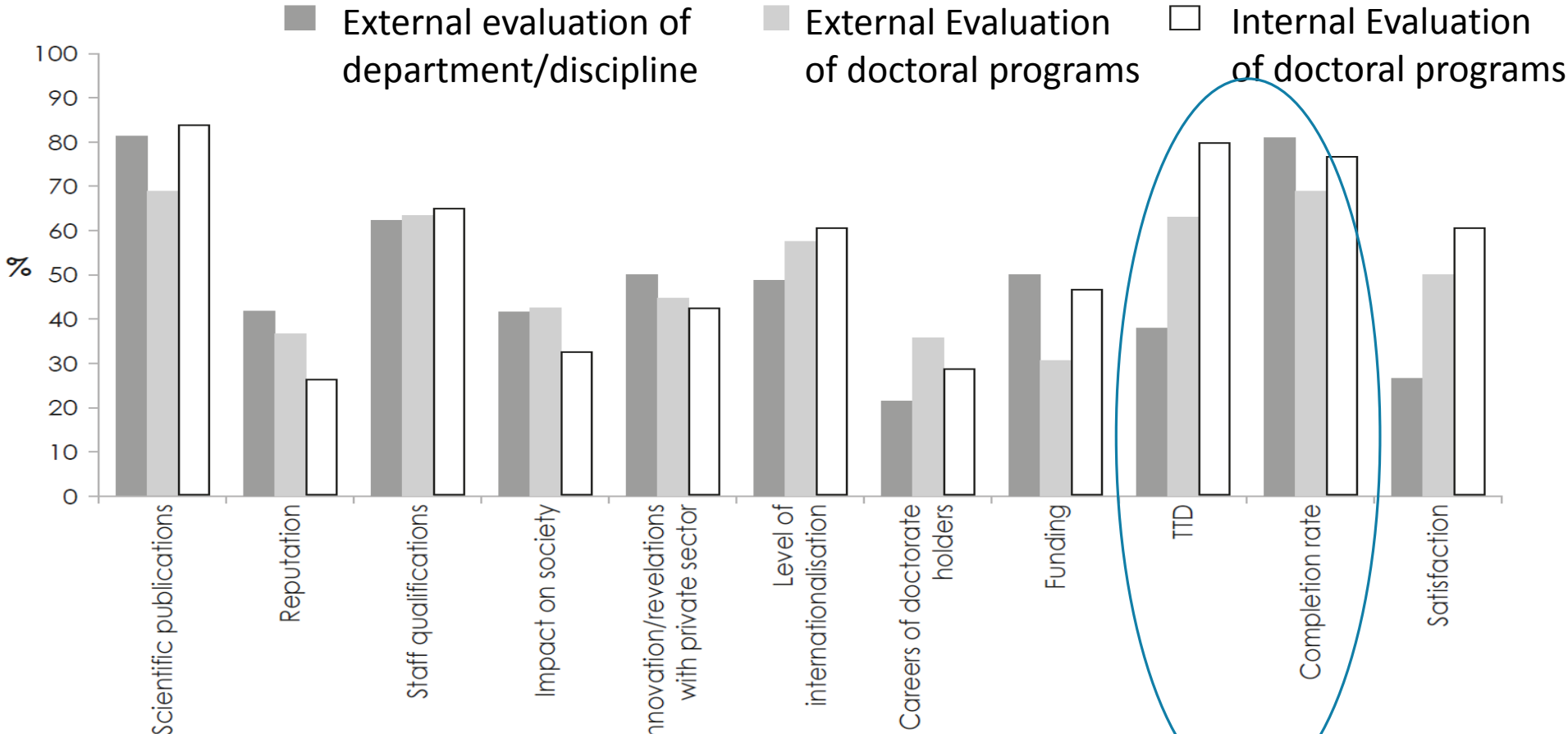
DEAN, GRADUATE RESEARCH JCU



Why are completion rates and times important?

- Indicator of performance – efficiency
- Quality metric?
- Benchmark
- Funding driver
 - Australia (RTP – % weighted completions –institutional level)
 - UK (Research Councils disciplinary/departmental level)

Completions rates and times widely used to evaluate doctoral programs in Europe



Source: Byrne et al. (2013)

Inter-method reliability – completion rates

- Ratios completions to commencements
- Cohort analysis
- Cumulative completions

Comparison of rankings using different completion ratio measurements

Australian Institution	3 year moving average completions to commencements	Ratio of completions to commencements over 10 years	Average ratio of completions to commencements over 10 years
A	1	1	1
B	2	4	3
C	2	3	2
D	4	2	2
E	5	5	5

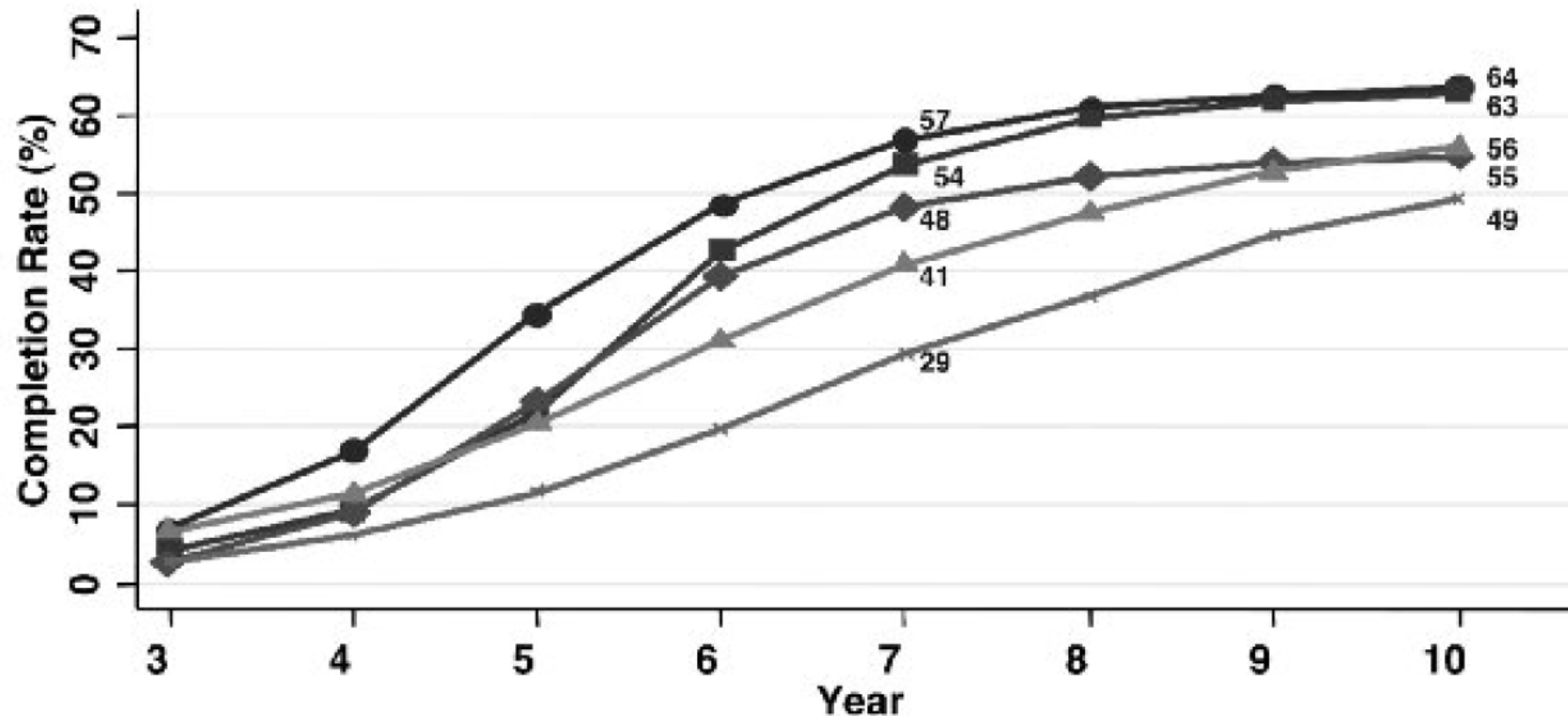
Inter-method reliability - completion times

When does completion occur?

1. First thesis submission date
2. Receipt of examination reports recommending changes
3. Receipt of final examination results recommending pass
4. Final date of enrolment
5. Date when passing grade recorded – admission date
6. Degree conferral date

Palmer (2014): 4 Australian institutions recorded 14 completion events

Patterns of cumulative completion vary by broad field of study



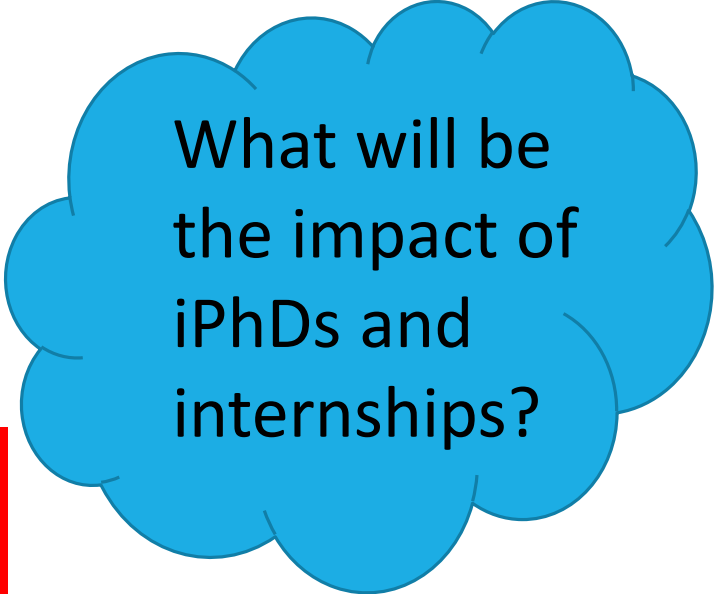
US PhD Completion Project (2008)
49,000 completions across 30 institutions over 10 years



Factors to consider in comparing completion rates and times across and within institutions

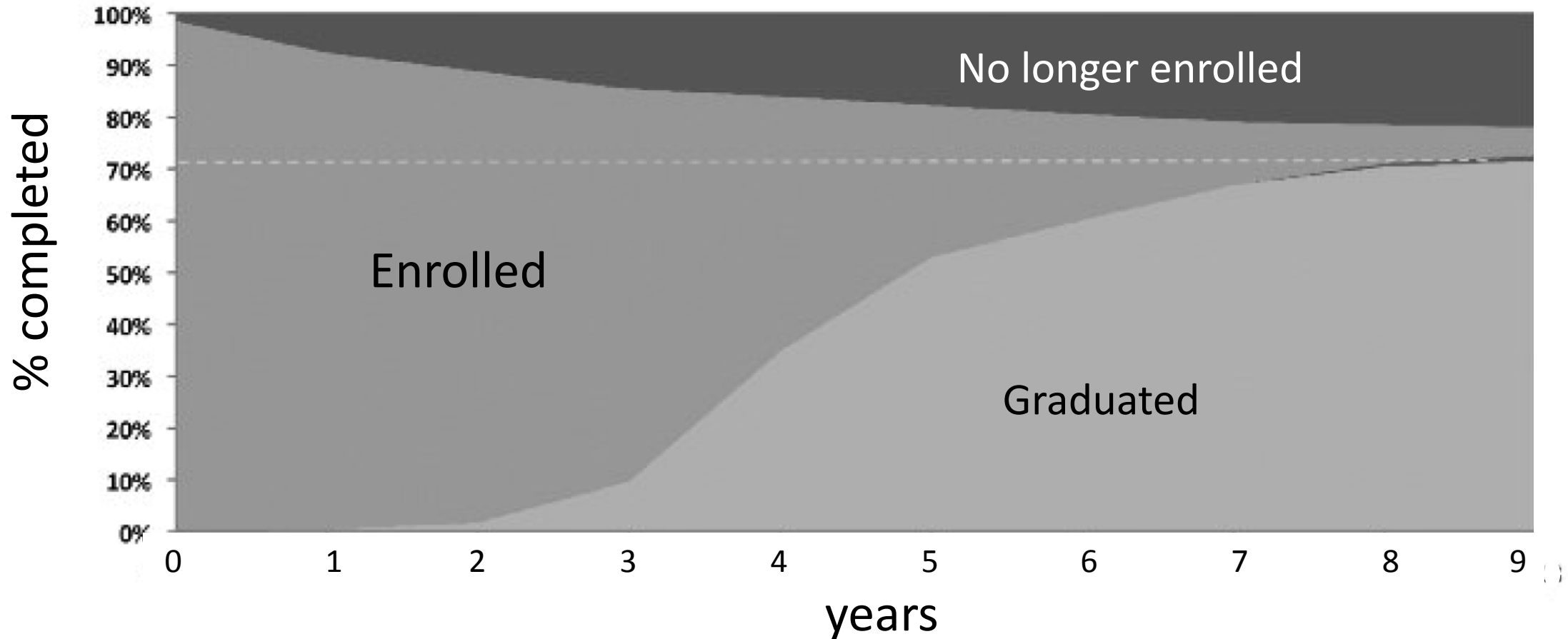
- Proportion of:
 - part-time HDR candidates
 - international candidates
 - stipend scholarship holders
- Requirement for continuous registration
- Disciplinary mix
- Job market for particular discipline

Has ACOLA Implementation Committee made recommendations?



What will be the impact of iPhDs and internships?

When is enough?



*Cumulative program status as of July 2013

Source: Unpublished data from a research intensive university in Australia

Palmer (2016)

Improve completion rates and times: structural factors

- Formal milestones
- Transferable skills training
- Oral examinations ???
- Changing the entry pathway – Masters of Research
- Compulsory coursework – Integrated 4 year PhDs
- Supervisor registration and training



Supported by
longitudinal study in
UK
Humphrey (2012)

Improving completion times: candidate assistance and rewards

- Cash bonuses to candidates who submit thesis on time X
- Allowing candidates who submit before end of scholarship period to continue to receive stipend to write papers
- Publication grants after thesis submission
- Completion 'coaching'
- 'Completion Space'

Improving completion times – candidate penalties

- Charge fees for overtime candidates
 - 22/35 HEPS charge in 2017
 - 32% international only; 68% international + domestic
 - Most charge standard tuition fees without phase in period
 - Two universities charge reduced fees
- Terminate candidature after defined time
 - In good standing – re-enrol to submit ??

Improving completion times –changing supervisor culture

- Convincing supervisors of validity of changes to PhD:
 - ‘end it itself’
 - ‘training person to operate like a researcher’
 - pathway multiple careers not just academia
- Separate publications from thesis submission while encouraging publication-based thesis

Improving completion times –managing supervisor performance

- Register of supervisors
- Supervisor training
- Panel supervision
- Supervisory expectations at various levels
- Supervisor performance reports
- No workload allowance for supervision of over-time candidates (what about rescue supervision?)
- Payments to Internal Research Allocations of Supervisors

Perverse outcomes ???

- Negative impact on mental health on candidates
- Unwillingness to accept candidates with non-standard backgrounds
- Reduction in 'blue sky' projects
- Premature thesis submission
- Inappropriate level of supervisory contribution to thesis
- Choosing 'easy' examiners
- Inflexible target-driven punishments – sample size problem for supervisors, small disciplines, departments (as now recognized in UK)



Law at
Cambridge
and Classics
at Oxford
blackballed

Support for HDR Completions

Attract

Well-prepared candidates doing PhD appropriate projects

Match advisors, projects and candidate

Support

Structure
Skills training
Coursework

Scholarships

Write-up support

Manage

Candidate performance and expectations

Supervise

Supervisors trained & re-trained technically and culturally

Supervisors performance managed

Enable

Clear budgetary links with performance at sub-institutional level

Primarily Academic

Managerial/Budgetary

Improving HDR completions requires a cocktail rather than a magic bullet



Questions?