

Reconceptualising the New Zealand PhD in English—Fit for What and Whose Purpose?

Parts of this article were first presented as a short conference paper called, “The New Zealand PhD: Who wants it?” at the Innovations and Links: Research Management & Development and Postgraduate Education Conference, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand, November 2001. The article also draws on research findings from the PhD thesis of one of the authors, for whom the other author was the principal supervisor.

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ABSTRACT: *The nature of doctoral programmes is being widely re-examined throughout the world, including Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, where the PhD is already a comprehensive and, in many cases, considerably longer degree than its New Zealand counterpart.*

What does the New Zealand PhD offer candidates and what should it offer them? Using the discipline of English as a case study, this paper considers the past, the present and—most important—the future of the PhD in New Zealand. It identifies a tension between the degree’s role as the sine qua non for an academic career and its usefulness as a qualification for employment in other fields. It also provides some suggestions for a reconceptualisation of the degree to prepare graduates more effectively for their futures—whether as academics or outside the university—through processes such as: co-authored publications; induction; thesis support groups; the introduction of course work and/or seminars; and the provision of teaching opportunities.

KEYWORDS: *PhD; English studies; postgraduate training*

INTRODUCTION

Internationally, doctoral programmes are coming under increasing scrutiny, as governments, institutions, academics, and students question the “traditional” PhD’s fitness for purpose, and new doctorates threaten its hegemony. Appendices 1–3

summarise various relevant projects, conferences, initiatives, research projects, and government-commissioned reports from the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), and Australia. Commonplace on all three continents are:

- a concern with the doctorate's suitability as training for both academic careers and careers beyond the university;
- a focus on attrition/completion rates (which are particularly poor in the humanities); and
- the proliferation of "professional doctorates".

The PhD is, according to Noble (1994) an "academic passport" with international reciprocity. To ensure that this reciprocity is not threatened and the New Zealand PhD remains internationally acceptable (Tyler, 1998) that has "international currency" (Tertiary Education Advisory Commission, 2001, p. 22), New Zealand needs to start examining the practices, policies, and procedures that govern doctoral education here. This article goes some of the way towards providing the kind of micro-study that Burgess (1997) believes postgraduate education needs, and, using the discipline of English as a case study, it considers the following: the history, nature, and purpose of the PhD; the experiences and aspirations of recent New Zealand PhDs in English; and the possibilities for reform in a New Zealand context.

HISTORY OF THE PhD

For as long as there have been universities, that is, since the middle of the 12th century, there have been doctors teaching in them. Initially, there were four distinct doctorates, corresponding to the four traditional faculties: Theology, Law, Medicine, and Philosophy (the least prestigious of the four). The award of a doctorate evidently constituted an internationally portable licence to teach in the appropriate faculty.

Until the beginning of the 19th century, universities were primarily teaching institutions, and the word "doctor" kept its original meaning of "teacher". Responsibility for the development of the modern research university is usually ascribed to Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose reform of the University of Berlin from 1810 involved a privileging of the hitherto despised Philosophy Faculty, which was the appropriate context for *Wissenschaft*, the holistic pursuit of knowledge favoured by Humboldt and his associates. "The idea that differing disciplines (e.g., today's natural Sciences and 'Humanities') should have different methods and reigning assumptions was foreign to them" (McClelland, 1980, p. 123). And so the PhD became a badge of research excellence across a wide range of disciplines, a position it still holds today.

But, although the new PhD focused on research, teaching was, and has remained, an important part of the German system: "Doctoral education in Germany is not a separate stage. It is rather the dovetailing of education and professional work.

Students are mostly employed as junior members of staff' (Baldauf, 1998, p. 161). Moreover, Germany quickly added a further qualification, the *Habilitation*, as a *sine qua non* for aspirants to a Lehrstuhl, a word which we generally translate as "[professorial] chair", but whose first element ("Lehr-") comes from the German verb "lehren", meaning "to teach". The *Habilitation* generally consists not only of a second extended thesis, but also of teaching demonstrations.

The Humboldt-style PhD was appropriated by the USA (from 1861), the UK (from 1917), and thereafter by most English-speaking countries. "The dovetailing of education and professional work" was sometimes lost in transition, however, especially in the UK, where the PhD was conceived simply as a research degree, and all that was required of the student was a thesis on an original topic, and an oral defense or examination, the *viva voce*. In contrast, the North American version was much more elaborate; the PhD established at Yale in 1861 required the following of its students:

- A. Specialized courses and residency of at least one year, including at least three years of doctoral enrollment.
- B. Language requirement demonstrating reading knowledge of one or two foreign languages.
- C. Qualifying or comprehensive examination.
- D. Dissertation.
- E. Oral examination in defense of dissertation and subject specialization. (Buchanan & Herubel, 1995, p. 3)

Conspicuously absent from this list, however, was, and still is, any explicit attention to teaching.

Neither the USA nor the UK requirements have changed significantly over the years, but in both countries the PhD has recently come under pressure from two distinct sources. On the one hand, some of those who regard the degree as an apprenticeship for an academic career have begun to call for a component devoted to the theory and practice of teaching, while on the other hand, doctorates that are more clearly fit for purpose than Humboldt's *Wissenschaft* have been introduced for professionals seeking advancement outside the academy. Of course such "professional doctorates" were never completely superseded by the PhD. The Doctor of Divinity (or Theology), for example, escaped the hegemony of Humboldt's PhD in some quarters, and many universities retain what Park (2005, p. 192) calls "higher doctorates", such as the DLitt and the DSc, for the purpose of acknowledging alumni who have distinguished themselves in specific fields (not necessarily academic). Awards of these doctorates are, however, sufficiently rare for us to omit them from this study. For different reasons we have also put aside honorary doctorates (usually the DLitt and the DSc) and the qualifications that allow medical practitioners to call themselves

“doctors”. Insofar as our investigation takes us outside the PhD, it is the “professional doctorates” (e.g., Massey University’s DBA and EDD) that interest us.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE UK, AUSTRALIA, AND THE USA

In the UK, “the research element of the doctorate remains the distinctive characteristic and essential cornerstone” of the PhD (UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE), 1996, p. 15). Even so, there have been many calls from different quarters for an overhaul of the degree. Much discussion, particularly in humanities (with which we are primarily concerned) has focused on how much research *training* the PhD should provide (Arts and Humanities Research Board, 2004; Burgess, 1997; Hasrati, 2005; Leonard, Becker, & Coate, 2005; Park, 2005; UKCGE, 2000). Given that “postgraduate research education is the principal vehicle for training teachers in HE” (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 1996) there has also been a call for better training in teaching for PhD students in the humanities (UKCGE, 1999). Litvack’s 2004 English Subject Centre-funded project on professionalising the PhD in the English Department at Queen’s University, Belfast, and the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CELT) on Preparing for Academic Practice in the University of Oxford notwithstanding—this has provoked less discussion than the call for the development of research skills.

Similar concerns are expressed in Australia. For example, Diamond (1994) notes that the degree pattern does not include course work, examinations, student networks, or a thesis committee. Cullen (1993) notes that a PhD, while usually necessary for securing an academic position, is not a guarantee for such a career. Various Australian conferences and government-commissioned reports have called for attention to the attrition and completion rates of PhD students, particularly in the humanities (Bourke, Holbrook, & Lovat, 2004; Latona & Browne, 2001; McWilliam et al., 2002; Neumann, 2003), arguing that more structure and support are required if humanities PhD students are to complete their degrees in a timely fashion, and graduate as fit for employment, whether in the academy or elsewhere. Considerable attention has also been paid in Australia to the proliferation in the last few decades of the “professional doctorates”, and, in more recent years, to what the PhD might learn from these newer counterparts in terms of programme structure, support for students, focus on employability, and fitness for purpose (Green, 2002; McWilliam et al., 2002). Other concerns in Australia include the development of various skills—research, IT, communication, for example (Dinham & Scott, 1999; Latona & Browne, 2001; McWilliam et al., 2002)—and the socialisation and support of PhD students (Malfroy, 2005; Neumann, 2003; Pearson, 2005).

In the USA, broader training for an academic career has long been an explicit focus of the majority of PhD programmes in English. The Modern Language Association (MLA) (1997) defines the PhD as “a degree primarily designed to prepare

candidates for teaching on a postsecondary level”, and recent calls for reform have focused on the need to acknowledge that “preparation for research is a necessary but insufficient qualification for academic employment” (Gaff & Lambert, 1996, p. 38; see also the projects listed in Appendix 1). The 2001 *Overview of Doctoral Education Studies and Reports*, published by the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID), is particularly concerned with attrition and the time taken to complete (as is the Council of Graduate Schools PhD Completion Project), as well as the preparation for academic, and other, careers (CID, 2001). These concerns were taken up by the English departments involved in the CID’s two “convenings” in 2003 and 2004, at which English department academics and students raised the following as real issues:

- excessive teaching loads for PhD students;
- the excessive number of required texts and courses;
- the nature and purpose of examinations, both oral and written, and;
- a desire for more interdisciplinarity and collaboration (Golde & Bueschel, 2003).

Critics in all three countries are also concerned about the future careers of PhD holders, and see a widening disparity between what the PhD trains its graduates for (if indeed, it is training them at all) and what they may, in reality, end up doing once they have completed their degree (Golde & Dore, 2001; Gaff & Lambert, 1996; Litvack, 2004; Malfroy, 2005; MLA, 2003; Neumann, 2003; Pearson, 2005; UKCGE, 1996, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

Taking a qualitative case study approach, this article provides some insight into the PhD experience for students in New Zealand university English departments. The early phase of the project, in the late 1990s, involved multiple methods of data collection, including questionnaires sent to all New Zealand university academic staff in departments of English, as well as heads of department (HoDs) of the six English departments in New Zealand universities. Focus groups were held with 16 English academics at three departments, and semistructured interviews were conducted with three HoDs, two recent PhD graduates, and the six heads of academic development units. (Methodological and demographic information for this phase of the research is provided in much more depth in Sutherland, 1999.)

Then, in 2001, seven semistructured interviews were conducted with PhD students and recent PhD graduates at three New Zealand university English departments. Participants were sought, with the permission of the HoDs, by means of email invitations sent to postgraduate lists in the three departments. Ethics approval of the process was granted by the principal researcher’s university. Confidentiality was assured and all interviewees gave their consent to participate in writing. Six interviews

were conducted face-to-face in the interviewee's office or home, and one was conducted by email. Demographic information is provided below.

These interviews were followed up in late 2005, when the researchers contacted all seven participants again to get updates on PhD progress, job situations, and further reflections on their PhD experience. All but one of the participants responded and some of their responses are incorporated throughout this article, although a more in-depth study will take place in 2006, which will, eventually, provide a snapshot of a decade of the English PhD in New Zealand universities. Thus, this paper reports on research that is still in progress, and any conclusions are tempered by the limited amount of data gathered to date. In this article, we present an historical overview and contemporary summary, both of which are currently lacking in New Zealand education research, especially in regard to the discipline of English. We hope it will provide an exploratory starting point for future consideration of the New Zealand PhD.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

We interviewed four women and three men whose ages in 2001 ranged from 26–54 years. Three had recently completed their PhDs, and the others were in various stages of their PhDs: two had just completed their first year, and the other two were in their fifth year of part-time study, and third year of full-time study, respectively. By 2005, six had completed their PhD theses, with one still to be examined, and one still to finish the thesis itself. Only one had been a part-time student for her entire PhD. One other started out part-time, but spent the last two years full-time on his PhD. The rest were all full-time students throughout, but four of them took some time off during the course of their degree, from three to nine months. Reasons for these suspensions of enrolment included: adopting children; working full-time as an assistant lecturer; other work commitments; and health issues. All seven interviewees had responsibilities other than their PhDs, including tutoring and other part-time work, administrative duties in halls of residence, and parenting.

FINDINGS

The Nature and Purpose of a New Zealand PhD in English

In New Zealand, a PhD in English is probably best summed up by the following quotation from an English department graduate handbook:

[A] PhD thesis 'demonstrates the candidate's ability to carry out independent research' and must also be 'a significant contribution to the knowledge or understanding of a field of study.' As well as intelligence and research aptitude, the degree requires considerable dedication and tenacity on the candidate's part. Though most university teachers have a

PhD, the degree does not automatically lead to a university position. The primary reason for embarking on a PhD should be your own commitment to a particular research interest. (Victoria University of Wellington, 1998, p. 30)

The New Zealand English academics surveyed for this research project were, however, rather ambivalent about the purpose of the New Zealand PhD in English. Some were clear that its purpose is to train academics: “If it be not, I know not what it be” (SL).¹ Others felt that the purpose of their department’s PhD is to train *intellectuals*, not necessarily academics, and to “encourage and facilitate scholarship” (L), “open doors” (ST), and “instil a capacity for research” (L).

Many English academics in New Zealand believed that their PhD students aspired to careers in academia, and all of the students interviewed indicated a desire for an academic career, but did not necessarily regard that desire as a realistic aspiration. Similarly, a UK survey found that 65% of PhD students there wanted an academic career (Lueddeke, 1997); in Australia the figure in a Melbourne survey was 73% (Powles, 1988), while in the USA, Golde & Dore (2001) reported that 79.7% of English doctoral students were primarily interested in a faculty career. Unfortunately, the current state of the university job market worldwide, particularly in humanities, suggests that the majority of these aspirants will be disappointed. Metcalfe (2004) claims that the UK doctorate is “becoming a non-vocational qualification (over 50% of doctoral graduates do not have a research or teaching position as their first destination)” (p. 3) and “only five to eight percent of British PhDs hold permanent (tenured) academic positions ten years after they received their degrees” (Newhouse, 2001, p. 1). In the USA, the CID (2001) estimates that at least half (with considerable variation by discipline) of new PhD recipients will not enter academic careers (p. 5) and the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Professionalization of PhDs reports that “the odds of new PhDs in language and literature finding full-time academic employment in their fields immediately after graduation have been no better than 50–50 and are often lower, while the odds of finding full-time tenure-track position in the five years after earning the degree have been about two out of three” (2003, p. 1). Statistics are no better in Australia where Pearson (2005) cites an Australian Graduate Careers Council report claiming that “less than 40% are now expected to work in the higher education sector” (p. 125).

Aspirations of New Zealand PhDs in English

Interviews with current PhD students and recent PhD graduates in English in New Zealand have revealed that most aspire to an academic career in some form, but acknowledge that the chances of achieving this are slim:

I’m interested in an academic job *now*, if I could get one! (Brandon)

Yes! Have I got a hope in hell of getting one? No! (Donna)

Others are more ambivalent:

I am not making an academic career my sole focus. If a suitable academic job comes along, fine. If not, I'll do something else, perhaps publishing, editing or writing. (Andrea)

One respondent says that she wants to “start publishing papers that have been generated by [her PhD]”, and that she “can’t manage without teaching”, but still claims, “I’m not doing this so I’ll get a job. It’s a different kind of motivation. I’m doing this because I passionately want to do this as a subject... I think I’ll go into retirement this way” (Brenda).

While Brenda, because of her age and financial situation, has the option of choosing retirement upon completion of her PhD, the other interviewees all had hopes of securing full-time employment in a university department. Two, both of whom had completed their PhDs in 2001 when the first interviews took place, have already done so. One has a tenured academic position in a New Zealand university English department, and the other has a non-academic teaching position in a university department other than English. Another had a limited term part-time position in an English department while finishing her PhD part-time in 2001, but has since ended up working in a non-academic support services role in another university. One was unemployed (“taking a rest”) in 2001, but seeking work in an English department. He managed a stint as a visiting fellow at an overseas university in 2003, but has been unable to secure academic employment since. Another tutored part-time while finishing his PhD, and is now working for a private tertiary establishment as a writer/editor.

Experiences of Current/Recent New Zealand PhDs in English

Teaching Experience

All interviewees have acquired varying degrees of teaching experience while undertaking their PhDs, from ongoing part-time tutoring, to one-off lectures, to helping plan and co-ordinate whole courses. Motivation varied from needing money, to wanting contact with students, to actively pursuing the kind of preparation they saw as necessary for an academic career:

I had decided that I wanted to be an academic, and I wanted a good academic CV. I actually set myself some goals for teaching and for publication. You know, try and ... get a paper published each year ... and teach these courses and do some lectures. (Steve)

PhD students in New Zealand English departments acquire teaching experience on an *ad hoc* basis, not as a result of their departments' predetermined, formal requirement that teaching will feature in their PhD programme. They are usually given tutoring opportunities, but there is no expectation that they *will* teach, and students cannot always assume that they will be invited to do so:

In my case, I'm motivated to [seek tutoring opportunities] but ... I'm sure there are many PhD students that don't go specifically hustling.
(Brandon)

Rather, as one academic described the situation in his department, "they have a kind of built-in right if they want to ask us for teaching. We would feel sort of obliged to let *them*" (SL). Such an obligation stems from a variety of issues: pedagogical; financial (for student *and* department); professional; and social.

Many English departments see benefits for *undergraduate* students in the use of PhD students as tutors:

We do see it as good for our students to have contact with graduate students who have been through the system, and have got to that stage ... [It is important] to have younger teachers who are seen as more accessible, especially I think at first year level. (AP)

There are also financial benefits for the department in allowing PhD students to teach. PhD students cost less to employ than full-time academics, and many can be employed to teach first- and second-year level courses, thus freeing up full-timers for teaching at higher levels. It is not just the department that reaps the financial benefits, however, and at least two HoDs said that one of the main reasons they offer tutorial teaching to PhD students is to help them out financially:

We have certain criteria according to which we appoint tutors. And when all these criteria are satisfied, we will then give preference to those who are graduate students so as to help these students financially. (HoD)

A colleague of this HoD contradicted him, however, when he stated that the reasoning behind offering PhD students teaching work was largely professional:

The policy we have for the appointment of tutors is that preference is given to people who are doing MA and PhDs, and it is regarded as part of their professionalization—that was the term that was actually used when the department was working out that policy. (SL)

Alongside a desire to help their PhD students develop professional skills, many New Zealand English departments offer their PhD students tutoring opportunities as a means of combatting the loneliness many experience working only on a thesis: “We encourage them to do a little bit of tutoring, partly to overcome the isolation of being a postgraduate” (HoD).

Isolation

Every single PhD student interviewed remarked on the sense of isolation and lack of social contact experienced during the PhD process. Some revelled in it:

I quite like working on my own; those who don't may not enjoy the experience ... make sure you enjoy research, writing, and working on your own before you start. (Andrea)

I think solitude is essential because you're searching and thinking. I mean, [the PhD] isn't a social activity. It is fundamentally a research activity and you can't constantly be distracted by other people and other concerns. So there has to be a certain element of solitude and PhD students have to be able to cope with that solitude. (Dylan)

Others felt let down by it:

You're in your own world a lot, and what are the skills that you're developing? In some ways, they're quite anti-social. (Brandon)

Most would have appreciated more support from their departments, in terms of advice, guidance, socialising, finding funding, understanding the processes involved in completing a PhD, professional development, and the opportunity to interact with other PhD students:

I feel like I've never really relied on my department for anything. I've relied on my supervisor and the rest I have done myself. It can be a struggle to be here. (Kelly)

I wish I had been given a clearer idea about what it takes to get a job in academe. A lot of older academics who started their careers in the good old days of tenure for life don't seem to realise how competitive academe now is, and how politically charged the selection processes have become, and they don't therefore communicate the difficulty of the situation to you. Being left on your own for three or four years to do your research is fine as far as it goes, but it doesn't prepare you for the academic world waiting for you after you get your doctorate. (Dylan)

Research and Publication

While it is easy to sympathise with Kelly and Dylan's predicaments, isolation has long been a hallmark of academic life, particularly in the humanities (Latona & Browne, 2001; Pearson, 2005). A survey of the research outputs of five of the six New Zealand English departments for the period 2000–2003 provides overwhelming support for Dylan's view that "solitude is essential" for researchers in the humanities (see Table 1). For the purpose of this exercise, only outputs focused on English *literature* were considered; research in associated fields (e.g., linguistics, media studies, and film) was excluded.

TABLE 1. English Literature Research Outputs from NZ Universities: 2000–2003*

Total outputs	Solo outputs	Total collaborative outputs	Collaborative outputs involving supervisor and graduate student(s)
578	537	41	5

* It should be noted that discrepancies among the different universities' presentations of their outputs in these pre-PBRF days mean that apples are combined with oranges (and other fruits) in our calculation of total outputs given above. These discrepancies derive not only from different decisions about what constitutes an output, but also from reporting systems that are not equally user-friendly. Victoria University of Wellington and Massey University websites list all outputs in a central database, organized by departments/schools, whereas Otago and Waikato list theirs in the personal web-pages of individual staff. Until 2003 Canterbury listed its outputs (by departments) in the annual *Calendar* (which was published in the preceding year, so that the outputs were at least a year older than the *Calendar* date); in 2003 Canterbury adopted the Otago/Waikato system. Auckland's outputs for the period appear to be inaccessible and could not be incorporated in our statistics.

As these figures show, there can be no doubt that English academics write and publish in "solitude", and collaboration between supervisor and student appears—especially when one considers that three of the five instances involved the same pair—all but non-existent.

DISCUSSION: POSSIBILITIES FOR REFORM

Kelly's "struggle" may thus constitute (as Dylan recognized) an "essential" component in the training of would-be academics in the humanities. Whether this ethos of isolation is desirable is another matter, of course. One argument against it is the likelihood that an isolated graduate student will not develop the communication skills that an effective teacher needs (except, perhaps, for the supervision of doctoral students—a vicious circle). A more pragmatic argument against isolation is that a considerable amount of research in the humanities is currently being lost. Of the seven PhD students interviewed for this survey, a few have gone on to publish: Dylan, Kelly, and Steve have been the most successful, with books, book chapters, journal articles,

and entries in literary dictionaries between them; Brenda has a contract to contribute a chapter to a forthcoming book, but very few of them published any refereed work from their theses while still students.

Co-authored Publications

Now that the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) has linked research outputs to funding, universities will surely be trying to ensure that this lost research gets published. While graduates who do not proceed to an academic position can contribute only their completed theses to their institution's profile, their research can find its way into PBRF profiles if students and supervisors collaborate on joint publications. Such collaborations, which are, of course, commonplace in the sciences and other areas (Neumann, 2003, p. 53), would bolster the supervisor's research outputs. It would also improve his or her "Contribution to the Research Environment", since one of the criteria for this section of the Evidence Portfolio is "supporting research students to ... produce research outputs that are quality assured (possibly in combination with other staff)" (Tertiary Education Commission, 2003). For their part, the students would gain an entrée into the world of academic publishing, which would in turn strengthen their case for an academic appointment, and may even improve the chances of their finishing the degree earlier.

Collaboration between supervisor and student could also improve completion rates. A recent Australian Government-commissioned report cites an earlier (1998) report, which found that "collaborating with supervisors in writing research papers" improved time to completion (Latona & Browne, 2001, p. 6). Interviewees for our research project were unanimous in their agreement that co-authored publications with their supervisors would have been desirable, though none of them was offered such an opportunity: "Co-authoring is an easier way of producing a publication than doing it all yourself" (Dylan). Some might argue that the danger of supervisors appropriating students' intellectual property is not worth the risk for the vulnerable student. Neumann's Australian study found, however, that:

The large majority of students [in Science] were encouraged to publish during their candidature, far more so than in any other discipline group ... Several referred to problems in relation to authorship rights and authorship sequence in publications arising from their work. *No students reported being denied proper acknowledgement as first author from their PhD.* (Neumann, 2003, p. 53; our emphasis)

Besides improving PBRF results, a greater emphasis on student research outputs and on more collaborative projects, whether between student and supervisor or supervisor and colleague(s), would bring the humanities PhD closer to the model that currently obtains in most other faculties. As a consequence, the degree would more comfortably serve as the common stepping-stone towards an academic career in any faculty. Such a

development would not satisfy the calls for better training in teaching, however, and in this respect homogeneity across the faculties might be hard to effect, if only because teaching is a *sine qua non* of academic appointments in the humanities, whereas research-only positions are sometimes available elsewhere.

Induction Process

Once the idea of collaboration is introduced, many other ways of combatting isolation and anxiety and preparing PhD students better for future careers, inside and outside academia, become possible. One of the PhD students interviewed floated the idea of an induction process spread over the first year or so, which would introduce new students to the process of doing a PhD, and enable them to interact with others across the university. Such a concept received a positive response from other interviewees, and is strongly supported in the international literature (Latona & Browne, 2001; Litvack, 2004; Neumann, 2003; UKCGE, 2000). In Australia “68% of all [Faculty of Arts] respondents felt better able to tackle their PhD research as a result of the structured program [at the University of Adelaide]” (Kiley & Liljegren, 1999, p. 72). Tyler (1998) summarises what such a programme might entail:

Specific departmental orientation should include access and safety policies, introduction to relevant staff and procedures, instruction and advice on research methodologies and social contact with departmental staff as a whole. Information regarding departmental and interdepartmental research seminars and presentations, and relevant similar activities in other institutions, is invaluable in encouraging collaboration. Mentoring through selected senior postgraduate students may be beneficial. (pp. 3–4)

Thesis Support Groups

Such a process could be further enhanced by the establishment (already effected in some New Zealand universities) of thesis support groups, where PhD students meet regularly to share ideas and support each other. As Bowen and Rudensine (1992) suggest, “some form of structured joint discussions among students and faculty during the dissertation years can be extremely valuable in creating an analogue to the ‘collaborative research model’ that prevails in the Sciences” (p. 263). Whether the formation and support of such groups is the department’s or the university’s responsibility is a matter for debate, but there is a substantial literature on their logistics and benefits (Green, 2002; Latona & Browne, 2001; Stevens & Asmar, 1999; Tyler, 1998).

Such groups would clearly also benefit from regular contact with postgraduate students’ associations and groups. For example, the Postgraduate Students’ Association at Victoria University of Wellington in 2001 secured its own physical space with a common room, computing facilities, offices, and study rooms. It

publishes a journal three times a year on issues of concern and interest to postgraduates, and provides funds for postgraduates to attend the annual New Zealand postgraduate conference. Similarly, postgraduates in the English department at the University of Otago founded, in 1995, an online literary journal, *Deep South*, which provides an outlet for publication and discussion.

Seminars and Course Work

One way of promoting more academic discussion among PhD students would be to introduce course work for the PhD. Some of the English academics we interviewed pinpointed the North American pattern of course work for the first one or two years as a good example of how more comprehensiveness might be achieved in a rapidly diversifying discipline. Others thought that, as well as combatting issues of coverage, course work might help alleviate loneliness and the lack of contact with staff and other students, which distinguishes the New Zealand PhD from the North American programmes in particular.

Becher (1993) recognises, however, that there is “not a sufficient critical mass of doctoral students in any one subject to allow for a suitable range of viable taught courses to be mounted”. He was referring to the UK, but the same problem exists in New Zealand. Indeed, where most North American English departments have an average of “45 MA students and 48 PhD students” (Huber, 1989, p. 132), at least two English departments in New Zealand had just two PhD students apiece in 1998. Furthermore, the New Zealand PhD students themselves do not appear to wholeheartedly support the introduction of course work:

I'd be very reluctant about it to be honest. So much of the course work I've done in my university career is absolute bunkum. You know, I think a lot of academics are not particularly original thinkers. I think the milieu forces you into a factory-style of teaching and a lot of people probably end up with a less original mind than they started out with ... it would take an extra six months to a year after you'd finished that [course work] in order to let go those really narrow and restrictive views and ways of understanding. (Brandon)

These sentiments are echoed in UK research, which found that while “half [of the doctoral students responding to a survey] support having [formal research methodology training] because they consider a more directly professional qualification useful ... the other half do not want compulsory courses because they believe they slow down thesis completion” (Leonard et al., 2005).

However, the formalised course work to which these students offer resistance is not the only option (Hastrati, 2005). Other types of courses on a not-for-credit basis might be more appropriate (and more easily and cheaply implemented): for example, short introductory taught courses for disciplinary coverage or depth (Wright &

Lodwick, 1989, and New Route PhD); courses for updating IT, library, and writing skills (Delamont, Atkinson, & Parry, 1997; Powles, 1988; UKCGE, 2000); classes on teaching and career-building—"getting published, giving conference papers, preparing the CV, job searching, raising research funds" (Delamont et al., 1997, p. 191; see also Litrack, 2004 and the New Route PhD); and meetings with various groups outside the university. At least some of these courses would serve to prepare the students for employment outside the academy as well as within it.

Another forum for promoting discussion, alleviating isolation, even helping to lay the groundwork for future careers, is the regular seminar series held in several English departments in New Zealand. Some seminar series are organised, run, and dominated by academic staff, but PhD students still benefit from attending and engaging in discussion and from the social contact involved. International research bears out this finding, too (Latona & Browne, 2001; Malfroy, 2005; Neumann, 2003). Others seminars are run by and for the postgraduate students, and staff tend to go only if the students they are supervising are presenting, because, as one HoD describes it, "we had one or two unfortunate experiences when people just starting out felt a bit overwhelmed by comments and queries which perhaps weren't as gentle as they might have been". Becher (1993, p. 131) indicates that the students he interviewed expressed a strong preference for postgraduate-oriented seminars "based on informal interest groups, often meeting outside an academic environment, with an emphasis on short introductory papers, a more impromptu program, and open, uninhibited discussion". The students also noted, however, that such seminars are often difficult to sustain because they depend "on a collective commitment that not all their fellow students were prepared to make" (p. 131). Steve echoes such sentiments in a New Zealand context: "The year I finished, so did three or four other people, and the whole graduate students' group went from about a dozen of us to about six, and they weren't so involved, and before you knew it the whole thing had fallen over."

Teaching Opportunities and Associated Professional Development for Teaching

Even when there *are* very few PhD students in a department, offering them teaching opportunities can help to allay isolation. It may also, if accompanied by appropriate professional development opportunities, help the PhD students to develop a range of skills useful for academic and other careers (Litrack, 2004; UKCGE, 2000).

Teaching internships or assistantships are generally accepted components of the North American PhD: "At Yale, teaching and full-time graduate study are regarded as complementary, and teaching assistants remain registered as full-time students" (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992, p. 234). There is also growing support for PhD students to be given teaching experience both in the UK (HEFCE, 1996; Litrack, 2004; Noble, 1994; UKCGE, 1999; New Route PhD) and in Australia (Stevens & Asmar, 1999). New Zealand PhD students agree that the teaching they have done has been valuable, although Kelly believes that probably only a third of her PhD colleagues actually sought teaching experience:

I'd say about half the Masters students tutor, and maybe a third of the PhDs, or they might tutor for a year and then not tutor. It's definitely a personal choice. (Kelly)

One questionnaire respondent felt that introducing teaching expectations would lower the standard of the PhD:

I would not wish to see the academic quality of the PhD, as a sustained piece of research, watered down. The PhD provides the best preparation for the *intellectual* demands of an academic career. Preparation for *teaching* is not (and should not be) its purpose. (L)

In general, however, it seems that few New Zealand English academics or PhD students would argue with the suggestion that PhD students be given teaching experience:

Presumably there's definitely room for including some of this in some of the PhDs, and certainly there's nothing to stop us from developing some sort of teaching component or at least teaching experience. (AP)

Whether they also need training in teaching skills is another matter, of course, one that has been covered in considerable depth in the international literature (see, for example, Nyquist & Sprague, 1998 and Chalmers, Herbert, Smeal, Whelan, & Hannam, 2003) and is beginning to be looked at in New Zealand (see, for example, Harland & Plangger, 2004; Retna, 2005; and Sutherland, 2002).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

We recommend that New Zealand university English departments consider implementing the following strategies to better support their PhD students:

- co-authored publications;
- induction processes;
- thesis support groups;
- seminars and course work; and
- teaching opportunities and associated professional development for teaching.

These suggestions arise from participants' suggestions and our analyses of the interview and survey data, and are often confirmed in the international literature. Not all are easily implemented, and may come at a significant cost to the departments (particularly the course work and teaching opportunities/development). However, we

believe that the first three suggestions, in particular, are cost-efficient and will have considerable impact for little outlay on the departments' behalf.

CONCLUSION

In English, as we have shown, most students and staff expect the PhD to lead to an academic career. And much of the research, including our own, suggests that it is still the *sine qua non* for an academic post (Allen, 1968; Henkel & Kogan, 1993; Simpson, 1983). On the other hand, limited career opportunities within the universities mean that the PhD must also serve as a preparation for employment of other kinds.

Increasingly, then, the PhD is being called upon to assume a dual focus. This difficulty is further compounded by the fact that, since Humboldt's time, the degree has been asked to cover a huge range of disciplines, all with different conventions and practices. The isolation of the English scholar, for example, is not necessarily shared by those doctoral students in science who tend to work alongside each other on related topics under the umbrella of a single research grant. Maybe it is time to award distinct doctorates for these very different kinds of activity. In the meantime, however, our research suggests that the possibilities for reform outlined above would bring the different versions of the PhD closer together and strengthen the humanities version in several respects.

Most significantly, if the PhD is to be the licence that leads to a lectureship, it needs to provide proof of expertise in the area that, according to current Ministry of Education estimates, will occupy staff for 80% of their time: teaching. Thus, it would be wise to include a teaching component within, alongside, or (as happens in several New Zealand universities already) immediately following the degree.

Even if the award of a PhD simply indicates an ability to analyze and synthesize that may prove useful in a wide range of careers, as students are increasingly finding in the USA and elsewhere (Horn, 1999, pp. 114–5), it would seem sensible for universities to heed the requirements of the putative employers of these highly trained thinkers. Among these requirements would almost certainly be a capacity, if not to teach, then to communicate clearly. If the PhD can guarantee this outcome, then the need for “professional doctorates” may decrease to some extent. As it is, there is a degree of resistance to the EDD, at least, in the UK (Park, 2005, p. 200).

Overseas the pressure on the PhD continues, and New Zealand has already seen the introduction of new, partly taught, doctoral degrees. The ferment arises out of a wholly justified concern that our highest earned degrees should exhibit fitness for purpose. There is nothing new about this, of course; the same concern evidently led to the establishment of four distinct doctorates in the original medieval universities. Now, in the case of the EDD and DBA at least, it has led to new practitioner-oriented doctorates. Meanwhile, Humboldt's notion that a single degree should constitute the crowning achievement for all branches of knowledge looks more and more like a Romantic dream. Clearly, we in New Zealand need to follow our colleagues overseas

in asking what purposes the PhD serves, what components it needs in order to achieve these ends, and whether the variety of ends and components is so great that a series of distinct doctorates needs to be encouraged.

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NOTES

1. Abbreviations after quotations indicate the status of the interviewee or focus group participant from New Zealand university English departments: P=Professor, AP=Associate Professor, SL=Senior Lecturer, L=Lecturer, ST=Senior Tutor, T=Tutor, HoD=Head of Department. Where names are used, these are pseudonyms for one of the PhD students/graduates who were interviewed.

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Appendix 1: US scrutiny of doctoral programmes and postgraduate education, with special attention to English Studies

Country	Project	Sponsor	Focus
USA	PhD Completion Project (from 2004)	Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), with funding from Pfizer and Ford http://www.phdcompletion.org/	Funding provided to 21 major US and Canadian research universities for 3 years, to create intervention strategies and pilot projects, and to evaluate the impact of these projects on doctoral completion rates and attrition patterns.
	Re-envisioning the PhD research project (1990s–2003)	The Pew Charitable Trusts http://www.grad.washington.edu/envision/	<p>A \$515,000 project funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts to foster local and national/international discussions and initiatives that address the question: How can we re-envision the PhD to meet the societal needs of the 21st Century?</p> <p>The project was funded to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify and produce examples of the scattered and diffuse attempts currently underway to redesign doctoral education; explore the connections among the efforts, the issues, and the many stakeholders involved; convene national leaders to develop a set of strategies and incentives and an overall concept or design for addressing the issues to effect change based on a new vision of the Ph.D; and continue to encourage and support national conversations and serve as a clearinghouse of innovative practices in doctoral education.
	Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID) (from 2001)	Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/CID/	<p>A multi-year research and action project to support departments' efforts to more purposefully structure their doctoral programmes. It involves disciplinary communities, as well as selected departments, in six fields of study: chemistry; education; English; history; mathematics; and neurosciences. The project aims to foster discipline-based conceptual work and design experiments, and to collect, examine, and disseminate findings from this significant discussion and related experiments.</p>

Appendix 1 (contd.)

Country	Project	Sponsor	Focus
	Preparing Future Faculty (from 2003)	CGS and Association of American Colleges and Universities, with Pew Charitable Trusts, National Science Foundation, and Atlantic Philanthropies http://www.preparing-faculty.org/	A national movement to transform the way aspiring faculty members are prepared for their careers. PFF programmes provide doctoral students, as well as some master's and postdoctoral students, with opportunities to observe and experience faculty responsibilities at a variety of academic institutes with varying missions, diverse student bodies, and different expectations for faculty.
	Future of Doctoral Education in English Conference (1999)	Modern Language Association	MLA, Committee on Professional Employment. "Proceedings of the Conference on the Future of Doctoral Education." PMLA 115 (October 2000): 1136-76.
	The Responsive PhD Initiative and Conference (from 2002, conference held in June 2005)	Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation http://www.woodrow.org/responsivephd/retrospective_prospective_conf.html	An initiative which aims to create a model for innovation that will provide a richer purpose and a richer population for doctoral education, by looking at four areas: new paradigms; new practices; new people; new partnerships. The June 2005 conference gathered together 50 graduate deans and representatives from higher education to assess recent innovations in doctoral education and develop an action agenda for the future.
	MLA Committee on the Professionalization of PhDs (2003)	Modern Language Association (MLA) http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/professionalization	A committee established to follow up on the 1990s MLA Committee on Professional Employment which argued for graduate programmes, on the one hand, to be more in tune with the realities of the academic workplace and, on the other, to find a way to acknowledge the experiences of those PhDs who have chosen to leave the academy to establish careers in what has come to be called the business, government, and not-for-profit (BGN) sector.

Appendix 2: UK scrutiny of doctoral programmes and postgraduate education, with special attention to English Studies

Country	Project	Sponsor	Focus
UK	AHRB Framework of Research Training Requirements (from 2004)	Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) http://www.ahrb.ac.uk/ahrb/website/images/4_93944.doc	Sets out the framework of research training requirements for institutions with AHRB-funded doctoral students to ensure that the doctoral students it funds receive appropriate and relevant preparation, training, and support for their development, helping them both to complete a high-quality doctoral thesis and to develop a range of knowledge, understanding, and skills necessary for their future employment. The AHRB pays £450 per AHRB doctoral award holder to institutions to be used in support of research training for the students specified. The core skills expected of AHRB-funded students are: written communication; oral presentation; project design and management; ICT skills; bibliographic skills; web-based resource identification and use; record-keeping and record-management; personal and career development.
	Centre for Excellence in Preparing for Academic Practice (from 2005)	Based at University of Oxford (and including seven other institutions) http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/2516.htm	This CETL will focus on the development of postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers as the next generation of academics. It will build on Oxford's pre-eminent position as a provider of academics to the UK HE system, its development of graduates as teachers, and both pedagogic research and educational development support from the Institute for the Advancement of University Learning. It will implement accredited programmes to develop the teaching, research, and graduate skills of future academic staff for UK HE, across all academic departments, and support a national Preparation for Academic Practice Network involving eight institutions with large doctoral programmes.

Appendix 2 (contd.)

Country	Project	Sponsor	Focus
	The New Route PhD (from 2001)	34 different UK universities http://www.newphd.ac.uk/	The New Route PhD began as a pilot project in 2001 with 10 universities, and has expanded to include 34 UK universities. Its aim is to "create a UK doctorate that more appeals to international students, particularly those who might otherwise find it attractive to study for a PhD in North America. [It] is modeled on the North American doctoral model, with taught elements (including research training and advanced disciplinary study) and a smaller thesis, but is shorter (four years, the first of which is largely dedicated to taking taught courses) and therefore cheaper, but no less rigorous intellectually" (Park, 2005, p. 201).
	The Award of PhD by Published Work in the UK (2005)	UK Council for Graduate Education http://www.ukoge.ac.uk/filesup/PhDbyPW.pdf	A 2005 report written by Stuart Powell which follows up on a 1996 report. The aim of both reports was to "assist institutions to consider ways in which this kind of doctoral work can be developed alongside other routes to the PhD while maintaining high quality and standards".
	Professional Doctorates Reports (2002 and 2005)	UKCGE http://www.ukoge.ac.uk/	The 2002 report (UKCGE, 2002) summarises the outcomes of a UKCGE working group project which surveyed professional doctorate provision across UK Higher Education Institutions, engaged in discussion with colleagues involved in doctoral education in the UK and abroad, and situated the development of Professional Doctorates within the context of the PhD. The 2005 report (Powell & Long, 2005) followed a December 2004 UKCGE workshop on professional doctorates and sought to clarify the range and nomenclature of professional doctorates in the UK.
	Professionalising the PhD: A Career-Related Initiative in English Studies (from 2003)	A Higher Education Academy, an English Subject Centre funded project http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/newsletters/newsiss ue7/itivack.htm	This series of developmental seminars, which make up a not-for-credit module offered across the three years (or four) of a PhD, is intended as training in career development, which has as its specific remit the preparation of doctoral candidates for the job market—both within and without English studies. It includes seminars on: the job market for English PhD graduates; previous patterns of employment; teaching assistant training; skills development; conference culture; research culture and strategy; publication; teaching and learning development; preparing a CV; and non-academic jobs.

Appendix 3: Australian scrutiny of doctoral programmes and postgraduate education

Country	Project	Sponsor	Focus
Australia	Quality in Postgraduate Research Conferences (from 1996)	South Australian universities http://www.qpr.edu.au/overview.html	Six conferences that have been held in Adelaide since 1994. Themes have included: QPR: Making it Happen (1994); Is it Happening? (1996); Managing the Agenda (1998); Making Ends Meet (2000); Integrating Perspectives (2002); Re-imagining Research Education (2004).
	Quality in PhD Education (1992)	Canberra Symposium	Cullen, D. J. D. (Ed.), (1993). <i>Quality in PhD Education – Proceedings of the 1 July 1992 Symposium</i> . Canberra: Centre for Educational Development and Academic Methods, The Graduate School, ANU.
	International Conferences on Professional Doctorates	Begun in New England in 1996	Fifth conference held at Deakin University in November 2004.
	Research on Doctoral Education Conferences	Begun in 2003	Second conference held at Deakin University in April 2004.
	The Doctoral Education Experience	DEST Report 2003	Triggered by Minister Kemp's 1999 White Paper, <i>Knowledge and Innovation</i> , this report aimed to get a better understanding of the doctoral education experience, by studying doctoral students' experiences across four discipline groups and six universities.
	Research Training in Doctoral Programmes	DEST Report 2002	Looks at what can be learned from professional doctorates: completion rates; programmes; and coursework, etc.
	Factors associated with completion of research higher degrees	DETYA Report 2001	Summarises various calls for reform in postgraduate education in Australia, and emphasises good practice for ensuring high completion rates in postgraduate research degree programmes.

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