



## **Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students and academic integrity**

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# Global higher education context

- dramatic changes in higher education
- competitive enterprise
- increasingly diverse student body
- under-resourced educational environment
- pressure to commit AI breaches
- media scandals around the world
- changing emphasis from research to training
- postgraduate research is no longer viewed according to narrow conceptions of supervision

(Mahmud & Bretag 2013, forthcoming)

# Emphasis on integrity in Australian HE

- Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (NHMRC et al. 2007)
  - Strong research culture
  - Honesty and integrity
  - Training
- TEQSA expectations
  - Quality assurance
  - Academic standards
  - Academic integrity

# Postgraduate study in Australia

- 45,969 HDR students in Australia
- Majority (84.5%) are doing their PhD
- Majority (73.3%) study full time students
- Majority (67.5%) are domestic students
- Majority (51.32%) are female
- A large proportion of HDR students (41%) are enrolled in a very small number of Australian universities (5/39 or 13%).

( Edwards et al. 2011)

# Postgraduate study in Australia

- Presumption that HDR students have a higher level of awareness and understanding of academic integrity
- Our findings indicate that many postgraduate students are undertaking the research phase of their academic careers seriously under-prepared and ill-informed of their institution's requirements.

(Mahmud & Bretag 2013, forthcoming)

# Research findings

- Academic integrity standards project (2010-2012) conducted a review of online academic integrity policies of 39 Australian universities, and an online student survey, and interviews across six project partner universities
- 15,304 students responded to the online survey on academic integrity

(Bretag et al. 2013)

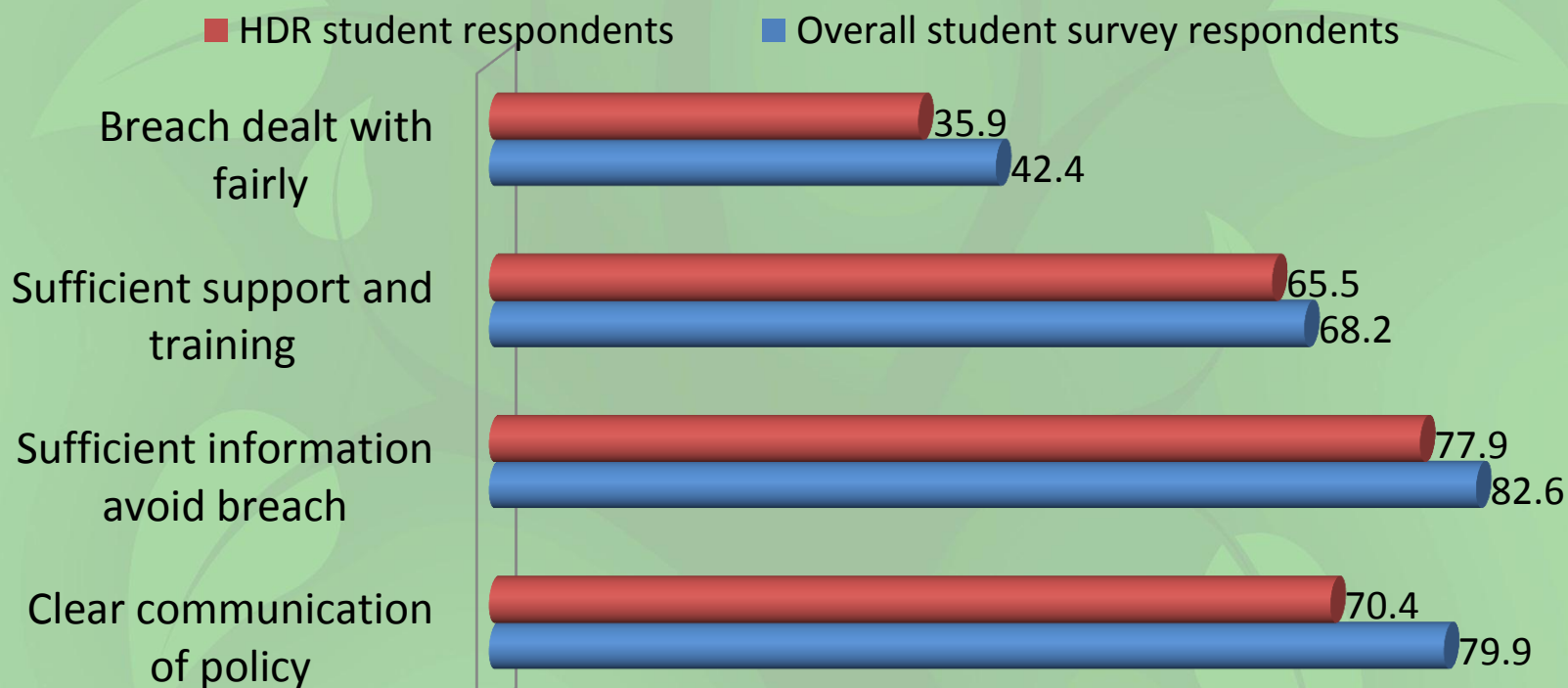
# Research findings

- Of the total 15,304 respondents to the survey, 7.7% (n=1,186) were HDR students
- One in five (18.5%) HDR students had never heard of academic integrity and only three in five (61.7%) said they knew their university had an academic integrity policy and they knew how to access it

(Mahmud & Bretag 2013, forthcoming)

# HDR Student perspective

## Academic integrity policy and practice: HDR student perspective



(Mahmud & Bretag 2013, forthcoming)



# HDR students less satisfied

- Lower proportion of HDR students (70.4%) agreed that academic integrity policy is clearly communicated to students as compared to the proportion of overall survey respondents (79.9%)
- HDR students least satisfied with the information they had received about how to avoid an academic integrity breach

(Mahmud & Bretag 2013, forthcoming)

# Carry on effect from undergraduate study

*“... and it really concerns me when I see things, as I’ve done in the past where I’m sitting on an academic misconduct committee and here’s a postgraduate student, who comes in happily saying, but I did this all the way through my degree and nobody ever stopped me, so I presumed that everything was alright, and you think, well, mmm there’s a worry.” (Senior Manager 2, University D).*

(Mahmud & Bretag 2013, forthcoming)

# Need for good research training

*“I’d like to go further than that [provision of information] because I’ve seen enough of universities to know that everybody is inundated with information and if there are really critical things which there are in this case, academic integrity and incidentally underneath that the ethical issues, that are **embedded in the code** those things need to be demonstrable, it’s not just a matter of putting it on the web and saying it’s there, absorb it if you will because everybody’s busy.” (Senior Manager 2, University B, emphasis added)*

(Mahmud & Bretag 2013, forthcoming)

# ACRCR Guidelines – Part A

- Principles and Practices to encourage the responsible conduct of research
  - general principles of responsible research
  - management of research data and primary materials
  - supervision of research trainees
  - publication and dissemination of research findings
  - authorship
  - peer review
  - conflicts of interest
  - collaborative research across institutions (NHMRC et al. 2007)

# ACRCR Guidelines – Part B

- Breaches of the Code
- Research Misconduct
- Framework for resolving allegations

(NHMRC et al. 2007)

# Breach vs Research Misconduct

- Section 10 of the Code distinguishes between breaches of the Code and research misconduct
- ‘Breach’ is used for less serious deviations from the Code
- More serious or deliberate deviations are considered ‘research misconduct’.

(NHMRC et al. 2007)

# Breach vs Research Misconduct

- A complaint or allegation relates to research misconduct if it involves *all* of the following:
  - an alleged breach of this Code
  - intent and deliberation, recklessness or gross and persistent negligence
  - serious consequences, such as false information on the public record, or adverse effects on research participants, animals or the environment (NHMRC et al. 2007)



# The Code and HDR students

- HDR students referred to as ‘research trainees’
- Clearly mentioned in Part A of the Code
- Not mentioned in Part B of the Code
  - “If proven, such misconduct would be expected to lead to disciplinary action by the institution in accordance with its instruments of employment”. (ACRCCR, Section 11)
  - Reference to staff is not necessarily inclusive of HDR students



# The Code - Challenges

- Processes for handling allegations in the Code are at variance with processes in employment agreements
- Handlings of allegations involving non-employees and previous employees
- Governance of collaborative research
- Avenues for appeal
- Responsibility to raise awareness of the Code and investigate allegations of research misconduct  
(Dyke 2012)

# Review of HDR policy on integrity

- Online academic integrity policies of 39 Australian universities accessed Jan 2013.
- Review of 9 policies which mentioned separate academic integrity policy for HDR students.
- Search terms to find appropriate separate policies for HDR students:
  - research integrity, research misconduct, HDR students
  - ‘research misconduct’ the most successful search term.

# Review of HDR policy on integrity

<b>Policy applies to HDR</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2013</b>
	<b>N=39</b>	<b>N=37*</b>
<b>Yes</b>	24	23
<b>No</b>	7	5
<b>Separate policy for HDR</b>	8	9
<b>Total</b>	39	37

\*One university restricted public access to its academic integrity policy and one was unavailable at this time

# Review of HDR policy on integrity

- Up to three documents related to research integrity were considered in the policy review
  - university policy on the responsible conduct of research
  - procedures for dealing with research misconduct
  - student misconduct/discipline rules.

# Review of HDR policy on integrity

- Each policy was evaluated against the ‘5 core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy’:
  - Access, approach, responsibility, detail and support
- Each policy was also compared with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (NHMRC et al. 2007).

# Review of HDR policy on integrity

- No single policy from the 9 universities was evaluated as including all five of the exemplary elements of academic integrity policy.
- Three universities' policies included four of the five exemplary elements.

# Core elements in HDR integrity policy

University	Access	Approach	Responsibility	Detail	Support
A	+	+	+	-	+
B	+	+	-	-	+
C	+	-	+	-	-
D	+	-	+	-	-
E	+	+	+	-	+
F	+	-	+	+	+
G	+	+	+	-	-
H	+	+	+	-	-
I	+	+	+	-	-

# Access

- In all cases (9/9), a link was provided to the ACRCR.
- In all cases (9/9), **access** to the relevant policy for HDR students was appropriate.
- A student would need to review at least three or more documents to gain an understanding of the university policy on research integrity.



# Approach

- 8/9 universities included a statement about the values of the university being upheld.
- Most often the values and importance of research integrity was well articulated in related documents or on the website, rather than in the actual HDR policy.
- Approach often not consistently articulated throughout the policy document.
- Research often referred to as a “vital function” without a rationale for why this was important.

# Responsibility

- In 8/9 universities there was a mention of **responsibility** for research integrity for numerous stakeholders, including the university itself.
- The weakest areas in the policies were:
  - detail (1/9)
  - support (4/9)

# Detail

- Only 1/9 universities had adequate **detail**.
- Areas not covered adequately included the procedure applicable to students.
- In some cases, penalties and appeals process were not covered.
- Inconsistency between policy documents about procedures for breaches.

# Detail

- In 4/9 cases research misconduct by HDR students was dealt with under the student misconduct/discipline rules
- In 3/9 cases there was a separate procedure to handle allegations of research misconduct by HDR students.
  - However in one such case the procedure for HDR research misconduct was mentioned in the policy but could not be located on the website.

# Definition of Research Misconduct

- Lacked consistency within some policies and also when compared to the Code.
- 3/9 policies mentioned the three conditions for a complaint or allegation to relate to research misconduct.
- In one case the policy referred to “ethics misconduct” separately in addition to research misconduct.
- In one case university policy was inconsistent within its own policy and with the Code.

# Support

- Less than half (4/9) of the policies provided specific information about the different types of support and training available to HDR students.
- Inconsistent with the Code's requirements
  - Responsibilities of the University
  - Responsibilities of supervisors
    - Need to specifically to induct HDR students into a research culture through early and sustained training.

# Need for overarching academic integrity policy

- A university's main AI policy should apply to all stakeholders.
- Importance of aspirational approach to be foregrounded and reiterated.
- HDR students need an additional mention with web links to research related policies.
- If a separate HDR policy is provided, adequate detail is needed (including key links).
- Consistency with the Code and within the institution's own policy is needed.



# References

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# Acknowledgements



[www.unisa.edu.au/EAIP](http://www.unisa.edu.au/EAIP)

*Support for this project/activity has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views in this project do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.*