

Quo Vadis: doctoral programs in private non-profit higher education?

The view from two providers

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Abstract

In order to provide high level research and postgraduate education opportunities in the widest possible range of contexts, private non-profit higher education providers (PNHEPs) have developed doctoral program offerings outside the university system. We discuss the nature of these programs, their origins, quality control mechanisms and current trajectories. We also explore the advantages and benefits of private doctoral programs along with their challenges and limitations.

Participants in the provision of private non-profit doctoral programs with a Christian ethos discuss these issues in this paper, dealing with both professional and research doctorates. Apart from the limitations arising from working outside the funding envelope of university doctoral programs and university self-accrediting status, numerous other potential limitations had to be overcome. These included the range of supervision resources available, the nature of academic freedom, and minimal institutional research culture. How these and other hurdles were overcome and how the collaborative engagement of a wide range of national and international top scholars was achieved is presented via case studies of two multi-disciplinary colleges.

The current doctoral programs in the two colleges reflect differing approaches to program quality and accreditation, one tending towards specialisation, the other towards a more generic model. These approaches may converge in the future as the experiences of the different players in the field are shared and optimal approaches are identified. This paper may assist institutions in deciding whether to adopt a generic or specialised approach for research doctorates.

Introduction

A number of private higher educational institutions have developed in Australia to meet the needs of specific audiences outside the public university sector. Many such institutions were designed to meet the needs of faith-based education, especially Christian education (Sherlock, 2009). A number of these institutions commenced with vocational education and/or undergraduate education (Slape & Beard, 2008), but over time realised the need to provide postgraduate education, including doctoral programs (Tuovinen & Buxton, 2012). This paper seeks to describe how these PNHEPs developed doctoral program offerings outside the university system as they sought to provide high level research and postgraduate education opportunities for their client groups. In this paper we discuss the nature of these programs, their origins, quality control mechanisms, current trajectories, the advantages and benefits of private higher doctoral programs and their challenges and limitations.

The authors of this paper are all participants in the provision of private non-profit doctoral programs with a Christian ethos and we will discuss both professional and research doctorates. Apart from the limitations arising from working outside the funding envelope of university doctoral programs and university self-accrediting status, numerous other potential limitations needed to be overcome. These include the range of supervision resources available, the nature of academic freedom and minimal institutional research culture. How these and other hurdles were overcome and how impressive strides were made in these endeavours, e.g. achieving the collaborative engagement of a wide range of national and international top scholars in these programs, is presented via case studies of two multi-disciplinary colleges.

Though the institutions reporting their experience in this paper differ in many respects from the university sector, there are still some experiences, which are shared with universities. Perhaps the shared experiences are not at the macro level of a university but there are still many synergies with universities at the micro level. Universities have many disciplines within them that do not have a history of research, many of the 'professional' disciplines are only emerging as researchers; the ability to develop a research culture that supports PhD students is not a simple task but requires management and a strategic approach. With respect to funding and accreditation the institutions reporting in this paper are very different, but in the need to develop research capacity and a culture that will support it, there is commonality with some university disciplines.

Nature of Programs

Avondale College's doctoral program consists of a generic Doctor of Philosophy across all disciplines, filling a special niche in the Australian higher education system. First, Avondale provides a Christian context in which candidates can undertake doctoral research: they can study topics at the nexus between Christianity and contemporary societal problems. Many candidates unable to find a place in established universities to undertake studies in this unique context enrol at Avondale. The topics Avondale is able to supervise are located in the professional fields and within three broad fields of study related to Avondale's research strength and critical mass, namely, society and culture (primarily in theology and arts), education and health. Avondale's distinctive Christian philosophy and values inform, but do not restrict, such enquiry, as supervisors encourage research students to consider the moral and ethical implications of their research and evaluate the underlying values of their findings.

The primary aim of the Avondale Doctor of Philosophy program is to advance the process of exploring past and present meaning and significance in human affairs, both for the student and for the larger community. At the nexus between Christianity and contemporary society, the emphasis is on investigating, constructing and communicating meaning while improving judgement in moral, social, and aesthetic fields. The degree seeks to expand the student's capacity to deal with the world of uncertainty and disagreement, to seek out meaning and evaluate the significance of human thought, action and imagination. It promotes open-ended research in examining complex issues through the application of interpretive and creative methods from historical, theological, educational, and health perspectives.

By framing and re-contextualising questions which must be asked by each generation, the student is challenged to refine the skill of judgment, particularly in matters of ethical, moral and aesthetic importance, while recognising that judgement is never final or absolute and that debate is essential to reasoned enquiry. Avondale acknowledges that while many of its higher degrees are professionally oriented, Avondale's doctorate has intrinsic value in creating a pool of thinkers, creators and practitioners who can enrich society, inspire vision,

foster growth, and deepen human understanding of the tangible and intangible dimensions of human experience and professional practice.

At the higher education level, Avondale offers a diploma, associate degrees, bachelors, honours, coursework masters, research masters and the Doctor of Philosophy, thus providing a seamless hierarchy of degrees. The Doctor of Philosophy provides high-achieving graduate students with the opportunity to extend their academic and creative skills, as well as facilitating meaningful areas of inquiry, research and creative endeavour for those in employment who wish to enhance their professional competence. The Doctor of Philosophy also enables closer associations between the institution and the community as research output will measure, test and bridge the gap between theory and practice by facilitating partnerships between the student, the institution, schools, health institutions and cultural centres. The Doctor of Philosophy program will also help foster interdisciplinary research and maximise the available resources of Avondale. The number of students enrolling in Avondale's PhD program is growing as evidenced in Figure 1, below:

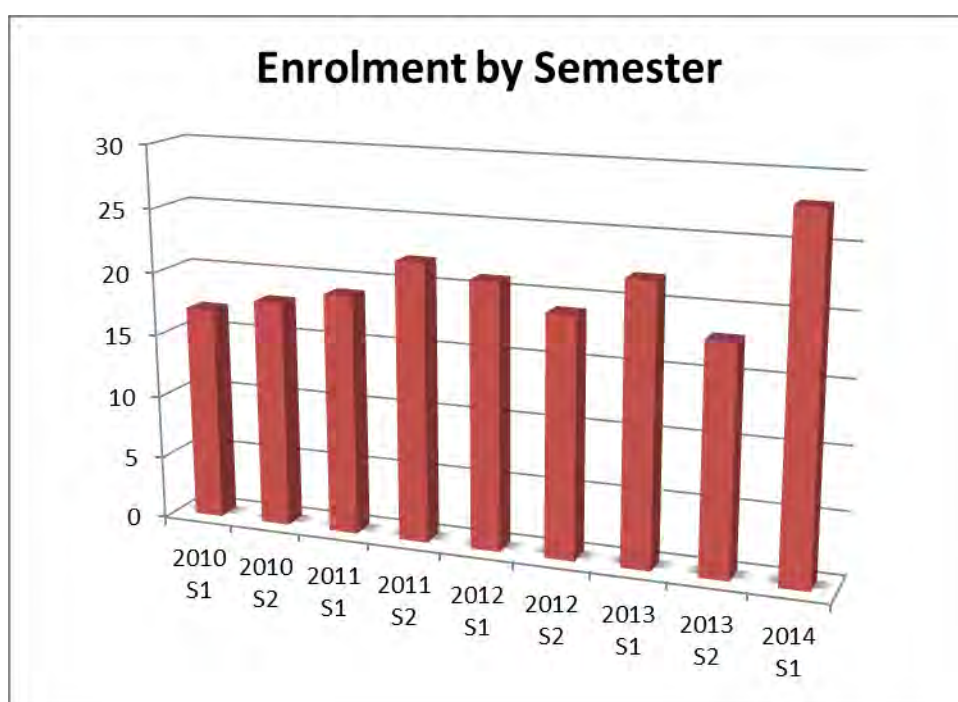


Figure 1: Avondale PhD Enrolments

The Tabor Adelaide doctoral programs operate in many ways in a similar context to those described for Avondale PhD program. The context is a Christian higher education environment, building on prior bachelors and masters level studies, where the doctoral programs seek to foster the advancement of knowledge and professional practice. After completing Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) level 10 studies at Tabor, graduates are expected to have systematic and critical understanding of a complex field of learning and specialised research skills for the advancement of learning and/or for professional practice. More specifically, their knowledge will be at the frontier of a discipline or area of professional practice, and they will have the capacity to apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, authoritative judgement, adaptability and responsibility as an expert and leading practitioner or scholar.

In the recently redesigned Doctor of Ministry (DMin) course Tabor Adelaide's goal is to offer a professional doctorate designed to meet the continuing education needs of those in full-time Christian ministry who wish to take their qualifications to the highest level for the advancement of professional ministry practice. The course is based on eight semesters, the first four of which consist of coursework, followed by two years of research training and a 60,000 word thesis. This restructuring ensures that, with the AQF criteria in mind, Doctor of Ministry graduates will gain systematic and critical understanding of a specialised field of Christian ministry that will enhance professional practice and contribute to knowledge at the leading edge of their vocation. In addition to continuing as mature practitioners and learners in a wide range of ministry vocational contexts, such as reflective senior pastors, pastorally skilful agents of change and denominational church and parachurch leaders, depending on their specialisation, outcomes for graduates of the Doctor of Ministry course include many opportunities. These include practising as consultants to churches, mission agencies and other Christian organisations, acting as educators of ministers in training in the fields of pastoral and theological education in theological and Bible colleges and local congregations, and mentoring peers and emerging candidates for leadership in professional ministry practice.

The Tabor Adelaide Doctor of Philosophy (Theology) is a research doctorate, originally accredited as a Doctor of Theology (ThD). The name change was made recently as the PhD award is better known and more widespread than the ThD. Through completing this award students will develop a substantial body of knowledge at the frontier of theological or biblical studies, scholarship and expert, independent research skills. They will be able to demonstrate expert theological analysis or exegetical skills, and reflect critically on the practice of theological or biblical studies in the light of contemporary scholarship. The course aims to form graduates who are world leaders in their area of specialisation, highly competent researchers, and capable of making a significant and original contribution to knowledge. Graduates may find employment in universities or Christian tertiary institutions (e.g. Bible colleges, seminaries) as undergraduate and postgraduate lecturers and / or researchers, and supervisors in their areas of specialisation. Because of changing patterns of publication and vocational options for graduates, a 'portfolio of publications' is now offered as an alternative to the dissertation in the PhD program. The Tabor Doctoral programs are also like Avondale growing in enrolments, see Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 Tabor Adelaide's cumulative Doctoral Enrolments

Note: The change from ThD to PhD (Theology) at Tabor only received accreditation in April 2014.

Tabor Adelaide made its choice to seek accreditation for a PhD (Theology) in the current accreditation rather than a generic PhD because it values a community model of scholarship over an apprentice model. In their view it is not enough to provide the student with a single suitably qualified supervisor, something they could do in a number of fields of study. What they are seeking to provide for the student is an active community of research scholars within a particular field of study. For this reason they focused upon Theology/Ministry, an area in which they have sufficient breadth and depth to create a kernel of community that has been expanded through our substantial connections with other local and international discipline-specific research scholars. Such a PhD is not just an occasion for laser-like research; it is an opportunity to be introduced to, and to become part of, a broad bandwidth of conversations much of which may not appear to be immediately 'relevant' to the PhD topic. While they are able to provide supervisors for generic PhDs they are not in a position to provide research communities for students outside of Theology/Ministry at this stage.

Origins

After Tabor Adelaide introduced master's degrees in theology, ministry, counselling and intercultural studies in 1998, two new professional courses were added in the following year: a Master of Education, and a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) course, with both coursework and research components (Slape & Beard, 2008). A major feature of the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) is the integration of advanced academic skills within the practice of Christian ministry. This occurs through a combination of coursework and research, involving biblical study, wide and critical reading, and theological reflection and analysis, which are related and applied to actual ministry settings.

Because of the diversity of research and research training needs, contexts and outcomes, and the necessity for original and significant research as component elements of doctoral study, the structure of the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) course was revised in 2008 in order to offer several broad categories of study – pastoral (with a focus on application), educational (with a focus on teaching) and intercultural (with a focus on cultural setting). These categories have been modified in the current round of reaccreditation, where the emphasis of the pastoral DMin has been continued in the Ministry Practice specialisation and students who would have pursued an educational DMin now have the opportunity to take a Biblical Studies or Theological Studies specialisation. The intercultural DMin has been discontinued due to a lack of student interest, and has been replaced by the Spirituality and Formation specialisation.

In 2009, Tabor introduced its first research-only award, the Doctor of Theology (ThD), which – similar to the DMin structure – recognises the diversity of research in contemporary theology. Accordingly the ThD was designed to embrace four disciplinary specialisations integral to the course: biblical studies, systematic and historical theology, practical theology and contextual theology. The number of discipline specialisations have now been simplified from four to two (biblical studies and theology) by grouping the theology options together.

Avondale introduced its PhD program in 2006, with the first enrolments in 2007. One of the primary reasons for its establishment was the aspiration for University College/ University status, though this was not the only rationale. The College had offered masters degrees since the early 1980s and Masters by Research since the early 1990s. The Theology and Education courses were College leaders in the research higher degree development at Avondale. What was beginning to happen was that when examiners' reports came back there was often the comment that the master's degree thesis was of a high enough standard and should have been expanded and submitted as a PhD, the move to a PhD was a natural progression. The College has a very high percentage of staff with PhD qualifications so there was an interest in offering the degree among the staff.

At Avondale to a large extent the conceptual framework for the doctoral program is individually constructed by the candidates themselves who form a theoretical framework particular to their individual study. However, in general, the aim of the program is to develop scholarly researchers skilled at discovery-type scholarship and who are capable of using the research process in problem solving.

The generic conceptual framework for the course is designed to develop students who undertake discovery-oriented academic pursuits, and in doing so, students are required to: differentiate known from unknown knowledge; critically analyse the existing knowledge; understand the dimensions of the unknown and from this understanding focus on a manageable field of endeavour; understand and use various ways of locating new knowledge; select from a range of options, a methodology appropriate to the purpose of their individual study; collect and accumulate data pertinent to the research question; merge new knowledge with existing concepts; interpret and make sense of the new knowledge and communicate the findings of this process to assist others to merge the new knowledge into existing conceptual schema in various disciplinary fields; and envisage the implications of their findings.

Avondale ensures that the characteristics of learning outcomes at this level include a substantial contribution to knowledge in the form of new knowledge or significant and original adaptation, application and interpretation of existing knowledge. These characteristics of learning outcomes may be based on a comprehensive and searching review of the literature, experimentation, creative work with exegesis or other systematic approach or may be based on advanced, searching and expansive critical reflection on professional theory and practice.

To assure that the Avondale PhD program aligns with the Australian Quality Framework requirements, a graduate of its doctoral degree program must be able to:

- carry out an original research project, or project(s) addressing a matter of substance concerning practice in a profession at a high level of originality and quality; and
- present a substantial and well-ordered dissertation, non-print thesis or portfolio, for submission to external examination against international standards.

Quality Control

The Avondale PhD program is overseen firstly by the Research Committee, which answers to the College's Academic Board. The Research Committee consists of

- Vice-President (Research) (Chair)
- Deputy Chair of Academic Board (voted from this group)
- College President ex-officio
- Vice-President (Learning and Teaching) ex-officio
- Research Services Officer (Secretary)
- Chair of each Faculty Research Committee
- Two members of the College Professoriate elected by and from the Professoriate
- One Senior HDR Supervisor appointed by the President
- Human Research Ethics Committee Chair (if not already a member)
- Head Librarian
- Up to two co-opted external research academics as determined by the Committee

The College Research Committee has three Faculty Research Committees reporting to it, each consisting of:

- Chair appointed by Dean in consultation with Heads of School
- Up to five full-time or fractional full-time academic staff with representation from all strands/disciplines
- Course Convenors of Research degrees ex officio
- Secretary elected by the members
- Vice President (Research) ex officio
- One Library Representative

The College Research Committee is overseen by the Academic Board which consists of:

- Chair elected from Avondale academic staff (excluding Faculty Deans) by the members of the Academic Board
- Two Deputy Chairs elected from the Research Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee
- President ex officio
- Vice-President (Research) ex officio
- Vice-President (Learning & Teaching) ex officio
- Academic Registrar (Secretary) ex officio
- Faculty Deans ex officio
- Flexible Learning Coordinators (Lake Macquarie & Sydney Campuses) ex officio

- Head Librarian ex officio
- Two academic staff members (one level C and one level B) elected by academic staff from each faculty
- Avondale Student Association President ex officio
- One post-graduate student
- One senior academic external to Avondale
- Other appointed members as necessary from senior academic staff (level D and E) appointed by President
- One member elected from and by the Professoriate

Avondale's Research Ethics Committee is predominantly drawn from the community with representation from the professions of law, education, medicine and ministry constituting the majority of the committee membership. The Chair of the Ethics committee is one of the College Professoriate. The PhD supervisors are selected by the Head of School in consultation with the Vice President (Research). The choice of supervisors is then endorsed by the Faculty Research Committee and recommended to the College Research Committee. The College Research Committee manages the six monthly progress reports as well as the selection of Confirmation Panel members and also approves the appointment of the thesis examiners.

Tabor Adelaide's Academic Board consists of a majority of external members, one of whom is the Chair. Its main responsibility is the oversight of academic Quality Assurance. In this capacity it approves, monitors, and oversees all academic policies, procedures, and guidelines. As a non-self-accrediting institution, all awards are accredited by TEQSA. The Academic Board both approves each award before it is submitted for accreditation (confirming equivalence between the Tabor Adelaide award and those offered in Australian Universities) and approves 'non-major' changes to the award during its period of accreditation. The Academic Board has two sub-committees: the Coursework Quality Assurance Committee (CQAC) and the Research Quality Assurance Committee (RQAC). These sub-committees consist of Tabor Adelaide academic staff; however, the Ethics Committee, a sub-committee of the RQAC, has majority external membership. The CQAC provides ongoing Quality Assurance to all subjects taught by Tabor Adelaide, including AQF level 9 coursework awards and the subjects offered within AQF level 9 and 10 research awards.

To ensure quality supervision consistent with the College policies, Tabor Adelaide will only use supervisors who are enrolled on the HDR Supervisors Register that is overseen by the Academic Board. Nominations to the Register are made by the RQAC (on the advice of a Postgraduate Course Coordinators) but only the Academic Board can approve enrolment.

To ensure Quality Assurance of its research awards, all dissertations are examined by two qualified examiners one of whom (sometimes both) is an international scholar. This ensures that any student being awarded a Tabor Adelaide doctorate has indeed completed it to an internationally recognised standard. To ensure the ongoing quality of the supervision process, the RQAC reviews external examiners reports and communicates their findings and any recommendations for change to the Academic Board. (The Academic Board may, on the basis of such a review, remove a person from the Register.)

Current trajectory

There were no changes deemed necessary for the Avondale PhD program in the current round of accreditation. It is meeting the needs of the students and the College and is growing in student numbers and the progression rate to graduation is very positive. The current needs are to increase supervision capacity, as each student

needs a supervisor who has supervised to completion. The College is actively engaged in raising its supervisor numbers.

Tabor Adelaide's professional doctorate, the Doctor of Ministry, has undergone a significant change in the latest accreditation round, completed in April 2014. The new AQF level 10 requirements have removed the previous option of increased coursework and a consequential decrease in the size of the research project. All DMin's now include a full two years of research, including a 60,000-word dissertation. As noted previously, the Doctor of Theology nomenclature has been changed to Doctor of Philosophy (Theology), but in other ways the PhD (Theology) has maintained much of its previous shape except the dissertation length has been standardised to 80,000 words, following an extensive review of similar Australian PhD programs.

This reduction in postgraduate coursework options will result in a decrease in the number of international scholars invited to teach intensives for Tabor Adelaide. The variety of scholars brought to Adelaide was previously considered a highlight of the College's program and a drawcard for such a small program. On reflection Tabor believes this AQF induced change has resulted from a misunderstanding of the nature of the professional doctorate and the type of student who enrolls in a DMin, leading to undesirable outcomes.

Advantages and Benefits

It is impossible to see how private non-profit higher education providers (PNHEPs) can offer awards at AQF level 9 or 10, which require substantial research, if they are not offering HDR awards. The culture of research required by TEQSA and the AQF of universities, which is linked to their research awards, cannot be maintained by PNHEPs without the active presence and involvement of research students and their supervisors. The lack of eligibility for HDR students at PNHEPs to receive government funding is an anachronistic inequality that hinders the development of small, yet emerging, doctoral programs.

The consequence of the AQF's standardisation of doctorates, undervaluing the distinctiveness of the professional doctorate, has limited the opportunity for small PNHEPs to develop their individual contribution to the sector. It seems to us that quality can be assured without stifling diversity.

Tabor Adelaide's 'not-for-profit' ethos means that it can offer programs that do not necessarily make surpluses, but rather meet the missional goals of the college and the needs of the community the college serves. The 'private provider' category is at times used in a derogatory sense – 'dodgy private providers'! – which is why the preference was not to use that language. Apart from the acknowledged redundancy of the term (Bradley et al, 2008, ix), Tabor Adelaide considers that such labelling can constrain its self-perception and its vision for the future and this, in turn, might limit its potential contribution to society. Rather than simply regarding itself as a niche provider Tabor Adelaide seeks to make a broad contribution to the public good of Australian and global society and considers itself well placed to do so.

Avondale believes that a Higher Education institution should have a twofold purpose, firstly it imparts knowledge, but what differentiates it from schools or the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector is that it also creates knowledge. The added benefit of a PhD program of study in the College is that it adds an extra dimension to its profile as it is now a contributor to the world of knowledge and this brings a currency and relevance to it as a Higher Education Institution.

Challenges and Limitations

Funding

Avondale, as with most Higher Education institutions confronts similar issues of funding and capacity. Identifying the source of funds to support the program without access to the funding support of universities provides challenges. The College is fortunate in that it has a high percentage of staff with doctorates, approximately 60%, with the significant majority of those not possessing doctorates currently undertaking them. It is hoped that by 2016 the number of potential doctoral supervisors in the college will be 80% of the academic staff, this also providing another means of being 'research active' for staff.

The challenge of funding the program will always be present without Government support but with the growth of capacity the College is finding support for students undertaking a PhD through externally funded scholarships, but the primary approach has been to provide fee-waiver scholarships for students who pass the research program Confirmation stage. Faculties are also able to offer scholarships to students that they see contributing to their strategic plan as well. The lack of fees and the RTF Block-grant funding does add a cost to the institution and this issue will be an ongoing one.

Because Tabor Adelaide is a private non-profit higher education provider, just as is Avondale, it is not able to access public funding afforded to the universities. On the other hand some of the restrictions of laws and regulations relating to public institutions do not apply as strictly to a private institution, offering it the potential to develop a more distinctive profile than a public university. The lack of government funding in particular means that students entering a doctoral program at Tabor could not expect Commonwealth student funding support for themselves, nor support for institutional infrastructure needs, such as the library. As a result, the areas of doctoral study offered have been very carefully defined in terms of resource availability and strategic expertise. However, this also means that the students who undertake the courses are often more highly motivated by intrinsic interest in the courses than those seeking cheaper courses in other institutions.

Because of its PNHEP status, the development and offering of Tabor Adelaide's doctoral courses have experienced a number of significant operational constraints. One response has been to engage external scholars to contribute to in-house supervisory pool. The engagement of international experts in the provision of regular intensive postgraduate courses has also contributed to the available expertise. For example, in 2011 a Memorandum of Understanding was established with St John's College at Durham University in the UK, where the Department of Theology and Religion has established an international reputation as one of the world-leading departments in its field. As well as offering faculty and student exchanges, potential joint publishing and research initiatives, the MoU offers the opportunity for reciprocal postgraduate supervision arrangements based on adjunct faculty appointments.

Supervision and supervision training

Having doctoral level staff is not necessarily the solution to PhD supervision. Experienced supervision is mandatory, and thus an institution beginning a PhD program of study cannot meet this by simply having doctoral level staff members. Starting a doctoral program in an institution requires support in mentoring staff in the role of supervisor. As such Avondale has been fortunate to be able to draw on a pool of experienced external supervisors to fill this void. Over time more of the college staff have achieved the experience of supervising to

completion and can take responsibility of mentoring others in the activity. It is expected that over the next five years Avondale's reliance on external supervision support will diminish.

Avondale employs a three-pronged approach in training its supervisors. Firstly, each student must have an experienced supervisor who has previously supervised a PhD to completion. It is usual that this experienced supervisor is able to support the study specifically through either being a content or method specialist in the area of the student's study. In the case where an experienced supervisor is not a content or method specialist in the area of the student's study they will assist the other supervisors through mentorship.

The second approach used at Avondale is less formal where the College research committee holds meetings of supervisors 2-3 times a year. This provides a forum where discussion can be held amongst the supervisors to identify issues and also to share supervision strategies. The third strategy is the use of the College's Learning Management system, Moodle, to support a site that has resources for supervisors which they can recommend to students to assist them in their studies. Finally, the College library has restructured its support of students generally through the use of online training sessions to assist them in the use of the library, academic integrity principles and strategies. The time formally spent in supporting undergraduates face to face is now directed to assist staff with their research and also to better support PhD students with their database searches, etc.

Avondale's use of external supervisors ensures that the college's approach to supervision is continually being examined and refreshed. Avondale has recognised the need to improve the training and support of supervisors in postgraduate research, and has recently benefited from the experience of a well-recognised research scholar who conducted seminars on supervision for those who are involved in postgraduate supervision. However, the college recognises that more work needs to be done in this area, and this will be a priority for a new staff member who has just been appointed to the postgraduate faculty.

The research supervision training in the various post-graduate research programs at Tabor Adelaide is a blend of apprenticeship learning, importation of training and supervision experiences from other institutions, e.g. some staff have undergone research supervision training and been postgraduate supervisors in other universities and institutions, and locally provided supervision training. The apprenticeship aspect consists of supervision of doctoral candidates by teams of supervisors, where experienced supervisors demonstrate effective methods of supervision to the less experienced team members. The local supervision training consists of supervision education seminars conducted by internal and external providers.

Academic Freedom

In terms of academic freedom, the freedom of academic enquiry is one of the fundamental academic values espoused by both Avondale College, as noted in the discussion of the Nature of Programs earlier, and Tabor Adelaide (e.g. see Tabor Adelaide Strategic Plan 2013 -2018). This means that in principle and in practice neither the research interest nor outcomes are restricted by preconceived philosophical or theological perspectives. However, as mentioned earlier, there are certain areas of particular strength in each of the colleges where substantial communities of interest and expertise can contribute broadly to the doctoral students' studies.

Research Culture

With regard to the research culture both colleges are moving from almost wholly teaching institutions to greater research engagement. At Tabor Adelaide this began by the original and early staff of the college undertaking research and gaining research doctoral qualifications, e.g. see the theses by Barry Chant (1999) and Graham

Buxton (2004). The improving staff qualifications, and hiring of well-qualified staff led to increasing serious publications, e.g. see Buxton (2001, 2005, 2007), Buxton, Mulherin and Worthing (2012), and Worthing (1995, 1996, 2004a, 2004b), and engagement with international high quality teaching and research centres, e.g. Fuller Theological Seminary, St John's College at Durham University, and the Faraday Institute at Cambridge University. It also gave further impetus to improving staff qualifications to doctoral level in many disciplines. More recently (in 2011) a specific research institute was established, the Graeme Clark Research Institute, which undertakes grant-funded research in numerous areas, such as science and faith, the history of science and faith development, ecology and faith, science and Christian education, Christian church education and Christian higher education.

The transition of Avondale College from an undergraduate provider to also engage in research and research training is a big paradigm shift. The college's infrastructure and culture were focused on teaching with a level of scholarship, whereas this is now changing to include the research and research training necessary to support a PhD program. The supervision strategies required to support PhD students is being developed, and the culture of contributing to knowledge through publication is a big change for academics used to the teaching of undergraduates. There has been no easy approach to this, it requires a strategic approach which includes:

- Research forums, at both Faculty and institutional level
- Development of research centres which align with the College's areas of expertise but encourage multi-disciplinary research
- Developing research networks within the College as well as links with external collaborators
- Linking with industry partners in research

It can be noted in the above list that many of these may not necessarily be linked directly to PhD studies, because Avondale believes that it is important to have a PhD program of studies embedded in a vibrant research culture. If staff members are actively engaged in research then supervision is an extension of this. It is not optimal or feasible to have a PhD program existing in a non-research culture.

Lessons Learned

What has Avondale learned from the journey thus far? The most significant lesson is that PhD students add a different culture to the institution. This is a positive outcome as the acknowledgement of the contribution a PhD student makes to the research culture and in adding a different dimension to the staff profile is significant. Interestingly despite the issues of limited funds to support the PhD student cohort and the staff workload they require, Avondale staff members are appreciating the potential for increasing the diversity of staff profile, which is important in a small institution. They also value the contribution to research publications made by the PhD students individually or in collaboration with their supervisors. With the growth of PhD students in the ten years since the beginning of the program the College now has 28 enrolled PhD students. The College hopes to be able to grow this to 60 in the coming years as new sponsors are identified and as the College develops the planned research centres. PhD students are integral to the success of research centres and these will provide the momentum from research growth as well as for opportunities for PhD students themselves.

Tabor Adelaide's doctorate program is a small one. This allows it to give individual attention to each student. But such individual attention means that it can be hard to standardise the program. As its program has matured Tabor has seen the need for greater attention to processes. While, on the basis of the reports of external

examiners, the College is confident of the value of its program, it recognises that it is difficult to demonstrate Quality Assurance without approved and monitored processes.

It is evident that PNHEPs need not be discouraged from developing doctoral programs so long as they define strategically the needs of the client group, so that appropriate parameters can be developed to ensure that their postgraduate program will work within the constraints of institutional expertise and infrastructure. However, if a real need exists in the stakeholder community, people are often prepared to contribute more towards their continuing education than would be expected of them in government-funded institutions. The global collaborative links that Tabor Adelaide has developed in recent years has ensured a depth of expertise that would otherwise not have been possible in the context of its doctoral program. Over the past five years, this intentional global academic networking policy has afforded students enrolled in postgraduate Ministry and Theology courses the privilege of attending intensive seminar subjects conducted by a wide range of national and international scholars who contribute to the culture of critical inquiry within the School of Ministry, Theology and Culture. This program will continue in the coming years with distinguished scholars invited to teach alongside Tabor faculty.

For Tabor Adelaide, the provision of doctoral programs has been a journey of faith, and the college remains convinced that it is possible to combine academic excellence and Christian faith in a way that encourages creativity and educational enterprise, leading to high levels of student satisfaction. This will involve the need to integrate existing postgraduate programs into new research initiatives as the college develops its research capacity. One way in which this can be achieved within the next few years is through postgraduate students undertaking research within the framework of research activities carried out by the Graeme Clark Research Institute, which was established to conduct, facilitate and promote research and development within Tabor Adelaide in the broad context of Christian service to the community. The experience of both colleges points to mutual benefit for the research centres and the postgraduate students from research centre/institute involvement of the doctoral candidates.

So in conclusion, what is the way forward for both institutions? Firstly, the identification of ways to fund the growth in PhD student numbers is going to be an ongoing issue for the colleges. This will always be an issue but the benefits for the colleges of active research engagement shared by staff and their PhD students is something that can only be seen as a significant benefit. The continued enhancement of practice among staff in supervision will be an ongoing task until the colleges create a pool of experienced staff to draw on for the supervision of PhD students. What will be a long-term benefit is the enhancement of the research culture of the colleges. Both institutions believe that all students of the colleges will benefit from being vibrant research communities.

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