Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference

Time: 8.55am – 9.05am
Date: Friday 22 April 2016
Place: National Wine Centre, Hackney Rd, Adelaide
Ladies and gentlemen, hello, my name is David

I’m not originally from this country but I am proud to call this my home.

And I’m telling you this in the language of the Kaurna people as a mark of respect.

The meeting this morning is taking place on Kaurna land.

The Kaurna people have performed ceremonies on this land for many centuries, and we pay respect to their living culture and the unique role they continue to play in the life of the Adelaide region.

Good morning.

I am delighted to be here to open this morning’s discussion on doctoral education.
• It’s the very highest level of learning and this is the world’s leading forum for its discussion.

• I am very pleased to represent all three South Australian university hosts as I welcome you this morning.

• The fact that all three South Australian universities – UniSA, Adelaide and Flinders – have collaborated on this conference says much about what true research and research education is:

• Cooperative endeavour at its best.

• The ‘Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference’ – or, to give it its short-form title, ‘QPR’ – nurtures the latest ideas in doctoral education, and champions the cause of ground-breaking scholarship.

• The growth of this conference, in terms of its participant numbers and its influence, has been incredible.
• This conference has developed, over a period of 20 years, from being a home-grown symposium attended by delegates largely from South Australia

• into an event that attracts several hundred participants from around the world.

• This is the 12th QPR conference and registrations have more than quadrupled since it first convened in 1994.

• My colleague at the University of South Australia, Professor Alistair McCulloch, in his capacity as Chair of the QPR conference organising committee, has played an integral role in the growth and importance of the meeting.

• As he sees it, that growth pattern of the QPR mirrors the development of doctoral education during that same period.
• When the first QPR was held there were no national organisations dedicated to promoting the enhancement of the postgraduate research student experience.

• Except for the Council of Graduate Schools that had functioned in the United States since 1961,

• there were no cross-national bodies concerned with doctoral education.

• At that stage, too, the importance of doctoral education as a critical element in their countries’ economic development and future prosperity

• had largely been ignored by government.

• But today, QPR has become the world’s longest-established conference devoted to this topic.

• It goes to show the remarkable progress you all have achieved.
• What’s more, the field of postgraduate research has been transformed almost beyond recognition,

• It has grown in scale and changed dramatically in nature.

• And I am very proud to say that the University of South Australia – of which I am vice-chancellor – is an active force within that process of transformation.

• As we have outlined in our strategic action plan, we want to transform the PhD at UniSA to ensure our researcher students have the skills they will need for success in their chosen fields of endeavour.

• This has required some significant re-thinking of what candidates will now experience.

• Our doctoral programs will incorporate:
o coursework and transferable skills components;

o a broadening of the nature of students’ supervision through the establishment of supervisory panels and practice-based dissertation committees involving end-users;

o and the introduction of a video defence of theses involving the participation of international, world-class researchers.

• You’ve probably guessed that the ‘video defence’ is an update on the traditional thesis examination practice: the viva.

• However, in our case, existing doctoral students can now elect to defend their dissertations by viva, while those starting on the doctoral path this year will be required at its conclusion to undergo a viva.
• Although the dissertation will remain as the core element in this process, the pathway towards attainment of a doctorate is being transformed.

• We maintain that this will, in turn, make sure our doctorates retain their relevance in a rapidly changing world.

• What I hope will happen is that our students experience their postgraduate time with is as a meaningful, positive and inspiring basis for all their future career contributions.

• Universities need to demonstrate to society just what postgraduate research programs can offer.

• One of the best ways of doing that is to involve representatives of commerce and industry in the doctoral process.
• And since these people are likely to be the existing and potential employers of doctoral graduates,

• it makes a lot of sense that they have an appreciation of what good, targeted research can offer them.

• In our plan we will invite them, as end-users, to become members of our supervisory panels –

• stimulating and emphasising the ‘real world’ nature of the research at hand.

• Just to give you an example or two of how this might work:

  o The development of new drugs in association with pharmaceutical companies,
  o or in the more effective use of such products in collaboration with health-care professionals.
• There are many possibilities in the defence industry

• and also in the delivery of education itself.

• The implications, and the potential benefits, for our state and our nation, are extraordinary.

• This part of the world has undergone some profound reverses in recent years, with the reduction – and even the demise – of old manufacturing regimes, such as the automotive industry.

• To replace those industries, our culture places an increasing hope on opportunities afforded by the so-called ‘knowledge economy’ and by the re-making of our state capital as an internationally recognised centre of education.

• It’s a good sign that this conference is working on the prospects for cross-fertilising ideas.
You are an eclectic audience of research degree supervisors, postgraduate students, academic policy developers, university decision-makers and administrators, government representatives, and people who conduct research in postgraduate education and associated areas.

QPR, therefore, supplies an ideal forum to discuss and debate emerging changes – and the complex, yet stimulating – shifts in practice that such potential changes might demand.

It also, I believe, includes an innovative element in itself: a pecha kucha (PE-CHA KU-CHA) presentation.

When I first saw this advertised, I thought it might be a travel destination in South America.

I now know that it’s Japanese in origin and involves a series of five-minute presentations, each allowing a maximum of five Powerpoint slides.
• It’s the Japanese contribution to the endemic academic disease, Death by Powerpoint

• I suspect that, like the three-minute thesis competition, the Pecha Kucha principle offers a valuable means of preparation for a viva.

• But does so more quickly.

• Having time constraints should help with the critical focus that doctoral research requires.

• QPR has manifested itself as a significant force in encouraging pioneering, incisive research and in helping to make the PhD process more comfortable and more clearly structured.

• But I would like to add that I find it strange that research into doctoral education has been a relatively recent entrant to the field of scholarship.
• The aim, now, is to place the scholarship of doctoral education firmly on the world stage

• And I wish you well in your endeavours for this day, and for the many that will come in future as you go about enhancing the postgraduate research student experience.

• Thank you.