The DBA in Australia

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Abstract

This study of the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree in Australia describes the structure and content of the DBA, and its future prospects. A total of 2O of the 37 universities in Australia offer the DBA, with each version incorporating a blend of coursework and research requirements. The majority of the universities surveyed included a research thesis (greater than 66% of the total course requirements) as the major form of assessment. Our findings indicate similarities with DBAs in the UK, and point the way for further refinements in the degree.

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of our paper is to examine the extent to which the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree is making inroads into Australian graduate education in light of the recommendations of the Australian Higher Education Research Council (1990). In its review of Australian graduate programs, the Council suggested the establishment of professional doctoral programs for the purpose of adding diversity and depth to graduate study programs in Australia. Our paper is restricted to the Doctor of Business Administration as a relative newcomer in the field of professional doctorate education as other studies have examined other professional doctorate degrees in some detail (e.g., Chapman, 1991; Lakomski, 1991; Maxwell and Shanahan, 1996). In order to address this purpose, we examine the following issues:

1. The structure of DBA degrees in Australia – enrolment status and length (duration) of course, course work versus thesis component, mode of study (internal/external), assessment (internal/external), number of units

2. Admission criteria (formal qualifications, work experience)

3. Costs of the program (government funded or full fees)

4. Enrolments to date

5. Summary – key features of the DBA in Australia

6. Problems and prospects

Because the field of graduate education is in a constant state of flux, the data presented in this paper can only be indicative of DBA programs at the time of publication. Our paper is restricted to the field of graduate research degrees as distinct from graduate course-based degrees. Federal government legislation stipulates that universities offering graduate research degrees that include a research component equal to or greater than two-thirds (67%) of the assessable content are eligible for, although are not guaranteed, full-funded RTS (research training scheme) places for these degrees
(DEST, 2002a:5).

For the purpose of further discussion, the definition of research as used by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA, 1999:16) as adapted from the OECD (1994) is used in this paper:

> Research and experimental development comprises creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.

DETYA has since been replaced by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), under the Ministership of Dr Brendan Nelson.

The Doctor of Business Administration — An Overview

The nature of doctoral education, of which the DBA is one form, is changing dramatically. An increasingly competitive global business community now demands more formally qualified and internationally experienced managers, educators and workers. In the past, standard-type graduate programs such as the Master of Business Administration (MBA) may have been sufficient to satisfy these demands, but this is no longer the case. The proliferation of MBA programs in western democratic countries has devalued the quality of MBA degrees. This outcome is insufficient for the overall demands of industry.

The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree now represents a new generation of graduate degree that builds on the MBA and similar graduate degrees, and provides candidates with a doctoral level qualification. Implicit in this level of sophistication is the requirement to conduct research at a doctoral level. What differentiates the DBA from the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree is the course structure that leads to different and more applied outcomes for the DBA. Many more applied DBA programs offer a portfolio of course work, seminar presentations, and industry-relevant research reports that contribute in a meaningful and current fashion to the ever-increasing demand for credentialism (Maxwell, 2001). The DBA may in fact represent that elusive kick-start to building more entrepreneurial and innovative business leaders that western countries rely on to sustain and grow their competitive strengths.

It may be useful to explore the differences between the PhD and the DBA in more detail. The DBA is designed to make a significant contribution to the enhancement of professional practice in business administration (public and private sectors, education, hospital, professional, and general management) through the application and development of theoretical frameworks. In comparison, the PhD places more emphasis on the development of new knowledge and theoretical perspectives.

The DBA is therefore a professional practice doctorate focused on researching real business and managerial issues through a critical review and systematic application of appropriate theories and research to professional practice. Sekhon (1989) and Trigwell, Shannon and Maurizi (1997:6, Ch 3) advocated that doctoral programs need to become more industry-oriented and include personal relationship training, practical problem solving, and a strengthened relationship between industry and higher education institutions. Professional doctorates like the DBA achieve most if not all of these imperatives, as has been shown to exist in other countries offering the DBA, such as the UK (Bourner, Ruggeri-Stevens and Bareham, 2000). As Bourner *et al* (2000:494) assert, "[the DBA] is a programme of research-based management development aimed at developing the capacity to make a significant original contribution to management practice."

Professional or research-coursework doctorates are seen as being more flexible than research-only PhDs, and they attract a wider variety of candidates with varying interests and work backgrounds when compared to PhD candidates (Trigwell *et al*, 1997:7, Ch 3). The DBA in particular provides opportunities for students to network with their cohort which most often includes candidates from all walks of life. For instance, the first cohort of students admitted into the Monash University DBA program in 2002 included scientists, medical practitioners, CEOs, psychologists, journalists, former armed services personnel, educators, financial services providers, business systems analysts, private consultants, lawyers, academics, and not-for-profit executive directors. Most of the students have had international business experience, and all are active in making their DBA research a strategic component of their work life.

The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree was introduced into American graduate business education around 20 years ago, and into the UK from the early 1990s (Bourner, Ruggeri-Stevens and Bareham, 2000). It has only recently appeared in the professional doctorate offerings in Australia (Maxwell and Shanahan, 1996, 1997), largely the result of the suggestion by the Australian Higher Education Council (1990) that universities consider the development of professional doctoral degrees, and as an initiative of business faculties to differentiate themselves and offer an alternative higher research degree to the traditional Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD). Recent research by Neumann and Goldstein (2002:34) identifies

the DBA as a rapidly growing alternative graduate qualification to the traditional PhD and with a focus more relevant to the needs of practitioners rather than academics.

In 2002 there were 37 public and two private universities in Australia, with 20 (54%) of these universities offering a Doctor of Business Administration degree as part of their graduate course programs (an additional institution not in the university sector, Gibaran Management Institute Australia, also offers the DBA). The first university to offer the DBA in Australia was Victoria University of Technology in 1993, followed by Murdoch University (1994), and a number of others in 1996 (Curtin, University of Western Australia, RMIT, Charles Sturt) and the remainder since 1996. Two of the universities offering the DBA are part of the group of eight (Monash, UWA), four are universities of technology (Curtin, RMIT, Swinburne, Victoria), and the remaining 15 comprise large second-tier research universities (e.g., Macquarie, Deakin) to small regional institutions (e.g., SCU, Charles Sturt) in addition to the Gibaran Management Institute. Table 1 shows the distributions of these universities classified by type.

Table 1: Australian universities offering the DBA degree classified by type

Type		
University	**f**	**%**
Group of Eight	2	10.0
Monash University		
University of Western Australia		
University of Technology	4	19.0
Curtin University of Technology		
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology		
Swinburne University of Technology		
Victoria University of Technology		
Second-tier	7	33.0
Deakin University		
Edith Cowan University		
Flinders University		
Macquarie University		
Murdoch University		
University of Canberra		
University of South Australia (GSM)		
Regionals	7	33.0
Charles Sturt University		
Northern Territory University		
Southern Cross University		
University of Ballarat		
University of Southern Queensland		
University of the Sunshine Coast		
University of Western Sydney/Hawkesbury		
Other	1	5.0
Gibaran Management Institute Australia (SA)		
Totals	**21**	**100.0**

As shown in Table 1, most DBAs are offered by the regional and second-tier universities (33% each), followed by universities of technology (19%). The top research universities comprise the smallest portion offering the DBA degree (10%).

Structure of the DBA in Australia

Program Content

Table 2 presents a summary of universities offering the DBA degree in Australia classified by selected program content characteristics. For the purpose of these analyses, the Gibaran Management Institute is not included, as it does not provide details regarding its programs, nor is it an Australian university.

Table 2: Australian universities offering the DBA degree classified by type and program content

Type of university	Years FT/PT	% cw/thesis	Mode Int/Ext	Assessment Int/Ext	Number of units	Fees total	Fees Units/ Annum	Years work experience required
Group of Eight								
Monash University	3/6	30/70	Internal	External	11	$14,000 pa	$15,000 pa I	2
University of Western Australia	3/5	33/67			6: 92 credit points			Nil
University of Technology								
Curtin University of Technology	2/3	33/67	Internal		150 credit points			6
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	4PT	33/67	Internal			$38,500		10
Swinbourne University of Technology	2/4	30/70	Internal		6	$10,000 pa coursework $7,500 Thesis pa PT $11,200 coursework I $16,000 Thesis pa FT		5
Victoria University of Technology	3/6	33/67	Internal		13: 360 credit points			2
Second-tier								
Deakin University	1	33/66	Internal	External	17: 20 credit points			2
Edith Cowan University	2.5/5	50/50?	External		6			5
Flinders University				Internal	9: 108 credit points			5
Macquarie University (Hong Kong)	3/6	33/67	Offshore		5: 96 credit points	$39,000 $246,000 HK		5
Murdoch University	3/6	50/50			72 credit points			
International Graduate School of Management, University of South Australia	2.5/5	50/50			10			
University of Canberra	3/6	33/67	Flexible delivery mode		7: 72 credit points			5
Regionals								
Charles Sturt University	3-4/8	50/50	Both		5: 128 credit points	$18,100	$1,900 per unit $10,500 thesis	5
Northern Territory University	4/8	33/67	Internal		10: 240 credit points		$19,800 pa $1,400 unit $10,000 pa I	
Southern Cross University	2/3	25/75	Internal Offshore		24		$1,400 unit $1,600 unit I $1,575 Offshore	
University of Southern Queensland	6		External		24		$1,400 unit $1,575 unit I	
University of Ballarat	3/4.5	100			9			
University of Sunshine Coast	2/3	33/67	Internal		12			5
University of Western Sydney	2.5/5	50/50	Off campus		8: 108 credit points			5

Enrolment status (FT/PT) and Length of Course

As indicated in Table 2, 16 universities offer a full-time degree ranging from one to four years in duration (mean=2.4 years, mode=3.0 years), and 18 offer a part-time degree of between three to eight years (mean=5.2 years, mode=6 years). Aggregated by type of university reveals the following:

Group of Eight — Three years full-time enrolment at Monash and University of Western Australia, six and five years part-time at Monash and UWA respectively.

Universities of Technology — Three universities of technology have degrees of two to six years in length, with RMIT having a part-time DBA of four years duration only.

Second-tier — The second-tier institutions range from a one-year full-time degree (Deakin) up to six years part time.

Regionals — The regional universities present the greatest dispersion in years of study required for the DBA, possibly as a result of their location and the need to deliver the program both externally and off-campus in order to access students. Therefore regional universities have the longest completion time required of eight years part-time study in the case of two universities (Charles Sturt, Northern Territory).

Course work/Thesis mix

Table 2 shows that every DBA program contains a major research component, ranging from 50% of the course requirements in five (25%) universities to 66% or greater in 14 (70%) universities. Federal government legislation stipulates that universities offering graduate research degrees that include a research component equal to or greater than 66% of the course requirements are eligible for full-funded research places for these degrees (DEST, 2002a:5). Aggregated by type of university reveals the following:

Group of Eight — The completion of a research thesis comprises the greatest percentage of course requirements for the DBA in "group of eight" universities (greater than 66%).

Universities of Technology — The completion of a research thesis comprises the greatest percentage of course requirements for the DBA in universities of technology (greater than 66%).

Second-tier — The second tier universities are about evenly balanced between 50% and greater than 66% of their DBA course requirements comprising the completion of a research thesis.

Regionals — The majority of regionals require students to complete a research thesis as part of the DBA degree.

Mode of Study

Table 2 shows that the DBA is primarily delivered internally (63%, or n=10/16, with four institutions not providing details about delivery mode). The six universities that provide the option for on-line and distance mode completions of the degree are generally the second-tier and regional institutions.

Assessment

Although access to information regarding assessment is limited, the majority of universities appear to offer DBAs with a mixture of internal and external assessment modes, with many opting for external assessment of the research component of the degree.

Number of Units

As shown in Table 2, the number of units required for completion of the DBA (units include both coursework and research components) range from five (Macquarie University — Hong Kong) to 24

(Southern Cross University, University of Southern Queensland). It is inappropriate comparing numbers of units required for completion, as the credit points associated with these units varies considerably across these universities. For instance, the University of Canberra offers a 72 credit point DBA, compared with a 360 credit point DBA at Victoria University. Monash University's DBA degree consists of 11 units equivalent to 156 credit points, of which 70% of these credit points is research-specific. Further information is required to help identify the degree to which research and coursework components of each DBA are a percentage of credit points in that degree before comparative assessments can be made.

Admission Criteria

Formal Qualifications

The admission criteria for entry into the DBA vary from the requirements of an undergraduate degree in a business-related area (UWA) to an honours degree, Masters degree, or MBA (Monash). In most cases, students who have not completed these qualifications in an English-speaking institution must provide evidence of an IELTS score of 6.5 or greater.

Years Work Experience Required

Generally, admission criteria for most DBA programs require some work experience at a management level, usually for a minimum of two years (e.g., Monash), but up to 10 years at RMIT. The average is 4.8 years of management or work experience (mode=5 years).

Costs of Program

Our data reveal that the cost of completing a DBA is on a subject by subject basis or on an annual basis. For example, Charles Sturt University charges $1,900 per unit and $10,500 for the thesis component, compared with Swinburne University of Technology that charges $10,000 per annum for the coursework and an additional cost for the thesis. The average cost for a DBA is around AUD$35,000. It must be remembered that costing structures for DBA programs are still fluid because of the relative newness of the degree in an Australian context. DBA providers appear to be monitoring their competitors' offerings and costs as a means of remaining competitive and attractive to the increasing graduate student client base.

Profiles of Enrolments

It is difficult to obtain firm data regarding numbers of students enrolled in DBA degrees in Australia, due to various forms of data collection employed by the federal government's Department of Employment, Science and Training. The best we can do is identify that in 2001 there were 358 students (equivalent full time) enrolled in doctorate by coursework degrees, and 1,160 enrolled in doctorate by research degrees in management and commerce (DEST, 2002b). Of the coursework students, 164 (46%) were international students. Of the doctorate by research students, 212 (18%) were international students. These data suggest that doctoral programs with coursework components in management and commerce are more attractive to offshore students than are the traditional research doctorates. However, because the DBA is a combination of research and coursework, it is difficult to assert that these findings indicate the DBA is more successful in catering to international students than is the PhD. Obviously we need to explore why students select the DBA ahead of the PhD, both from a domestic and international perspective. Additionally, the degree to which the DBA consists of research and coursework components may help differentiate among which degrees attract the greater number of international students. For instance, is it likely that DBAs with a larger research component attract more international students, or fewer than their domestic counterparts?

Summary — Key Features of the DBA in Australia

Our paper has examined the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree in Australia today. A number of features identify this degree as follows:

- The DBA in Australia is a relative newcomer in graduate research-coursework offerings, with the first DBA degree commencing in 1993 at Victoria University (previously Victoria University of Technology).

- The majority of universities offer a full-time degree of around three years duration, and these degrees contain a major research component, ranging from 50% of the course requirements in five (25%) universities to 66% or greater in 14 (70%) universities.

- The DBA is primarily delivered internally (63% of cases), while on-line and distance mode completions of the degree are generally the province of second-tier and regional institutions.

- Most universities offer a mixture of internal and external assessment modes, with many opting for external assessment of the research component of the degree.

- The number of units required for completion of the DBA ranges from five to 24, and the credit points associated with these units varies considerably across universities, ranging from 20 credit points to 360 credit points.

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- The admission criteria generally require completion of an undergraduate degree in a business-related area, or an honours degree, Masters degree, or MBA. Most DBA programs require around four years of management or work experience.

- The average cost of a DBA is around AUD$35,000.

- There were 1518 students enrolled in research and coursework doctorates in management and commerce in Australia in 2001, of which 376 (25%) were international students. DBA programs with coursework components in management and commerce appeared to attract more international students than the traditional research doctorates.

Problems and Prospects

The following observations relate to the future development of the DBA specifically, and graduate research education generally in Australia.

In December 1999, the Federal Government of Australia released a major research initiative entitled *Knowledge and Innovation: A policy statement on research and research training* (DETYA, 1999). In that statement, the Federal Minister for Education at the time, Dr David Kemp, outlined that "research as a key source of knowledge and new ideas is central to success in the global knowledge community" (DETYA, 1999:1). In order to achieve this objective, the government instituted a performance-based allocative funding scheme that disburses funds to universities on the basis of graduate student completions, research capacity, and research output (DETYA, 1999:19). The emphasis on the need to increase the numbers of graduate students and improve the quality of research outcomes is unambiguous in these government imperatives.

The DBA degree in the main is a graduate research degree, so is subject to the regulations and objectives governing this initiative by the federal government. However, graduate research students require academic supervisors to guide and direct the students through the research process to completion. Unfortunately, the federal government's push for increased graduate research student completions has not considered the need to increase the numbers of staff available to supervise, nor the resources available to assist in this supervision. This issue had been addressed almost half a dozen years ago through a federal government sponsored study of research-coursework doctoral programs by Trigwell *et al* (1997:2, Ch 6), whose findings identified that the lack of supervision was a major problem for these programs. A review of DBA programs in Australia by Neumann and Goldstein (2002:33) also identified the lack of supervisory staff as compromising the quality of the degree overall. A major challenge for universities intending to satisfy and indeed exceed these government imperatives is how to increase the numbers of staff

appropriately credentialed to take on supervision of doctoral and Masters by research candidates. For example, in 2002 Monash University introduced a Supervisor Training Workshop Module that fast-tracks academics into supervisory positions. The training modules cover nine keys facets of supervision: (1) policy preliminaries — doctoral regulations, admission procedures, resources; (2) first meetings between students and supervisors; (3) initial 3-4 month period — defining and refining research proposal; (4) monitoring student progress; (5) reading and providing feedback; (6) problem solving — resources, student grievances; (7) producing the thesis; (8) examination process; and (9) final debriefing. Staff who complete a training workshop will achieve competency and accreditation in a number of the modules. The remaining modules are completed over the remainder of the year under the guidance of a staff mentor who must have had a minimum of three students successfully completing their doctoral studies.

Other issues that need attention are more macro in nature, and may require some external intervention. For example, there are still too many types of DBA degree on offer. Invariably, some DBA degrees are better than others. These observations reiterate the trend reported in the United Kingdom almost a decade ago (Kay, 1995), and again affirmed by Bourner *et al* (2000: 494). In some cases, students can obtain their DBA degree by completing a minimum of three units and a research thesis of around 50,000 words. This standard is not much more rigorous than the requirements for the completion of an honours year in some of our universities.

In other cases, and as shown in the findings, the number of units required for completion of the DBA degree range from five to 24, while the credit points associated with these units range from 72 to 360 credit points. Obviously these numerous standards complicate the ease with which cross-institutional transfers are made. For example, the potential exists for some DBA courses not recognizing the units completed by students wishing to transfer from another DBA course in which that student is enrolled. On the basis of these complexities, it is clear that until a benchmark of admission criteria, teaching and research standards, and expected outcomes at the DBA level is established, then poorer quality DBA degrees will continue to compromise the integrity and acceptability of the DBA as a suitable alternative to the PhD.

Similar to the observations of Bourner *et al* (2000), Bareham, Bourner and Ruggeri-Stevens (2000), and Neumann and Godistein (2002), we contend that the DBA is more specifically designed for the senior management practitioner who seeks different learning outcomes from the traditional PhD candidate. The flexibility and broad-based curriculum offerings of DBA programs help candidates conduct research in areas most relevant to their business needs, while also helping these candidates achieve a high degree of research expertise. Barehman *et al* (2000: 401) state that "the DBA represents the coming of age of work-based learning at the highest level of higher education." Consistent with these findings, our Australian research indicates that DBA programs in that country are looking more alike in their strategic intent, but still retain their individual attractions in other ways. For example, Australian DBA programs are achieving research outcomes with practical as well as theoretical outcomes, similar to those reported in the UK (Bourner *et al*, 2000), but are achieving these outcomes through various modes of delivery and at varying levels of sophistication and research rigor.

Our findings have addressed some of the concerns raised by Bourner *et al* (2000: 495) about comparing the program content and structure of DBA degrees in the UK with those in Australia. However, there is still some way to go in identifying the minimum required research outcomes of the DBA in Australia, in comparison to the fairly specific regulations governing the satisfactory completion of a PhD. Additionally, we need further information governing why students are attracted to one DBA program ahead of another. For example, differing admission criteria may preclude the self-selection of candidates into particular programs. Alternatively, various other variables such as different fee and cost structures, modes of delivery, research rigor of theses, caliber of academic staff, and provision of supervisory expertise may help potential candidates in their selection of DBA programs. These decisions may be influenced by cultural factors, so that domestic students use a different set of selection criteria compared with their international counterparts. These issues need further examination in future studies into the DBA.

Overall, we affirm that the DBA degree is increasingly being recognized as a viable alternative to the PhD as a doctoral qualification, but with different outcomes and catering to a different clientele. More research is needed to examine these differences in detail.

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