

26.5.2026

**Author**

CUTHBERT, Denise (MOLLA, Tebeje)

**Title**

PhD crisis discourse : a critical approach to the framing of the problem and some Australian "solutions" / Denise Cuthbert ; Tebeje Molla

**Publication year**

2015

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education. - 69 (2015) 1, S. 33 - 53

**Inventory number**

37543

**Keywords**

Ausland : Australien : Studenten, Studium, Lehre ; Ausland : Australien : einzelne Hochschulen ; Promotion : allgemein

**Abstract**

A feature of HE reform discourse is the tendency to construct the rationale for reform in terms of averting calamity and risk. We refer to this risk talk as 'crisis discourse'. This study examines the formulation of PhD crisis discourse internationally and in Australia. We find that a key feature of PhD crisis discourse is that universities are producing too many graduates for too few academic jobs; and graduates lack skills that enable them to be productive in jobs outside academia. In Australia, the discourse has shifted from one dominated by efficiency concerns from the late 1990s to the present focus on graduate skills and employability. The policy solution to the efficiency crisis in the Australian PhD resulted in system-wide changes in research training funding focused on increased efficiency. The current unemployability discourse has as yet prompted isolated institutional responses, the introduction of new PhD programs or re-badging existing offerings as pro-skills development offerings. Following an examination of three Australian institutional responses, we conclude that the

**26.5.2026**

crisis discourse signals tensions surrounding the PhD: should achievement in doctoral education be measured by outcomes in intellectual excellence or the responsiveness of qualification to the current needs and priorities of society? (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Molla, Tebeje, E-Mail: tebeje.m@deakin.edu.au