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Employment opportunities in Australia for educational researchers: a review of recent advertisements

Abstract

The Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) by promoting the conference theme has identified a need to be more proactive to ensure growth in the number of educational researchers. Within the higher education sector there are a number of methods used to encourage interest in a particular area, and these include policy, funding, sponsorship, employment and scholarships. There are three types of employment for academics: Research, Lecturing and Teaching and Learning and two types of scholarships: either students self-identify the topic or topics are targeted with associated funding. The aim of this study is to review the academic positions and targeted scholarships of Australian Universities and research organisations gathered from advertisements in a national newspaper. This will establish a baseline of recent practice from July to December, 2006 and identify opportunities for researchers in all Disciplines and specifically in education. Results reveal the two main groups for academics are Research and Lecturing, with a small number in Teaching and Learning. Although the education Discipline is well represented overall (3rd in 12 Disciplines after Health and Science) in terms of research opportunities education then moves to 10th position. A further significant finding is the highly contractual nature of research versus the more stable, tenured environment for lecturing. There are a number of implications arising from this short study. Firstly, the Discipline of Education as a targeted area for research alone is significantly under-represented in the advertised positions but is well represented in lecturing where the role always requires teaching and research. Thus it seems the amount of time devoted to research by academics in the education Discipline is significantly lower than for health or science. Secondly, there are few industry/government targeted scholarships in the education Discipline therefore any growth in numbers of educational researchers through postgraduate study is not expanded by funding to meet identified needs. In conclusion AARE, an association interested in promoting the growth of educational research, has an obvious need to encourage and review the outcomes of this study and perhaps adopt some of the successful strategies employed by other Disciplines to improve the opportunities for educational researchers in the future.

Keywords: academics, capacity building, higher education

Introduction

This paper was inspired by a perceived need to highlight the lower funding for straight research in the Discipline of Education and to raise interest in this fundamental matter of improving scholarship. It is intended to be delivered and debated at the forthcoming conference addressing the AARE theme “How do we interest more people in becoming educational researchers?”

The Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) by promoting the conference theme has identified a need to be more proactive to ensure growth in the number of educational researchers. Within the higher education sector there are a range of methods used to encourage interest in a particular area, and these include policy, funding, sponsorship, employment and scholarships.

It is commonly understood that research is a cornerstone of higher education and that opportunities offered through employment and formal studies offer ongoing development of research and researchers. Employment plays a vital role in this development and Universities encourage research through employment of academic staff and students in different roles like research, lecturing, and support. Furthermore Universities offer students opportunities, through enrolment and scholarships, to

engage in research through coursework and research studies at honours, masters and doctoral levels.

This paper will explore the areas of employment and scholarships across Australian Universities, and other research entities, through advertised positions in a national paper. The findings will be analysed to determine any strategies, themes or differences between Disciplines and Universities, locate and compare the Discipline of education and identify the opportunities offered to educational researchers within this context.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to review the academic positions and targeted scholarships of Australian Universities and research organisations gathered from advertisements in a national, daily newspaper. This study will explore the following questions:

- (i) What advertised opportunities are available in the higher education sector from July to December 2006 at Australian institutions?
- (ii) From the findings, where does the Discipline of education sit within the sector and are there any outstanding strategies identified in other Disciplines?

Data Source

The Australian Newspaper (2006) was identified as the only national, daily paper in Australia where Australian Universities and research organisations commonly advertise academic positions for both research and teaching. In line with an early study by Bradmore and Bedgood (2001), a census of advertised positions to review industry experience as a criterion for academic staff appointment at Australian Universities, The Australian continues to offer a comprehensive and representative coverage of advertised academic positions across all Australian Universities.

The time period for this paper will cover advertisements for one semester (July to December 2006) found in The Australian Wednesday issue Higher Education Supplement (HES) and The Weekend Australian Career One. Each advertisement was recorded with information on institution, Discipline, employment type, position, level, subject area or topic for study, mode, day and month of advertising. All 39 Australian Universities advertised positions within this period and all advertisements for a non-University institution, like a research association or government department, were placed in a group called "Other".

There were a number of exclusions from the dataset of collected advertisements, repeats, re-advertised and generic scholarships. The reasons for the exclusions are explained below:

Repeat: Where an advertisement was repeated, the second and subsequent advertisement was excluded.

Re-advertised: These were excluded except where the original advertisement was outside of the set time frame.

Generic scholarships: Advertisements for generic scholarships were excluded from the dataset for two reasons. Firstly, the information about the number of scholarships offered and associated Discipline is not available. Secondly, not all Universities advertise this type of scholarship therefore these advertisements were not seen to be an incomplete sample.

The final adjustment to the dataset occurred where a position spans two levels (for example postdoctoral fellow/research fellow or lecturer/senior lecturer). In these

circumstances the position was recorded at the lower level to indicate the minimum level of appointment.

Dataset: advertised positions

There are three types of opportunities for academics included in this study: Lecturing, Research, and Teaching and Learning (T&L). The definition for each of the employment types is outlined below:

Lecturing: An academic position identified with duties that include teaching and research advertised by a University or government department like lecturer or senior lecturer.

Research: An academic position identified with duties that include research only advertised by a University, government department or research centre like targeted PhD scholarship, research fellow or senior research fellow.

Teaching and Learning: An academic or general staff position identified with duties such as teaching, academic and technology support in both central and Discipline like learning designer or e-learning lecturer.

There is a fourth type of employment for academics: **administrative**. This is defined as an academic position identified with duties that do not specifically include research or teaching like Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor and Dean. The administrative type of employment was excluded from the data represented in this study.

Results

Overview of Advertised Positions

All Universities in Australia advertised positions during the period of this study, July to December 2006. As shown in Table 2 Advertisements by University, 82.5% were placed by Universities with the remaining 12.5% placed by “other” institutions. The share of positions offered by Universities ranged from the highest at Monash University (192) to the lowest number at Southern Cross University (4). There are a significant number of positions offered by organisations ‘other’ than Universities (308).

Examination of the data shows that a total of 2,472 advertised positions were identified over the period July to December 2006. As shown Table 1 Advertisements by Type, 57% fall within Lecturer, 41% in Research and the remaining 2% in Teaching and Learning (T&L).

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Positions</i>
Lecturer	1406
Research	1020
T & L	46
TOTAL	2,472

Table 1 Advertisements by Type

The majority of advertised positions in higher education were placed in the Wednesday issue of The Australian newspaper. In this study, 89% of the advertisements were found in the Higher Education Supplement (HES) with 11% in The Weekend Australian. As shown in Figure 1, when comparing this study to the previous study in 2000 (Bradmore & Bedggood), there is a 9% shift in higher education advertisements from The Weekend to Wednesday’s HES.

<i>Australian Universities</i>	<i>Lecturer</i>	<i>Research</i>	<i>T&L</i>	<i>Positions</i>
Australian Catholic University	27	0	0	27
Australian National University	13	53	0	66
Bond University	6	4	1	11
Central Queensland University	46	2	9	57
Charles Darwin University	27	10	1	38
Charles Sturt University	59	5	1	65
Curtin University of Technology	36	22	1	59
Deakin University	28	6	3	37
Edith Cowan University	18	2	0	20
Flinders University	18	20	0	38
Griffith University	69	26	0	95
James Cook University	19	5	2	26
La Trobe University	32	19	0	51
Macquarie University	31	15	0	46
Monash University	116	74	2	192
Murdoch University	8	2	0	10
Queensland University of Technology	95	15	2	112
RMIT University	29	35	1	65
Southern Cross University	1	2	1	4
Swinburne University of Technology	13	6	0	19
University of Adelaide	46	24	0	70
University of Ballarat	21	3	0	24
University of Canberra	17	4	0	21
University of Melbourne	33	49	2	84
University of New England	21	4	0	25
University of New South Wales	51	59	0	110
University of Newcastle	65	20	0	85
University of Notre Dame Australia - The	19	0	0	19
University of Queensland	50	85	0	135
University of South Australia	44	15	1	60
University of Southern Queensland	38	0	3	41
University of Sydney	86	45	2	133
University of Tasmania	48	40	4	92
University of Technology Sydney	25	10	0	35
University of the Sunshine Coast	16	1	0	17
University of Western Australia	25	36	1	62
University of Western Sydney	35	12	1	48
University of Wollongong	37	16	0	53
Victoria University	8	4	0	12
Other	30	275	3	308
TOTAL	1,406	1,025	41	2,472

Table 2 Advertisements by University in alphabetic order

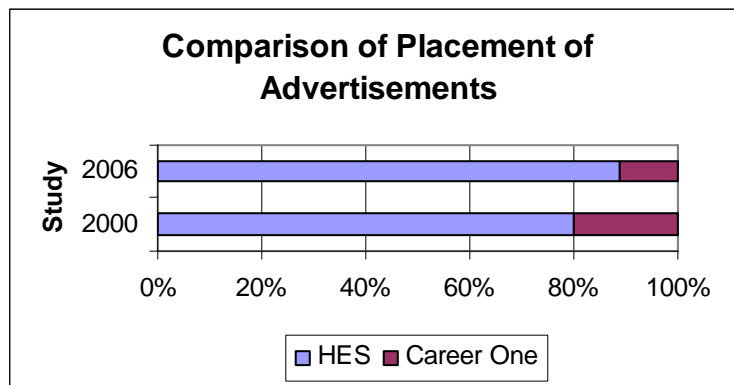


Figure 1 Comparison of Placement of Advertisements

The main months for advertised positions in higher education is October (21%) and November (26%) and this strong advertising period in higher education leads into preparation for the new calendar year. As shown in Table 3, this is consistent across the three categories.

Category	July	August	September	October	November	December
Lecturer	139	232	235	284	369	147
Research	91	151	171	223	258	126
T & L	2	12	7	3	19	3
TOTAL	232	395	413	510	646	276

Table 3 Advertisements by Category and Month

The advertised positions offer either tenure (ongoing position) or contract (fixed term). This shows strong similarities between Lecturer (81%) and Teaching and Learning (63%) where most offer tenure. However, as shown in Table 4, Research positions are the complete opposite to these, where only a small minority (6%) are offered tenure. It is outside the scope of this study to explore the affect of the high number of contract positions in attracting applicants to research positions.

Categories	Tenure	Contract
T & L	29	17
Lecturer	1141	265
Research	58	962
TOTAL	1,228	1,244

Table 4 Advertisements by Category and Mode

The Teaching and Learning (T&L) category is quite unique in that positions can be located centrally, in Faculties or in service units. T&L represents the smallest number of advertised opportunities (2%) with the majority of positions designated to support services to assist academic staff. Therefore further analysis in this study will focus on the Lecturer and Research categories only.

Lecturer and Research Categories

The 2,425 advertised positions in Lecturer and Research were classified into 12 Disciplines groups in line with the Discipline groups used in the Learning and Teaching Fund (Australian Government Department of Education Science and Training, 2006). In Table 5 below, the Disciplines are ranked from highest to lowest number of advertised opportunities. This places the Discipline of Education as 3rd (8%), in the overall number of positions after Health (26%) and Science (22%).

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Lecturer</i>	<i>Research</i>	<i>Positions</i>
Health	383	254	637
Science	128	407	535
Education	168	24	192
Engineering	98	86	184
Humanities	87	89	176
Business	126	18	144
Economics	119	17	136
Architecture	107	9	116
Agriculture	34	51	85
Arts	57	23	80
Computers	38	34	72
Law	61	7	68
TOTAL	1,406	1,019	2,425

Table 5 Advertisements by Discipline and Type

However, when viewed by the percentage of Lecturer to Research in each Discipline, it shows that although Education may be 3rd overall, but the major component is Lecturer (88%) with Research (12%) a minor component. Therefore, in terms of Research opportunities, this difference would move the Discipline of Education from 3rd overall to 10th of 12 Disciplines.

This is highlighted in Figure 2, and shows the significant differences in the research opportunities offered to academics and students in the top three Disciplines ranging from a minor focus in Education at 12%, a major focus in Science at 76% and a more balanced focus in Health with Research at 40%.

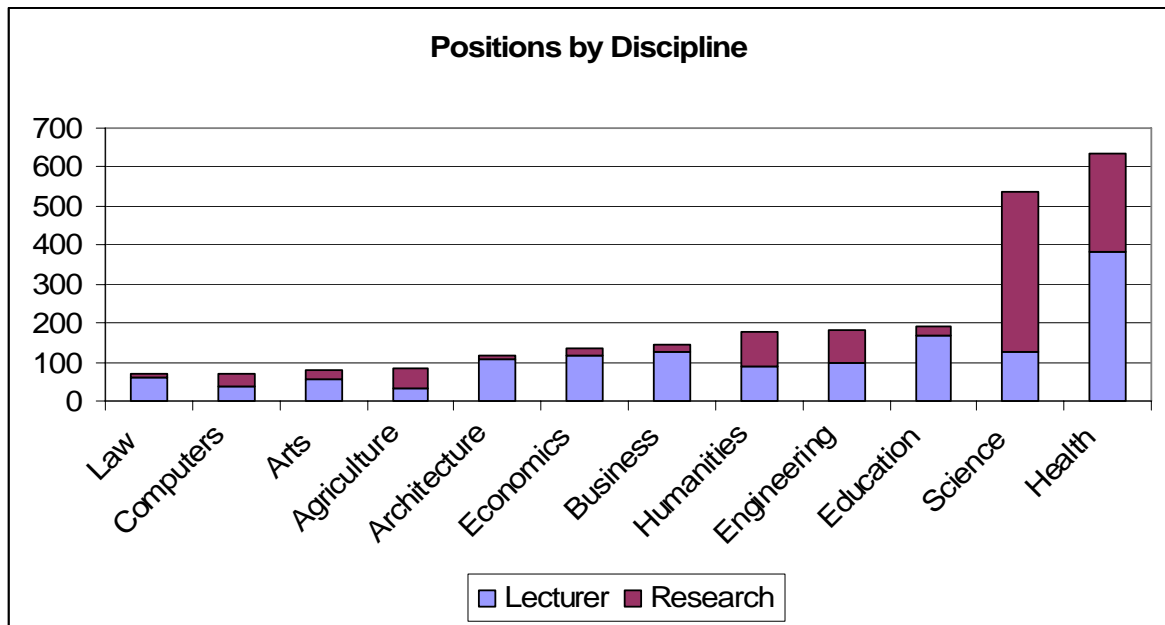


Figure 2 Lecturer and Research by Discipline

Doctoral Studies

Further analysis within the Research category, in Figure 3, highlights the strong trend to offer doctoral scholarships in predetermined, or targeted, topic areas by Health and Science, and to a lesser degree Agriculture, Humanities and Engineering.

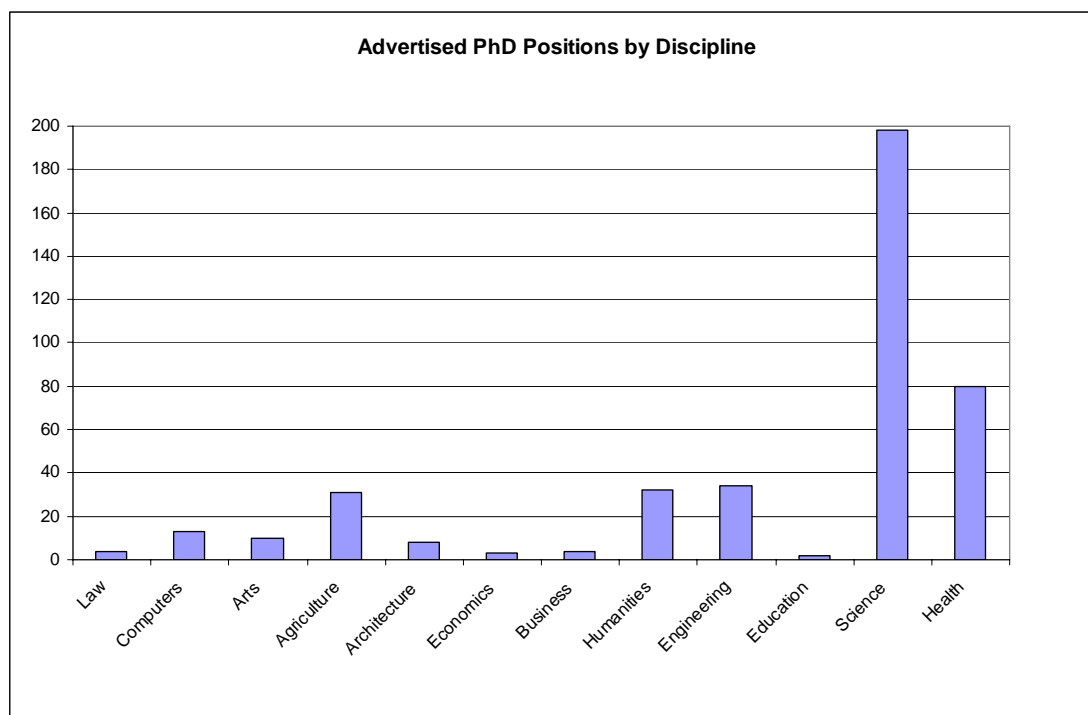


Figure 3 Advertised PhD Positions by Discipline

Within the Discipline of Education there were only 24 advertised positions in the Research Category and half (50%) of these are Research Fellow positions. Although Table 6 shows PhD as a relatively small number (8%) this represents the targeted PhDs and does not represent the total number of students enrolling in or completing doctoral studies in Education.

<i>Advertised Role</i>	<i>Education</i>
Research Assistant	1
PhD	2
PhD Fellow	5
Research Fellow	12
Senior Research Fellow	2
Professorial Fellow	2
TOTAL	24

Table 6 Advertised Roles in Education

In fact a comparison of targeted PhD scholarships across all Disciplines highlight the huge differences in the allocation of monies. The Australian Postgraduate Award scholarship is usually offered for 3 years with the value in 2007 set at \$19,616 per year (University of Newcastle, 2007). This translates into a focussed investment of \$58,848 for the candidature in a topic nominated or identified by a Discipline or Research Centre.

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>PhDs</i>	<i>APA \$58,848</i>
Law	4	\$235,392
Computers	13	\$765,024
Arts	10	\$588,480
Agriculture	31	\$1,824,288
Architecture	8	\$470,784
Economics	3	\$176,544
Business	4	\$235,392
Humanities	32	\$1,883,136
Engineering	34	\$2,000,832
Education	2	\$117,696
Science	198	\$11,651,904
Health	80	\$4,707,840
TOTAL	419	\$24,657,312

Table 7 Advertised PhDs by Investment based on APA 2007 rate

This illustrates another trend where the experience of doctoral candidates in targeted scholarships may include working in teams on large projects rather than a single candidate working with PhD supervisors. It is outside the scope of this study to explore the research pathways of targeted PhD students; however, it would be of some interest to know the post PhD research pathways taken by students from different Disciplines.

Points of interest

Research in the Discipline of Education is often conducted in isolation. The lack of references for this paper is a good example of this study standing quite alone. For example there is excellent data available on doctoral completions over the last 60 years, and yet, this study does not build upon the other it merely fits alongside. A case of scattered studies in research rather than building a solid body of research, therefore, cohesion and working toward common goals to advance the cause for educational researchers may be a goal worth pursuing.

The Disciplines of Health and Science have strong outside support above and beyond the funding and positions allocated by individual Universities. This source of support, encouragement and direction is not evident for the Discipline of Education. There is a need for everyone within Universities, associations and professional bodies to foster strong alliances with industry and government organisations to improve funding, industry interest and increase the opportunities to build the capacity of educational researchers.

Within Universities the majority of Lecturer positions advertised included both teaching and research duties, however, it is too simplistic to assume that the duties at of equal value. It may be valuable for Disciplines of Education to review positions and designate 'research' positions where the majority of time is allocated to research with a lesser role in teaching. This may help identify, strengthen and identify current educational researchers and lend greater credibility to the network as a whole.

Conclusion

There are a number of implications arising from this short study. Firstly, the education Discipline as a targeted area for research alone is significantly under-represented in the advertised positions but is well represented in lecturing where the role always requires teaching and research. Thus it seems the amount of time devoted to research by academics in the Discipline of Education is significantly lower than for Health or Science. Secondly, there are few industry/government targeted scholarships in the Discipline of Education therefore any growth in numbers of educational researchers through postgraduate study is not expanded by funding to meet identified needs.

In conclusion AARE, an association interested in promoting the growth of educational research, has an obvious need to encourage and review the outcomes of this study and perhaps adopt some of the successful strategies employed by other Disciplines to improve the opportunities for educational researchers in the future.

References

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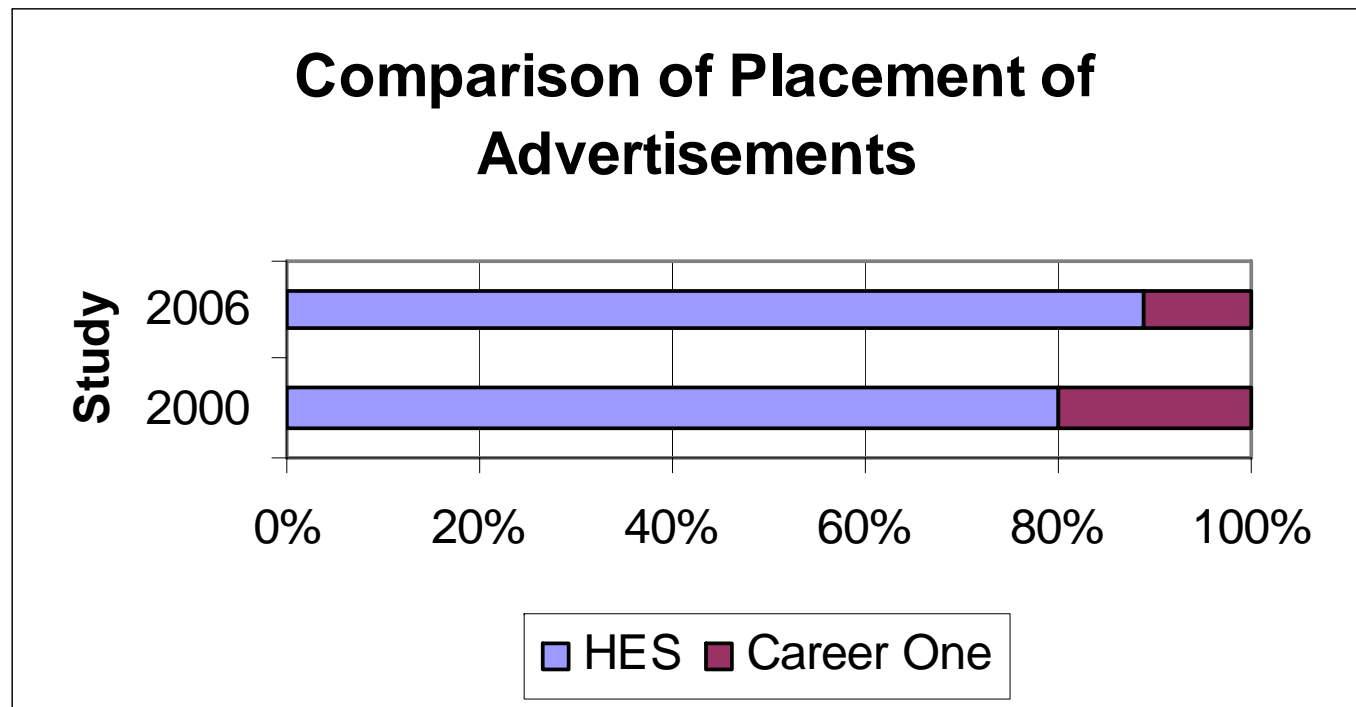


Advertised positions Jul-Dec 2006

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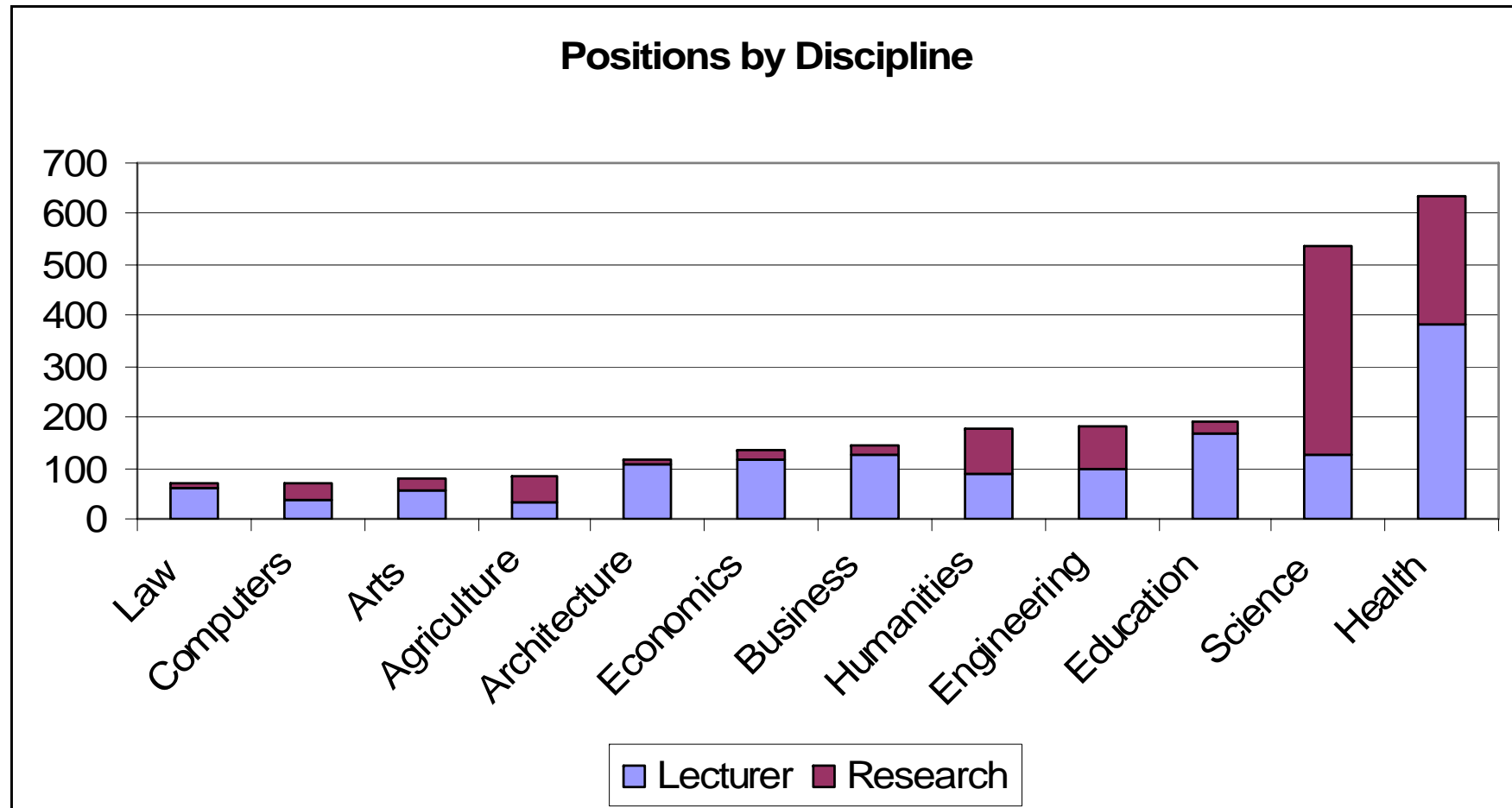


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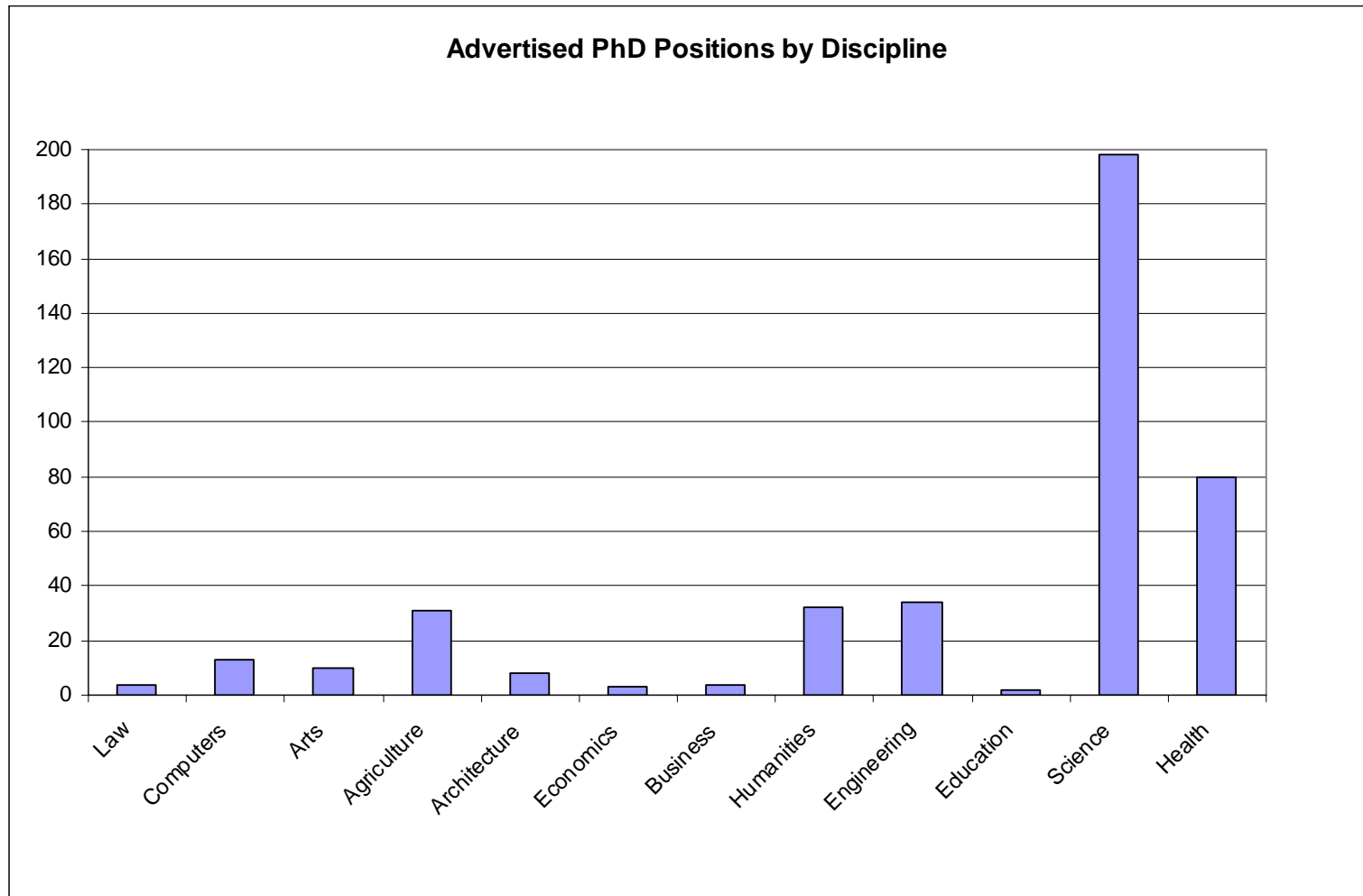


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Targeted PhDs





Research positions within Education

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Targeted funding for advertised PhDs

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Points of interest

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- The Disciplines of Health and Science have strong outside support above and beyond the funding and positions allocated by individual Universities.
- Within Universities the majority of Lecturer positions advertised included both teaching and research duties, however, it is too simplistic to assume that the duties are of equal value.



Your feedback and suggestions

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