

# CAMPUS REVIEW

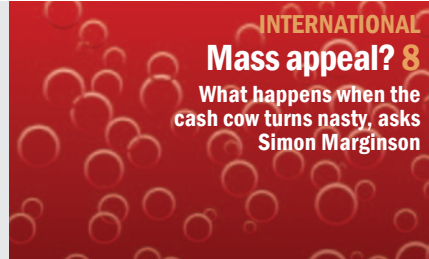
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Diane Kalendra, front, was one of three PhD and three DBAs to graduate from the private Gibaran Graduate School of Business in Adelaide last Friday.

## Landmark moment: first private PhDs conferred

by Joanna Mather and Elizabeth Heath

A private provider in Adelaide has conferred Australia's first non-university PhD qualifications. Three students received PhDs in management from the Gibaran Graduate School of Business during a graduation ceremony on Friday. Three other students received doctorates of business administration (DBAs).

A PhD at Gibaran costs \$48,000 and a DBA \$36,000.

It was a landmark moment for Australia's education sector, higher education policy analyst Gavin Moodie said.

While universities were likely to be unimpressed at the move, it would probably be "warmly welcomed" by federal Education Minister Julie Bishop, he said.

"But there are two risks and I think they would concern most universities," Moodie said. "Is it private for-profit and does the profit motive introduce too big a risk for compromising standards, cutting

corners and what not?"

"The second issue is whether a provider that is so small and so specialised could offer the depth and breadth of experience that you would expect of a PhD."

The Gibaran Graduate School of Business in central Adelaide is part of the Gibaran Learning Group. Chairman Dr Selva Abraham said quality was a top priority and the cost of its DBA and PhD courses were similar to universities. Further, the school could deliver better outcomes for students as a result of being small and specialised.

"We have been through three accreditation processes since our establishment," said Abraham, a former adjunct professor with Southern Cross University.

"We tend to be very, very protective of quality and we have always maintained that. At the start of course we were the 'black sheep' in the business, but over time I think people now understand what we do and that we are a quality institution."

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## Carrick announces new discipline-based strategy

by Julie Hare

The Carrick Institute is to establish five networks to be headed by senior academics to replace the current discipline-based initiatives grants process, executive director Professor Richard Johnstone said last week.

The network heads will be charged with developing a range of activities and strategies that focus the "collective energy and commitment" of their discipline groupings to improve the quality of learning and teaching, including dissemination of best practice, engaging with early-career academics and providing them with meaningful support and developing priority areas.

"The networks will provide a kind of Carrick outreach," Johnstone told *Campus Review*.

"I am very conscious of the fact the Carrick is a national body. We need to build links into the sector so there is a pathway from the Carrick Institute right through the institutions to the individual academic."

The discipline pathway heads will be engaged, employed and funded by the Carrick but physically located in a university.

While high-profile former Discipline-Based Initiatives director Associate Professor Jan Orrell has resigned, Johnstone denies the new strategy is related to her departure.

He said 43 projects had been funded in 2006-07, of which about a dozen are almost complete. While no new projects will be funded under the discipline-based Initiatives grants scheme in 2008, all existing projects will be offered the opportunity to apply for ongoing funding if they can clearly identify a way to take their projects forward in their final report.

Project managers would be able to apply for additional funding of up to \$150,000 under this new measure.

"We will be continuing applications and giving current grant holders the opportunity to seek additional funding. At the moment we are not seeking applications for new grants under the Discipline-Based Initiatives scheme but looking at what, if any, additional priority areas we want to introduce into our overall projects and grants scheme," Johnstone said.

He said the first two years of had been treated very much as a "scoping exercise".

"We are now looking at a second stage to ask how well we best provide effective guidance and leadership to take some

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South Australia's *Training and Skills Development Act 2003* enables non-university institutions which have demonstrated their academic *bona fides* and capacity to meet national regulations to issue higher education qualifications.

Following accreditation processes between 1995 and 1999, Gibaran was accredited to award the full suite of higher education qualifications in management, from diploma through to doctorates.

In 2001, three new institutions in niche areas of business were created: the Australian Institute of Business Administration, Entrepreneurship Institute Australia and Tourism Institute Australia. The Gibaran group now offers qualifications through 13 delivery centres in countries including Singapore, New Zealand and the UK.

However, Moodie claimed South Australia had the least rigorous accreditation requirements of all of the states.

"I don't know how much credibility the PhD would have among other universities – it would have to develop over several years," he said.

"I haven't read the thesis and I don't know who the examiners were so I can't comment on the specific PhD. But I do think that it's so unusual it will take time to develop credibility and standing."

Sid Bourke, professor of education at the University of Newcastle, who is currently undertaking his second ARC-funded project to look into Australian PhDs said the major concern with private providers was quality, which embraced issues such as lack of infrastructure such as libraries, networks and lack of a research culture.

"The first concern is quality. [In our research] we've argued the quality of PhDs is set by the examiners. Given [Gibaran's] academic board has academics from other intuitions they are probably using the same sets of examiners that we are using," he said, adding this alleviated much of his concern.

Abraham said the school had collaborative

relationships with Adelaide University and the University of South Australia.

"Flinders gave us their online library to support us in this process," he said.

"Members of our academic board are made up of people from University of South Australia, Adelaide University and from other universities."

When asked about equity, Abraham said if a potential student with "financial challenges" approached the school with a topic of special interest he would try to work out a partial scholarship.

Abraham said the group took a "very cautious" approach to its new responsibilities.

"The strength that we have is that we concentrate on a narrow area of workplace learning. A PhD is a very highly respected qualification and we don't want to create a mass market situation."

Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations president Nigel Palmer agreed a smaller, specialised provider could bring certain advantages for research students.

"A niche provider can offer quite good value for money to a PhD student, but there's always the risk that what they have on offer is very narrow," he said.

"Research students in general are potentially more vulnerable to be short-changed because of the unstructured learning environment of Australian PhDs, but they are also more vulnerable to run into problems which smaller providers may be less equipped to support them on."

Moodie said Australia was largely unfamiliar with small specialised institutions, unlike the US and UK where examples include Caltech, Imperial College, and Rochester.

"These are all very specialised institutions than you exactly get in Australia so it might be a bit of local prejudice," he said.

"[Gibaran] has been around for quite a while. It started with mid-level management programs and has steadily built them up. It's not as if this is out of the blue. It's the result of a steady accumulation of work."