



Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia

DATA FOR THE FUTURE

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In 2014, with Kylie Brass from the Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH), I co-authored the report, *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia*.¹ The proposal for such a report was originally put to the then Minister for the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIICCSRTE), Senator Chris Evans, by the then President of the Academy, Emeritus Professor Lesley Johnson AM FAHA. It was inspired by the Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb AC's 2012 report on the health of the sciences. This report provided a baseline of information and analysis for policy and planning for the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, and highlighted, by example, the need for a similar baseline to be set for the humanities, arts and social science (HASS) disciplines. Though initially aimed at mapping only the humanities disciplines, the AAH proposal was funded by the government on the condition that it extended its reach into the arts and social sciences. Accordingly, the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) became partners with the AAH in this enterprise; it was managed through the Secretariat of the AAH and overseen by a steering committee of AAH and ASSA Fellows.² As a result, much of what is outlined below relates to the HASS sector as a whole, although at some points I have disaggregated the findings and focus on the humanities disciplines separately. Finally,

it is important to note that, in addition to the funding provided by DIICCSRTE and the two Academies, the project received generous in-kind support from the Office of the Chief Scientist and from the Australian Research Council (ARC); without this support we would not have been able to provide a report of such scale and complexity.

Typically, some would say almost pathologically, the HASS sector feels it does not get the attention and support it deserves. There are often good reasons for that feeling. On the one hand, people can undervalue the knowledge these disciplines generate because the focus of their work is so directly related to people's everyday lives; at its best, in fact, the results can just seem like common sense rather than specialised expertise. On the other hand, when these disciplines get a little too sophisticated and develop technical terminology (routine and acceptable for the sciences but not apparently for HASS!), the media in particular tend to bolt for the exits, screaming 'Postmodernism! Run for your lives!'. More seriously, and regrettably, those wishing to make the case for the sector have long been hampered by the lack of comprehensive empirical evidence of what they do, the value it brings to the nation, and the conditions in which they do it.

The *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* report sets out to put an end to that. What it provides is evidence, in abundance, of what the HASS sector contributes to the nation,

(right)
 Professor
 Ian Chubb AC,
 Australia's Chief
 Scientist, launching
 the *Mapping the
 Humanities, Arts
 and Social Sciences
 in Australia* report
 at the National
 Press Club of
 Australia, Canberra,
 28 October 2014.

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 NATIONAL PRESS CLUB
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while also pointing to issues that are critical to its future. If the nation wants to maintain a strong and vibrant HASS sector, the evidence contained in the report is vital to the planning and commitment that this will require. It cannot be stated too often, in my view, that the HASS disciplines are fundamental components of every comprehensive national university system around the globe. I am not a supporter of those who feel that the humanities, in particular, need to remake themselves so that they more closely resemble the sciences — emphasising their applied capacities and their vocational value. Nor is it an issue of communication — as in we need to be better communicators

provides the HASS sector with a body of evidence to help it respond to that opportunity.

Regrettably, to date, Australia's approach to generating and maintaining our national capacity in the HASS disciplines has been contingent upon short-term strategic policy settings, relatively autonomous institutional and sector-level funding decisions, and short-term responses to fluctuations in student demand and study preferences. Often strategic decisions that serve the purposes of governments have had unforeseen and deleterious knock-on effects for the HASS disciplines; their exclusion from the tax concessions to business for research investment is one, particularly egregious, example of this. While the need to properly plan the national capacities in research and higher education is now being recognised in higher education and research policy discussions, so far government has only concerned itself (and then, only after much effort from the Chief Scientist) with STEM.

A nation of Australia's size has no option but to be strategic in how it invests its resources, and to plan its futures. For this to happen, decision-makers at all levels need authoritative information on our current capacities in order to plan for the future. Until now, the information that would make this possible for the HASS

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about our work. In my view, the way to defend these disciplines is to continually demonstrate to the community not only that the particular knowledges and understandings these disciplines generate are intrinsically valuable in themselves but also that they are especially valuable in the complex environment we face today. Responding to today's social, cultural and economic challenges requires specialist knowledge of the peoples, societies, regions and cultures that underpin, fuel or react to these challenges. The HASS disciplines are integral to achieving this fine-tuned understanding. In some quarters, there is a greater acceptance of that position now than ever before, and the HASS community should see this as a moment of opportunity. *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*

sector has not been available in an accessible form. *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* is a major first step towards a more informed understanding of the current health of the sector. Those who prepared and funded the project want the report to be used — by academic staff, by academic planners and administrators, by departments, schools, faculties and universities, and by policy-makers within government. The report is detailed and contains an impressive collection of data, information that has never been aggregated before, and the benefits it offers to us, by becoming available, are considerable.

The project, which surveyed the period from 2002 to 2012, set out to address the following research questions:



(left)
Cover and spreads from **Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia** report (Australian Academy of the Humanities, 2014).

- * What are the major areas of research and teaching strength in HASS in Australia?
- * What is Australia's public investment in teaching and research in the HASS disciplines?
- * What are the current trends in HASS enrolments in Australian universities?
- * Where are the gaps in research capabilities and research infrastructure now and in the future?
- * What is the current profile and capacity of the academic workforce in HASS?

Addressing these questions involved dealing with a range of data sources that are not necessarily interoperable, with material being collected under different categories for different purposes. Activity in teaching, for instance, is collected under the Australian Bureau of Statistics' categories of Fields of Education (FoE), while activity in research is collected using the Australian Research Council's Fields of Research (FoR) categories. It is not possible to aggregate these to produce a body of information that combines them.³

THE CURRENT CONDITION OF THE HASS DISCIPLINES

So, what have we found? Unfortunately, perhaps, for those who might want to use *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* as an argument for significant increases in overall government funding for these disciplines, we found that the HASS disciplines are currently in good health and making a substantial

contribution to the nation's education, research, training and employment. Of course, this does not necessarily refute arguments that the sector is poorly funded, but it does point to its high levels of productivity (on these figures, the best in the sector) and its resilience within a climate of (at best) flat-lining funding and escalating workloads in teaching and research as student load grew dramatically over the life of the Labor governments led by Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard.

In research, the HASS disciplines are among the highest performing FoRs nationally. In the 2010 Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) assessment round, of those FoRs with the highest numbers of units of assessment at the top ranking of five, two are from the humanities: History and Archaeology, and Language, Literature and Communication. Against the ERA's Discipline Growth Index, of the sixty-two disciplines returning above average growth (that is, above 12%), thirty-two are HASS disciplines. They are impressively productive: although they generate only 16% of the nation's research income, and receive 28% of research and development investment, they are responsible for 34% of the nation's research outputs; they also contributed 44% of the total number of units of evaluation in ERA.

As one would expect, most of the HASS research income is derived from the ARC's National Competitive Grants Programme; the humanities and creative arts field of research received 9.7% of the programme's funding. History and Archaeology is the standout humanities FoR with a 12% share of that funding. A notable figure, given how often the HASS disciplines are accused of having little to do with

the ‘real world’ of government or business, is the 22% of total HASS research funding that comes from the ARC’s Linkage Projects scheme. HASS research is dominated by project rather than programme funding, a limitation it shares with the rest of the sector, but which is particularly affected by the fact that the HASS disciplines have had restricted access to many of those strategic initiatives that do generate programme funding. While much of the research in these FoRs is undertaken by a sole researcher, the average number of researchers per Discovery project is two.

There are two primary areas of concern that need flagging, although I will return to such issues later. The first is the overwhelming dominance of the metropolitan universities and, in particular, the Group of Eight (Go8), in the area of research funding. For the Discovery project scheme, 68% of ARC funds went to the Go8 universities; only 4% went to regional institutions. The other area is the relatively poor record of both participation and success in some of the capacity-building programs offered by government. HASS has not done well in the Centres of Excellence (CoE) programme, securing only three out of the thirty-two CoEs established in the survey period.⁴ There is a similar story with the Linkage Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities (LIEF) scheme, where the HASS disciplines have extremely low levels of application and correspondingly low levels of success.

In teaching, there is continuing demand, high levels of student satisfaction, and the long-term value of generalist degrees such as HASS offer, like those in science, is emerging as a significant social benefit for the kind of future we face. The sector carries more than its share of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching: HASS teaches 65% of Australia’s students with 52% of the staff. Over 2002–2012, the average staff–student ratio (SSR) in HASS was 22.6, while in the STEM disciplines it was 16.8. This was preceded by an increase in HASS SSRs over the previous decade of between 27% and 35%. The positive way of seeing this is as a substantial gain in productivity — but it is also clear evidence of a significantly increased workload for those teaching in these disciplines. On the other hand, demand for the Bachelor of

Arts (BA) degree has declined slightly. Between 2001 and 2010, despite an increase in the number of students enrolling in the broader Society and Culture FoE, the number of students enrolled in a BA degree, as a proportion of enrolments in the Society and Culture FoE, dropped from 32% to 26%.⁵ There was a reduction in course offerings over this period, especially in tagged degrees, but a significant increase in dual degree enrolments. While language teaching expanded overall, there was a worrying trend in the declining provision of teaching of certain language groups, most notably Southeast Asian Languages and Australian Indigenous Languages. There is also reason for concern about the range of HASS options, again especially in the languages, available in regional universities. The *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* report contains detailed analysis of the enrolments and other data for each of the HASS FoRs.

In terms of the HASS sector’s contribution to the Australian workforce, while it is commonplace for government and media to spruik the value of professional training programs, thus implying that a generalist HASS degree may not offer the same employment outcomes, around 60% of tertiary-educated Australians have a HASS degree. This would imply that something around that percentage of those currently in the workforce are HASS trained. HASS graduates have proven to be employable, across a wide range of occupations. For instance, four years out from graduation, 90% of those graduates from the Society and Culture FoE who are available for employment have found full-time employment.

So, despite the rhetoric we increasingly hear from the United States and the United Kingdom, the HASS fields in Australia are not accurately described as being ‘in crisis’. There are, however, critical issues which demand attention if the sector is to remain strong and competitive into the future.

ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

First, the introduction of the demand-driven system has led to market failures that have significant implications for the national interest. Fluctuations in student demand have put pressure on areas of low enrolment, risking the

loss of expertise in areas of national or strategic importance. Expertise in regional languages and cultures is the example cited most often, but there are more. The condition of less commonly taught languages (LCTL), including Cantonese, Hindi and Thai, is of particular concern; there are thirty-two LCTL programs nationally, but half of these are at the Australian National University; in total only nine out of thirty-eight universities in Australia have accepted the responsibility to support the offering of the LCTL.⁶

As a result of the higher education sector's response to fluctuations in demand, HASS offerings are increasingly concentrated in the metropolitan universities, thus significantly limiting the opportunities for students wishing to study HASS disciplines in regional Australia. Important disciplines, such as history, are not taught as majors in the regional universities at all, and in one or two cases (anthropology, for instance) they are not taught outside the Go8. Worryingly, this replicates the trend in research funding that is also shifting resources to the metropolitan universities and the Go8. The government's current patterns of cluster funding for disciplines plays a part in this, having significant ramifications for course offerings and research expertise in the medium to long term that are not necessarily evident in the short term. In combination with the operation of a demand-driven system, the cluster funding arrangements risk making the disciplines that the nation needs appear to be non-viable in the short term, and thus highly vulnerable in the long term.

Second, there are systemic impediments to the participation of HASS disciplines in the sector as a whole. Examples here include the exclusion from the tax concession for research noted earlier, the exclusion of HASS from some strategic research initiatives such as the Super Science Fellowships, the manner in which the design of some sector-wide initiatives implicitly or even systemically privileges STEM research, and the minimal levels of research infrastructure spending on HASS-related capabilities through central government programs and by the universities. Although there have been repeated attempts within the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy to redress this last issue, the fact is that all such attempts have



failed. As a result the record of governments of both persuasions on research infrastructure spending for the humanities, arts and social sciences is scandalously poor. This is one area where the shortsightedness of adopting policies which explicitly exclude half the research sector is damaging the whole of the research and innovation system, and government needs to seriously commit to addressing it in the national interest.

Third, our research has revealed significant challenges to the HASS academic workforce for the future. The academic workforce overall is ageing faster than the rest of the workforce; while baby boomers make up 42% of the national workforce, they constitute 56% of the academic workforce. The situation is particularly bad in HASS: 50% of the HASS Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) academic workforce is over 50 and the figures for some of our disciplines are alarming (the details for each discipline are available in the report). The trend is for the average age of the academic workforce to increase. There are also questions about who is being positioned to replace them. The supply of replacement staff is challenged by the trend towards the casualisation of the workforce, and by unbalanced staff profiles which often involve high levels of junior appointments. In some HASS disciplines, there has been a 43% increase in casual staff, as opposed to a 13% increase in FTE. The increase in casual staff and the aging FTE cohort carry risks and challenges for succession planning, curriculum development, future leadership and the renewal of the workforce.



(above)

The report's co-authors, Graeme Turner and Kylie Brass, presenting their findings at the Academy's 45th Annual Symposium, 'Look it Up: Dictionaries, Encyclopedias and Atlases', Canberra, November 2014.

PHOTO: M. WILSON

The shift towards casual staff can be seen as a direct response to funding pressures caused by the combination of cluster funding and the rising staff student ratios. Over 2002–2012, student load for the HASS sector grew by 44% while the growth in staff numbers was exactly half that, at 22%. Given the expansion in other aspects of the academic workload, such as managing students' online access to teaching staff, this is an unsustainable trend that is likely not only to affect the quality of the education provided, but also the capacity of the academic workforce to find time for research. Already there are worrying signs of disenchantment among younger members of the workforce, with

closely at how universities have allocated funding to the HASS disciplines, and the degree to which it can be claimed that there has been a pattern of institutional disinvestment in HASS by at least some universities. Within what is framed overwhelmingly as a competitive system, there is currently no systemic mechanism to assist universities to respond to market failure in ways that protect the national interest, rather than just the commercial interest of the institution. And there are few incentives for universities to behave (individually and in general) in a way that manages their national responsibility for these capabilities. In order to demonstrate what can be done, however, and within the current



MAPPING HASS UNDERLINES THE NEED FOR A GREATER NATIONAL COMMITMENT TO THE OVERSIGHT AND PLANNING OF THE HASS SECTOR ITSELF.

one survey finding that 40% of those under 30 are planning to leave the sector within the next five to ten years.⁷ There is a genuine risk that we are burning out a whole generation of young academics by employing them on multiple short-term contracts with high teaching loads, not providing them with mentoring or opportunities for career development, and then expecting them to generate a research career in their spare time. Without the prospect of a continuing teaching and research position, there is no reason for these staff to stay in the system.

Finally, those who are advocating a better deal for the HASS disciplines need to recognise the importance of the role played by an individual university's institutional investment in the health and future of the HASS disciplines. While we are prone to, and indeed are often encouraged to, blame our governments for failures in education funding, the universities themselves must bear much of that responsibility as well. Both government and the universities are the custodians of our national capacities in these fields, and their maintenance in the national interest. The evidence in the report indicates that individual institutional investments play a major role, and that their decisions are driven as much by concerns internal to each university as by the national funding environment. Consequently, there is good reason to look more

funding parameters, this report does cite current examples of positive steps in this direction; there are consortia of universities, for instance, that have collaborated to maintain quality and capacity in areas of fluctuating demand, such as the teaching of classics and languages, and there are affirmative action initiatives around language teaching through the Go8 to privilege those students enrolling with a high school background in a foreign language.

CONCLUSION

The current condition of the HASS disciplines provides grounds for congratulating those who have produced such strong outcomes in a context of declining funding, increasing workloads, and a volatile policy environment. The outlook for the future, though, is less rosy as the situation mapped in this report is not sustainable without being the subject of greater attention and better planning. The current condition of HASS in Australia is greatly influenced by the effects of policy settings that have in some cases handed over the responsibility of planning to the operation of the market or, in other cases, have left the responsibility for the maintenance of our national resources to the internal consideration of individual universities. The evidence in

this report suggests that this is an operating environment that, unmoderated, will not serve Australia well in the long term. As Ian Chubb has argued in relation to STEM, Australia is not big enough to just let the market do the job; we need to make strategic decisions and to plan what we can and should do as a nation. He has outlined a national research strategy to this end, and it is pleasing to see the recent establishment of the Commonwealth Science Council as a first step towards such a strategy, even though that should not be the only step. The HASS sector demands a similar commitment to a programme of national strategic planning. Many issues of national importance, which are not about science or indeed about commercialisation, also require long-term planning.

Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences underlines the need for a greater national commitment to the oversight and planning of the HASS sector itself. It is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that the humanities, arts and social sciences have a unique contribution to make to the nation. The work of these disciplines is fundamental to a modern, civilised society and they feed directly into the quality of that society — not only as providers of training and innovation, but also as generators of knowledge and understanding, which is a public good that is of value to every Australian. ¶



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a Federation Fellow (2006–11), convenor of the ARC Cultural Research Network (2006–10), and a member of the Prime Minister’s Science, Innovation and Engineering Council (2008–13), Emeritus Professor Turner is one of the leading figures in the humanities in Australia. He has published 24 books with national and international academic publishers, and his work has been translated into ten languages. He is a co-author of **Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia**.

1. Graeme Turner and Kylie Brass, *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 2014), <http://humanities.org.au/Portals/o/documents/Policy/Research/MappingProject/txt/Mapping_HASS_Aust_FinalReport_All_Oct2014.pdf>.
2. The composition of the steering committee was Professor Graeme Turner FAHA (chair), Professor Mark Western FASSA (deputy chair), Professor Joy Damousi FAHA FASSA, Professor Stephen Garton FAHA FASSA and Professor Sue Richardson AM FASSA. The project also employed a research assistant, Dr Rebecca Coates, who was responsible for the preparation and analysis of the statistics gathered.
3. The primary data sources include: Australian Bureau of Statistics Research & Development data; the ARC’s data on National Competitive Grant Programmes and the ERA National Reports 2010 and 2012; Departments of Industry/Education: Higher Education Staff and Student Statistical Collections; and the Graduate Careers: *Graduate Destinations* and *Beyond Graduation* surveys.
4. Figures obtained from the ARC exclude the CoEs in Policing and Security awarded in 2007 and in Cultural and Media Industries in 2005
5. D. Gannaway and K. Shepherd, *Benchmarking the Australian Bachelor of Arts* (Teaching & Educational Development Institute, University of Queensland, 2012), <http://dassh.edu.au/resources/uploads/publications/project_reports/1._Benchmarking_the_Australian_BA_-_Trends_Report_.pdf>.
6. K. Dunne and M. Pavlyshyn, ‘Swings and Roundabouts: Changes in Language Offerings at Australian Universities 2005–11’, in *The Next Step: Introducing the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities: Selected Proceedings of LCNAU’s Inaugural Colloquium in 2011*, ed. by J. Hajek, C. Nettelbeck and A. Woods (Australia: LCNAU), pp. 9–19, <http://www.lcnau.org/pdfs/lcnau_2011_dunne_pavlyshyn.pdf>.
7. E. Bexley, R. James and S. Arkoudis, *The Australian Academic Workforce in Transition* (Report prepared for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, 2011), <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/people/bexley_docs/The_Academic_Profession_in_Transition_Sept2011.pdf>.