



# MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES

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## The Power of the Humanities

17 September 2015

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Linguistics and bio-informatics: it's difficult to think of two subject areas more different from one another. Yet academic researchers in these two fields, working together, have found a way to determine whether a disputed play was written by Shakespeare – and then used the same methodology to help diagnose cancer.

Their remarkable cross-disciplinary collaboration is just one example of the diverse, enlightening and transformative research projects being carried out by humanities scholars around Australia. Twenty of these are profiled in a new publication, *The Power of the Humanities*, to be launched today by The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Minister for Education and Training.

The aim of the publication is to “encourage a wider national conversation about the many and varied benefits of humanities research”, says the Academy’s President, Professor John Fitzgerald.

He adds: “*The Power of the Humanities* is first and foremost about the way humanities scholars engage with the real world. It also demonstrates how they collaborate with industry, government and cultural and community organisations, nationally and internationally.”

Academic research is sometimes said to fall into two categories: that which has intrinsic value, and that which can be applied to concrete problems. The case studies in *The Power of the Humanities* demonstrate compellingly that it can be both, and that ‘blue sky’ or ‘basic’ research can have unexpected applications to a range of present-day issues and challenges.

The collaboration between linguistics expert Professor Hugh Craig and his University of Newcastle colleague, biomedical researcher Professor Pablo Moscato, grew out of “sheer curiosity”.

Craig’s use of supercomputers to analyse works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries caught the attention of Moscato, who applies advanced computing techniques to the diagnosis of cancer, Alzheimer’s and multiple sclerosis. Pooling their skills, they found a way not only to identify a writer’s stylistic ‘signature’, but also to pinpoint a molecular ‘signature’ indicating a sub-type of cancer that could be treated with narrowly targeted drugs.

*The Power of the Humanities* features other examples of outstanding work by humanities scholars, and demonstrates the sheer breadth of research being carried out in universities – research which focuses not only on domestic challenges such as health, social cohesion, the environment, the economy and food security, but also on Australia’s place in the Asia-Pacific region and on the benefits of a historical perspective in a rapidly changing world.

### About the Australian Academy of the Humanities

One of Australia’s four learned academies, the Australian Academy of the Humanities advances knowledge of, and the pursuit of excellence in, the humanities in Australia for the benefit of the nation. Established by Royal Charter in 1969, its elected Fellows are leaders and experts in the broad disciplinary groups which share a common and central concern with human behaviour and culture.

### Launch details

**When:** 5–6pm Thursday 17 September 2015 **Where:** Private Dining Rooms 1 & 2, Parliament House, Canberra

**Who:** The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Minister for Education & Training, will launch the publication

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