



## Australian Academy of the Humanities International Engagement Consultation August 2015

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The Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the International Engagement component of the *Vision for a Science Nation* consultation paper in the context of broader discussions about international science and research policy.

As one of Australia's four Learned Academies, a key role of the AAH is to provide independent expert advice to government and policy makers, promoting the social significance of humanities scholarship and its importance in shaping effective public policy.

The AAH thanks the Department of Industry and Science for the opportunity to participate in a working-level consultation session on International Engagement in Canberra on 29 July 2015. In following up now with a written submission we focus on the need for a coordinated approach across government portfolios to address the research and innovation system as a whole.

The AAH made a submission to the *Vision for a Science Nation* consultation paper (July 2015).<sup>1</sup> We welcomed the development of a strategic approach to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, strongly rooted in a commitment to basic research and public good, but also emphasised the importance of developing an integrated and high-level vision for the national research, education and innovation agenda as a whole.

The STEM strategy for international engagement is not a plan for the overall system. The terms 'science' and 'STEM' are not interchangeable. The Government's broader agenda for 'science' must embrace both halves of the system – STEM together with the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS). A recent editorial in *Nature* argued that "if [governments] want science to deliver for society, you need to support a capacity to understand that society".<sup>2</sup> This means that to maximise the effectiveness of Australia's research and innovation policies there needs to be greater commitment to engage humanities, arts and social sciences expertise: HASS in its own right and in collaboration with STEM.

We were, therefore, encouraged by the briefings at the International Engagement session from the three Departments with portfolio responsibility for international research and education and science diplomacy. The AAH made a submission to the Department of Education's *National Strategy for International Education* consultation<sup>3</sup> and we look forward to contributing to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's consultation on its science diplomacy strategy in the coming months.

The Australian Government's competitiveness agenda seeks to optimise Australia's comparative advantages across a range of sectors. In the international engagement arena, this

means playing to strengths, building capacity in areas of research priority, and working on shared research challenges.

## Key principles of a broad-based science engagement strategy

### 1. Reciprocity

Australia will continue to benefit from its international engagements in direct correlation to the quality and substance of what we contribute to these collaborations. The recently released *Smart Engagement with Asia* report finds that Australia needs to develop “smart engagement” strategies which move beyond a “pragmatic emphasis on economic benefit” and work “towards nurturing wide-ranging, long-term, deep and mutually beneficial relations, based on the principle of reciprocity”.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Regional public good

Working on shared challenges – the cultural and social sustainability of urbanisation, health services provision, developing green technology, and providing access to the digital economy – will provide a strong basis for contributing to, and building up, regional relations. These are challenges Australia shares with its regional neighbours – as evidenced in ASEAN’s Krabi Initiative, which highlights the importance of a “Bottom-of-the-Pyramid focus” to “ensure STI effectiveness towards inclusiveness of people’s basic needs and quality of life improvement”.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Long-term sustainability

The importance of international standing, viability of international networks and the capacity to sustain long-term research collaboration are vital to the health and longevity of all fields of research. Strategic planning and long-term investment is needed to develop meaningful relationships over time. Building people-to-people links via our international research is not a ‘soft’ or ‘supplementary’ add-on to an international engagement strategy; at its core, building people-to-people links creates more durable bridges in the long term.

As we noted in our submission to the International Education Strategy, the work of historian Professor Colin Mackerras FAHA was singled out for special mention when China’s President, Xi Jinping, addressed the Australian parliament in November 2014. The President thanked Mackerras for building “a bridge of mutual understanding and amity between our people”. And he praised his “tireless efforts to present a real China to Australia and the world, based on his personal experience of China’s development and progress”. While trade can play a significant role, Mackerras says that “studying and engaging with another people’s culture over a long period fosters a deeper understanding and builds more durable bridges [than trade]”.

### 4. Future-looking – planning for the next generation of researchers

Connecting younger Australian researchers with international knowledge networks is crucial for developing Australia’s future research capacity. Connections, made initially informally through overseas post-doctoral experience or staff exchanges, or conference networking, are

developed over time into deeper relationships resulting in formal collaboration – ranging from co-authored publications to jointly funded research projects or centres.

## **5. Strategic policy development for whole-of-system**

The Department's international science strategy needs to work across the research and innovation system. If research policy is segmented along discipline lines or by aims to improve outcomes in one area without keeping the broader system in view, there is a risk to the overall health of the system and its potential to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits to the nation.

Australia's international exchange in research and science has historically been premised on the understanding that 'good science' makes for good strategy. Other countries have clearer strategic objectives which they advance with the aid of Australian 'good science.' Australia needs to identify strategic objectives of its own to guide its international engagements. A clearly identified set of national objectives would include humanities, arts and social sciences research collaboration in any vision for influential international engagement to address the challenges of our times.

## **6. Quality/excellence**

Any strategy looking to build on our current international success should ensure that maintaining this standard and reputation of excellence is a top priority. The humanities disciplines have a key role to play here. Of the top five broad fields of research in the last Excellence in Research (ERA) for Australia in 2012 (those with the highest numbers of a ranking of 5 or 'well above world standard'), two are from the humanities: History and Archaeology; and Language, Literature and Communication.<sup>6</sup>

## **7. Support for basic and applied research**

Basic research across all disciplines gives the research system its core capacity and is foundational to its overall health, including the capability to address societal challenges and capacity to respond to unforeseen challenges. As we noted in our submission to the *Vision for a Science Nation* consultation, a situation where the scales are tipped too heavily towards short-term applied research at the expense of basic research would ultimately limit this capability.

## **8. Academic freedom**

Free and open critical enquiry, a hallmark of Australian research and scholarship, should be promoted through Australia's international engagement strategies. Intellectual integrity and innovation depend on the ability of scholars in every field to engage in debate without fear of censorship or retaliation, and without undue intervention from governments or interest groups. The right to academic freedom carries responsibilities that oblige researchers to undertake their work in good faith and within the ethical frameworks required of researchers. An international engagement strategy should promote exchanges in HASS disciplines to advance the principles of free and open critical enquiry in meeting national and international objectives.

## 9. Open access

The AAH supports the principle of open access as foundational to the wide dissemination of the outcomes of publicly-funded research, including those that arise from international collaboration.

### Mechanisms for international engagement

- We welcome further details about the proposal for an Asia Research Zone – and would echo some of the points made at the working session that Australia is behind other countries in the region in driving multi-lateral collaboration. We have a lot to gain from participating more actively in regional research networks.
- There is opportunity for the Government to take a more active leadership role in stimulating broader engagement in the region, to mobilise and build expertise in a range of bilateral and multilateral engagements and to encourage the participation of the full range of disciplines in meeting the strategic objectives of existing and future programmes.
- In the AAH's own experience administering international programmes, bi- and multi-lateral collaborative workshops built around agreed areas of priority and research strength in the humanities have proven a particularly effective model to bring together leading researchers from Australia, international scholars and early career researchers to consolidate new research relationships.
- There is a need to improve data collection and analysis to better understand the opportunities, and improve policy and programme design and evaluation. As we said in our submission to the *Draft Strategy for International Education*, in developing a long-term strategy for international education Australia needs to understand the 'how' and 'why' and not simply the 'what' and 'who' – which is where our evaluative processes currently focus.

This requires a broader range of robust quantitative and qualitative data to inform policy and programme development and evaluation. Reliance on bibliometric indicators gives a very limited picture of international engagement. As noted in the AAH's report to the Department of Industry and Science, *Measuring the Value of International Research Collaboration*, methodologies such as network mapping offer a way to understand the range of interactions, relationships, flows and values associated with international education and research collaboration.

The Academy welcomes the opportunity to be involved in further consultation, and would be pleased to elaborate on any of the observations contained in this submission.

Professor John Fitzgerald FAHA  
President

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<sup>1</sup> Academy of the Humanities, Submission to *Vision for a Science Nation* Consultation Paper, July 2015 <http://www.humanities.org.au/PolicyResearch/Submissions.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Editorial, 'Time for the Social Sciences', *Nature*, 30 December 2014.  
<http://www.nature.com/news/time-for-the-social-sciences-1.16621>

<sup>3</sup> Academy of the Humanities, Submission to *National Strategy for International Education* Consultation Paper, June 2015 <http://www.humanities.org.au/PolicyResearch/Submissions.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> Ang, I., Tambiah, Y., and Mar, P. (2015) *Smart Engagement with Asia: Leveraging Language, Research and Culture*. Australian Council of Learned Academies. Available from <http://www.acola.org.au/PDF/SAF03/SAF03%20SMART%20ENGAGEMENT%20WITH%20ASIA%20-%20FINAL%20lo%20res.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> ASEAN, 'Krabi Initiative', <http://www.sti.or.th/kiworkshop/index.php/krabi-initiative>

<sup>6</sup> Australian Research Council (2012) *Excellence in Research for Australia* report, pp193, 199, [http://www.arc.gov.au/era/era\\_2012/outcomes\\_2012.htm](http://www.arc.gov.au/era/era_2012/outcomes_2012.htm)