Australian Academy of the Humanities

Universities Accord Submission, April 2023

The Australian Academy of the Humanities welcomes the opportunity to contribute its advice on the Universities Accord.

We are the national body for the humanities in Australia, championing the contribution humanities, arts and culture make to national life. Our work aims to ensure ethical, historical and cultural perspectives inform the way Australia plans for and responds to challenges and opportunities. As one of Australia's five learned Academies we are a unique resource for government.

Our vision for 2050 is that Australia will lead the world in bringing Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Environment (SHAPE)[1], Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and Indigenous Knowledges together in research and education to meet the profound challenges of our time, including:

- The climate change and biodiversity crises;
- The unchecked development of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI);
- Addressing social inequality, particularly generational inequality, and First Nations disadvantage;
- The worsening crisis in the public formation of knowledge and opinion, and the rise of misinformation, and;
- Rising geopolitical tensions and the need for strong cross-cultural (including linguistic) understanding.

Only a strong and resilient higher education ecosystem, can provide the necessary investment in human capability and capacity.

Humanities training and research are central to Australia's knowledge, skills and capability needs

In 2020, the humanities, together with the arts and social sciences – the SHAPE disciplines – trained and graduated 143,752 of Australia's university students, representing 63% of the system.[2] Humanities graduates equal or outperform science and maths graduates in full-time employment and labour force participation;[3] and are in demand in sectors projected for substantial growth and expected to resist automation.

[1] SHAPE is a new collective term to describe the humanities, arts, and social science disciplines, and originated from a coalition of organisations in the UK, including the British Academy, the London School of Economics, and the Arts Council England. see https://shapefutures.com.au

[2] Based on 2020 domestic student data from the Department of Education's Higher Education Statistics Collection – where SHAPE fields are: Architecture, Education, Management and Commerce, Society and Culture, Creative Arts.

[3] See Graduate outcomes survey data at https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/graduate-outcomes-survey-(gos)

Australia's future workforce requires humanities skills and knowledge - understanding of our global context, linguistic diversity, critical understanding and analytical skills.

Yet SHAPE graduates have been virtually invisible to date in discussions about how we will address the key challenges of our time.

The focus on STEM alone is counterproductive. All the big challenges and opportunities for the nation have human, social and cultural dimensions.

Ensuring a strong and sustainable SHAPE sector also has clear benefits to STEM, in terms of interdisciplinary collaboration.

We urge the Panel to adopt a whole-of-sector agenda with SHAPE and STEM both in view, looking to the removal of barriers to collaboration across disciplines, and introducing a level playing field in programs that support teaching and research.

Summary of Recommendations

1. The Panel consider establishing a coordinating body, for example, a **Universities Commission, to manage the Accord as an ongoing process**.
2. That the **Universities Commission include the Learned Academies** as key stakeholders on its board, as an expert voice on a range of higher education matters, independent of universities and with a mandate to produce national reports on the state of the disciplines to inform national coordination and planning.
3. That the panel make a **significant recommendation in respect to the development of a funded national Humanities Infrastructure strategy** that will address the long-term needs of the higher education sector, harnessing capabilities of Large Language Models (LLMs) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The strategy must include the necessary staffing to support this infrastructure.
4. We recommend that **ERA is replaced by a State of Research Report** to address performance, capabilities and priorities in a global performance context.

Further, we are strongly advocating for:

5. **The creation of a Humanities Future Fund**, to fund vital initiatives in Humanities teaching and research, such as: the provision of humanities education programs in the national interest, new CoEs and bridging research grants, and much needed Humanities Research Infrastructure (as noted in recommendation 3).
6. **A refreshed approach to addressing gender discrepancy and diversity** in SHAPE disciplines.
7. We invite the Accord Panel to support the establishment of the **Prime Minister's Prizes for Humanities and Social Sciences.**

Q1: How should an Accord be structured and focussed to meet the challenges facing Australia's higher education system? What is needed to overcome limitations in the current approach to Australian higher education?

We support a vision of the Accord as a structured, continuing process between higher education stakeholders. The lack of a permanent mechanism for expert academic input into higher education policy, independent of universities in competition with one another, is a limitation of current approaches.

A Universities Commission, drawing on ACOLA and Learned Academies

To manage the Accord process a national coordinating body, such as a "Universities Commission", should be established with the objective of managing how our higher education system serves Australia's national interests in both education and research.

The mandate of the Universities Commission would be to drive collaborative approaches to integrated education and research across the sector. Crucially, it would also have oversight of other areas where a national perspective is needed, including:

- national capability gaps, including research training;
- patterns of course offerings, including how teaching programs are providing for broader economic and societal needs;
- assessments of the state of disciplines;
- monitoring pathways between vocational education and training and higher education;
- monitoring student participation and attainment, providing overviews of workforce needs and seeding new models of industry engagement.

If the government takes forward recommendations that universities need to become more specialised, then the Commission might also have a role in advising in this regard as well.

We would see the Universities Commission as a powerful body, drawing on the individual Learned Academies and the integrative powers of their collaborative body ACOLA. The Learned Academies bring different domains together in ways that universities struggle to. Fundamental to the success of a Universities Commission would be the establishment of a diverse stakeholder advisory body, with universities, Learned Academies, peak bodies, industry, government, the NFP sector and communities all having a role in strengthening the higher education ecosystem.

The establishment of a Universities Commission would address several limitations of Australia's current approach to higher education. A key area of concern is that there is no mechanism for the sector (or government) to form a national view of the performance and development of disciplines and certainly not a national view of how teaching programs are impacting broader economic and societal needs.

Individual universities, as is their right, make local decisions on course offerings and research programs. There is no provision for identifying and developing discipline areas where we want to maintain sovereign capability.

From a national standpoint, a Universities Commission might be tasked with knowing if we are producing enough "experts" in core fields through research training. The Commission could also contribute a whole-of-sector view to industry workforce plans by sector - for example, AI, the Creative Industries and Defence - so that we can be confident, as a nation, that we are producing cohorts of graduates with the foundational education and skills to meet the challenges of our time.

As key stakeholders on a Universities Commission advisory board, Australia's Learned Academies and our collaborative body ACOLA would be well placed to develop national frameworks for the development of our disciplines, balancing expert academic advice, international best practice, data analysis, stakeholder input and national needs.

The Learned Academies, and ACOLA, have a history of providing national assessments of the state of domain areas and individual disciplines, for example the Academy of the Humanities led Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia (2014) report, Australia's China Knowledge Capability (2023) report, and the Decadal Plans produced by the Academy of Science. There are developed relationships and structures in ACOLA to tackle strong cross-disciplinary projects, to which both SHAPE and STEM perspectives have been integral (such as through Rapid Research Information reports, and horizon scanning reports).

Recommendations:

The Panel consider establishing a coordinating body, for example, a Universities Commission, to manage the Accord as an ongoing process.

That the Universities Commission include the Learned Academies as key stakeholders on its board, as an expert voice on a range of higher education matters, independent of universities and with a mandate to produce national reports on the state of the disciplines to inform national coordination and planning.

Q 4: Looking from now to 2030 and 2040, what major national challenges and opportunities should Australian higher education be focused on meeting?

There are several major challenges and opportunities that Australian higher education should be focussed on meeting from now to 2030 and 2040. These include:

- The climate change and biodiversity crises;
- The unchecked development of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI);
- Addressing social inequality, particularly generational inequality, and First Nations disadvantage;
- The worsening crisis in the public formation of knowledge and opinion, and the rise of misinformation; and
- Rising geopolitical tensions and the need for strong cross-cultural (including linguistic) understanding.

Addressing these challenges will require a skilled and adaptive workforce, and well-educated citizens. The nation will need to draw on both deep disciplinary expertise and broad cross-disciplinary collaborations. **Humanities expertise in both research and education is vital to this task but has experienced under-investment over the past thirty years.** In the points below we show brief examples of how re-investing in the humanities will deliver strong socioeconomic and public good returns. As the convergence of climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us, we do not have the luxury of dealing with deep challenges separately or one at a time. The intertwined nature of these challenges means that investment in public good in one area will have flow-on effects elsewhere.

The climate change and biodiversity crises

Scientific reports on climate change continue to warn that '[any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future'](#)[4]. Yet as a society we continue to either tiptoe around the scale of these existential challenges or take a 'just listen to the science' approach, which assumes a direct and linear relationship between rational truth and public policy. One potential circuit breaker is to treat these as social and political issues just as much as environmental and scientific ones. Of course, science is essential for understanding climate change and biodiversity loss, and technology is critical for solving climate related problems, but the challenge for higher education is to mobilise a broader range of expertise, ensuring our teaching and research programs encourage multidisciplinary approaches. The prevailing emphasis on science and technology solutions (in challenge-based government research funding rounds, for example) constitutes a structural hindrance to this mobilisation. An international analysis published in 2020 showed that the natural

4 IPCC 2022 Sixth Assessment Report. Working Group 2. Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability.

and technical sciences received around 770% more funding than the social sciences and humanities for research on climate change.[5]

There is untapped potential for universities to become part of the solution and fulfil their role in providing community leadership. Many universities have started down this path, but a stronger mandate, e.g. through the UN Sustainable Development Goals, would help them become enablers of deep institutional change expressing bold, ethical cultures of innovation.[6]

Unchecked development of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Like climate change, the unchecked development of generative AI poses an existential threat[7]. It is impossible to accurately forecast how things will play out in the case of the development of generative AI but we can ready our higher education and research system, future graduates, the workforce we need – for navigating this changing world.

The Academy of the Humanities has recently led a Rapid Research Information Report for the Australian Chief Scientist on generative Artificial Intelligence – a multidisciplinary project with the Academy of Technology and Engineering. The expertise of the humanities on AI development in Australia is central in its own right (not just in support of the science and technology) to the development of tractable solutions and inclusive uptake across a range of sectors.

The risks associated with generative AI include: validity and reliability; trust in accuracy of answers; safety; security and resilience; system accountability and transparency; explainability; privacy; management of biases and other quality assurance considerations. Contextual and social risks to human rights and deployment of AI can reproduce and accelerate existing social inequalities and systemic social and economic risks, including impacts on democratic systems, social discourse, and environmental impacts, as well as mistrust in private and public organisations. These factors, coupled with the large "transformation of work" agenda, are just some of the challenges that lie ahead.

AI involves not just technical computing expertise, but also a broad range of social, medical, and ethical considerations spanning cultural, economic and environmental realms.

To meet these challenges, our higher education system will need to see fundamental re-alignment, including the creation of new education programs and new approaches to

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5 Overland, I. and Sovacool, B.K. 2020 The misallocation of climate research funding, Energy Research & Social Science, Volume 62, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2019.101349.

6 Steele, W. and Rickards, L. 2021 The Sustainable Development Goals in Higher Education: A Transformative Agenda? Palgrave Macmillan.

7 OECD.AI Policy Observatory, 2023, Artificial General Intelligence: can we avoid the ultimate existential threat? https://oecd.ai/en/wonk/existential-threat

challenge-based research initiatives that see the humanities represented, on their own terms.

Increasing social inequality, particularly generational inequality, and First Nations disadvantage.

Access to higher education has historically been an important pathway out of socioeconomic disadvantage, through the access it provided to stable well-paid employment. That is less the case for current and future generations who carry high levels of student debt and face ongoing precarity in employment and housing. Australia will face increasing levels of generational conflict unless it can redress these disparities.

We note that the humanities have provided important first access points to higher education for many low SES, Indigenous, rural and regional, and mature-aged students. While this important role should continue to be facilitated, simply providing increased access to higher education on its own will not solve the problems. We need a major national research effort to understanding the changing nature of work and housing, and to articulate alternatives.

The worsening crisis in the public formation of knowledge and opinion, and the rise of misinformation

Linked to the risks posed by unchecked generative AI is the worsening crisis in the public formation of knowledge and opinion and the rise of misinformation. In many advanced societies, scepticism of science and research, distrust of experts, intolerance, fundamentalism, authoritarianism, populism, polarisation and erosion of civility are inhibiting the effective democratic policy-making that is needed to address global challenges of climate change, democratic change, emerging technology, and geopolitical shifts.

The current trend is running against disciplined learning, science, and expertise, resulting in the rise and prominence of misinformation and misrepresentation of evidence and fact, to outright conspiracy theorists influencing mainstream debate.

This crisis is not a matter that science, narrowly conceived, can itself address. This is a philosophical matter, and it is a social matter. Its analysis can and should be informed by humanities forms of enquiry.

Rising geopolitical tensions and the need for strong cross-cultural (including linguistic) understanding

Australia's location in the Asia-Pacific has meant we play an important role in regional relationships, through trade, diplomacy and higher education. The need for strong cross-cultural understanding will only increase over the next thirty years. It is vital that universities invest in these cultural and linguistic capacities required to support this engagement. For example, our recent report on Australia's China Knowledge Capability highlights a significant erosion of China expertise within Australian universities, with the

contraction of China studies programs by universities who were once strong. Our future talent pipeline is thus diminished, impacting our sovereign capability to understand and engage with one of our most important geo-political partners. Our much-reduced capacity in teaching and research into Indonesian culture, history and languages is also likely to expose us in the future in our dealings with our nearest powerful neighbour. The same case could also be made for India.

Seizing the opportunity of engaging with Indigenous Knowledges.

There is a hunger across the higher education sector for greater engagement between Indigenous Knowledge systems and SHAPE and STEM disciplines, as we laid out in our vision statement. This is a bigger issue than we can fully address here but one necessary manifestation from our humanities perspective is the need for greater recognition of Indigenous Studies as a discipline in its own right.

The sector needs to review its current support for contemporary Indigenous Studies which has not enjoyed the development trajectory that other mainstream discipline areas have (in concentration of degree offerings and research profile). Indigenous academic staff are often disadvantaged through being stretched across student-support and disciplinary roles, and in providing supplementary support to other disciplines.

There is a pressing need for Government and universities to work together to provide matching or greater academic infrastructure, including positions for Indigenous researchers to Indigenous Studies as is provided to mainstream disciplines, with the aim of ensuring that Indigenous knowledges and research methodologies are supported to engage with western disciplines on par. We see this support as essential to: the continued local, national and international relevance of Australia's universities, to enabling an authentic national engagement with Indigenous experience and, ultimately, as a step towards achieving true reconciliation between Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Q5 How do the current structures of institutions, regulation and funding in higher education help or hinder Australia's ability to meet these challenges? What needs to change?

We see three main structural hindrances in higher education to Australia's ability to meet the challenges:

- Market failure and over-emphasis on a business model for higher education, at the expense of the public good;
- The inequities created by Research Block Grant distribution and Jobs Ready Graduate programs, and;
- Unsustainable practices in supporting the teaching workforce and unaddressed gender equity and diversity issues in SHAPE disciplines.

Market failure

Over time, universities have been encouraged to think of themselves as "businesses" within the higher education "market". Decisions on course offerings are made based on supply and demand with universities doing all they can to maximise "student load". Teaching revenue is cross-subsidising research endeavours, including efforts to attract academic researchers in areas that will maximise university rankings.

Market dynamics create winners and losers. Least profitable strategies are either discarded or underfunded. For the University sector this has resulted in a reduction in the diversity of offerings available to students and therefore in the breadth of the knowledge base provided to the community and the nation.

With the dominance of the commercial, market-based approach, we have lost sight of the objective of working in the national interest and for the public good. The maintenance of a substantial knowledge base and knowledge infrastructure is not being protected against short-term market movements.

As a result, there has been a consistent trimming of offerings across the sector, particularly in the Humanities, and we are seeing the consequences of diminished capacity. For example, our China Knowledge Capability report mentioned above.

Research Block Grant Distribution

SHAPE disciplines are structurally disadvantaged through the Research Block Funding scheme as funds are allocated based on how much research income is earned, favouring large grants in the STEM and health disciplines (essentially the rich get richer). The upshot is there is very little to no support provided in universities for humanities and social science researchers.

Jobs Ready Graduates

The Productivity Commission recently concluded that "Students appear to make good choices of their own volition. They have the best information about their own abilities and interests, making them well placed to make decisions about what they will enjoy — and benefit from — studying."[8]

[8] Productivity Commission (2022), From Learning to Growth, p. 56.

The Academy was a vocal opponent of the JRG legislation which was based on flawed assumptions about employability and workforce needs; disproportionately impacted women; made it far harder for students from low SES backgrounds, including in the regions, to aspire to and succeed at university in subjects of social, economic, cultural and community value; and, incomprehensibly made the study of Indigenous culture and history more expensive than medicine.

Humanities graduates do not find it harder to secure employment, and raising the HECs debt on courses has proven to have little effect on the choices that prospective students make about enrolment and careers.

The University Accords process offers an opportunity to redress the failures of the discredited Jobs Ready Graduates Package. We advocate for the reinstatement of flatter cluster funding.

Demand driven funding

In consideration of future funding arrangements, we do not advocate for a return to the "demand driven" funding system. It was not fit for the purpose of maintaining the nation's knowledge infrastructure.

Humanities teaching and impact of casualisation

Vibrant humanities teaching offerings are the backbone of a healthy university system, providing in-depth pathways for students who wish to major in humanities disciplines, e.g. in the Bachelor of Arts or associated double degrees, as well as a range of subject options for those aiming to supplement other specialisations. **Humanities subjects often provide the first steps on the university journey for students coming from non-traditional and disadvantaged backgrounds; low SES, Indigenous, mature-aged, rural & regional, and VET transition students.**

Teaching to the needs of diverse student cohorts requires skilled educators who have the time and capacity to do the job well. Increased casualisation of the workforce militates against this requirement and exploits the enthusiasm of the staff involved. While there will always be a need for short-term and casual appointments to maintain stability in teaching offerings, and provide teaching experience for early career scholars, we believe the balance has swung too far towards casualisation when whole subjects regularly depend on casual staff.

If the Accord panel is moving towards recommendations that increase the diversity of the Australian university system, we urge them/you to retain a strong research-teaching nexus as the core of a healthy system. We would not support the development of teaching-only universities.

We do not favour teaching-only universities or a plethora of teaching-only positions. The best and richest educational experiences are research-led because they ensure students are exposed to cutting-edge thinking and that subjects are continually updated to reflect recent research findings. Our international best-practice comparator universities make a point of ensuring that undergraduate students are exposed to and inspired by top researchers in their fields. While there is some anecdotal evidence of poor teaching practices by research-intensive academics, there is much more evidence of strong relationships between high quality research and high-quality education.

A sustainable Humanities workforce

The question of casualisation cannot be discussed separately from a more detailed consideration of workforce and workforce development issues in higher education. As is made abundantly clear in the submission by our colleagues in the SHAPE Futures EMCR Network, early and mid-career scholars are frustrated by the lack of sustainable academic career pathways. The university system thirty years hence will not be able to achieve any of its goals without a strong and exceptionally skilled workforce. One of the roles of the University Commission or equivalent body would be to maintain national oversight of workforce issues.

Gender divide and diversity in SHAPE disciplines

The Athena SWAN Charter initiative has been a major driver of efforts to advance gender equity in higher education. Initially a commitment to advancing the careers of women in STEM employment, the Charter was expanded in 2015 to include staff and students working in the arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law sectors. At present, it seems that the 2015 expansion into other disciplines has not yet been implemented consistently across participating institutions, with the first round of applications revealing that while institutions employed a whole-of-institution approach in undertaking self-assessment, they developed action plans only for STEM[9].

The question of just how suitable the Athena SWAN project is for Australia's SHAPE sector is central to current debate on the future of the humanities workforce, as we acknowledge that the overall problem of gender asymmetry in the SHAPE academic workforce is similar to that which has been observed across the STEM sector, and that certain SHAPE disciplines reveal levels of disparity that are on a par with numbers in STEM fields.

Other diversity factors, including cultural and linguistic diversity, must also be addressed, in order to genuinely deliver inclusive workplace opportunities for all.

Recommendation: A refreshed approach to addressing gender discrepancy and diversity in SHAPE disciplines needs to be a priority for universities and should be noted in the Panel's review recommendations.

Q24 What reforms will enable Australian research institutions to achieve excellence, scale and impact in particular fields?

Setting National Research priorities

It is our fervent hope that the simultaneous reviews occurring across the portfolios of industry and education lead to a joined-up approach to the establishment of National Research Priorities. The Australian Chief Scientist has recognised the need to mobilise research capacity across the sector[10]. However, in our submission to the revitalisation of the National Science and Research Priorities, we have expressed deep concern that the framing of the discussion paper calls for "science" and not "research" led solutions to the

[9] Glisic, I (2020), Academy of the Humanities, *Future Humanities Workforce: Literature Review*, p. 40.
[10] For example, the Academy of the Humanities recently led a Rapid Research Request on generative AI, with the Academy of Technology, Science and Engineering, a multi-disciplinary approach to a major national challenge agenda.

challenges facing our nation. It is important that establishment of research priority schemes are fit for purpose, which means encompassing the entire research system, not one segment in isolation. The role the National Science and Research priorities will play in framing national research program funding is unclear, and it is vital the SHAPE disciplines are not excluded from priority planning or national funding initiatives.

The ARC Review

We have made a submission to the Review of the ARC and welcome its consideration as part of the review of Higher Education. It is our view that the research funding ecosystem needs a major review and overhaul to make sure national needs – including in the humanities – are being met, and sustainable research career paths developed.

To ensure the humanities are able to make a quality, sustainable and high impact contribution to the Australian research ecosystem, we make the following points:

- #### Rolling Grants Calendar

  We note the ARC has published a rolling grants calendar until the end of 2024. It would be highly beneficial to have this calendar continue, with updates every 6 months for the following 12 months, and to stick to it in terms of application deadlines and announcement dates. This will allow the research community to plan effectively and for administering organisations to deploy resources efficiently.

- #### Re-framing the one-size-fits all model for grant programs

  The one-size-fits-all model for grant programs, operating with a single set of rules across all academic disciplines, is not maximising opportunities for research and translation in SHAPE disciplines.

  We are calling for the ARC Review to introduce a discipline-specific (or cluster specific) scheme that retains rigorous assessment processes but has higher success rates and lower funding limits. An example worth considering is the Insight Program administered by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council[11]. This program is divided into Stream A and Stream B for low- and high-cost research projects in social sciences and humanities (both of which are inexpensive relative to the cost of STEM projects). Both streams are subject to the same assessment process, but the success rate for projects in Stream A is higher.

  This solution would capture a significant volume of SHAPE research; where research programs are low-cost, and not necessarily suited to larger, institution-wide programs. This scheme would go a long way to growing the humanities research profile but would not capture all SHAPE research needs. We are mindful that funding support for multidisciplinary research between STEM and SHAPE fields often involves a combination of different approaches and thus different kinds of funding requirements.

[11] See https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/insight_grantssubventions_savoir-eng.aspx

- The Centre of Excellence Program (CoEs)

  The humanities are not being funded at collaborative, multi-institutional scale.

  In Australia, there are relatively few programs and incentives for the humanities to build at scale across institutions. One of the few sources for longer-term contestable research funding is the ARC's Centres of Excellence program.

  Since its inception in 2003, the program has funded 85 centres totalling more than $2.3billion. Over time, investment through this program has built chains of infrastructure for the sciences but less so for the humanities (or social science).

  Relative to the size of these disciplines, the success rate for SHAPE disciplines in the scheme has been weak and varied, which, in part, is a function of the model itself and challenges related to the need to "fit" the humanities into a science model of research in terms of both scale and nature of collaboration.

  Since 2011, the government has funded only six humanities led Centres of Excellence out of 54 in total; one for each year except in 2023, when there were two.

- Growing the SHAPE research agenda

  The ARC needs new funding processes that reflect a grander vision of excellence in SHAPE research. In the SHAPE fields, we have seen the dominance of project-based funding (typically three-year, individual projects) rather than program funding (longer-term, collaborative funding aimed at building critical mass). One of the missing pieces of the puzzle is funding within the Discovery program that is explicitly geared towards building collaborative research programs (including with international partners) that might lead to future Centres of Excellence, or other at-scale research initiatives. Once more, a one-size-fits-all approach is preventing more innovative and flexible funding opportunities, including those that help build research capability across disciplines, as opposed to incentivising over-concentration in a narrow range of fields (perceived to be the most likely to be funded).

  Here, we advocate for the **introduction of bridging grant programs**, which would support research that is collaborative, but not yet of the scale of a Centre of Excellence.

Q 25 How should Australia leverage its research capacity overall and use it more effectively to develop new capabilities and solve wicked problems?

Humanities research infrastructure

Australia's capacity to undertake and apply humanities research relies on the quality and sustainability of its data and infrastructure, and the robustness of its training and workforce capability.

Humanities research infrastructure includes historical archives and material culture collections housed in institutions such as museums, libraries, archives and galleries. Digital repositories are an increasingly important part of this infrastructure and our Fellows are emphatically of the view that this diverse and vital infrastructure needs to be

understood as the **laboratories of the humanities** with the necessary long-term investment to ensure their sustainability and innovative potential.

Australia's future ecosystem is likely to be less oriented around centralised facilities and more focused on distributed and cloud-based infrastructure, data networks, and cyber-resilience. It is also predicated on building multidisciplinary capability in areas of greatest opportunity and challenge. The development of more human-centric technology, for example, addressing entrenched social disadvantage, and preparing public health engagement strategies for future pandemics requires deep SHAPE expertise, in collaboration with science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medical (STEMM) fields.

In 2022, the ARDC, ACOLA and Learned Academies collaborated to undertake an Environmental Scan to better understand Australia's data-enabled research future for the Humanities. We found that Humanities data capability is dispersed, untapped, uneven, and under-developed. Institutional and project-based infrastructures exist, many of long-term duration, but there is a lack of coordination and limited strategic planning. All of which means Australia is not yet making the most of its public investment in research. We need:

- A **long-term strategy and sustainable data and digital research infrastructure funding**. To date, funding has been short-term, and project based (for example through LIEF grants), making it difficult to strategise and plan and create efficiencies at a national scale.
- Better data management needs to be driven by disciplines to address data standards, management frameworks and digital and data literacy. Workforce challenges and succession planning and loss of career pathways have an impact here.
- Support to scale up the application of humanities expertise to the cultural, social and human dimensions of global problems (as addressed in Q4).
- Investment to build capability in data-enabled research in areas such as ethical AI and automated decision-making and cultural resilience.

University repositories for humanities research are not equipped to meet the research needs of the future and our Fellows cite regular examples where publicly funded research and data are not available for wider use (for example, the sudden closure of key Australian Collections at the National Library has had a profound impact on the ability of researchers and students to undertake research).

To date, our national research infrastructure has been contingent on LIEF funding, which is not a functional strategy for long-term. It is only recently that the NCRIS program has gone some way to addressing the needs of Humanities research, through the establishment of the HASS Research Data Commons and Indigenous Research Capability program. **It is now critical that we build on this program to capitalise on advances in AI's Large Language Models** to fully release benefits across the system, by bringing together researchers, Indigenous knowledges experts, policy makers, GLAMs and communities to work on next-generation opportunities.

We commend the government's recent commitment to provide ongoing funding for TROVE, and increased funding for some national cultural institutions; but we implore the panel to take a broader view in recommendations for future NRI investments. Funding at the NRI scale is needed for significant initiatives such as the Australian Social Data Observatory (ASDO).

Recommendations:

We implore the panel to make a significant recommendation in respect to the development of a funded national Humanities Infrastructure strategy that will address the long-term needs of the higher education sector, harnessing capabilities of AI's Large Language Models. The strategy must include the necessary staffing to support this infrastructure.

Establishment of a Humanities Future Fund (addressing Q4, Q5, Q24 and Q25)

We advocate for the creation of a Humanities Future Fund, to fund vital initiatives in Humanities teaching and research, such as: the provision of humanities education programs in the national interest, new CoEs and bridging research, and Humanities Research Infrastructure (as above).

Q. 41 How should research quality be prioritised and supported most effectively over the next decade?

A Prime Minister's Prize for Humanities and Social Sciences

We acknowledge that scholars doing great work in the humanities are not always recognised or understood by the wider community. Together with our colleagues in the Academy of Social Sciences we have written to the Prime Minister to suggest the establishment of a Prime Minister's Prizes for the Humanities and Social Sciences, to complement the existing Prime Minister's Prizes for Science. Over time the Prime Minister's Prizes for the Humanities and Social Sciences could build to showcase the outcomes of government investment in humanities and social science research, enhance the careers of humanities and social science researchers, including those at early stages of their career, and provide a platform for wider impact and policy uptake.

ERA

The number of Units of Evaluation (UoEs) in Humanities and Creative Arts (HCA) disciplines evaluated in ERA has been steadily declining since ERA was introduced. This is true for each of the 2-digit FoRs in the HCA panel. This trend has not been seen anywhere in the STEM, Health and Medical FoRs, where the level of evaluated units has sustained or grown across the period. We believe that this points to the **systematic disadvantage that ERA has fostered in the higher education research system against humanities and creative arts.**

We were pleased to see the recent suspension of the ERA and consider that, while it achieved its initial purposes, the scale and magnitude of the effort involved is no longer justified as a good use of public resources. Our preference is to move to a less frequent State of Research Report model, whereby government has line of sight over

performance, capability and priorities, so that research assessments can be made about how we are tracking globally.

The following observations are based on the ERA process, and provide lessons for any future research assessment model:

- The primary difficulty Research Evaluation Committees (RECs) have found with peer reviews is the wide variation of expertise and experience among peer reviewers themselves. Many universities nominate peer reviewers who are early in their careers (to build experience and capacity). The consequence has been that many of the more junior peer reviewers lack the experience to make the kind of high-level distinctions required of them. The ARC needs to play a strong role in assessing whether candidates possess the necessary experience and seniority to undertake the role.
- The role of RECs in peer review disciplines is the backbone of the ERA process. A perennial and serious issue impacting the ERA exercise is the disproportionate workload carried by REC members in peer review disciplines, especially in the humanities and creative arts where books have remained the standard for research quality. This matter was not directly addressed in the ERA review consultation paper.
- The Field of Research (FoR 45) for Indigenous studies requires further work. Concerns to be addressed include confusion around the inclusion of work of non-Indigenous scholars; a revision of assessment criteria to focus on quality; and the applicability of peer review, despite many of the 4-digit codes sitting under it being traditionally assessed by citations (eg health).

Recommendations:

We invite the Accord Panel to support the establishment of the Prime Minister's Prizes for Humanities and Social Sciences.

We recommend that ERA is replaced by a State of Research Report to address performance, capabilities and priorities in a global performance context.