

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) represents the Deans of faculties of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities in universities and higher education institutions across Australia and New Zealand.

DASSH advocates for the role of teaching, research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences and humanities by:

- sharing information and disseminating best practice between member institutions
- fostering research
- providing a forum for discussion of higher education management
- contributing to the development of education policy and administration issues with a view to establishing national position statements
- taking a lead role in fostering the arts, social sciences and humanities in Australasia
- creating alliances with related organisations and institutions nationally and internationally, and identifying and responding where appropriate to issues relevant to the arts, social sciences and humanities

The Deans of DASSH are actively involved in the governance and management of education and research in their respective institutions. They are ideally placed to provide an accurate and realistic insight into sector operations at universities.

The views are a collective input from individuals of member institutions of DASSH.

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## Introduction

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) welcomes the Higher Education Review (HER) and the opportunity to provide input.

DASSH notes that the HER is one of a number of Government reviews, the scope of which includes the higher education sector. Each of these will make recommendations that will impact on the higher education sector. In turn, higher education does and will continue to make an impact on innovation and Australia's future.

This submission therefore will make reference to other Government reviews namely:

- Review of the National Innovation System
- Excellence in Research for Australia
- 2008 Strategic Roadmap of Research Infrastructure (NCRIS)

This is an opportunity for a holistic national policy and plan to be developed that can deliver integrated funding, services, infrastructure and operating and guiding principles for the higher education sector. DASSH strongly recommends that the HER take this opportunity. This will ensure Australia is innovative, educated and positioned to meet its own needs for the future and participate in and contribute to global arena.

### Section 3.1 Meeting labour market and industry needs

The higher education sector provides its students with skills, knowledge and experience that contribute to Australia's ability to be innovative. Through the nature of the content of the Arts, Social Sciences Humanities (ASSH) sector and its methods of research, teaching and learning, members of DASSH create and contribute to an "innovative culture". ASSH also provides skills and methods for qualitative evaluation, to critique and contextualise ideas and priorities. Many of the qualities identified as "graduate attributes or generic skills" by employers are acquired through disciplines that are part of the sector. It is apparent that as units from the sector are included in degrees across universities in a service capacity, that it is recognised that many generic skills are taught through ASSH.

ASSH develops graduates with attributes that lead to careers in a large range of areas – helps create a workforce that flexible, internationally focussed and able to work with others in culturally and socially appropriate ways. ASSH students study a range of discipline content but also a focus on individual and team learning, skills of writing and speaking, an ability to critique and argue on an evidential base and understanding of a range of perspectives.

DASSH is currently working on Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) funded project, "Nature and Roles of Arts Degrees in Contemporary Society". Work to date has produced data showing the breadth, depth and contribution to transferable skills from the sector.

On this basis, the DASSH submission to the review of the National Innovation System recommended:

- The encouragement and support at all levels of education for inclusion of ASSH and cross-disciplinary research.

- Improvement of the structures, systems and recognition for cross-disciplinary research and projects. Working across sectors often requires more time. Time is needed to connect, engage and develop common understanding and communications. Such activity needs to be appropriately funded.
- Provide a third stream of funding for cross-disciplinary research and projects and collaboration to disseminate and implement the findings their implementation through collaboration with the Excellence in Research for Australia initiative.
- Revamp structures for allocation research funding that provides encourages and supports cross-discipline projects

Aspects relating to this question are also raised in this submission under Section 3.5 Higher education's role in the national innovation system.

### **Section 3.2 Opportunities to participate in higher education**

Indigenous, first-time students, refugees often enter higher education through ASSH. Support for these students is likely to be required as the cultural capital is different from other middle class students. ASSH staff workloads are already very high. Funding is required that frees current staff or enables additional staff to be taken on to support these students. While it is recognised that students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds need support throughout their schooling, time is required for University staff to make contacts with schools and to provide transition arrangements. The ASSH sector is amongst the lowest funded in Universities and rising workloads make such programs difficult to sustain.

Students are increasingly relying on technological developments to access education. The ASSH sector no longer uses "chalk and talk" – an assumption underlying the current funding model. Indeed the sophisticated and expensive teaching infrastructure which is necessary is often beyond the reach of the sector, with the result that students feel that their education is dated. A more realistic funding model needs to factor this in.

### **Section 3.3 The student experience of higher education**

Information from a number of surveys shows that Australian students need to work, often at a higher priority than, and therefore at the expense of their education. This means that Australian students often have a far less rich experience than their European counterparts. Australian students are torn between the need for financial survival and educational involvement. Staff report that in the ASSH disciplines, the time needed for reading and absorbing is diminishing. It is also much more difficult for students to obtain cadetships etc in these sectors.

Indigenous studies in a range of forms are usually associated with studies in the ASSH sector. These are important for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. They are also important by often providing a gateway for Indigenous students into higher education. The support of Indigenous Centres is vital but so too is the knowledge base to support students inside awards. The current funding regime for Indigenous student support needs a rethink and an overhaul at national level. DASSH supports the new NCRIS capability that allocates funding for ASSH.

Internationalisation is a vital part of much of the work in the ASSH. Australian ASSH students benefit from internationalisation, from both studying overseas and having international students at Australian universities. However, student debts and costs preclude many from travel, an integral part of a global focussed education.

DASSH agrees with the students that access to staff is becoming more difficult. This is a result of large class sizes and the loss of time as a result of both increased workload and compliance and the need to continue to research. In a time- poor system, where often discussion is an essential part of learning, many students miss out- this is identified as causing stress for the staff who believe they would like to provide better learning environments.

### **Section 3.5 Higher education's role in the national innovation system**

Points raised under section 3.1 Meeting labour market and industry needs, relate to this section of the discussion paper, namely

- The need for inclusion of ASSH with the natural sciences in education at all levels
- Structures and funding to encourage and reward cross-disciplinary research and projects

Further to this is the requirement for recognition of practice-based research, especially for the creative and design disciplines. Practice based outputs are not recognised or easily measured by the current ARC measures and assessment processes.

Innovation in the higher education sector is being limited by

- Very high class sizes in ASSH as a result of the current funding regime. More time is expended in preparing, looking after casual staff, marking etc to ensure high quality teaching. This is at the expense of staff opportunity to undertake research and community engagement.
- A funding regime based on an assumption about the costs of teaching in these areas which may have been true in the early 90's, but is no longer relevant. There are equipment and technological needs in ASSH that have not been factored in, in comparison with, science. For example, the rising costs in creative arts, media, archaeology means that it is very difficult to give a high quality education

DASSH notes that the Exposure Draft to the *2008 Strategic Roadmap for Australian Research Infrastructure* for the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) has now incorporated a new capability for ASSH. This "reflects the clear articulation of these infrastructure needs by the community and recognises the importance of ASSH as a priority research area.

The new NCRIS capability will provide an avenue for ASSH e-Research infrastructure installation plus enable new capacities to create, collect, analyse, manipulate, visualise, compare and re-use data. This in turn will support collaborative, project-based research; provide greater access both nationally and internationally.

Endorsement of the new NCRIS capability for ASSH by the HER is essential.

### **Section 3.7 Higher education's contribution to Australia's economic, social and cultural capital**

DASSH considers that ASSH play a vital role in knowledge transfer and community engagement. Through the creative arts, in encouraging and supporting community research, in recording history and culture and in providing advice to governments and the community, for example, Australia is enriched. The issue again is one of time

and resources. Third stream funding for these activities and measurement of their impact would be a good start to ensure their survival.

### Section 3.8 Resourcing the system

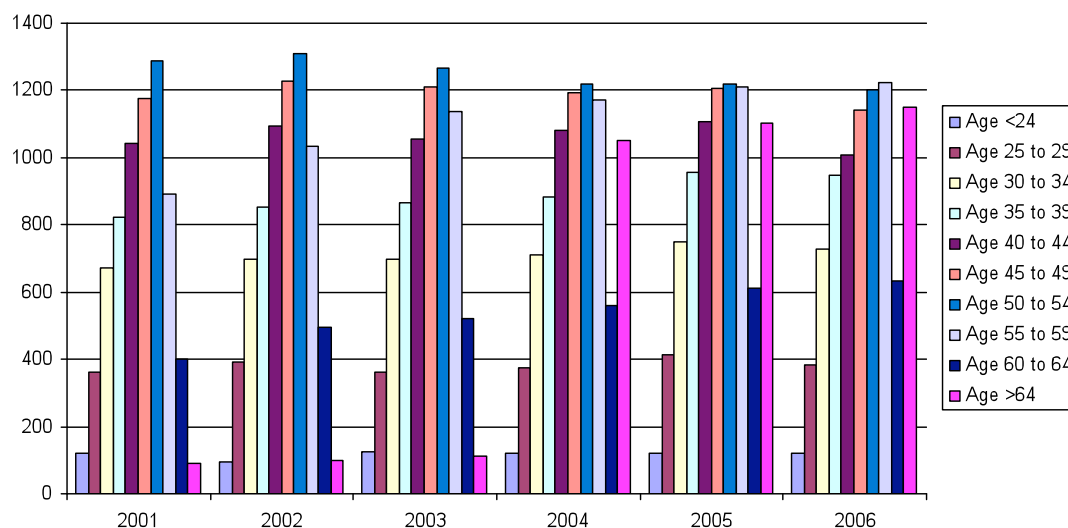
Recommendations and comments pertaining to this section are raised under sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.5 and 3.7. These are:

- Provide a third stream of funding for cross-disciplinary research and implementation through collaboration with the Excellence in Research for Australia initiative.
- Funding to reduce class sizes in ASSH so that staff can increase their opportunity to undertake research and community engagement
- Support of new NCRIS capability that allocates funding for ASSH to digitise its research and improve electronic access to this research.
- A funding regime based on the current costs for teaching ASSH using modern equipment and technology.

In addition it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit high quality staff - a sector wide problem. The ageing population in ASSH is as shown on the next page.

The lack of recognition of practice-based research for the creative and design disciplines is also reducing the ability to recruit staff that are current, cutting edge in their work and can contribute to national debates.

Despite these considerable shortcomings and the long-standing difference in funding relativities, ASSH is recognised for its high quality teaching but it is at the expense of a reasonable work-life balance. Studies of the contemporary work force show that work-life balance is an important incentive for employees to remain with their employer.



The graph is supported by the evidence that suggests that the workforce is not being renewed. (See table from DEEWR)

1. Information from the ALTC funded BA scoping project, *The nature and roles of Bachelor of Arts degrees* indicates, “between the period of 2001 – 2006, 24 institutions reduced the number of fulltime staff. This meant a reduction in these AOUS by 699 FT staff at a variety of levels. Over the same time period,

nine institutions increased their full time staff by 423 academics, generally at level B level. In 2001, there were 4017 academics in full time employment. By 2006, there were 3671 academics in full time employment. This reduction does not relate directly to a reduction in the number of students. In fact, in 9 institutions (5 of which are currently under major review) there was a decrease in students and an increase in staff employees. The biggest jump was at ANU, which employed an additional 160 staff – many of these on level D and E.

2. Only 3 institutions showed an increase in staff and in student numbers. Nine showed a decrease in staff and a decrease in student numbers, 14 showed an increase in student numbers and a decrease in staff. UWS had an increase from 2735 in 2001 to 3890 in 2006 and a corresponding drop in ft staffing from 165 in 201 to 101 in 2006.
3. All in all, the ratio of academic staff to students changed from 17:1 in 2001 to 20:1 in 2006. Student numbers for programs under discussion increase in student numbers from 69648 in 2001 to 73482 in 2006.

The combination of these findings indicates that significant problems may lie ahead if funding continues to fall. This appears likely in the current industrial climate.

### **Section 3.9 Governance and regulation**

DASSH recognizes the need for government and its bureaucracy to be accountable and therefore the necessity for reporting, legislation and compliance. However, the DASSH is of the firm view that the current level of reporting and compliance is a barrier to innovation and effective and productive teaching and research. In particular, for example, the requirement to meet targets, report on new topics, seek Ministerial permission to respond to change, reporting and compliance requirements take much needed resources from teaching and scholarship.

DASSH observes that outcomes of research funded by the Australian Research Council are recorded according to Research Fields, Courses and Disciplines (RFCD) codes. This may well meet the needs of bureaucracy and accountability but does not meet the needs of current or potential users. Users want to be able to access findings by topic, content or links with other research. Users also want to connect to the findings of other activities such as the Higher Education Innovation Programme (HEIP) projects. These need to be connected to the national innovation system.

Recommendations put forward by DASSH in its submission to the Review of the national innovation system are pertinent here. DASSH recommends that the level of reporting and bureaucracy be minimised to that which

- Makes users of public funds accountable
- Creates the freedom to take a level of risk
- Focuses on mechanisms for disseminating and diffusing the skills and knowledge and findings of research to current and potential users

### **Summary**

DASSH sees itself as a vital part of the Higher Education sector, responsible for a large number of graduates. DASSH believes that this Review has the potential to redress many of the issues facing Universities and to further strengthen a remarkably resilient contributor to Australia's success.

DASSH would welcome the opportunity to clarify and expand on its recommendations.