

About DASSH

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) is the authoritative agency on research, teaching and learning for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH) across Australian and New Zealand universities. DASSH represents Executive Deans and Pro Vice-Chancellors of 45 university faculties, with ASSH disciplines representing 33 per cent of all students studying full-time at Australian universities.¹ We welcome the opportunity to comment on the development of the 2012 Process to refresh the National Research Priorities. In particular DASSH greatly welcomes the proposal to introduce a new national research priority in the humanities, arts and social sciences, “Enhancing Society, Culture and Communities,” which recognises the importance of these disciplines in generating understanding and knowledge in their own right. In this submission we suggest a number of improvements to the wording of the priority goals to redress the apparent assumption in the current wording that knowledge and understanding relevant to Australia's research priorities can proceed without reference to international or global society and cultures. Our point is that research that is important for Australia is not limited to research undertaken in or about Australia, because the future of Australia is inevitably tied up with international factors that need to be understood by Australians.

Submitted by:

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¹ Calculated from Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), *Equivalent FT Load by Discipline by Citizenship Category*, [Higher Education Statistics Data Cube \(uCube\)](#), 2010.

REFRESHING THE NATIONAL RESEARCH PRIORITIES 2012 - SUBMISSION TEMPLATE

- 1. Does the proposed wording of the new *Enhancing Society, Culture and Communities* NRP and its associated priority goals provide an opportunity for researchers within the humanities, arts and social sciences to contribute to Australia's research priorities?**

Your response: DASSH strongly supports the inclusion of this new NRP and its recognition of the significance of HASS disciplines, and urges a broadening of the focus beyond Australia ("*Stimulating the development of an Australia which celebrates culture, knowledge, inclusion, wellbeing and active citizenship*") The narrow focus on Australia fails to recognise the importance of understanding Australian events and culture in relation to what can be known or understood about other cultures and international phenomena. As such the changes we recommend under consultation question three would better capture the ways in which HASS disciplines can support Australia's research priorities. Further this new NRP seems to too narrowly understand the value of research in languages, cultural performance and civic engagement, and we make specific recommendations relating to these.

Rationale: Knowledge of Australia's current cultural identity involves both understanding how the cultural mix and practices found here have arisen, but also understanding the ways in which these reflect, or are distinct from, or shape cultures, practices and communities outside Australia. Adequate understanding of Australian society and culture requires understanding of the wider social forces shaping it. The new national research priority emphasises the use of the knowledge and understanding gained, while under-emphasising the importance of having sufficient knowledge and understanding of the concepts, cultural practices and social institutions as a basis of the knowledge on which such uses are based.

- 2. Do you consider that those suggested adequately cover the areas of national priority of particular importance to the HASS disciplines? Please provide specific example of any alternate goals and the context to explain your comments or suggestions.**

Your response: The suggested areas cover a large number of HASS disciplines, but appear to overlook research in languages, cultural performance, and the concepts, ideologies and values underlying cultures, communities and society.

Rationale: The recommended changes listed in response to consultation question 3 address and explain each of these.

- 3. Do the descriptions underneath the draft NRP and each priority goals adequately explain their purposes? Please provide specific example of any alternate text and the context to explain your comments or suggestions.**

Your response:

1. Existing: "Creating a vibrant Australia through art, sport, cultural industries, social innovation and digital and other technologies" → Recommend: "Creating a vibrant Australia through art, cultural performance, cultural industries, sport and recreation, social innovation and digital and other technologies."
2. Existing: "Understanding Australia's identity, culture, heritage and histories" → Recommend: "Understanding Australia's identity, culture, heritage and histories and its place in the global community and the concepts and values that shape Australia's identity."
3. Existing: "Fostering tolerance, diversity, multiculturalism and social engagement" → Recommend: "Fostering tolerance, diversity, multiculturalism, social participation and civic engagement."
4. Existing: "Fostering understanding, improving well-being and celebrating the knowledge and creativity of indigenous Australians" → Recommend: "Fostering understanding, improving well-being and celebrating indigenous knowledge, cultures, history and creativity".

Rationale for each:

1. This goal seems to exclude non-commercial research into music and performance as means of understanding and enhancing society, culture and communities, and the phrase "sport and recreation" better captures the cultural role of sport.
 2. a) It is impossible to adequately understand any culture, identity or history in isolation, the revised wording makes this explicit; b) given that changes in any community or culture involve shifts in conceptual understanding as well as social practice, this rewording draws attention to the importance of conceptual research.
 3. It seems that this goal is trying to cover both the involvement of people in communities and their sense of connection to and active engagement with civic activities. The revised wording separates these two more clearly—the goal relating to institutional governance focuses on the institutional structure of society, rather than the promotion of civic virtue and involvement.
 4. Australia's own indigenous communities cannot be fully understood in isolation from the global political aspirations of indigenous communities in a range of settler cultures.
- 4. Are there any amendments which should be considered to the existing language of *An Environmentally Sustainable Australia* NRP and/or its associated priority goals to refresh its relevance to contemporary Australia? Please comment on the proposed amendments provided above, provide specific examples of any new proposed amendments and provide the context to explain your comments and suggestions.**

Your response: Existing: "Increasing our understanding of the impact of climate change and variability at the regional level across Australia and addressing the consequences of these factors on the environment and on communities." → Recommend: "Increasing our understanding of the social economic and political factors relevant to responses to climate change and viability and increasing our understanding of climate change and variability at the regional, national and global level and addressing the consequences of these factors on the environment and communities"

Rationale: Environmental sustainability Australia depends on social change, if the factors relevant to making those changes are not understood and managed, then Australia will not respond effectively to the impact of climate change. The proposed revisions would better reflect the social and political changes at the local, national and international level required for any significant changes in behaviour and carbon pollution reduction.

5. **Are there any amendments, which should be considered to the existing language of the *Promoting and Maintaining Good Health* NRP and/or its associated priority goals to refresh its relevance to contemporary Australia? Please comment on the proposed amendments provided above, provide specific examples of any new proposed amendments and provide the context to explain your comments and suggestions.**

Your response: This NRP appears to emphasize the importance of medicine over a social understanding of health and well-being and individualises ill-health and disability. Recommend the following:

- Replace "Developing better social, medical and population health strategies to improve the mental and physical capacities of ageing people and fostering social connection and support in ageing."
- Add comma after "New" in "New ethical evidenced-based..." (it is interesting that this is the sole mention of ethics in this document, presumably ethical research is to be supported throughout the NRPs?)

Rationale: While often ageing and ill-health occur together, ageing per se is not an illness and the well-being of older people is greatly supported through their engagement in social activity and through personalised social supports.

6. **Are there any amendments, which should be considered to the existing language of the *Frontier Technologies for Building and Transforming Australian Industries* NRP and/or its associated priority goals to refresh its relevance to contemporary Australia? Please comment on the proposed amendments provided above, provide specific examples of any new proposed amendments and provide the context to explain your comments and suggestions.**

Your response: The amendments to the language in this NRP area avoid the narrowness of the previous version.

7. **Are there any amendments which should be considered to the existing language of the *Safeguarding Australia* NRP and/or its associated priority goals to refresh its relevance to contemporary Australia? Please comment on the proposed amendments provided above, provide specific examples of any new proposed amendments and provide the context to explain your comments and suggestions.**

Your response: DASSH notes that there was concern in the consultations about the defence focus of the original NRP (Consultation paper, p 10). While a food security area has been added to this NRP, it still focuses on defensive responses to threats rather than understanding and reducing the opportunity for these threats to arise (e.g. through better understanding the social and political causes of tensions and Australia's capacity to aid other states). This is an area again where placing the immediate Australian interests at the centre may misidentify what the nature of a "threat" to security may be. Suggest adding something to the effect of "identifying means of fostering global security" to the text under each of the goals to capture this.

Rationale: The text is current still relatively reactive and suggests that Australia can be conceptually, politically and strategically isolated from the rest of the world.

8. **Are there any further amendments or refinements, which should be considered to the NRPs and/or their associated priority goals in order to reduce repetition or duplication?**

Your response: *No comment*

Rationale: