# Researcher Career Development in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

## 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) in Australian and New Zealand universities. DASSH represents Deans, Executive Deans and Pro Vice-Chancellors of 45 faculties, with ASSH disciplines representing 29 per cent of students (and 34 per cent of domestic students) undertaking postgraduate research at Australian universities.[1]

## Introduction

DASSH strongly supports the Australian Government's development of a Research Workforce Strategy and the priority areas outlined in *Research Skills for an Innovative Future – A Research Workforce Strategy to Cover the Decade to 2020.* In particular, we endorse building Australia's ability to meet the demand for research skills, strengthening the supply quality from the Research Training System, and enhancing the attractiveness of research careers and participation.

We welcome the proposed development of *Researcher Career Development Guidelines* and the opportunity to comment and recommend actions. Different disciplinary researchers have common concerns, but attention needs to be given to the significant variances in research across disciplines and the resulting impact on career development. Our perspective is from the arts, social sciences and humanities (ASSH) disciplines, although some elements will be relevant to other disciplines. Our broad recommendations are on how ASSH researchers' career development can be better supported by a) the Australian Government and b) universities and research institutions.

## Key Factors Influencing ASSH Researcher Career Development

For any research career development strategy or guidelines to be successful in the ASSH disciplines, there are important influencing factors that we must firstly acknowledge. These include:

1. **Recognition of the significance of ASSH research in addressing the key issues affecting global society**
2. **Australia's ability to attract and retain the next generation of researchers in ASSH disciplines**
3. **The importance of balanced research career development in ASSH disciplines.**

These factors are further explored below and are an important background to the recommendations we make.

[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.

## 1. Recognition of the significance of ASSH research in addressing the key issues affecting global society

Australian arts, social sciences and humanities (ASSH) research plays a significant role in contributing to Australian society; facilitating an engaged and informed citizenry by addressing the big issues affecting us globally, such as, health and ageing, the environment, sustainability, population growth, labour trends, social inclusion, regional issues, the economy and globalisation. ASSH research informs and contributes to a range of sectors – public, industry, arts, media and culture – across many domains (such as social, economic, cultural, environmental, and political), and to both Australian and international research agendas. ASSH research not only contributes greatly to policy development, but to Australian and international understanding of history and culture[2] and to the private sector[3] – for example, by informing marketing, new product and service development, customer satisfaction and engagement.

Australian ASSH research has significantly contributed to public policy in Australia and internationally including: the development of international human rights law and standards; identifying Australian and Asia-Pacific regional workforce, training gaps and international labour movement trends and developing related policies; the development of Australian and international self-funding retirement schemes and providing input into the World Bank pension reform in Asia; and development of Australian and international media and creative industries' policies.[4]

ASSH researchers contribute to public policy in a range of ways, including: as public servants employed to conduct research within government departments; as academic researchers contracted to conduct research for, or in collaboration with, government departments; and as academic researchers conducting research about government policy, processes and social impacts.

Many international governments also recognise the role that the social science research institutes play in effectively contributing to public policy. Traditionally these research institutes were found in Europe and the US, but recently the growing economies of Asia have made large investments into institutions employing social science career researchers. For example, the Academy of Social Science in China and the Tata Institute for Social Science Research in India.[5]

In Australia many Commonwealth Government Departments commission and use social science research for advising policy development on key social issues.

[2] For example: Professor Joy Damousi's work on Australia's history, cultural diversity and the impact of Australian international events; Professor Iain McCalman's contribution to BBC, ABC and independent productions of documentaries on Australian and British maritime history.

[3] Social science researchers, historians, literary scholars, designers, communications specialists and media researchers are just some of the ASSH professions that actively make an array of contributions to the private sector.

[4] Referring to research led by Professor Hilary Charlesworth, The Australian National University; Professor Graeme Hugo, University of Adelaide; Professor John Piggot, University of New South Wales; and Professor Stuart Cunningham, Queensland University of Technology

[5] The Academy of Social Science in China is state-funded and the Tata Institute for Social Science Research in India is industry funded and very highly regarded as an independent research body.

There are some very able people engaged within and with different government departments; but nowhere does social science policy research come together functionally in any completely holistic way. ASSH research has a significant role to play in collaborative and interdisciplinary research[6] to better inform public policy and improve the well-being of society as a whole. Only a National Social Science Research Institute and/or a Senior Social Scientist,[7] with an understanding of the profession, its research methods, and its latest thinking on a range of multi-disciplinary issues can fully bring this to bear. A Chief Scientist, with a background on the physical, life and medical sciences, has a restricted ability to draw on the social science insights and risks not using social scientific tools to look at and address the pressing social issues of our generation.

2. **Australia's ability to attract and retain the next generation of researchers in ASSH disciplines**

In a 2009 study, over 30 per cent of the Australian academic workforce, who changed job, moved overseas.[8] One of the main reasons for an overseas move is to avail expanded research opportunities. While we need to acknowledge gaining overseas experience is invaluable for broadening research capability, we also need to ensure that Australia is able to both retain and attract world-class researchers. Nowhere is this more necessary than in the current ASSH workforce, where there is a significantly higher proportion of senior academic staff nearing retirement.[9]

In contrast to the tenured retiring academics – many who lead ASSH faculty research – there are a significantly high proportion of younger research assistants, combined researchers and teachers, and Early Career Researchers (ECRs), who are on casual or short-term contracts. This casualisation offers very little incentive or opportunity for mentoring and succession planning and has lead many ECRs to look at non-university positions offering better job security and work conditions.

The ASSH sector produces a large number of PhDs, many of whom are from overseas,[10] but there are relatively few public or privately funded postdoctoral research positions available to encourage continuation of their research careers. Although ASSH disciplines have proportionally performed well through the Australian Research Council's Discovery Early Career Researcher Awards (DECRAs), the number of ECRs still fall short of what is needed to meet the future demands of ASSH disciplines.[11]

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[6] Social science research plays a key role in interdisciplinary collaboration through the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) on Youth, Technology and Wellbeing and the CRC on Mental Health. Although these CRCs are an excellent mechanism to research big societal issues, there is still scope to better address the well-being of society as a whole.
[7] In March 2012, the UK House of Lords supported the appointment of a Chief Social Scientist
[8] Hugo G, *The Future of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Academic Workforce: A Demographic Perspective*, (Presentation at DASSH Conference), September 2011.
[9] Hugo G, *The demographic outlook for Australian universities' academic staff*, CHASS Occasional Paper #8, 2008.
[10] Hugo, 2011.
[11] ASSH success rates are proportional to the number of ASSH applications (35%), which in turn are equivalent to the proportion of domestic HDR students in ASSH disciplines. Source: ARC 2012 DECRA Funding Outcomes.

Not only is there a need for Australia to build its research workforce in the ASSH disciplines, but there is also a unique opportunity to do so. The significant devaluing of ASSH in the UK and the economic uncertainty in Western economies on the one hand, provide an extremely qualified research workforce, from which to recruit. On the other hand, the increasing investment in ASSH research capacity in developing countries such as India and China both challenges and provides more regional engagement opportunities. Australian competitiveness as a research-led, knowledge economy depends on its investment in sustainable research careers in the public and private sectors including its ability to attract and retain researchers in the international market. We face a significant opportunity to gain competitive advantage and take on a prominent role in leading the Asia Pacific region in these fields.

3. **The importance of balanced research career development**

ASSH disciplines currently represent 33 per cent of the students studying full-time at an Australian University,[12] and will play a significant role in meeting participation targets. Increasing enrolments and teaching demands will greatly impact on the current academic workforce's ability to focus on research activity. It is important to both provide teaching-research balance and to encourage young researchers to experience the teaching environment.

It is not only important to achieve balance between types of work, it is equally important to facilitate the gaining of experience and knowledge across sectors. Although we are seeing significant growth in ASSH researchers being engaged by the private and public sector, the higher education sector provides a significantly high proportion of employment (and will continue to do so). DASSH welcomes more business, industry and university collaboration, such as, the Industrial Transformation Research Program, which recognises the importance of ASSH to transforming industries and to social innovation. However, generally movement across sectors, disciplines and in and out of the ASSH research profession is low. Although women account for one third of doctorate-qualified people in Australia[13] (this figure is even higher in ASSH disciplines), the discouragement of career breaks has impacted female representation at senior university levels.

To gain a truly balanced research career, international experience also inevitably offers many benefits. A number of Australian universities have developed cotutelle and cross-university Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) programs to encourage international movement during the ECR research-training period. Science programs, in part because of the potential to access specialist skills and laboratories, have embraced these more readily. In ASSH disciplines, current arrangements tend to be limited to collecting data, visiting archives or presenting work in international colloquia or conferences.

[12] DEEWR, 2010.
[13] 2006 Census.

## Recommendations for Government

The following are DASSH's recommendations on how Government could better support researchers' career needs and developments in the ASSH disciplines.

- **Policy inclusion of cultural and social innovations:** ASSH research continues to play a significant role in informing better public policy addressing the big issues affecting society. However, sometimes research related policy focuses more on the 'hard sciences' and the resulting technical innovation. DASSH agrees that research plays an important role in leading to innovation and there are many advantages of market-driven research. We strongly recommend that the current system – including the Research Training Scheme and R&D tax incentives – takes account of the importance of cultural and social innovation.
- **Recognition of ASSH research output:** In terms of rewards, recognition and research career development, government research guidelines need to distinguish the specificity of ASSH researchers, especially regarding expectations about research grant income, and use of citation indexes. Some work has been done on recognising research output from the creative and performing arts in New Zealand[14] and through the ARC's Excellence for Research in Australia (ERA) assessment. However, more refinement is required around types of performance and recording of creative arts research. We recommend redefining what constitutes a 'research output' in the Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC) and that there be consistency in the evaluating and funding of research outputs to include the creative and performing arts.
- **Build long-term ASSH research capacity and Australia's international profile:** To ensure continuity in significant ASSH research and to improve the attractiveness of ASSH research careers in Australia, we suggest long-term strategic and institutional funding for both developing areas of ASSH research and key ASSH researchers. There is a significant opportunity to increase both Australia's global and regional standing in these fields, particularly by taking advantage of 1) the highly skilled international research workforce available and 2) collaborating with the growing economies of India and China, where major investments recognise the role social sciences play in better policy-making.
- **Recognise the role of social science in contributing to the big issues:** Many of society's most pressing and costly issues are too important in Australia's national agenda not to have a body, nor a position, that can influence policy agendas and public debate from a holistic perspective. We recommend appointing a Chief Social Scientist and investing in a national social sciences research institute that can holistically better inform public policy and improve the well-being of society as a whole.
- **Develop transition pathways and increase funding for ASSH ECRs:** To make the most of our research workforce, we need to identify and facilitate pathways into and transitions within research careers in Australia. DASSH supports more flexible pathways to achieving a doctorate, increasing opportunities to attract domestic students to early career research work and also increasing the ease of

[14] The Tertiary Education Commission's Performance Based Research Fund, *Creative and Performing Arts Panel – Specific Guidelines 2012 Quality Evaluation.*

hiring excellent overseas researchers.[15] We recommend expanding the DECRA scheme, for example, through targeted post-doctoral research training support (similar to the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council's postdoctoral fellowships).[16]

- **Promote a balanced research career:** To produce better researchers, we recommend developing policies and strategies to encourage more balance in research workforce development. Our recommendations include:
  - Offer short-term (3-6 month) international HDR focused research training exchanges, collaboratively funded by public research bodies. This would include expediting visas for international visitors on these exchanges.
  - Ensure that current policy, infrastructure and funding includes: the promotion of teaching-research balance and interdisciplinary and cross-sector research collaboration; staff mentoring incentives; the development of transferrable generic research skills; and encouragement of young researchers experiencing the teaching environment.

## Recommendations for Universities

The following are DASSH's recommendations on how universities could better support researchers' career needs and developments in the ASSH disciplines.

- **Improve work conditions and flexibility:** By improving employment security and shifting away from short-term contracts, there is an opportunity to enhance the adoption of succession planning, mentoring and career development strategies. There is a growing demand for researchers outside of universities; and for universities to be competitive employers, there will need to be attractive work conditions. Universities also need to implement further flexible family-friendly policies and more mid-career research fellowships to retain and attract senior female researchers.
- **Research career development strategies:** To limit the impact of large-scale impending retirements across ASSH faculties, we strongly recommend better succession planning for research leadership, with faculties starting earlier to groom future research leaders and spending more time mentoring mid-career researchers. Incentives, resources and research-relevant programs need to be put in place to reward and encourage a culture of staff mentoring and development. We also encourage manageable student-staff ratios, the hiring of research active level D/E academics to lead ASSH disciplines, administrative support to enable outstanding research supervisors to focus on research training, and workforce renewal with promotion pathways defined in terms of the measures appropriate to ASSH disciplines and its creative outputs.
- **Encourage publication and collaboration opportunities:** Universities can do much to encourage publication opportunities and collaborations across all disciplines including ASSH. Research students are the corner stone of research activities in many universities. Up to 70 percent of all university research outputs

[15] For example, DASSH supports the Government's opening up Australian Postgraduate Awards (APAs) to International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (IPRS).
[16] Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council one to two-year postdoctoral scholarships.

are linked to student contributions.[17] ASSH HDRs need to be encouraged to look for publication opportunities (mentored sole publication or joint publication with the supervisor), which would better acquaint them with research publishing conventions and expectations in their chosen research field. HDRs should also be given opportunities to teach and participate in international exchanges and professional development networks, which play an important role in both disciplinary and cross institutional collaboration.[18]

- **Promoting non-academic research careers in the ASSH sector:** Although there will be significant opportunities for ECR academics to enter the university workplace with the ageing of the academic demographic, ASSH disciplines have yet to promote strongly the research career opportunities available outside universities. There is a need for ASSH disciplines and universities to develop their ability to assist ECRs to transition across university, public and private sectors, so as to promote research career possibilities and strengthen research skills, new thinking and innovative approaches across all sectors.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

ASSH research addresses big issues affecting society such as social change, social impact, social innovation, social inclusion and social connection (e.g. the National Broadband Network), resilience, and demographic change. We strongly urge an increased recognition of the role social sciences plays in better policy-making by investing in our ASSH research workforce – to not only address society's important issues, but to take a prominent role in influencing global debate and leading the Asia Pacific region in this area.

We look forward to seeing research career development strategies and guidelines that help address the key challenges and opportunities for developing a globally competitive ASSH research workforce in Australia.

***Submitted by:***
**The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH)**
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[17] Larkins, F (for the LH Martin Institute), *Overseas students help boost Australian universities research profile,* 30 Nov 2011.

[18] For example, the Languages and Culture Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU) and DASSH Associate Deans of Research Network