
DASSH Submission to the Inquiry into Funding Australia's Research

In this submission, the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) sets out the key areas of concern for Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) disciplines in the higher education sector.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the current state of research funding in the sector. Noting that this inquiry will be focused on federally funded research agencies, their funding mechanisms and university collaborative research, we are offering comments on behalf of the HASS disciplines across a broad range of institutions with different capabilities to manage research funding and externally funded grants. We acknowledge that the House Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Training will inquire into and report on the efficiency, effectiveness and coherency of Australian Government funding for research. We address the different terms of reference below in our submission.

- *The diversity, fragmentation and efficiency of research investment across the Australian Government, including the range of programs, guidelines and methods of assessment of grants*

In our view, Australian Government funding of research through the National Competitive Grant Program (NCGP), Research Support Program (RSP) and Research Training Program (RTP) for Higher Education Providers (HEPs), and Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs) serves well to ensure necessary investment in the HASS research base and output.

The Discovery Program provides appropriate investment in the development of research capacities (through the DECRA and Future Fellowships schemes), basic and applied research (through the Discovery Projects), and in world-class research (through the Australian Laureate Fellowships scheme). Across these DECRA, Future Fellowship and DP schemes, around 30% of awards were made to HASS applications in 2016-2018. We also commend the support to Indigenous research and capacity development to the Discovery Indigenous scheme. We note with some concern that typically fewer than 20% of the awards in each scheme are made to female applicants (see Table), and this suggests the need for active measures to address gender equity in this area of public funding.

Table 1: ARC Discovery Program Awards

Discovery ECR Awards:

2016 - 33.5% to HASS, 35.5% to women

2017 – 34.5% to HASS, 17.7% to women

2018 – 32% to HASS, 20% to women

Future Fellowships

2015 – 28% to HASS, 19% to women

2016 – 29% to HASS, 26.8% to women

2017 – 30.8% to HASS, 38.3% to women

Discovery Projects

2016 – 30.9% to HASS, 17.4% to women

2017 – 30.6% to HASS, 17.6% to women

2018 – 28.8% to HASS, 20.3% to women

Australian Laureate Fellowships

2016 – 31.25% to HASS, 18.75% to women

2017 – 23.5% to HASS, 23.5% to women

Source: <http://www.arc.gov.au/selection-outcome-reports>

The Linkage Project scheme is a key source of funding available to HASS researchers to form partnerships with external stakeholders. We welcome the emphasis in this scheme on the funding of risky and/or innovative research. We note that in an increasingly complex world, facing multiple forms of social, technological, and economic disruption, it is more important than ever to develop interdisciplinary solutions to policy and community challenges. Accordingly, we consider there to be more scope to explicitly support interdisciplinary research that cross the STEM-HASS “divide”. We welcome and support the ARC’s efforts to date in this area, particularly the 2018 [ARC Statement on Interdisciplinary Research](#), however, more can be done. DASSH suggests that instead of merely “encourage[ing] interdisciplinarity in] both individual and team-based research projects under key schemes across Linkage and Discovery Programs”, the ARC could add this as an explicit criterion to the Linkage Project scheme. Moreover we observe the tendency of the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) exercise to reinforce disciplinary boundaries, and therefore would suggest that it may be worth considering various ways that there could be more explicit promotion of multidisciplinary research in the NCGP.

- *The process and administrative role undertaken by research institutions, in particular universities, in developing and managing applications for research funding*

Our members (Deans and Associate Deans of HASS) note that most universities have well developed structures to develop and manage applications for ARC grants, including central and faculty support units, internal review processes, and workshops and advice on developing research grant applications.

- *The effectiveness and efficiency of operating a dual funding system for university research, namely competitive grants and performance-based block grants to cover systemic costs of research*

We broadly welcome the administrative efficiencies afforded by the introduction of RSP and RTP in place of the previous six research block grant programs. However, as noted in [our response to the 2016 consultation on this change](#), we are concerned about the formula for determining RSP and RTP grants to HEPs, which are proportionate to the level of income from industry and other non-government sectors (52.8% for RSP and 25% for RTP). We have

two concerns here. Our first concern is that the sole focus on income does not accurately reflect the level of actual engagement in HASS with industry and other non-government partners. For our sector, external partners are typically drawn from the public sector; the galleries, libraries, archives and museums sector; and Non-Government Organisations, who usually support research collaboration through in-kind contribution, such as expertise, data, labour, and facilities. Our second concern is that HEPs will introduce new formula for the internal distribution of RSP and RST to reflect the formula applied by the ARC for determining HEP funding under both programs, and this will result in real cuts to funding of research support and training for HASS disciplines. Accordingly, we call for the formula for determining RSP and RST grants to be revised to more accurately capture the level and value of engagement with industry and non-government engagement by HASS disciplines.

- *Opportunities to maximise the impact of funding by ensuring optimal simplicity and efficiency for researchers and research institutions while prioritising delivery of national priorities and public benefit*

HASS disciplines are focused even more keenly on topics of national importance and relevance, given the pressing social issues of our times. As we state above, the role of our disciplines across all projects imagined as interdisciplinary, as well as the value of our disciplinary research, needs to be understood and valued for its national and international significance.

In our 2015 [response to the call for comment on Vision for a Science Nation. Responding to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: Australia's Future](#), then as herein, we acknowledge the valuable contribution of STEM research in tackling a number of the current global challenges and that policies to ensure long-term stable investment in funding to address these are needed. However, it cannot be forgotten that all of these challenges involve people, politics, values and regulatory structures, none of which can be tackled by science alone. Nor can the social sciences and humanities aspects of these challenges be “tacked on” after the science is done: for successful outcomes, the STEM and HASS elements need to be addressed in tandem. The best international research in areas such as global security demonstrates the benefits of disciplinary collaboration in tackling complex problems.

Given the vital role HASS research has to play in meeting the challenges of a modern world, we again urge the government to consult with and include the HASS community in the development and implementation of a comprehensive science and research policy.

On matters of streamlining and efficiency, we judge there to be considerable scope to improve the efficiency of the ARC Discovery and Linkage Programs, specifically with regard to reducing the length of the applications. For example, an ARC Discovery Grant application with three researchers can run to over 150 pages. In contrast, a grant application with three researchers for an equivalent scheme with the UK Economic and Social Research Council would be a maximum of 32 pages. The Royal Society of New Zealand’s Marsden Fund has

two rounds: the first is a simple preliminary proposal of up to 20 pages including CVs; invitations for full proposals are then invited by the assessment panels, and referees only invited at that stage. Given the very large volume of applications to the Discovery and Linkage Programs, the length of each application produces a significant burden on the ARC Assessor community. We would suggest more broadly that there may be useable lessons from the experience and practice of the ESRC and RSNZ, as well as other models, for improving the efficiency of the Australian NCGP.

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President

Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH)

28 June 2018

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 in Australian and New Zealand universities.

DASSH supports those within these institutions who have responsibility for the governance and management of research and teaching and learning in their universities. DASSH also supports those who aspire to these positions through a Network of Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching), a Network of Associate Deans (Research) and a Network of Associate Deans (International).