

Response to National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund Consultation

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the new National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF). Our members support the investments in teaching and research and the promotion of university collaborations with industry partners. However, they continue to be disappointed by the lack of recognition given to the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) in Australia's national priorities and in the government's understanding of industry needs.

The design of the NPILF, and the Job-ready Graduates package more generally, is predicated on assumptions about the future of work and Australia's economic and societal needs that do not stand up to scrutiny. Our association, along with many others, has repeatedly demonstrated that demand for HASS skills is high among business and industry leaders, and that the whole of society benefits from HASS-trained graduates.¹

This submission registers our members' concerns and makes the following recommendations which are supported by detailed evidence outlined below:

1. Develop a comprehensive evidence base to inform a revised strategy which addresses any real obstacles facing graduates seeking employment.
2. Remove the singular focus on increasing STEM-skills training from the NPILF to better reflect current and projected employer demands.
3. Revise the Job-ready Graduates package, including the NPILF, to create and incentivise opportunities for all university students to diversify their knowledge and skillsets.
4. Embed HASS-skills training into the eligibility requirements for accessing NPILF funding.

There is a lack of evidence demonstrating that Australian universities are not currently producing enough STEM-skilled graduates

The government's claims that STEM-skilled graduates are more employable than their HASS-trained counterparts are not supported by evidence. If such evidence was apparent, the NPILF's efforts to improve employment outcomes for STEM-skilled graduates would appear unnecessary and misaligned with the assertions that these graduates are in high demand.

Recently released data from the Australian Graduate Outcomes Survey² (a government endorsed longitudinal survey funded by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment) demonstrates that there is very little difference in the short (1-year post-graduation) and medium (3-years post-graduation) term employment prospects of university graduates from all disciplines. In fact, HASS graduates were found to be employed at higher rates than graduates from a number of the STEM disciplines that are promoted through reduced student contributions in the Job-ready Graduates legislation (see Appendix A).

We are not aware of any evidence to suggest that the small proportions of unemployed graduates are out of work due to a lack of STEM skills. A multitude of factors determine whether a graduate will find employment,

¹ Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities. (2020). "Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020," *Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities*. Viewed 21 October 2020.
https://dassh.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/JobReadyGraduates_SenateInquiry_2020.09.09.pdf

² Survey for Graduate Outcomes (2020). *Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching*. Viewed 7 September 2020.
<https://www.qilt.edu.au/qilt-surveys/graduate-employment>

and while we applaud the aspiration to improve the employment prospects of university graduates, it is unclear why the current government strategy fails to address the need for skills diversity.

Recommendation: Develop a comprehensive evidence base to inform a revised strategy which addresses any real obstacles facing graduates seeking employment.

Employers are demanding graduates with HASS skills

In recent years, there has been a wealth of research published by academics, industry and consultancy groups which consistently points to the skills fostered through tertiary-level study of HASS degrees as integral to the jobs and workplaces of the future, and as the skills least likely to become redundant as a result of automation and technological advances.³

These skills include the ‘human skills’ of communication, creativity, cultural awareness, flexibility/adaptability, leadership, teamwork and critical thinking. Studying a discipline that helps build these skills does not exclude a graduate from a job in a STEM field,⁴ but rather prepares them for a career in which they will be asked to regularly learn and adapt to new circumstances, technologies, people and ideas. With this in mind, the attempt to direct students away from HASS courses appears contrary to the stated objectives of the policy.⁵ DASSH members agree that it is students themselves who are best placed to identify the courses which will launch their future careers. These students deserve the opportunity to undertake those courses, in whatever disciplines, at a fair and equitable cost.

Among the previous research on the value of HASS degrees is a 2018 report published by DASSH.⁶ The report found that HASS disciplines supply two-thirds of Australia’s workforce, and that graduates of HASS degrees are highly prized and increasingly sought-after across industry groups. The report also found that HASS disciplines have been undervalued historically. Australia cannot afford to allow this to continue.

The reduction in support for the study of HASS disciplines is also a failure to recognise the intrinsic value of the disciplines, or of a society with an appreciation for their content and methodologies. According to Deloitte Access Economics research, those trained in HASS fields exhibit greater levels of trust, volunteerism, political engagement and tolerance than those without such education.⁷ DASSH members are troubled at the prospect of a policy environment that does not value these traits.

Recommendation: Remove the singular focus on increasing STEM-skills training from the NPILF to better reflect current and projected employer demands.

³ Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities. (2020). “Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020,” *Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities*. Viewed 21 October 2020.

https://dassh.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/JobReadyGraduates_SenateInquiry_2020.09.09.pdf

⁴ Turner, G., and Brass, K. (2014) Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia. *Australian Academy of the Humanities*. Viewed 13 August 2020. <https://www.humanities.org.au/issue-item/mapping-humanities-arts-social-sciences-australia/>

⁵ Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2020). *Job-ready Graduates: Higher Education Reform Package 2020*, pg. 9. Viewed 13 August 2020. <https://www.dese.gov.au/document/job-ready-graduates-discussion-paper>

⁶ Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) Degrees: Powering Workforce Transformation Through Creativity, Critical Thinking and Human Interaction (2018). *Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH)*. Viewed 13 August 2020. https://dassh.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/DASSH_HASS_and_Future_Workforce_FINAL_Report_2018.11_.21_.pdf

⁷ The Value of the Humanities: A critical foundation of our society (2018). *Deloitte Australia / Macquarie University*. Viewed 13 August 2020. <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/value-humanities.html>

The focus on 'STEM-skilled graduates' evidently comes at the expense of HASS-skills training

While the NPILF does not explicitly exclude HASS-skills training, given the limited number of students in higher education and the limited number of subjects these students can complete during their degrees, it seems apparent that STEM-skills training will come at the expense of HASS-skills training.

During the announcement and promotion of the 'Job-ready Graduates' package, the Minister for Education, Dan Tehan MP, recommended that students completing HASS degrees reduce the overall cost of their degree by undertaking electives from STEM areas. Disregarding the fact that not all students can accommodate elective subjects in their degrees, and that the lines between STEM and HASS are often blurry, it is concerning to see that the Minister has overlooked the necessity for students in STEM programs to diversify their skill sets by undertaking electives from HASS areas. In fact, there is now a disincentive for students in STEM programs to complete HASS subjects. This will likely produce *less employable* graduates, based on the research findings highlighted earlier in this submission.

Recommendation: Revise the Job-ready Graduates package, including the NPILF, to create and incentivise opportunities for all university students to diversify their knowledge and skillsets.

Social, political and cultural contexts are key to solving even the most technical of problems

The singular focus on STEM-skills is not only poorly justified, it is also a potential threat to the role that Australia will be able to play in shaping the world's future scientific, technological and engineering advancements.

Public Health and Medicine

Events during current COVID-19 pandemic provide many clear examples of the requirement to integrate HASS expertise into public health and medical decisions.

Early on in Melbourne's second wave of COVID-19 infections, reports surfaced of high rates of infections among communities with relatively low rates of English literacy.⁸ Materials were published in a range of languages to help advise those in these communities, but it was revealed that some of these materials were poorly translated to the point that they were nonsensical. Others, apparently unintentionally, included different information in multiple languages.⁹ If the policies were prepared by personnel with an in-depth understanding of effective communication with diverse populations, appropriate cross-cultural communication would more likely been an automatic consideration rather than an embarrassing and delayed realisation.¹⁰

On an even wider scale, improved understandings of the motivations behind Melbourne residents' movements, including those in breach of lockdown laws, could conceivably have informed faster and more effective control of the outbreak.

Information Technology

The ongoing rapid advancements in information technology and online services are inextricably intertwined with the types of issues that require HASS skills and expertise to address. Wider exposure to disciplines like philosophy, history, social theory, and literature, among tech entrepreneurs, coders and developers may have spared us many of the ethical concerns currently facing the tech sector.

⁸ Dalzell, S. (2020). "Government warned of coronavirus 'missed opportunity' to protect migrant communities before Victorian spike," *ABC News*, 24 June 2020. Accessed on 21 October 2020. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-24/government-warned-failing-engage-migrant-communities-coronavirus/12384800>

⁹ Dalzell, S. (2020). "Government coronavirus messages left 'nonsensical' after being translated into other languages," *ABC News*, 13 August 2020. Accessed on 21 October 2020. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-13/coronavirus-messages-translated-to-nonsense-in-other-languages/12550520>

¹⁰ Hanasz P. (2017). *The Social Sciences Shape the Nation*. Canberra: The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia.

The spread of conspiracy theories and ‘fake news’ on social media now has real-world consequences, consequences which are on full display in election campaigns and COVID responses. Tech companies have been slow to act on calls to censor misleading or dangerous content, and their eventual actions are often piecemeal and inconsistent.^{11,12} More coherent and timely responses might be expected from companies staffed by HASS-trained employees.

Artificial intelligence is also a growth area in the information technology sector with clear demands for HASS expertise, requiring in-depth considerations of privacy, the rights of the individual and ultimately, what defines humanity.¹³

Infrastructure

It is not only emerging technologies that require the inclusion of HASS-trained experts. The infrastructure needs of Australians now and into the future can only be satisfactorily met with input that thoughtfully considers how such infrastructure will be used and foresee potential problems that could arise as the population changes. Infrastructure contributes to the wellbeing of communities, and infrastructure that is planned and designed by experts who have critically engaged in studies of society and culture is better placed to improve the lives of those it is intended to serve.¹⁴

The capacity for infrastructure to address the needs of its community can be improved by incorporating creative elements and art into its design.¹⁵ Those with an informed understanding of art and design theory and practice are better equipped to reliably produce the types of infrastructure that are valued by communities.

Conclusions

The three examples listed above are not an exhaustive list of the roles that HASS-skills can play in sectors traditionally associated with STEM-skills, or even an exhaustive list of the roles that HASS-skills can play in those three sectors. They are included here to demonstrate the need for HASS-skills across all sectors of our future workforce. A suitably designed NPILF would include requirements for universities to ensure students receive instruction in HASS disciplines as part of their preparation for the workforce.

Recommendation: Embed HASS-skills training into the eligibility requirements for accessing NPILF funding.

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 Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) in Australian and New Zealand universities. DASSH supports those within these institutions who have responsibility for the governance and management of research, teaching and engagement in HASS disciplines. DASSH also supports those who aspire to these positions through a Network of Associate and Deputy Deans.

¹¹ Deibert, R. J. (2019). The road to digital unfreedom: Three painful truths about social media. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(1), 25-39. doi:10.1353/jod.2019.0002

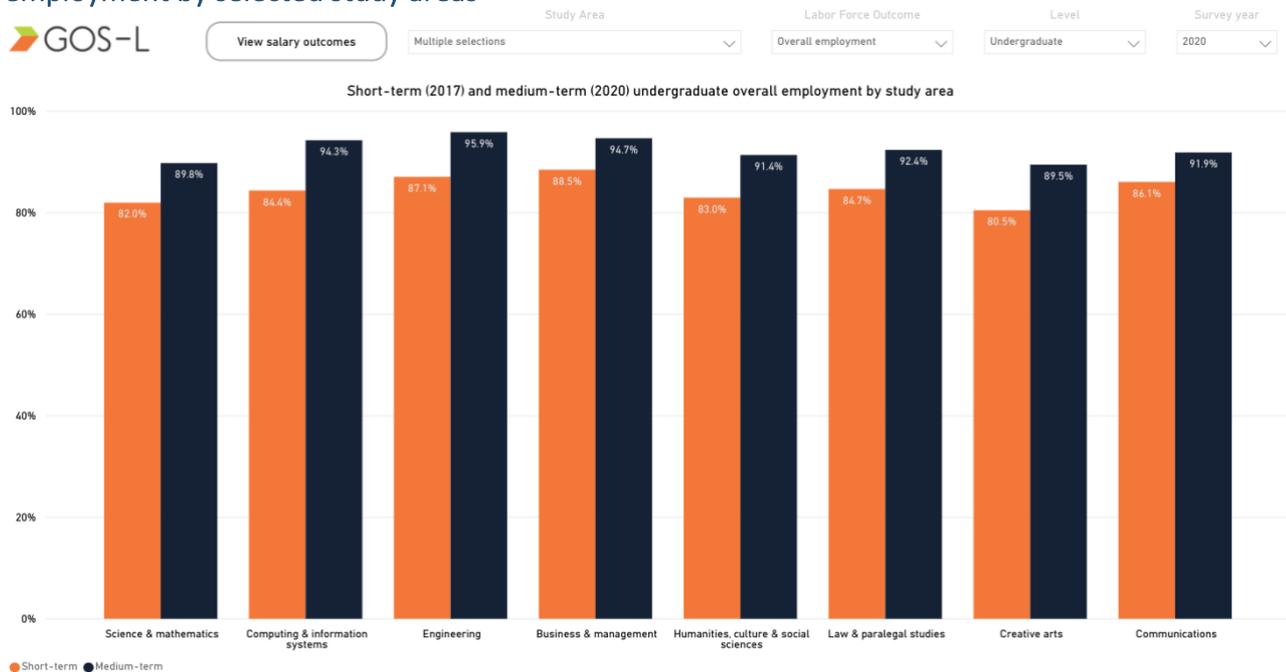
¹² Iosifidis, P., & Andrews, L. (2020). Regulating the internet intermediaries in a post-truth world: Beyond media policy? *The International Communication Gazette*, 82(3), 211-230. doi:10.1177/1748048519828595

¹³ Bostrom, N., & Yudkowsky, E. (2014). *The ethics of artificial intelligence. The Cambridge handbook of artificial intelligence*, 1, pp. 316-334.

¹⁴ Hillier, B. (2008). Space and spatiality: What the built environment needs from social theory. *Building Research and Information*, 36(3), 216-230. doi:10.1080/09613210801928073

¹⁵ Sharp, J, Pollock, V, & Paddison, R. (2016). Just art for a just city: Public art and social inclusion in urban regeneration. *Urban Studies*, 42(5-6), 1001-1023. doi:10.1080/00420980500106963

Appendix A: 2020 Graduate Outcomes Survey, Short- and Medium-Term undergraduate overall employment by selected study areas



Source: Survey for Graduate Outcomes (2020). *Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching*. Viewed 7 September 2020. <https://www.qilt.edu.au/qilt-surveys/graduate-employment>