

# University Research Commercialisation

Submission from the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a model for university research commercialisation in Australia.

Our members recognise the value that research commercialisation can bring to our communities and applaud the government for taking a leadership role in enhancing Australian universities' capacity to commercialise the research they produce. In its efforts to promote research commercialisation, we urge the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) to consider the entire pathway to commercialisation, which begins with basic or 'blue-sky' research, that is, research which builds knowledge for knowledge's sake. **Without adequate ongoing support for blue-sky research, Australia's research commercialisation efforts will quickly stagnate**, regardless of the level of support from government.

As leaders in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) sector, we urge DESE not to limit their interpretation of commercialisable research to work coming out of the STEM disciplines. Research outputs from HASS disciplines have great potential to contribute to our economy and society through social enterprises, consultancy services and cultural activities. There has historically been little attention paid to the potential for HASS research commercialisation, but a report commissioned in 2004 by the then Liberal Party Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, offers important insights still relevant to this consultation.<sup>1</sup>

With these points in mind, DASSH makes the following recommendations for the current exercise:

## **1. Missions should be identified through a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes.**

The proposal to use 'Missions' as a priority-setting mechanism is appropriate only if the Missions are defined using a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes. Universities, industry and business leaders across a broad range of sectors (including the arts and culture, social and community services, legal, financial and management services) all have significant expertise and potential to contribute to the nation's research translation and commercialisation strategy. The aim is to include not just a government perspective on priorities but to actively engage with diverse groups to canvass ideas so that the final missions reflect input from a broad spectrum. We acknowledge the important role that government plays in agenda-setting, but urge DESE to ensure its agenda reflects the real and diverse needs of Australian communities.

## **2. The specification of smaller, targeted Challenges within Missions should be avoided.**

To ensure the research commercialisation model can adapt to changing circumstances, we advise DESE against making its Missions overly prescriptive or introducing targeted Challenges within those Missions. Innovation relies on the ability of creators to remain agile and address problems and opportunities as they arise. By defining its priorities narrowly, DESE risks encouraging researchers and industries to invest in areas which fall from significance sooner than expected, or discouraging researchers and industries from investing in areas which unexpectedly gain prominence.

Furthermore, the proposed terminology of 'Missions' and 'Challenges' as used in the discussion paper may result in confusion. Research programs internationally (e.g., European Regional Development Fund,<sup>2</sup> UK

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<sup>1</sup> Gascoigne, T. & Metcalfe, J. (2005). Commercialisation of research activities in the humanities, arts and social sciences in Australia. *Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS)*. Viewed on 23 March 2021. Available at <https://www.chass.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/PAP20050501TG.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> European Regional Development Fund. (2021). Grand Challenges: The new mission-oriented innovation frontier. *European Regional Development Fund*. Viewed on 23 March 2021. Available at <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/news/5970/grand-challenges-the-new-mission-oriented-innovation-frontier/>

Industrial Strategy<sup>3</sup>) and in Australia (CSIRO<sup>4</sup>) articulate their strategies in terms of broad Challenges which each consist of a series of more targeted, measurable Missions. This is the opposite of what has been proposed by DESE and would seem to provide a more logical framework. We recommend DESE word its policies and guidelines in a way which is consistent with international norms.

**3. All selected 'Missions' should emphasise the broad human/social contexts of the issues they seek to address.**

There are no prospective commercial endeavours or problems facing Australia which do not require significant input from those with expertise in the cultural and social contexts in which they have emerged.

We recommend that human/social contexts be factored into all 'Missions' included in the model for research commercialisation. Universities and industry partners should be encouraged and incentivised to collaborate with HASS specialists and research and to demonstrate that they have an adequate understanding of the specific human/social contexts upon which the success of their endeavours will depend.

#### 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, UK. (2021). Policy Paper: The Grand Challenges missions. *Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, UK*. Viewed on 23 March 2021. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy-the-grand-challenges/missions>

<sup>4</sup> CSIRO. (2021). Partner with us to tackle Australia's greatest challenges. *CSIRO*. Viewed on 23 March 2021. Available at <https://www.csiro.au/en/about/challenges-missions>