

## Growing industry internships for research PhD students through the Research Training Program implementation paper

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 the Research Training Program (RTP).

DASSH members are glad to see the Australian Government making a commitment to financially reward universities for PhDs undertaken by research that have been completed with an internship component. The Council recognises the importance of giving researchers access to real-world industry experience – for the economy, the strength and breadth of research being produced and for the professional development and employment prospects of Australia’s researchers.

The decision to streamline the reporting process is also welcomed, as it will allow universities to report on broader, more diverse and expansive internship undertakings.

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment’s (DESE) *Implementation Paper* notes “Industry will benefit from more opportunities to host research PhD students, which will bolster their ability to harness ideas and concepts for innovation and encourage the recruitment of high-calibre PhD graduates”. DASSH strongly endorses this statement. This is particularly pertinent to the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) sector because it has been clearly demonstrated that HASS graduates comprise almost two thirds of Australia’s future workforce.<sup>1</sup>

With this figure in mind, the Council remains concerned that the eligibility requirements for accessing National Priorities Linkage Fund (NPILF) exclude HASS disciplines. DASSH urges the DESE to give greater weight to HASS training within this program, and to place as much emphasis on industry engagement for those disciplines as it does the science, technology, engineering and maths fields.

### **In response to this implementation paper DASSH makes the following recommendations:**

- A comprehensive evidence base must be developed to inform this strategy so that it directly addresses the actual obstacles facing graduates seeking employment whether in STEM or HASS. For example, many researchers face ill-defined graduate pathways.
- The Australian Government embed HASS skills training into the eligibility requirements for accessing National Priorities Linkage Fund (NPILF) funding. DASSH would like to see training in social innovation and sustainability embedded for example.

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<sup>1</sup> Gould, H. (2018) “Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) Degrees: Powering Workforce Transformation Through Creativity, Critical Thinking and Human Interaction, Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities”, 2018, [https://dassh.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DASSH\\_NationalPrioritiesIndustryLinkage\\_FINAL\\_20201030.pdf](https://dassh.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DASSH_NationalPrioritiesIndustryLinkage_FINAL_20201030.pdf) Accessed August 4 2021

- The RTP give equal priority to forging and fostering links with a broad range of industry partners and hosts for HASS students.
- Provide the opportunity for students to pursue an internship in the second half of a student's PhD, rather than the first, to the benefit of both industry and researcher, and to demonstrate the specific skills and qualities of the HASS cohorts. There may be exceptions to this recommendation in terms of co-produced knowledge in contexts such as the heritage, cultural sector for example, in particular the galleries, libraries, archives and museums sector.
- The DESE allow students to do internships in areas that are not necessarily the same as their HDR research – for example, a History PhD candidate should be able to do an internship with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- The RTA scheme be broadened to include not just voluntary industrial internships but any kind of professional development scheme in a non-university setting.

While the initiative is broadly welcomed, as a matter of priority DASSH recommends a comprehensive evidence base be developed to inform this strategy so that it directly addresses the real obstacles facing graduates seeking employment to underpin this policy. This is needed so that the RTP can directly address the practical and environmental barriers to HDR students finding ongoing employment post-graduation, regardless of the nature of their research. Some of the obstacles encountered include perceptions of the relevance of skills acquired through HRD training as well as ill-defined graduate pathways.

This program is being developed within the framework of the Jobs-Ready Graduate Package implemented late last year. Within this, the NPILF was established and is heavily geared toward applied sciences, to the detriment of the humanities, [as was argued at the time by this organisation](#)<sup>2</sup> in its submission to the DESE. DASSH recommends the Australian Government embed HASS skills training into the eligibility requirements for accessing NPILF funding as a major priority. It is impossible to achieve the goals of improved productivity and employment outcomes while excluding such a significant portion of the research community. Training opportunities could revolve around social innovation, sustainability, critical analytical skills and communications skills.

DASSH recognises the RTP offers greater funding opportunities for universities offering HDRs, however, as noted above, the Council is concerned that this program is also heavily geared towards sectors where there are clearer and easier lines of connection to industry such as applied sciences and social sciences. There is a risk that this will lead to a negative bias against areas of humanities research such as literature and philosophy where there is no immediate perceived link with industry. Our members report that partnership with industry is critical for all HASS students, as their skills are highly transferrable and desirable, yet ability to make the connections between students and industry is difficult as the connections are often unclear. DASSH recommends that the DESE prioritise forging

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<sup>2</sup> Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities. (2020). "Submission: Response to National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund Consultation," *Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities*. Viewed 4 August 2021, [https://dassh.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DASSH\\_NationalPrioritiesIndustryLinkage\\_FINAL\\_20201030.pdf](https://dassh.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DASSH_NationalPrioritiesIndustryLinkage_FINAL_20201030.pdf).

and fostering links with industry for HASS students as it would provide benefits to both students and industry.

The RTP's ambition to reward universities for research PhD students that graduate having undertaken a three-month industry internship, commencing within the first 18 months of enrolment is also seen as problematic by the Council in certain circumstances. While DASSH broadly supports this proposal it is concerned about the timeframe suggested for the program. DASSH argues there may be greater benefits in pursuing an internship in the second half of a student's PhD, in some cases, rather than the first, both for industry hosts and researchers. This said, DASSH is an advocate of the [Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme](#) adopted in the UK. This scheme partners cultural institutions with a proven track record in postgraduate research the opportunity to apply for a cohort of a minimum of three studentships per year over a three-year period. This pro-active industry engagement could take place within the first 18 months of a HRD to the benefit of students studying within that sector.

#### **About DASSH:**

DASSH represents more than 250 deans, and associate and deputy deans, from 43 universities across Australia and New Zealand, leading schools and faculties that teach tens of thousands of students and several thousand scholars in the HASS disciplines. Led and governed by an executive committee, DASSH supports those who have responsibility for governance and management of research, teaching and learning across those member institutions.

**Please see below a list of recent submission papers from DASSH relevant to this implementation paper response:**

- [Response to National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund Consultation](#)
- [Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries and Institutions](#)
- [Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Higher Education Support Amendment \(Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students\) Bill 2020](#)
- [Submission to Job-ready Graduates Package draft legislation consultation](#)