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SPEECH

*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

***Launch of the Australian Academy of the
Humanities publication
'The Power of the Humanities'***

Australian Parliament House, Canberra

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Acknowledgements

Let me begin by thanking Professor Lesley Johnson for providing her Acknowledgement to Country.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Fitzgerald for his welcome and I would like to acknowledge all of the distinguished guests here today.

Introduction

Today it is my great pleasure to launch the Australian Academy of the Humanities publication, *The Power of the Humanities*.

This publication builds on the *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia* report, released in October last year as a collaboration between the Academy of the Humanities and the Academy of the Social Sciences.

The mapping report was launched by the Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb, to show the major contributions the broader Humanities, Arts and Social Science make to the national higher education, research and innovation system, including to preparing Australians for rewarding careers.

The Power of the Humanities takes the next step, offering real life examples of how humanities research is making a real difference to our society and economy.

The Power of Humanities

As you know so well, the humanities are about human culture and experience, with disciplines covering broad and exciting fields of study.

These include ancient and modern history and languages, literature, philosophy, performing and visual arts, the digital humanities, and more.

Like the founder of my party, Sir Robert Menzies, I believe that the humanities are of immense importance both for a civilised society and for a competitive economy.

Menzies's commitment to the humanities was evident throughout his life and career. For example, in his retirement after serving as Prime Minister, he was active in fundraising for the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

In 1959, as Prime Minister, Menzies wrote the foreword to a survey of *The Humanities in Australia* published for the then Australian Humanities Research Council. In his strong advocacy of the humanities, Menzies wrote that “history...tends to produce a sense of proportion; ... languages... tend to produce a precise understanding of words and meanings; and philosophy...tends to explain the sources and nature of ideas and emotions”.

Menzies also suggested that the humanities encourage “wisdom, a sense of proportion, sanity of judgment, [and] a faith in the capacity of [humankind] to rise to higher mental and spiritual levels”.

Conscious of the focus of his time on the sciences and technology, Menzies urged that “humane studies must come back into their own; not as the enemies of science, but as its guide and philosophic friends”.

Today, as we are also conscious of the importance of promoting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, we need also to remember that the humanities are not hostile to those disciplines, but can be their “philosophic friends”.

In seeking to promote STEM disciplines, I am keen also to encourage a renaissance of the humanities in Australia.

Indeed, high quality teaching and research in the humanities are important contributors to securing an innovative, prosperous and sustainable future for Australia.

This publication, *The Power of the Humanities*, presents 20 case studies which illustrate the great discoveries and careers that can be built on the back of a qualification in the humanities.

One case study, 'Enlisting Shakespeare to Help Fight Cancer', is a remarkable story of collaboration between two University of Newcastle researchers, one in linguistics, Hugh Craig, and the other in bioinformatics, Pablo Moscato.

These two researchers set out to identify the molecular 'signatures' for diseases through the application of linguistic methods used in literary research.

Working together they used supercomputing systems to analyse literary word markers to identify the authorship of disputed literary works.

The researchers were then able to apply the same approach to identify the molecular signatures for diseases like Cancer, Alzheimer's and Multiple Sclerosis.

This research has made significant contributions to advances in the diagnosis and treatment of these diseases.

Understanding the human experience is fundamental to dealing with and avoiding human disasters, as highlighted by the case study ‘Healing the scars of Black Saturday’ – and learning the lessons of history.

Mining a rich seam of creativity is a study of Sydney’s Chinatown, its cultural capital and cross-cultural connections, to assist planning for future development while protecting its heritage.

These studies show how we can apply learning from the study of the humanities to other disciplines, to change the quality of people’s lives and to shape society.

Support for the humanities

The Power of the Humanities constitutes part of a greater national effort to build a world-class education system, from schools through to higher education and vocational training – a system that supports economic and social growth through participation and engagement in quality teaching, learning and research.

The humanities play an essential role in providing students with a well-rounded education, with the understanding and knowledge to contribute to our community in a meaningful way.

In our nation’s schools, for example, we work with education authorities and school communities to support learning in the humanities through a suite of initiatives including national competitions for young historians, online resources to support teaching in music and the arts, quality assurance for community languages schools, and professional learning opportunities for teachers.

At all levels of education – from early childhood to higher education – we are actively encouraging the study of languages, which is widely recognised as crucial for Australia’s future in this global century.

Obviously the study of the humanities in our universities is of crucial significance – both in teaching and learning, and in research. In 2014 alone, over \$105 million in funding was provided through the Australian Research Council to research projects in the humanities and creative arts. Indeed, 19 of the 20 case studies presented in *The Power of the Humanities* involve researchers who are currently, or have previously been funded by the Australian Research Council since establishment of the National Competitive Grants Programme.

The humanities also play an important role in giving Indigenous Australians a voice in higher education and broader society. In 2014, 4912 Indigenous students studied society and culture fields, and a further 1065 studied creative arts.

Together these represent over one third of all Indigenous higher education enrolments.

In addition, I should mention that the Government is giving strong support to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, whose irreplaceable collection of Indigenous cultural materials is so important to understanding Australia’s Indigenous heritage.

World leading research in the humanities is a shared endeavour and is supported through a number of initiatives, including funding of over \$1

million per annum for the Australian Academy of the Humanities under the Higher Education Research Promotion (HERP) Scheme.

Through the Australian Research Council, in 2014 around \$360,000 was provided to the Australian Academy of the Humanities through this scheme for the project '*The humanities in the Asia region: capacity for research collaboration*'.

It will examine research capacity, priorities, trends and policy developments in the humanities in a number of Asian countries and help inform future strategies for international research collaboration.

Importance of the humanities and links with other Government priorities

You will be aware that earlier this year the Government published National Science and Research Priorities. These priorities and the research challenges that come under them underscore the importance of a range of high-quality basic and applied research across all disciplines, including the humanities.

Humanities disciplines are crucial to the success of the National Science and Research Priorities. They contextualise the powerful social, economic, cultural, political and linguistic influences that shape the complex challenges facing our world today.

The Power of the Humanities truly lies in its ability to champion creativity and communication and, in turn, spark new ideas and innovation across the broader Australian research sector.

Australia's future competitiveness depends on increasing collaboration across disciplines and sectors, and on turning our ideas and research into real goods and services, technologies and life improvements.

The Government's *Boosting the Commercial Returns from Research* strategy will provide the incentives needed to enhance collaboration between the research sector and industry so that publicly funded research does more to drive innovation and productivity.

The humanities have an important role to play in these collaborations. In July this year, I announced funding for 252 new research projects through the Australian Research Council Linkage Projects scheme worth \$86.9 million^[1].

This funding is for Australia's best researchers to work collaboratively with industry and other partners to deliver important outcomes for the nation.

The Power of the Humanities publication shows this partnership in action. It shows the vital research that the humanities are delivering in partnership with the arts, social sciences and STEM sectors.

The Government is keen to uphold and promote both the impressive quality and the scale of Australia's research effort. But we do badly by international comparison in the linkage between industry and research, and the application of research to achieve positive social and economic impact.

^[1] Christopher Pyne MP, Media Release, '\$86.9 million to promote industry-university linkages', <http://www.arc.gov.au/news-media/media-releases/869-million-promote-industry-university-linkages>

As part of the Government's effort to address this challenge, I have asked the Australian Council of Learned Academies to conduct a major review of the research training system.

Due to be delivered in March 2016, the review includes the academies of the humanities and the social sciences, as well as those of science and technological sciences and engineering.

Together we can ensure our research training system is truly world class, and meets Australia's research needs well in to the 21st century.

Closing remarks

I commend the Australian Academy of the Humanities on the production of *The Power of the Humanities* booklet and thank all the researchers involved.

I would particularly like to congratulate Professor Lesley Johnson for her work on *The Power of the Humanities*. It was Professor Johnson's entrepreneurship, passion and energy in bringing all the researchers on board that made her idea a reality.

Together, you have showcased all of the inspiring ways that the humanities are changing how we look at the world and helping us innovate for the future.

It will be a valuable resource for teachers and students in our schools and universities across the country.

Together we will work to ensure that the study of humanities continues to be a strong part of our world-class education system.

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