AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES
LEARNED ACADEMIES SPECIAL PROJECT

Future Humanities Workforce

Consultation Summaries

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1 Introduction

In April 2019, the Australian Academy of the Humanities opened the public consultation phase of its Future Humanities Workforce project. We invited submissions to inform the direction of the project.

Our consultation paper included questions addressing each of the project themes:

- the future knowledge, skills and capabilities required for a productive humanities workforce;
- support mechanisms for early career researchers (ECRs); and
- workforce diversity and gender equity.

We received 23 submissions in total – 16 from organisations, and 7 from individuals.

This report presents an overview of the responses to the consultation and call for evidence, key emerging themes and potential workforce development strategies.

2 Future Knowledge, Skills and Capabilities

2.1 The most distinctive capabilities and skills of humanities researchers and graduates

We invited contributions about humanities training and the skills that this training helps to develop; how these skills map onto the requirements of the contemporary workforce; what future humanities training might require; and how humanities expertise might augment current debates on technical and digital literacy.

Respondents highlighted the fact that humanities training serves to develop deep disciplinary knowledge, and that humanities graduates and researchers use this knowledge to explore complex social and cultural phenomena that shape our world.

In addition to specific disciplinary knowledge, humanities training develops strong research skills, and the ability to locate, evaluate, analyse and synthesise a wide range of sources, including textual, visual and musical records. Humanities training aids the development of advanced written and oral communication skills – including the ability to construct sophisticated, evidence-based arguments. It also promotes a human-centred approach to problem-solving, enhances the capacity to think critically and independently, and strengthens cultural competency.

> Humanities skills help us think about the kind of society we want and why. These skills are of use not just in setting goals but also in assessing and selecting the best ways of getting there. The ability to draw on the range of human thought and achievement also adds a crucial dimension to creative problem solving and innovation.
>
> __ Monash University, Faculty of Arts

> Humanities researchers and graduates more broadly embody and preserve memory of and continuity with indigenous, western and middle eastern cultures which nourishes and invigorates all Australian culture – its national identity, institutions, community aspirations and its laws and ethical values.
>
> __ Council of Deans of Theology

Responses relating to the question of which skills and capabilities are most valued and used in the academic and wider workforce highlighted the value of strong research skills, written and oral communication skills, and the ability to solve problems across diverse contexts. Openness to different knowledge and research paradigms is also seen as critical within the academic context, particularly as research gains a more interdisciplinary profile.

Respondents also observed that humanities training builds the ability to teach others, which is recognised as a highly relevant and valuable twenty-first century skill, especially with life-long learning seen as an increasingly critical component of professional agility.

> Discussions about the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the future of work, technology, artificial intelligence, and more, invariably include a call for increased skills in areas traditionally associated with the humanities: creativity; lateral and critical thinking; ethical thinking; textual analysis; the ability to process and synthesise disparate information sources into a cohesive narrative or argument; rich cultural understanding; and highly-developed written and verbal communication skills.
>
> __ Australasian Association for Digital Humanities

2.2 Priorities for the future

With respect to current skills and capability gaps in training for the humanities graduates and researchers, there is broad consensus that quantitative and statistical research skills need to be further enhanced. In addition, concerns have been raised over the predominantly monolingual profile of Australia's humanities graduates, and the humanities research workforce more broadly.

Enhancing the ability to work creatively with digital technologies was raised as a priority. While an embrace of digital technology is a standard component of academic work (such as publishing, locating research material, and teaching), there is a need to further extend technological literacy. Competency with textual analysis, visualisation tools, data processing, and machine learning provides an opportunity to open new methods of analysis and areas of research in the humanities. More advanced use of technology can also augment data preservation, collection, management and storage practices.

Large-scale interdisciplinary schemes such as the ARC's Centre of Excellence initiative were identified as crucial to capacity building at individual, discipline and institutional level. Various submissions identified that working in large-scale interdisciplinary settings aids in developing skills associated with project management, business case development, and project finance, as well as legal knowledge associated with contract, copyright and privacy issues which are important areas of professional development relevant to work both within and beyond academia.

Several respondents noted a perceived disconnection between humanities education and the requirements of the workforce, and remarked upon the need to better articulate the alignment between the humanities and skills that cut across a range of professional contexts.

Key skills such as research, communication, and critical thinking were all highlighted as future knowledge, skills, and capabilities that humanities researchers will require. The current lack of foreign language competency was characterised as something requiring urgent attention. Various submissions also highlighted that, within the academic context, there will be a significant need for researchers to develop literacy across different disciplines to be able to operate effectively within an increasingly interdisciplinary environment.

> The relevance and value of the Humanities to the economy and society are not well understood. The lack of clear narrative linking workforce capabilities with Humanities education is a barrier to articulating career pathways for graduates and identifying case studies of excellence. Ideally, the workforce would be strengthened by a clearer understanding of the link between Humanities education and essential skills such as effective communication, human interaction, service design, collaboration, teamwork, negotiation and advocacy, leadership, team building, embracing diversity and understanding communities.
>
> __ University of South Australia, Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences

Data and technical literacy was identified as the most important area for skills development for the future humanities workforce. The ability to analyse tools, collections, services, and interfaces; to understand the possibilities and limitations of digital data; and to reflect on technical and ethical challenges of collecting, using, and sharing data is seen as a vital component of the future humanities skills set.

As technological and data literacy continue to become vital for research across all areas, our consultation also raised the question of how the humanities can contribute to the digital agenda over the next decade.

Here the humanities are viewed as disciplines that can provide a crucial human-centred dimension to digital and data literacy by lending cultural and social context to data, advocating for its ethical use, and raising the visibility of issues such as digital accessibility, inclusion, and citizenship.

> We have heard a lot about "data ethics" and "AI and ethics" in humanities-focused response to recent social changes. These are important and necessary, but what will become increasingly important is data/AI civics: a study of the ways in which automated and data driven systems incorporate civic priorities and understandings. […] The humanities have a crucial responsibility to develop this area. Without it, we sacrifice the answers to the "big picture questions" about democracy, human rights, and social justice to the technocracy.
>
> __ Monash University, Faculty of Arts

3 Support for Early Career Researchers

3.1 Challenges for humanities ECRs

Respondents consistently highlighted the fact that precarious employment within academia and high levels of casualisation across the academic workforce pose a severe impediment to the development of research careers across all disciplines.

According to a survey conducted by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) in August 2018, only 35.6 per cent of those employed at Australian universities enjoy secure, ongoing work. Some professional associations, along with local NTEU branches and individual universities have conducted their own surveys on casualisation (most recently the Australian History Association), which have demonstrated the predominance of casual and fixed-term contracts in higher education.

In engaging with this evidence, the submissions emphasise that any investigation into the best methods for supporting ECRs must consider the precarious nature of contemporary academic labour, which disproportionally affects researchers at early stages of their professional lives.

> Casualisation and precarious employment remain significant challenges in the academic workforce, and disproportionately affect ECRs. This is not unique to the humanities.
>
> __ Australasian Association for Digital Humanities

> We are concerned that humanities research is under-valued by decision makers, resulting in less funding allocated to important projects that are disparaged as failing the 'pub test'.
>
> __ Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations

In addressing the question of whether ECRs in the humanities experience different or additional challenges compared to their peers, respondents agreed that the current model of academic employment has a negative impact on ECRs across all disciplines. Current granting practices, in conjunction with government-set research priorities that have an exclusive focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), however, present additional challenges for humanities researchers.

The relatively individual nature of research in the humanities, along with longer publication and impact timelines, is often not accounted for in performance metrics used by universities, granting agencies, and policymakers – and this has direct, negative implications for funding.

Furthermore, there is presently no coherent approach to recognising non-traditional research outputs (NTRO) such as, for example, creative work, translation, or commissioned reports within these metrics, despite their importance for humanities scholarship and engagement.

A significant number of submissions also raised the issue of the ministerial veto of humanities and social science Australian Research Council (ARC) grants in 2018 (and the associated undermining of the academic peer review process) as an illustration of the challenging operational context in which

humanities, arts and social sciences scholars currently work.

> Australian Research Council (ARC) vetoing of research grants clearly disadvantages Humanities scholars. We are yet to see any redress of this issue.
>
> __ Australian Historical Association

> It is […] harder for Humanities researchers to sell 'national benefit,' particularly since the Australian government changed its 'National Research Priorities' into the 'Science and Research Priorities' in 2016.
>
> __ International Australian Studies Association

Heavy teaching loads, the precarious nature of employment, and comparatively underdeveloped national and international research networks were all identified as key additional challenges experienced by the ECRs in progressing their careers compared to mid-level or senior academics. Grant-writing skills and financial literacy were also highlighted as critical for ECRs entering the highly competitive granting system.

In outlining the main challenges to their career progression, ECRs echo the above-outlined concerns. The precarious nature of academic work, the 'dead-end' nature of research and teaching contracts, and the lack of opportunities for professional development and career progression have all been identified as common concerns.

> Being stuck in the academic precariat and finding a continuing job is the largest challenge to ECR career progress. Too many fall into the trap of doing casual work to pay the bills, but by putting so much energy into casual teaching, they are not able to produce the high-quality research outputs that universities prioritise in hiring practices.
>
> __ International Australian Studies Association

> No room for promotion from junior positions as senior academics remain in place longer of late and this is not a growth sector in terms of hiring within universities, although there is a need for both graduates and researches within the broader professional sector in the humanities.
>
> __ Australian Library and Information Association

Furthermore, respondents made note of the age-based discrimination inherent in the 'early career researcher' term, as many members of this cohort are at more advanced stages of their lives than the moniker might suggest. The term also obscures the fact that a large portion of ECRs are highly experienced, and the 'apprenticeship' connotation is used to justify unpaid or underpaid work they perform.

The expectation that researchers will move interstate or internationally to develop their careers and research networks – often without any guarantee of ongoing employment or financial support – is perceived as a major impediment. Financial challenges associated with this expectation are identified as being a primary cause of forcing ECRs out of the research system. In addition, a number of submissions noted that the expectations imposed on ECRs have a disproportionally adverse effect on female scholars.

3.2 Best ways to support humanities ECRs

An important strategy for supporting ECRs, proposed by several submissions, relates to granting affiliation privileges which extend beyond a single short-term contract. This practice would allow researchers – many of whom often transition from one short-term contract to another – to have continued access to institutional email, libraries, staff profile page, and shared workspaces, and thus the ability to continue research work while in between teaching and research appointments.

Other proposed strategies include providing honest, effective, organic, and critical mentoring for ECRs; offering professional development opportunities regardless of the type and length of contract; and ensuring that the ECRs have access to institutional travel, publishing, and seeding grants.

In acknowledging that ECRs in the humanities often work as research assistants on the projects of other scholars, several submissions suggested that there is a need to develop appropriate forms of authorial credit for research assistants. One submission also proposed that a number of paid weekly research hours be incorporated into these types of contracts, to allow research assistants the opportunity to work on their own projects and thus remain on a research career path. The inclusion of ECRs in co-supervision panels with senior academics would also provide experience in training and supervising postgraduate students, which is often a prerequisite for academic employment.

A number of respondents advocated for the inclusion of named postdoctoral positions within larger ARC grants, as a way to increase the number of postdoctoral opportunities in the humanities. Various submissions noted that the ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) does not provide a realistic career pathway for junior ECRs, as applicants are expected to have a highly advanced track record to be considered competitive for this scheme.

Development of stronger collaborative ties with sectors outside academia was also recognised across the submissions as critical for the development of ECRs, and easier transition across and beyond the higher education sector.

> ECRs often do not have the industry connections to gain access to systems or resources that will help them in their research. All ECR programs should include mentoring partnerships, preferably with mentors from other organisations and universities.
>
> __ Australian Library and Information Association

In highlighting the increasing propensity for teaching and research to be undertaken on short-term contracts, the submissions were consistent in highlighting the need for government and university policies to be designed to curtail this phenomenon, to ensure that the Australian higher education sector enjoys continued access to a strong talent pool.

3.3 Ways to better track the career trajectories of ECRs within and beyond academia

Respondents were unanimous in suggesting that there is an urgent need for developing better methods for tracking the career trajectories of ECRs. Data of this nature would enable universities, professional associations, and peak bodies to better prepare and guide ECRs to work both within and beyond academia.

The model developed by the American Historical Association – Where Historians Work – was hailed as an example of good practice. Other submissions propose linking available datasets such as unique student identifier, ORCID, HR records, and other information to track ECRs. Submissions by professional associations highlight an appetite to do more in this area, but they also note the fact that most of these bodies are volunteer-led and do not have the capacity for large-scale longitudinal projects. A more united effort is needed to combat this problem, with professional associations (and relevant peak bodies) working in collaboration with entities such as the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Importantly, the submissions also advocated for the development of a sector-wide ECR definition as a pre-requisite for any information-gathering endeavour.

> As a small, member-based volunteer-led peak body, the AHA has limited capacity to undertake [a regular survey] but would be willing to work with other organisations such as the Australian Academy of the Humanities in a co-operative endeavour.
>
> __ Australian Historical Association

> Data collection is important here […] through associations and groups such as the Australian Academy of the Humanities, the Australian Historical Association, aaDH, and similar bodies. It is essential that this data is qualitative as well as quantitative, capturing the texture and specificity of particular experiences; and that data is captured and analysed in a way which helps to reveal and challenge systemic biases affecting careers due to gender, race, class, or socio-economic background.
>
> __ Australasian Association for Digital Humanities

> Longitudinal surveys could be run by central agencies or learned societies to track the movement of specific cohorts.
>
> __ University of South Australia, Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences

4 Workforce Diversity and Gender Equity

4.1 Inequities in the workforce today

In considering the most pressing inequities in the humanities workforce, respondents highlighted the ongoing under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the humanities workforce. For members of academic staff who are of Indigenous background, working conditions are made more challenging by having to take on additional administrative, training, and pastoral duties as representatives of their communities.

Respondents also consistently emphasised gender inequity as a pressing issue throughout the academic sector. While gender equity in the humanities may not appear as marked as in science, technology, engineering and mathematics areas, humanities disciplines also have a gendered work culture. Women are over-represented at lower levels of employment, but under-represented in senior and leadership roles in humanities disciplines.

While women comprise the majority of undergraduate and postgraduate students, and despite the fact that gender parity is observed at junior levels of the workforce in most humanities fields, only a proportionally small number of women have been able to secure sustained career progression and rise to senior positions.

The underlying data for the Australian Research Council's ***Gender and the Research Workforce Report*** (2019) indicates that parity exists in humanities and creative arts fields until Level D. At Level E just 37 per cent of Professors are women, while in fields such as philosophy this figure drops as low as 22 per cent.

> Gender and racial inequality (including with regard to pay) remains a concern […] There remain many other inequalities. Insecure work and casualisation unjustly favours those with financial support and creates a barrier to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds; many disciplines in the humanities remain disproportionally white (particularly in senior positions); and representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remains troublingly low.
>
> __ Australasian Association for Digital Humanities

Several respondents noted that humanities fields have had different levels of success in addressing inequities, with disciplines such as philosophy highlighted as the field most closely resembling the pattern in many STEM fields. Conversely, medical and health sciences have a workforce profile which is more akin to HASS fields. Taking a 'HASS' or 'STEM' lens to tackling inequity can over-simplify and obscure disciplinary-level trends.

Career interruption factors that tend to disproportionately affect women were identified as a key driver of gender inequity, as were issues of work hours and work patterns. While universities affirm their commitment to an inclusive agenda, competing expectations of high productivity in compressed timeframes, driven by university rankings exercises, reinforce traditional gendered models of work participation.

Various submissions also raised concerns regarding a range of inequities faced by people of diverse genders and sexualities; with diverse abilities and disabilities; with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; people who are first in family to attend university and those who experience intersectional diversity and difference in academia. The pace at which these issues are addressed was also identified as a major problem.

> Structural disadvantage, highly competitive environments, and metric-based hiring practices discriminate against and impede opportunities and perpetuate inequality for those who come from groups which have historically been underrepresented in the humanities and academia more generally.
>
> __ Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

All submissions pointed to workforce casualisation as the principal driver of inequity within the academic workforce. While casual employment and fixed-term contracts affect the entire academic workforce, precarious employment creates even greater challenges for those with health issues, caring responsibilities, from rural areas or of low socio-economic backgrounds, who have limited resources for unpaid and costly CV building while in these positions. For this reason in particular, casualisation continues to amplify existing asymmetries across the academic workforce.

> Staff from migrant, non-white and non-English speaking background face other challenges. Staff with heavy accents, especially from Asian countries, regularly receive teaching evaluation of lower quality and not reflective of their skills as teachers. […] The Humanities are more welcoming of LGBTI people than some other industries. Still, they may face discrimination from students, external stakeholders […] Transgender and intersex staff face extra barriers including misgendering, ignorance about gender identity and intersex variations, and prejudice from members of the workforce or students.
>
> __ International Australian Studies Association

4.2 Challenges associated with achieving a more inclusive agenda

In reflecting on the main impediments to achieving a more inclusive agenda, respondents identified a range of both cultural and structural issues.

Culture – and in particular the persistent view that issues of inequality are a thing of the past – was identified as the principal obstacle. The consultation suggests that the profile of the humanities workforce remains predominantly Anglo-Celtic, and has not demonstrated an appetite for cultural and linguistic diversification.

A lack of leadership and 'buy-in' across all the levels is also seen as a major challenge for dealing with workforce inequities. Finally, the emphasis on student fees and the pressure of external competition for funding – which trains so much university focus on research production – was frequently identified as a structural driver of inequity.

4.3 Initiatives with proven success in addressing inequities

In thinking about initiatives that have proven effective in addressing inequity, respondents asserted that ongoing access to current (and high-resolution) data on humanities disciplines and its workforce would help to push beyond anecdotal evidence, and raise the visibility of specific issues. Respondents also emphasised the need to examine recruitment and promotion practices, with some suggesting compulsory training in unconscious bias for panel members and targeted recruitment as potential remedies. Investment in mentoring, research support, re-entry programs and affordable on-campus childcare facilities are also hailed as strategies that can drive an inclusive agenda.

The enterprise bargaining process was cited as a critical mechanism for achieving change in this area.

Submissions emphasised the need for curricula diversification as a critical step toward positive change. Course programs and syllabi that include a multitude of scholarly voices are perceived as critical in shifting cultural attitudes, both as part of educating humanities graduates and postgraduates (and therefore the future workforce), and also as a way to enhance and reinforce awareness of different perspectives among academic staff.

There was support for extending initiatives such as the Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charter across humanities disciplines, reflecting the belief that political support and enhanced visibility of equity issues can translate into funding for programs and mechanisms tailored to address them.

> A number of initiatives within the STEM disciplines would translate well to HASS disciplines, including the Humanities […] As with Athena SWAN, the UK's Race Equality Charter also has elements that could be relevant to the Australian humanities context. However […] the EDI context and landscape within Australia presents somewhat different challenges – particularly in relation to equity for Indigenous peoples and in regards to addressing intersectionality. This needs to be taken into consideration when drawing on the experience of the UK under their two charter marks.
>
> __ UNSW, Arts and Social Sciences

There are, however, aspects of the Athena SWAN implementation process that produce a level of apprehension – including, for example, the fact that the administrative workload associated with implementing these initiatives tends to fall predominantly on women, and that these initiatives often do not enjoy support from across the workforce. Furthermore, while these initiatives focus on the inclusion of women and place the onus on women to bring about change, they do not address the status of dominant groups, or demand any accountability for the lack of diversity within them.

In addition to initiatives such as the Athena SWAN and the Race Equality Charter, responses to the consultation paper also suggested that models and strategies developed within the ARC Centres of Excellence – the flagship program for building focal points of research expertise on areas of national importance – could be adopted across the sector.

> The interdisciplinary Centre for Biodiversity and Heritage (which includes significant humanities and social science researchers along with STEM) has established a program for supporting women and Indigenous researchers. Some of the initiatives include the provision of generous carer's grants for fieldwork, travel or conferences, formalized mentoring program, and a charter of behaviour (aimed squarely as a response to #metoo). In addition, there are workshops and masterclasses on a range of topics; including, writing for a wide audience, time management, work life balance, career planning, as well as numerous technical skills development sessions
>
> __ Australian Historical Association