



AAH Policy

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2021-22

The [Australian Academy of the Humanities](#) (AAH) is the national body for the humanities in Australia. As one of the nation's five Learned Academies, we provide advice to government and policy makers on issues of national and international significance. Our work aims to ensure ethical, historical, and cultural perspectives inform discussions regarding Australia's future challenges and opportunities.

New Policy Proposals for the 2021-22 Federal Budget

Our Pre-Budget Submission 2021-22 is focused on an evolving environment marked by events of 2020, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic and 2019-20 bushfire season, both of which have exposed the need for tailored cultural and social solutions alongside medical, technological, and scientific approaches to recovery.

Support the government's recovery response to the combined crises of bushfires and COVID, boosting decision-making capability by drawing on cultural and humanities expertise to inform Australia's research, education, health, industry, and environmental agendas:

1. Commit to the sustainability of the Research Information Forum (RRIF) by building policy and research capability in Australia's Learned Academies
2. Establish a National Ethics Authority
3. Formalise the involvement of SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy) expertise as a complement to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) on National Science and Technology Council (NSTC)

Support government priorities to strengthen language and intercultural capability and infrastructure (especially in times of crisis):

4. Develop a coordinated national approach to languages policy
5. Establish a National Languages Taskforce to develop a national multilingual emergency communications strategy
6. Scope a program of 'Language Lifesavers'

Support the government's priority to bounce back better from the bushfires, COVID and the recession by building multidisciplinary workforce capability and digital creativity:

7. Create incentives to build collaborative/interdisciplinary capacity across SHAPE and STEM university training and research in areas of workforce and community priority
8. Recognise the creative and cultural industries in existing government industry development programs
9. Expand the ARC's Industrial Transformation Scheme to incubate university/industry collaboration in the creative and cultural industries.

AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES

The role of SHAPE – Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy

The humanities form part of the disciplinary alliance known as SHAPE – Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy. The research and training produced by the SHAPE¹ fields stands in concert with the STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – disciplines to provide the multidisciplinary capability needed to address Australia’s immediate challenges and prepare for the future.

The Academy’s focus throughout 2020 has been to provide a humanities perspective for these times of crisis. In this context, it is the humanities that provides expertise across a range of policy priorities, including:

- the cultural, historical, and political factors that have shaped bushfire management in Australasia.
- Indigenous land use, management, and cultural burning practices.
- social, emotional, and cultural impacts of natural disasters and rapid climate change.
- community recovery and resilience through cultural and creative activities.
- emergency linguistics for access to critical information for Australia’s multicultural population.
- robust media and communications for extreme events; and
- barriers to digital access, equity and safe and secure engagement with online platforms and apps.

Throughout 2020, the Academy provided advice to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, to the Office of the Chief Scientist, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, and Minister for Education, and collaborated through the Australian Council of Learned Academies and the newly established Rapid Research Information Forum.²

Key areas of policy focus for the Academy this year centre on climate change, workforce futures, Australia-China relations, Indigenous reconciliation, knowledge diplomacy, and the impacts of COVID and higher education reforms on research, teaching and workforce capacity of the humanities.

As we transition to 2021, our Pre-Budget Submission outlines ways to maximise the humanities contribution to Australia’s higher education, research, and innovation system in a COVID-19 recovery environment, while at the same time building capacity for the longer term.

AAH Budget Priorities

1. Invest in multidisciplinary research capacity

In the face of devastating ecological, economic, and social impacts of recent crises, the cultural, ethical, historical, communications and social expertise of the SHAPE disciplines will be more vital than ever – for the national interest and for Australia’s global engagement. Currently our system is not making the most strategic use of public investment in this research, nor is it geared to ensuring that this capability – which is part of the supply of Australia’s multidisciplinary expertise – is progressed.

The future sustainability of Australian research and especially humanities research (given its importance to post-COVID recovery) is of ongoing concern. Any new funding should be focused on drawing out the best cultural, social, and ethical research (SHAPE and Indigenous knowledge) in productive collaboration with medicine and technology.

To ensure decision-makers have access to the unique contribution of this knowledge base, we recommend establishing and strengthening formal mechanisms to facilitate social, cultural, and Indigenous research expertise into government.

Rapid Research Information Forum

In 2020, the Academy of the Humanities joined with Australia's other Learned Academies and leaders from Australia and New Zealand's research and innovation sectors to form the Rapid Research Information Forum (RRIF).³ Convened by Australia's Chief Scientist, the RRIF has proven a highly effective model in coordinating and delivering multidisciplinary, evidence-based advice to government on the COVID-19 pandemic.

The value of RRIF has been its timely delivery of independent multidisciplinary research advice to government. Its true point of difference is that it draws from across the humanities, social sciences, medical and health sciences, engineering, and technology, i.e. SHAPE and STEM. Capacity constraints have prevented it reaching full potential. Alongside the other Learned Academies, we are committed to fully realising the value and sustainability of this asset beyond the COVID crisis, which requires a dedicated standing policy capacity within each of the Learned Academies. We support plans for a RRIF process to sit alongside the Horizon Scanning agenda led by the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) for the Office of the Chief Scientist.

A National Ethics Authority

The COVID-19 pandemic has also shone a light on the need for formal ethics-based advice into policy and planning processes at the highest levels of government. Australia does not have a national ethics authority, akin to independent bodies internationally and we think there is a case for scoping such a mechanism. A referral body of this kind would help build trust in policy solutions at times of crisis or disaster, and act as a central resource for ethical advice required by different portfolio areas of government.

Two international models are instructive: Germany's Ethics Council, which, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, released a report *Solidarity and Responsibility During the Coronavirus Crisis with ten recommendations*;⁴ and the UK's Nuffield Council on Bioethics, 'an independent body that informs policy and public debate about the ethical questions raised by biological and medical research'.⁵

National Science and Technology Committee

The National Science and Technology Committee (NSTC), Australia's highest advisory council for science, research and technology in Australia, needs to have access to expertise in humanities, social sciences or Indigenous knowledge to ensure rigorous and balanced advice to the Prime Minister, Australia's Chief Scientist, and Ministers for Science and Research, Innovation and Health.

We recommend that the Australian Government:

- **Commit** to the sustainability of the **Rapid Research Information Forum (RRIF)** by building policy and research capability in Australia’s Learned Academies
- **Establish a National Ethics Authority**
- **Formalise the involvement of SHAPE expertise as a complement to STEM expertise on National Science and Technology Council (NSTC).**

2. Mobilise Australia’s language and intercultural capability

In late 2020, five of the world’s leading Learned Academies, including the Australian Academy of the Humanities, joined forces in calling for urgent action to protect and promote language study globally. It is the first time national peak bodies in the humanities and social sciences have collaborated to issue a public call on behalf of language diversity to meet the growing communications challenges of the 21st century.⁶

This unprecedented collaboration has been prompted in part by the COVID-19 pandemic which has intensified and challenged communications – virtual meetings, streamlining cultural content, international news, social media – and increased tensions across international borders.

Develop a coordinated national approach to languages policy

The national deficit in language capability is one of Australia’s great unrecognised skill shortages. Australia’s national effort in sustaining language learning has faltered.

The ability to communicate, engage and build trust across cultures at local, regional, and global levels is as urgent as ever before. A nationally coordinated approach that balances the maintenance of Australia’s community and Indigenous language skills with acquisition of strategic language capabilities is urgently required to support the full range of Australia’s cross-cultural engagements, both at home and abroad.

A coordinated national languages strategy would not only assess current capabilities but consider ways in which existing capacity could be better engaged and deployed, including community capacity. There is a cross-cultural and intercultural imperative to this agenda; it will involve a rights-based and anti-poverty perspective (including for Indigenous and immigrant populations); and addressing variable access to communications platforms and digital disadvantage.

Multilingual emergency communications strategy

In the context of COVID-19 Australia’s linguists are working with counterparts to share best practice strategies for crisis communications in different national and local contexts. Their research and our preliminary work indicate gaps that should be addressed as part of a national emergency communication plan specifically addressing multilingual and cross-cultural communications for successful public health initiatives.

Language Lifesavers – building on our national volunteer traditions

In times of natural disasters such as bushfires and cyclones, Australia’s volunteer community has always played a vital role. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a need for ‘a volunteer force of multilingual talent who can be activated to support the government’s communication

efforts in a time of crisis.’ On par with volunteer firefighters, language volunteers could ‘help build community confidence by providing accurate, timely translations and interpreting.’⁷

We recommend that the Australian Government:

- **Develop a coordinated national approach to languages policy**
- **Establish a National Languages Taskforce** to develop a multilingual emergency communications strategy.
- **Scope a program of ‘Language Lifesavers’.**

3. **Building future workforce capability through next-generation AI and digital creativity**

Australia needs a workforce development and skills-mixing agenda that mobilises the capabilities across both SHAPE and STEM. A 2017 OECD report found that Australia’s innovation skills remain weak, and recommended that government widen ‘the scope of subsidies for innovation-related subjects beyond STEM’.⁸ Addressing the siloed approach to future work agenda for innovation and industry development is imperative.

In the context of AI and automation, the social, legal and economic consequences of these technologies have been recognised as a high priority for current research, education and policy development by the Commonwealth Government’s own Technology Roadmap, the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Council of Learned Academies’ AI report, and in a series of recent major national research investments, including the new humanities-led Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society.⁹ These developments underline the need for the technological sciences to engage directly with the social sciences and humanities, in both research and teaching programs.

Current fee structures, introduced through the Job-ready Graduate reforms, introduce disincentives for computer and technological sciences students to take humanities and social sciences subjects.

We recommend that the Australian Government:

- **Create incentives to build collaborative/interdisciplinary capacity across SHAPE and STEM university training and research in areas of workforce priority.**

4. **Capitalise on the potential of Australia’s creative economy**

In our submission to the current Inquiry into Cultural Industries and Institutions we recommended a number of initiatives to diversify Australia’s industrial base to capitalise on the potential of Australia’s creative economy.¹⁰

According to estimates from the Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research (BCARR), the creative and cultural sector contributed \$115.2 billion to the Australian economy in 2017-18 (6.3% of GDP). BCARR reports that 9.5% of those employed in Australia, almost a million workers – held a ‘creative’ qualification.¹¹ The establishment of the Creative Economy Taskforce by the Australian Government in August 2020 was a welcome and important initiative. There are some immediate gains and impacts that could be achieved by recognising the creative and cultural industries in existing government industry development programs.

The Australian Research Council’s Industrial Transformation Research Hubs and Industrial Transformation Training Centres have a remit to engage ‘Australia’s best researchers in issues

facing the new industrial economies and training the future workforce'.¹² The research training component is literally in the business of building future workforces. To date the scheme has aligned to the Government's Industry Growth Centres. Considerable benefits would flow from expanding the scope of this scheme to accommodate a creative and cultural industries growth agenda. This would ensure that these industries can adapt, thrive, and meet current and future digital, social, and economic disruption.

We recommend that the Australian Government:

- **Recognise the creative and cultural industries in existing government industry development programs**
- **Expand the ARC's Industrial Transformation Scheme to incubate university/industry collaboration in the creative and cultural industries.**

The Academy would be pleased to elaborate on this submission and convene further expert input. Please direct your initial inquiries to the Academy's Executive Director, Dr Christina Parolin on (02) 6125 9860 or christina.parolin@humanities.org.au

REFERENCES

- ¹ ‘SHAPE’ stands for Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy. The SHAPE agenda originated from a coalition of organisations in the UK including the British Academy, the London School of Economics, and the Arts Council England. See <https://thisisshape.org.uk>
- ² For further details on the Academy’s COVID initiatives, see <https://www.humanities.org.au/advice/policy/covid/>; our policy submission to the Royal Commission here <https://www.humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/AAH-Policy-2020-National-Natural-Disaster-Arrangements.pdf>; and the AAH-led RRIF paper here <https://www.science.org.au/covid19/covidsafe-app>
- ³ Rapid Research Information Forum (RRIF), <https://www.science.org.au/covid19/rapid-research-information-forum>
- ⁴ Deutscher Ethikrat (2020), ‘Solidarity and Responsibility during the Coronavirus Crisis’, <https://www.ethikrat.org/fileadmin/Publikationen/Ad-hoc-Empfehlungen/englisch/recommendation-coronavirus-crisis.pdf>
- ⁵ See Nuffield Council on Bioethics, <https://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/>
- ⁶ ‘Australia joins global call to action’, <https://www.humanities.org.au/2020/12/01/australia-joins-global-call-to-action-to-celebrate-language-diversity-and-promote-a-multilingual-world/>
- ⁷ ‘It’s time to break down the language barriers’, <https://www.humanities.org.au/2020/10/07/fighting-covid-19-its-time-to-break-down-the-language-barriers/> The AAH’s RRIF report on the COVIDSafe app cited the role of multilingual and cross-cultural communications for successful public health initiatives, see <https://www.science.org.au/covid19/covidsafe-app> – and. See also the leadership on these issues by Professor Ingrid Piller FAHA and others through Language on the Move <https://www.languageonthemove.com/> and special edition of *MultiLingua* journal on COVID-19, <https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/mult/39/5/mult.39.issue-5.xml>
- ⁸ OECD (2017) Economic Surveys: Australia https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/oecd-economic-surveys-australia-2017_eco_surveys-aus-2017-en
- ⁹ See: Technology Investment Roadmap (2020), <https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/technology-investment-roadmap-first-low-emissions-technology-statement-2020>; Human Rights and Technology project, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/projects/human-rights-and-technology>; ACOLA’s report *The Effective and Ethical Development of Artificial Intelligence*, https://acola.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/hs4_artificial-intelligence-report.pdf; ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision Making and Society, <https://www.admscentre.org.au/> Their focus areas are: Health, Social Services, Transport and Mobilities, and News and Media.
- ¹⁰ Australian Academy of the Humanities’ submission to the Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts’ Inquiry into Australia’s Cultural and Creative Industries and Institutions, https://www.humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/201028-AAH-Policy-Creative-Cultural-Industries_final.pdf
- ¹¹ Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research (2018) ‘The economic value of cultural and creative activity’, <https://www.communications.gov.au/departmental-news/economic-value-cultural-and-creative-activity>. See also Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communication’s submission (#293) to Inquiry into Australia’s Cultural and Creative Industries and Institutions, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Communications/Arts/Submissions
- ¹² Australian Research Council’s Industrial Transformation Research Program, <https://www.arc.gov.au/grants/linkage-program/industrial-transformation-research-program>