

Introduction

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) is one of Australia's four learned academies and consists of an elected fellowship of over five hundred of Australia's leading social science researchers. The Academy promotes excellence in the social sciences and in their contribution to public policy. It coordinates the promotion of research, teaching and advice in the social sciences, promotes national and international scholarly cooperation across disciplines and sectors, comments on national needs and priorities in the social sciences, and provides advice to government on issues of national importance.

Disciplines represented by the Academy's members are Anthropology, Accounting, Demography, Economic History, Economics, Education, Geography, History, Law, Linguistics, Management, Marketing, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Social Medicine, Sociology and Statistics.

Some guiding assumptions

1. Not all valuable and high impact research can or should be commercialised, some such research leads directly and non-commercially to innovative public policy.
2. Researchers are generally good at anticipating the commercial potential of their research.
3. Researchers are generally ill-prepared to pursue pathways to commercial opportunities.
4. Pathways to commercial opportunities are increasingly to be found overseas.

Creating stronger incentives for research-industry collaboration

The Academy supports the development of targeted incentives for industry supported social science research that accord with broader public policy priorities. Many of the Australian Government's policy ambitions depend on highly sophisticated social science understanding of domestic and international communities. When Australia is able to implement strategic, well-informed regulatory frameworks and international trade partnerships, business is among those who benefit most.

Finding incentives that are both attractive to researchers and business/industry, and which do not incur costs by those parties or to government are not readily obvious. While the creation of stronger incentives for research-industry collaboration must be vigorously pursued, there is an equally important need to assist from the other dimension, reducing barriers to research-commercial outcomes. Those barriers are largely, but by no means limited to, the regulatory activities of governments. Arguably, the most efficient means for effecting research-commercialisation translation lies in the reduction of barriers. Barriers in application processes, barriers in repeated reporting, barriers other administrative requirements and barriers inherent in grant conditions all contribute to costly reductions in impetus and persistence of parties to engage productively. Government might consider means by which administrative burdens can be reduced. That could have a positive effect by reducing government workloads as well.

The Academy also advocates providing incentives for research-industry collaboration that has high social benefits beyond the profit-making of particular businesses. This recommendation has also been made by the Productivity Commission, in 2007 (see footnote, p. xxvi)ⁱ. Desirable in its own right, such "spillovers" from research-industry collaboration in the social sciences has the additional benefit of providing for the public good without direct funding from the Australian Government.

State and Federal governments in Australia already provide significant funding to social science researchers. It is important that more targeted efforts are made to ensure increased funding support for research from industry.

Supporting research infrastructure

The Academy strongly supports the aspiration that Australian industry should be a strategic partner with social science researchers. We therefore recommend greater business investment across the social science disciplines. After all, few government or business decisions are taken without significant consideration of the relevant economic and legal questions.

Australian industry also has a strong interest in local social science researchers consolidating their status as a world-leading research and teaching community that continues to attract international students and highly skilled migrants. As Australia's fourth largest export industry, tertiary education is enormously important as an economic sector in its own right.¹ More than 50% of enrolments in the largest field of study in Australia, Management and Commerce, (26% in 2011) are overseas students. Moreover, as Australian business competes for high-quality manufacturing and services contracts in the Asia-Pacific region, social science students provide an important pathway for attracting highly skilled migrants to Australia.

Providing better access to research

The Academy is a longstanding advocate for freer access to the outcomes and publications resulting from social science research. This includes encouraging university publications to provide greater access to the outcomes of publicly funded social science research, as often appears in leading peer-reviewed journals and other publications.

The Academy therefore recommends exploring options for Australian government support for greater industry access to academic publications across a range of social science disciplines. This includes targeted access to research outcomes for relevant businesses.

Academic publications in the social sciences are often still reliant on long-established, print business models for distributing access to readers. This often entails restrictive copyright barriers to accessing many of the leading, peer-reviewed social science journal articles in Australia, often reliant on institutional subscriptions provided within academia by university libraries. As part of its targeted efforts at allowing industry greater benefits from the outcomes of publicly funded research in the social sciences, scope exists for greater support from the Australian government for more open access to research publications including journal articles.

Challenges to this proposal that would need to be considered include the fact that the existing business model of many academic publications relies on the restrictive, subscription system. The Australian Government could look to making freer access to academic publications part of the original funding arrangements supporting the research in question. Another potential response includes engaging support from industry to access social science research, in recognition of the important role of social science research towards commercial research and development programs.

¹http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/ArticleDocuments/209/An%20Agenda%20for%20Australian%20Higher%20Education2103_2016.pdf.aspx

The Academy is not alone in calling for an industry-oriented revision to the intellectual property arrangements of universities. For example, reform of these arrangements was also recommended in the Productivity Commission's 'Public Support for Science and Innovation' Research Report, 9 March 2007.

Increasing industry relevant research training

The Academy recommends greater cohesiveness between industry relevant training programs, and the development of early career social science researchers within academia. Within PhD programs, in particular, there are a large number of researchers conducting projects that are highly beneficial to Australian industry interests. There are also social science research projects in many PhD programs that offer insights into the broader policy and regulatory frameworks in many industry contexts. How will Australian businesses best engage with the provision of middle class services, for example, in the Asian century? How will regional communities best adapt to the continued shift from manufacturing exports to service and hospitality exports? Many of these questions are already being addressed by publicly funded social science research.

The Academy therefore recommends a targeting approach, instigated by the Australian Government, bringing together specific researchers such as PhD candidates with industry relevant training programs. Such a strategic partnership program could be facilitated by existing institutions within the social science research community, including the Academy. This would achieve two very important policy ambitions. It would improve the research and development programs of Australian businesses. It would also improve the early career development of leading social science researchers.

Measurement of outcomes

The Academy continues to advocate its longstanding support for measurement of outcomes that emphasises the often intangible, long-term benefits to a wide range of Australians from leading social science research. Much of this important research is undertaken for government, as the Productivity Commission described in their 2007 Reportⁱⁱ "there are two strong rationales for public funding support of science and innovation. The first is that publicly funded R&D is a significant contributor to innovation in the functions performed by government. Governments need to invest in research to improve the products and services they offer or to better discharge their functions, just as the private sector does." This constitutes basic research and is essential for a modern, productive society. It will not always be suitable for patenting.

The Academy calls for greater business understanding of social science research, including its long-term outcomes and potential benefits. Further, we recommend greater business investment in social science research. This contribution reflects the important innovation improvements from which many businesses benefit, including the leading skills-base provided by a workforce containing many people receiving tertiary education from a world-leading social science research community.

The Academy also recognises inherent differences between social science benefits, and the outcomes of the other research disciplines. Social science outcomes are often much broader than profit-making for specific businesses or entrepreneurs. They often address wider regulatory frameworks, or identify the community-wide conditions most conducive to success across an entire

sector. It is important that this inherent difference with other, more patent-oriented research disciplines is recognised by any funding formula promoted by the Australian Government. The social sciences are crucial for encouraging broader conditions for Australian business success and any measurement of research outcomes is best achieved by recognising this feature. It cannot be assumed that research that is industry-focused will always entail commercialisation as its priority.

Improving commercial outcomes from research

Allowing that a body of research, small or large, has achieved a measure of success in the commercial world there is arguably unmet justification for continuing research by social scientists to first measure the impact of that commercial outcome on individuals, groups, institutions, businesses or industries, assess the nature of that impact and then provide advice to commercial operators who may wish to alter their product or its delivery to enhance utility to consumers and thus the uptake of the product or service. Forward thinking industries can exploit research to do much more than sophisticated marketing to increase their commercial position. An example of this the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) who have called upon social science research to assist in guiding their commercial future. The Australian mobile telephone market being super-saturated nearly a decade ago has looked to demography (ageing populations in particular), sociology (family management by mobile phone), business management (the mobile office), mobile security for individuals and other social science driven insights to continually improve what is a highly competitive and ever-adapting industry. While science and technology can improve the instruments and their capacities, social sciences can analyse the nature of the uptake of innovation and the gaps that are needed by current and future users. Thus, in this instance, social science research improves the evolutionary capacity of an industry to grow and meet the needs of consumers. The industry partners in AMTA need not benefit only from technological innovation, but also from impact-based social science research on what people and their institutions demand as their own practices and needs evolve. Improving commercial outcomes by continual assessment of impact and user aspirations should be more routinely exploited by business, industry and researchers. R&D is fundamentally important. RD&A (where A is Assessment that helps fit commercial outcomes with society's needs) would be an important and wealth creating improvement.

Capitalising on the Medical Research Future Fund

The Academy welcomes the important research opportunities arising from the Fund. We also seek to ensure that the indispensable contributions of social science disciplines to overall health and well-being outcomes across the Australian community are deeply incorporated into the research projects to be supported by the Fund. It is social scientists that will take good ideas and turn them into effective, efficient and useful public policy outcomes.

Conclusion

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia is pleased for the opportunity to make this submission to the review "Boosting the Commercial Returns from Research". Not all valuable and high impact research can or should be commercialised. Much of the necessary and important research base, including much of social science research, leads directly to innovative public policy.

Where there are commercialisation opportunities, it is the researchers themselves who are most aware of the commercial potential, but pathways to commercialisation are hazardous. For a number of reasons, including incentives to publish in international journals, research subjects are increasingly involving an international interest, limiting the opportunity for Australian commercialisation.

ⁱ Productivity Commission, 9 March 2007 – *Public Support for Science and Innovation*.

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