

## Australian Universities Accord December 2022

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The [Australian Academy of the Humanities](#) welcomes the Australian Universities Accord process, The appointment of Professor Mary O’Kane AC as Chair of the Accord Panel, and the broadly constituted Ministerial Reference Group announced by the Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP, last week.

The Academy is the national body for the humanities in Australia. As one of the nation’s five Learned Academies, we are a unique resource for government, working to ensure cultural, creative, and ethical perspectives inform Australia’s plans for now and the future.

Our Fellowship comprises just over 700 humanities leaders who, together with extensive international and national networks, we are able to draw from to advance excellence, support the next generation of talent, and provide independent advice to government.

At this early stage of consultation, we offer the Academy’s convening power and expertise in support of the process – and to provide expert advice on a range of priority areas identified in the Accord Panel’s Terms of Reference.

Specific priorities we would like to put on the agenda for the Panel’s consideration are:

### Humanities training and research are central to Australia’s knowledge, skills and capability needs

In 2020, the humanities, together with the arts and social sciences – the SHAPE<sup>1</sup> disciplines – trained and graduated 143,752 of Australia’s university students, representing 63% of the system.<sup>2</sup> Humanities graduates equal or outperform science and maths graduates in full-time employment and labour force participation;<sup>3</sup> and are in demand in sectors projected for substantial growth and expected to resist automation.

Australia’s future workforce requires knowledge of our global context, linguistic diversity, critical understanding and analytical skills, and making innovation and technology ethical, accessible and sustainable. These are skills provided by the humanities, and

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<sup>1</sup> SHAPE is a new collective term to describe the humanities, arts, and social science disciplines, and originated from a coalition of organisations in the UK, including the British Academy, the London School of Economics, and the Arts Council England. It’s the new name for the SHAPE Futures Network for early and mid-career researchers in the humanities, arts and social sciences, see <https://shapefutures.com.au>

<sup>2</sup> Based on 2020 domestic student data from the Department of Education’s Higher Education Statistics Collection – where SHAPE fields are: Architecture, Education, Management and Commerce, Society and Culture, Creative Arts.

<sup>3</sup> See Graduate outcomes survey data at [https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/graduate-outcomes-survey-\(gos\)](https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/graduate-outcomes-survey-(gos))

integral to any “roadmap for Australia to build a bigger, better-trained and more productive workforce.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet these graduates have been invisible to date in discussions about workforce opportunities for Australia.

Australia’s lop-sided focus on STEM alone is counterproductive. All the big challenges and opportunities for the nation have a human, social and cultural dimension.

Ensuring a strong and sustainable SHAPE sector also has clear benefits to STEM, in terms of interdisciplinary collaboration. The five Learned Academies have worked together productively over many years now on major projects requiring multidisciplinary insights and approaches. One of the most recent of these reports: *Australia’s Energy Transition Research Plan* identifies an urgent and critical gap in energy research in the SHAPE disciplines, specifically “relatively little research that considers the social, cultural and economic impact of the transition for local communities and end users”.<sup>5</sup>

We urge the Panel to take a whole-of sector-agenda with SHAPE and STEM both in view, and look to the removal of barriers to collaboration across disciplines, by introducing a level playing field in programs that support teaching and research so experts from across the disciplines with applicable skills and knowledge can compete on their merits for funding.

Below we highlight just two areas where humanities skills and knowledges are integral to future workforce needs:

## **1. Address Asia literacy as a skills and research agenda**

In the lead-up to the Government’s Skills Summit in September, the Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs Tim Watts MP hosted an Asia Literacy roundtable. This was a welcome high-level commitment which speaks to the importance of the cross-portfolio agenda needed to achieve step-change across education and training, industry and government sectors. These are skills generated through teaching and research in the humanities, arts and social sciences.

The Academy’s new report (to be launched in early 2023) on the role of universities in generating [Australia’s China Knowledge Capability](#) is a case study in why Australia needs better knowledge coordination across sectors and disciplines. We would be happy to brief the panel about this work.

## **2. Creative and cultural economy**

As automation and digital media transform the workforce, the proportion of Australian jobs generated in the creative and cultural economy is increasing.

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<sup>4</sup> Employment White Paper consultation <https://treasury.gov.au/consultation/c2022-322158>

<sup>5</sup> ACOLA’s report available at <https://acola.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/acola-2021-australian-energy-transition-plan.pdf>

Pre-COVID-19, employment in Australia's creative economy was growing at twice the rate of the general economy.<sup>6</sup> In 2018, it employed more than 600,000 workers, either directly in creative occupations in creative industries, or embedded in creative roles across other industry sectors.<sup>7</sup>

Humanities graduates comprise 63 per cent of the graduate workforce in Australia's creative industries.<sup>8</sup>

### Job Ready Graduates needs urgent reform

The Universities Accord process offers an opportunity to redress the failures of the discredited Jobs Ready Graduates Package. This has been counter-productive in punishing students who choose area studies, history, culture, media. The Academy was a vocal opponent of the JRG legislation which was based on flawed assumptions about employability and workforce needs; disproportionately impacted women; made it far harder for students from low SES backgrounds, including in the regions, to aspire to and succeed at university in subjects of social, economic, cultural and community value; and incomprehensibly made the study of Indigenous culture and history more expensive than medicine.<sup>9</sup>

Australians should be encouraged to pursue educational and training interests in which they will thrive, and at the same time encouraged to build skills in areas of demand. This is why the Jobs Ready Graduate Package was a public policy failure.

### Improving access and opportunity

We agree with Glyn Davis that to improve quality and equity we need to remove structural features of the higher education system that require research and scale at the expense of teaching and student experience. The Learned Academies are uniquely placed to bring the domain knowledge and expertise to these questions – offering a national perspective alongside the university sector.

### Indigenous research and Indigenous knowledges

Humanities researchers and teachers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have been instrumental in promoting knowledge of Australia's distinctive Indigenous cultures to domestic and international audiences. This role is the single most important, distinctive feature of Australian humanities in a global context. Indigenous-led research offers unique insights on Australia history, society, and culture. Indigenous scholars in the

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<sup>6</sup> A New Approach (2020), *Australia's cultural and creative economy: A 21st century guide* <https://www.humanities.org.au/new-approach/report5/>, 5th report, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Bureau of Communications and Arts Research (2018) 'The economic value of cultural and creative activity' <https://www.communications.gov.au/departmental-news/economic-value-cultural-and-creative-activity>.

<sup>8</sup> Data analysis by Research Strategies Australia of data from the 2016 census, in *FHW*.

<sup>9</sup> See submissions: [https://www.humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/200817-AAH-Policy-Job-Ready-Legislation\\_final.pdf](https://www.humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/200817-AAH-Policy-Job-Ready-Legislation_final.pdf) and <https://www.humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/AAH-Policy-2020-Senate-Inquiry-Job-Ready-Legislation.pdf>

humanities in Australia have extended the global relevance and intellectual reach of many fields of study.

Australia's university system is also now recognising the role it plays in both ensuring an Indigenous voice across a broad range of inquiry, and better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Yet the realities for Indigenous researchers and students are often at odds with institutional plans and strategies. Our higher education and research institutions, including Australia's Learned Academies, are only now coming to terms with their own failures to support and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, and the specificity of Indigenous knowledge systems, within institutional structures.<sup>10</sup> Making space for First Nations researchers in our knowledge institutions, nurturing those at the beginning of their careers, and promoting respect for Indigenous knowledges is not only a matter of social justice and equity, but if approached with genuine reciprocity, promises to prompt new angles for inquiry from the heart of all disciplines. The Academy has recently announced plans to establish an Indigenous Studies Section as part of its organisational structure.

### A seat at the table

The Accord process and any reform agenda will have consequences for the SHAPE and STEM disciplines. SHAPE leaders therefore need to be at the table for discussions and deliberation, and when decisions are made. A lack of humanities leadership and representation will jeopardise the quality and authority of the advice delivered to the panel and to government.

Finally, we note that the Academy has been involved in consultations on the review of the National Science and Research Priorities and the Review of the Australian Research Council. In our advice to other review processes, we have urged that these important parts of the puzzle align.

We would be happy to elaborate on any of these points and look forward to engaging further with the process in 2023.

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<sup>10</sup> Michelle Trudgett, Susan Page, and Stacey K. Coates. "Peak Bodies: Indigenous Representation in the Australian Higher Education Sector," *Australian Journal of Education* (April 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441211011178>; Martin Nakata, "The Rights and Blights of the Politics in Indigenous Higher Education," *Anthropological Forum* 23:3 (2013): 289–303, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2013.803457>. On Indigenous researchers in the Australian Academy of the Humanities, see Bronwyn Carlson, "Culture, Nature, Climate: Indigenous Knowledge and the Environment," 2021 Academy Lecture, Australian Academy of the Humanities, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0ShPIex-4A&t=2177s>