

*Australian Academy of the Humanities*



16 March 2010

Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP  
Chair, Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation  
PO Box 6021  
House of Representatives  
Parliament of Australia  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Vamvakinou,

Please find attached a submission by the Australian Academy of the Humanities to the inquiry being conducted by House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation into Australia's international research collaborations.

The Academy is grateful for the opportunity to contribute its ideas to this important inquiry. Australia has a strong international research reputation in the humanities, with world-leading research in several fields including cultural studies, history, philosophy, archaeology, art history and literature, film and new media. The Academy considers that the international engagement of Australia's research workforce is vital for a robust, vibrant, and innovative humanities research sector; and this in turn contributes to the nation's social, cultural and economic fortune and its fruitful participation in the global community.

The timing of the inquiry sees the Academy particularly well placed to contribute its ideas: early data generated from work we have recently undertaken in this area has helped us to understand collaborative activity in ways unavailable to us previously.

I commend this submission and its recommendations to you. We would be pleased to elaborate on any of our observations and suggestions should the Committee find it helpful.

With kind regards,

Professor Joe Lo Bianco AM  
President



Submission to the

## **INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS**

**March 2010**

### **Introduction and Context**

The Australian Academy of the Humanities is one of the nation's four learned academies. Established by Royal Charter in 1969, it comprises over 400 of the most influential and internationally celebrated humanists in Australia drawn from the disciplines of Archaeology; Asian Studies; Classical Studies; English; European Languages and Cultures; History; Linguistics; Philosophy, Religion and the History of Ideas; Cultural and Communication Studies and the Arts. The Academy aims to advance knowledge of, and the pursuit of excellence in, the humanities disciplines in Australia, and the Australian humanities abroad.

Part of the Academy's remit in this respect is to build and maintain relations and exchanges with allied international bodies, to broker relationships between Australian researchers and scholars of other nations, and to engage with the humanities policy and advocacy community internationally.

The Academy has played an active role in its global organisation, the Union Académique Internationale, and is a significant participant in other international humanities networks. It is the lead agency in a nascent global network of humanities policy and advocacy organisations. It has also fostered scholarly exchanges between humanists of many nations through its bilateral International Exchange Programmes with other learned academies and scholarly organisations.

The decision by Minister Carr in September of 2008 to remove the structural impediment to the participation of humanities, arts and social sciences disciplines in the International Science Linkages scheme was a landmark decision for the sector. It has allowed the Academy's programme activities to focus more strongly than ever before on supporting international research collaboration for the humanities and creative arts (HCA) disciplines within Australia.

In preparation for the Academy's first funding round of the ISL programme, we undertook a scoping study in mid-2009 to gather in-depth information on the nature and extent of

## *Australian Academy of the Humanities*

international collaboration and the collaborative ambitions of Australia's HCA researchers. A web-based survey was conducted to develop a statistical snapshot of the sector and its activities, and briefing sessions were held at universities across Australia. The survey and briefing sessions provided indicative trends on the scope of international collaboration, patterns of networking, mobility of researchers, shifts in research agendas, structural impediments to research collaboration, preferred models, and priority areas of engagement. The outcomes informed the development of the ISL-HCA grants programme that the Academy is administering on behalf of the Commonwealth, starting in late 2009. The information collected in this study is also being fed into the first comprehensive survey of the humanities conducted in over a decade: *The Humanities in Australia Today (HAT)* project, funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC).

The strong response to the Academy's survey and briefing session, as well as the overwhelming demand for collaborative funding through the new ISL-HCA programme, indicates that international research collaboration is of crucial and growing importance to researchers in the humanities and creative arts.

## **1. The nature and extent of existing international research collaborations**

The Academy takes seriously its mandate to assist Australian researchers to access researchers and research networks abroad. For the past four decades, the Academy has nurtured relationships with many overseas institutions, which have led to various opportunities for international collaboration for Australian humanities researchers. Exchange agreements with allied organisations in the Netherlands and Sweden see several Australian scholars visit these countries each year, or provide for international researchers to be hosted in Australia to collaborate on areas of mutual interest. The Academy's Visiting Scholar programmes assist scholars from Russia and the former USSR, as well as Indonesia and South-East Asia, to attend conferences, deliver papers and gain access to research materials in Australia. The British Special Joint Funding Programme, a partnership with the British Academy, is designed to support joint projects between Australian and British scholars on projects of interest to both countries. The Netherlands and British programmes are co-sponsored at this end by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia.

Of all the Academy's programmes, probably the most successful to date is its Humanities Travelling Fellowships (HTF) scheme. Operating since 1985, the programme offers funding to support the travel of early career Australian researchers to visit with potential overseas collaborators and to access scholarly resources held across the world. In 2009, the scheme incorporated two new programmes, the Embassy of France in Australia Humanities Travelling Fellowships and the Ernst Keller European Travelling Fellowships.

These programmes, however, have been necessarily modest in nature (\$4000 for 10-12 researchers per year) as they have been funded from within the Academy's operational expenses. This is in sharp contrast to the \$94.5M funding over nine years provided through the International Science Linkages programme to foster international collaboration in the natural and physical sciences.

The humanities and creative arts research sectors therefore welcomed Minister Carr's interpretation of 'science' in its broadest sense, to encompass all fields of knowledge and systematic enquiry, and the accompanying provision of \$1 million to support international collaboration for researchers in the humanities, arts and social sciences. With half of this funding being administered by this Academy, the first funding round for ISL-HCA closed in late 2009 and offered two programmes: one providing funding to bring eminent international researchers to Australia, to expose our scholars to the latest thinking of the leading figures in their fields; and the other for early- to mid-career researchers from Australia to travel abroad to collaborate with overseas counterparts. The second round, currently in assessment stage, provides further funding within these schemes, and adds a third programme to support international collaborative workshops, hosted either in Australia or abroad.

The response from the sector to the ISL-HCA funding opportunities has been overwhelming, particularly as this as the first iteration of the scheme. Almost 180 applications were received over the two rounds, with 16 successful recipients in the first round, and the second round recipients due to be announced in late March. Our analysis of the applications shows clear demand for support for international collaboration in the humanities and creative arts. The quality and potential impact of existing and proposed collaborations is impressive, and the distinct impression we have formed is that this opportunity has provided a support mechanism for previously frustrated collaborative work of the first order. When the feedback reports from completed projects begin to come

in during 2010, the Academy will gather even more information about new and emerging opportunities, humanities geographies, and partners and collaborators.

This information will be invaluable to the Academy and to policy makers, as the focus on science and technology in previous large-scale surveys of the research sector means that Australia lacks an exhaustive account of current international research collaborations across the academic disciplines. Without comprehensive, national-scale, quantitative and qualitative information about the breadth, character, and patterns of contact, it is difficult to form a precise picture of the actual and potential contribution of Australian researchers from across the disciplinary spectrum, or of the structures and programmes they need to help them get the job done.

The Academy's 2009 ISL-HCA scoping study survey casts some light on the nature of these pursuits in the humanities and creative arts. Sixty per cent of survey respondents reported that they are currently actively involved in international research collaboration and want to do more. Conference participation is the most common activity, followed closely by the more elaborate and intense 'backbone' activities of humanities international collaboration: jointly authored publications and collaborative research projects. Other collaborative activities embarked upon include research network engagement, convening international conferences, undertaking fellowships, exchanges and master classes, and workshop participation. In terms of future collaboration opportunities, the survey marked increased preferences for collaborative projects and programmes, for participation in research networks, for producing jointly authored publications, and for fellowships and exchanges.

The survey reveals that international collaboration is the natural order of things for many researchers in the humanities, not some add-on to their research practice. The image of an isolated solo researcher is outdated and unhelpful: in the words of one survey participant, 'for many of us, international research collaboration is just a day-to-day part of business.' Such activity ranges from comprehensive formal networks to informal communication, with variation in scale and complexity often depending on 'internal' factors such as career status and extrinsic factors such as levels of support from institutions and funding bodies.

However, we also know from our preliminary research that though a broad range of international collaboration is occurring actively in the humanities, a great deal of it is happening under the radar. Such connections often occur outside the confines of the academy system, and are often marginally funded (some, we discovered, are even entirely self-funded by dedicated scholars, without any external support whatsoever). Myriad and diffuse connections at the individual researcher or team level are simply not traceable especially when that collaboration is not formally funded, does not pass through a university research office, or arises from connections developed through conference participation or via individual links. What is clear is that the formally constituted activities do not come close to representing the total effort of international collaboration within the humanities.

In terms of the geographical focus of international collaboration, there is strong ongoing, as well as aspirational, collaboration with traditional research partners such as the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States of America. However, there is also much work being done beyond the Anglo-American 'matrix' with international collaboration with Asian partners very strong within some disciplinary groups such as the cultural studies sector. Levels of engagement with China and India are progressively and proportionally on the rise, as is engagement with our near-neighbours in the Pacific.

## **2. The benefits to Australia from engaging in international research collaborations**

The humanities, arts and social sciences are no different to science, engineering and technology in delivering benefit to Australia, both domestically and through engagement in international research collaborations. The benefits are manifold. The humanities are drivers of social change and awareness, record keepers of the past and present, and lend a creative and human face to innovation and progress. While the humanities disciplines in this country make a vital contribution to the national interest by developing our knowledge of the unique Australian society and culture, this scholarship cannot be formed in a vacuum without reference to the global context. Similarly, the understanding and insights gained from deep and sustained research into the history and cultures of other nations and peoples enables Australia to participate on a solid base of knowledge and understanding, as it operates as a member of the global community.

Just as international collaborators can provide unique impressions and insights of Australian society and culture from their position as ‘outside observers’ and from bringing a comparative lens to our history and culture, so too Australian scholars are highly valued in many fields for their specialist knowledge of other cultures and societies around the globe. In particular, Australian Asian-specialists are highly valued by the research communities of North America and Europe as culturally accessible ‘conduits’ to knowledge about this increasingly important region.

International collaboration in the humanities plays a crucial role in expanding our strategic knowledge of the societies and cultures of key interest to Australia, such as our near neighbours, our trading partners, and the nations of historical importance to Australia. However, this interest is not restricted to nations which currently attract our attention due to present strategic interest, but extends also to potential future priority nations and regions. It takes time to develop knowledge of language and the complex cultural and social systems of other nations; it cannot often be predicted where such capabilities will be needed in the future and investment only at the time of need will usually be too late for Australia’s benefit. A standing capability in language and culture expertise is therefore required if we are able to respond usefully and appropriately to emergent interests.

Researchers in the humanities are also increasingly recognised as vital partners in the search for solutions to the nation’s and the world’s most pressing problems, such as climate change, sustainability, global security and human health. They do so not as handmaidens to the hard sciences and technology, but as independent contributors in their own right. The human, social and cultural elements of our major problems and opportunities are at least as important to identifying causes and finding solutions as scientific and technological methods. To truly foster innovation, we need to widen the perspective of analysis and interpretation of issues and events, not only through bringing multiple disciplinary viewpoints to the challenge at hand, but by bringing different cultural perspectives and different modes of analysing information that come from international collaboration.

One Fellow of the Academy cites the example of an international collaboration on languages education he worked on, funded by the Irish government, and also including Swiss and Welsh scholars in the research team. The interdisciplinary collaborations of each of these researchers multiplied the total number of disciplines involved in the policy related work well beyond language studies to include history, economics, sociology, social-psychology and education, greatly improving the quality of advice provided to the Irish government. In turn, these collaborations had knock-on effects back to Australia, with PhD students sharing in a much richer field of knowledge. The same Fellow also pointed

to a Thai project which involved Israeli researchers; the triangulation producing a noticeable improvement in the policy advice tendered to the Thai government.

Governments of other nations are clearly recognising that language and cultural understanding have far reaching benefits – often intangible and difficult to quantify – but nevertheless vital both domestically and internationally. Not only do these understandings and appreciation for the complex cultural and language systems that operate around the world have intrinsic benefits for the nation, but they clearly have applied benefits for the country across the gamut of Australia's international engagement activities, including: multinational and global business endeavours; disaster and humanitarian assistance missions; international diplomacy; the global climate change effort; and international migration management.

Defence strategy experts also agree with the argument that has been put by Australia's humanities community for decades: while knowledge of foreign languages is vital, it is incomplete, much less effective and at times even dangerous unless it is teamed with cultural understanding. This, as Lieutenant Colonel Nick Floyd notes, includes things like 'behavioural considerations and drivers; power and influences sources; government, political and grouping structures; tribal or ethnic dispositions; and spiritual, economic and geo-social factors ... not just [of] adversaries but also non-combatant partners and our coalition partners.'<sup>1</sup> Building capacity within Australia in language and cultural understanding will exponentially boost our effectiveness in military, police and civilian deployments, whether these are security, disaster relief, humanitarian or administrative assistance engagements.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.defence.gov.au/defencemagazine/editions/2009\\_7/defmag\\_0907.pdf#nameddest=army](http://www.defence.gov.au/defencemagazine/editions/2009_7/defmag_0907.pdf#nameddest=army)

### **3. The key drivers of international research collaboration at the government, institutional and researcher levels**

#### *Government*

A large number of government programmes exist to support international research collaboration. These are funded in a variety of ways: some through the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (through its International Science Branch), some through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (as an adjunct to its international education measures), some through government statutory agencies such as the ARC and the National Health and Medical Research Council, and some through independent organisations such as the Learned Academies. Some of these programmes are operated under the auspices of bilateral agreements. The lion's share of these programmes are either unavailable to humanities scholars altogether, or have empirically very low rates of support for humanities collaborative research where these disciplines are technically eligible.

#### *Institutional*

Over the past decade, in an increasingly globalised and market-based higher education sector, internationalisation has become a key element in the array of initiatives pursued by Australian universities. International assessments of the performance of Australian universities are increasingly used to market and define our nation's universities. Recent international ranking entities suggest that the Australian humanities community regularly out-performs most other discipline clusters in international assessments of global research strengths. For example, the ANU's widely-reported dominance in the Times Higher Education global university rankings in 2009 was significantly a product of its strength in the humanities and creative arts, which comfortably outstripped all other discipline clusters for our top-ranking university. Within the next two Australian institutions, the Universities of Melbourne and Sydney, humanities and creative arts were outperformed only by medical sciences, leaving the other discipline groupings in the shade.

Yet international success in these disciplines does not readily or necessarily translate into targeted institutional support for humanities researchers, because another key institutional driver for international collaboration – the access to significant pools of government funding – simply does not exist for humanities researchers in the way it does for their colleagues in the natural and physical sciences. Not surprisingly then, institutions, through their research offices, devote their resources and energies to supporting those researchers able to access government funding programmes with the promise of the highest possible gains based on their disciplinary profile.

#### *Researchers*

For humanities researchers, our survey data strongly suggests that a key driver for international collaboration is its critical professional development function. Virtually all respondents to the survey (99.5%), indicated they would engage in future international collaboration given the opportunity and funding. International exposure is highly important for research impact, providing researchers with 'an increased and realistic sense of standards and benchmarks of intellectual and knowledge developments worldwide, pooling of resources to create larger and more extensive networks of knowledge', expanding the 'sense of possibility' of what could be achieved in the research field.



International research collaboration also nurtures the future generation of researchers; a vital outcome for the continued health of Australia's research sector. By connecting younger researchers with established leading scholars, PhDs and early career researchers gain the enhanced training and experience required to excel in their fields. Comments in the Academy's survey cite the success of the ARC networks, in particular the Cultural Research Network model, as valuable platforms for achieving these goals. This is why the Academy has targeted its international travel assistance through the HTF scheme to early career scholars, and stipulated the involvement of early- and mid-career researchers for a component of the ISL-HCA programme.

Many such researchers, in their applications for ISL-HCA funding, listed the ambitions that stimulated their interest in international collaboration. For these researchers, key drivers were the potential of future collaborations building from visits; the improvement of their own track records; and the opportunity to learn and be mentored by the best in the field. One applicant for example, noted that her visit 'would lead to a stronger ARC proposal by exposing me to leading scholars and giving me access to a leading research environment overseas.'

However, while personal ambitions are key to driving the individual's collaborative goals, many outcomes of individual collaboration can lead to long-term benefit to a larger research network. One ISL-HCA applicant pointed to the aim of creating 'a network of cooperation' to apply for European funding through the European Commission's Framework 7 research programme. From a disciplinary standpoint, the importance of international standing, viability of networks and the capacity to sustain long-term rolling collaborations are vital to the health and longevity of specialist fields of research.

#### **4. The impediments faced by Australian researchers when initiating and participating in international research collaborations and practical measures for addressing these**

Our research shows that for Australia's humanities researchers, the key impediment to participation in international research collaborations has been the arbitrary exclusion of these disciplines from key funding and policy programmes which encourage such engagements. This has stemmed from utilitarian attitudes towards the value of research and a failure to recognise the intrinsic benefits of knowledge which is not easily measured in tangible outcomes. A serious knock-on effect of the chronic under-funding of the humanities, arts and social science disciplines is that it leaves few institutional incentives to encourage or support international collaboration within the humanities, which obviously only exacerbates the problem.

Access to funding to undertake collaborative work on an international scale clearly remains the key impediment for Australia's humanities researchers. The overwhelming response to the new ISL-HCA programme by Australia's humanities and creative arts scholars points not only to the enthusiasm and appetite for engaging in international research collaboration, but has highlighted the dearth of other funding opportunities for this major sector of Australia's research workforce. A significant long-term challenge to sustained international collaboration is the availability of funding past the seed-stage. While programmes such as the ISL-HCA provide excellent opportunities for initiating contacts, there is an urgent need for other grant programmes to allow maturation and growth of the initial outcomes.

The Academy has welcomed the effort that the current government has begun to make to redress many of the structural impediments to international collaboration facing humanities researchers; most notably, the extension of the ISL programme, albeit modestly in its first iteration, to these disciplines. This decision provides an important signal of the value of all research activity regardless of disciplinary cluster. The decision is also very much in step with international developments in this regard: the humanities and social sciences are now included as priorities in the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7).

We would hasten to emphasise that special measures are not being sought: all that is necessary is that humanities scholars and projects are given equal access to compete on their merits for funding to support international collaboration that is currently available to their science, technology and engineering colleagues. This measure alone will remove the single most obstructive impediment to international research collaboration in the humanities.

Other elements of government policy and strategy relating to research continue to act as impediments to the full participation of humanities researchers in the international collaboration space. The legacy National Research Priorities are overly technocratic in approach to problems, and marginalise some disciplines that have important contributions to make. The National Priorities for Innovation do address this problem, but the continuing existence of the outdated, narrow and unimaginative NRPs in the selection criteria for many government funding programmes continue to militate against innovation and holistic problem-solving. The NRPs (and, potentially, the NPIs) also impose a sometimes inappropriate local focus on an international collaboration with a broader view.

The continued exclusion of research in the humanities, social sciences and arts in the new R&D Tax Credit, due to begin in July 2010, is another impediment to international

collaboration for these disciplines. The scheme provides increased incentives and opportunities for international collaboration in business R&D. The Academy has long argued against the explicit wholesale exclusion of research within the humanities, arts and social sciences from eligibility as core research activity under the current R&D tax arrangements. Australia has a pronounced and growing strength in the creative industries, for example, both directly through the creative economy and indirectly as a component of industry case-based R&D. This entire sector of the economy, a major driver of innovation that contributes very substantially to the national prosperity, is intimately dependent upon the humanities and creative arts. Current international trends demonstrate that the potential exists for far greater returns than our current levels of investment are able to realise. The exclusion of humanities and arts research from legitimate support by R&D tax incentives limits industry's uptake of and engagement with these highly successful fields, constituting an impediment to the involvement of this world-class research activity in the national innovation system. Such exclusion is anti-innovative, closing down creative space and militating heavily against both interdisciplinary and international collaboration. This exclusion is antagonistic to the Federal Government's research and innovation agenda, one stated aim of which is to consolidate and support disciplines in which Australia has a recognised strength.

Some more generic issues that create problems for prospective collaborations include: the lack of harmonisation with partner-country research programmes; blanket matching fund requirements that are insensitive to remarkable variation in capacity; and restriction on support for visiting researchers.

### *Cultural Impediments*

At a cross-cultural level, Australia's current major collaborative partners are predominantly English-speaking countries, and we risk missing out on key research collaborations in emerging research countries such as China and India due to language limitations. This is of particular resonance for humanities research which often focuses on subtle behaviours and social issues, as such barriers can severely limit our contribution to and understanding of our culturally and geographically close neighbours. The Academy supports a national languages policy from primary school upwards in order to develop Australia as a linguistically sophisticated and world-ready population. This ability is not just crucial for researchers themselves, but also for the large structures of engagement in other areas, such as in trade, tourism and politics, which often open the gates to research collaboration opportunities. Australia's language disadvantage is considerable and needs urgent attention: the breadth of the gap between our current capability and that required, and the time that will be needed to close that gap (or even narrow it appreciably), are both considerable.<sup>2</sup>

Low levels of funding, aimed at the transformation of the humanities and interdisciplinary research practices through the uptake of digital technologies is another issue affecting many HCA researchers' ability to effectively engage in international research collaboration. There are an increasing number of opportunities for international collaboration that do not necessarily involve travel, through e-research and research in digital humanities, both at the level of the development of tools and service for such research, and at the level of substantive research projects themselves. For example, the increased speed and reliability of internet connections opens up possibilities to collaborate online in creative work and online publication. Similarly, digitisation of collections from archives, libraries, museums

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<sup>2</sup> See also the Academy's National Languages Summit Communiqué from 2007, and any other recent statements from the Languages Committee.

and galleries is needed desperately to expand research pathways. Already, such projects draw on the expertise of a range of experts who are geographically dispersed. Funding to promote such international links would be of obvious use.

The Academy ISL survey research reveals that HCA researchers want Australia to be seen as an active contributor to the early stages of these new research practices. Other nations around the world face similar challenges as Australia and are moving towards separate solutions. The potential to research solutions collaboratively is strong, particularly as many issues are too large and intricate to be funded and solved in Australia alone. Australian research would benefit greatly from combined international approaches to funding humanities research infrastructure, especially digital and e-research programmes. The Academy's report *Towards an Australian Humanities Digital Archive* (2008) authored by Professor Graeme Turner, makes recommendations to facilitate interdisciplinary and collaborative research as a priority in any work towards materials for digitisation.

## **5. Principles and strategies for supporting international research engagement**

- a) **Equity of access.**  
Governments and institutions should remove systemic bias against the humanities, arts and social sciences where it exists in generalised programmes, allowing researchers in these domains to compete on their merits for research collaboration funding. (Closely targeted programmes aimed at specific activities are obviously excluded.)
- b) **Recognition of difference and specificity.**  
Programmes should be designed to support the specific needs of humanities researchers, along the lines of tailored programmes in particular SET disciplines.
- c) **Holistic understanding.**  
Conduct data-gathering exercises and reviews across the entire research enterprise to accrue a more reliable and comprehensive view of all research activity taking place, both within Australia and in partnership with collaborators abroad.
- d) **Acknowledge the human element to our major problems and opportunities.**  
Science is not the only useful way to understand the nation's and the world's major problems, or to pursue solutions: indeed, on some matters it is helpless.
- e) **Adopt multi-disciplinary approach to real-world problems.**  
The issues we face neither respect nor adhere to disciplinary boundaries: we need all the expertise that has a contribution to make at the table when we are tackling our major problems.
- f) **Support the full range of disciplines to enable their contributions.**
- g) **Support basic research across the board.**  
The elementary curiosity-driven research that takes place far from the applied interface provides the raw material for ground-breaking applications down the line.
- h) **Human development and intellectual interest.**  
The community supports work within history, art history, philosophy and archaeology (to name a few) every bit as much as astronomy and palaeontology, for the same fundamental reason: curiosity about our place in the world, the nature of our kind, and the path we are on is of inherent interest to the public that funds the research enterprise.
- i) **Implement strategic research support initiatives to build capacity.**  
Humanities researchers need some targeted measures to help them compete on a level playing field, after many years of relative neglect. Programmes could include: seed funding to kick-start new collaborations; mentoring schemes; grant writing workshops; information sessions. These could be efficiently delivered through the Academy in close consultation with DIISR.