

## **Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences President's Report to Members for 2008-09**

October 27, 2009

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Since we last met there have been major changes to government policy in research and innovation policy, tertiary and school education, and a significant boost to public spending on knowledge and skills creation in this country.

The Council has in turn developed resources and strategies to encourage and support the HASS sector's contribution to the change and development which has followed.

The Board reports this year on the Council's input and response to the reforms in research and education policy which have dramatically changed the operating environment for the humanities, arts and social sciences.

Just one year ago at the National Press Club, the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator The Hon Kim Carr, spoke to members and supporters of the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences about the changes. In many ways, Carr's speech marked the successful conclusion of the Council's first advocacy agenda and we thank him for his clear statement of the Government's vision for the sector.

Senator Carr unequivocally stated that the humanities, arts and social sciences are critical to the new innovation strategies. In addition to announcing the new Australian Laureate Fellowships Scheme and his intention to open up the International Science Linkages Program to HASS, the Minister said HASS provided vital insight into developing strategies for renewal and solutions to pressing real-world problems. He also frankly and openly endorsed the role of the arts as a rich and rewarding way of understanding and experiencing our lives, stating that "Whatever they may be worth in the marketplace, it is their intrinsic value we should treasure them for".

Throughout the year, the Bradley and Cutler reviews worked their way through the policy process to result in a 25 per cent boost to research and innovation spending. Australian governments committed themselves to the development of a national cultural policy, and have included both languages and creative arts in the national school curriculum.

The Council formed five years ago when our disciplines and the professions and enterprises built on them were considered a second order priority. Our first few years were focused on advocating for the value of our contribution to a prosperous, inclusive, innovative and creative Australia and research to document our argument.

With national recognition of our contribution, there is much to do to support our members as they move into the new environment. The Council has identified and discussed a new agenda of issues around the challenges of integrating the sector in the innovation system. We need to build good structures and models to use in the transfer and translation of the HASS knowledge and skills in a number of arenas, beginning with building bridges between researchers and policy

makers. In arts education the curriculum issues are complex, and with new programs in research infrastructure and research workforce development it is vital that the very diverse practices and career pathways in the HASS disciplines receive attention and recognition if the policies are to succeed. The Government has challenged us all in the sector to respond to the new opportunities offered, and wants us to do so quickly.

My report to you today is about the work of the Council to prepare itself for this second phase of work to build recognition and resources for the humanities, arts and social sciences. It has been a very big year for your Board in doing so. Major changes in governance, the membership structure and consultation procedures, and in staff skills and resources, and our strategic planning have been necessary as we engage in the task.

## **Advocacy**

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CHASS actively contributed to the debate as the policy reviews were underway in 2008. CHASS members have met with government officials for briefings and to discuss implementation processes and consultation for the policy reforms underway. CHASS has worked collaboratively with member organizations to strengthen our voice.

The Council contributed submissions to the Review of the National Innovation System and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation's inquiry into Building Australia's Research Capacity. CHASS has also made submissions to the review of the national broadcasters and to the consultation on the Excellence in Research for Australia Indicators paper in October 2009.

CHASS published three occasional papers all of which had significant impact on policy development.

John H Howard's paper *Between a hard rock and a soft space* (Occasional Paper #5) led to new discussion about the role of design and was integral to reviews of its role associated with the Australia Council, and later to industry discussions about moving design into innovation strategies.

Graeme Hugo's paper *The demographic outlook for Australian universities' academic staff* (Occasional Paper #6) has been important in summarizing the research and evidence on an important issue for the knowledge economy. It was quoted extensively and consolidated CHASS's submissions to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, science and innovation's inquiry into Building Australia's Research Capacity. CHASS believes it was important in setting the agenda for the current development of a research workforce strategy.

Brad Hasemen and Luke Jaaniste's paper *The arts and Australia's national innovation system 1994-2008* (Occasional Paper # 7) has been taken up in subsequent policy development and research.

CHASS spoke at a number of conferences, and participated in discussion in forums ranging from the Informa Higher Education Recruitment conference and the Sydney Writers Festival to lectures and events in member institutions. We were pleased to participate in the Australian Academy of Humanities conference on philanthropy in the humanities, and to organize and sponsor the afternoon session of the Council for Australian Postgraduate Association's 'Postgrad Roadshow' held at the University of New South Wales.

## **Promotion and communications**

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This year CHASS brought practitioner and industry groups together with the university based researchers in design in a dialogue to build an understanding of the issues and opportunities for them. The Design Dialogue resulted in an agenda for future work – and a commitment to work to the recognition of design as the third essential element in innovation. Research, design and development complement and strengthen each other.

We opened up discussions with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations about using Australian social science and educational research into creating capable students in the development of policies to achieve by 2020 the goal of increasing to 20% the number students from disadvantaged backgrounds participating in higher education. CHASS has worked to bring researchers doing ground breaking work in social policy about building aspirations and capabilities in disadvantaged Australian families together with education researchers. This relationship will feature at the 2009 HASS on the Hill's 'Social Inclusion in Education' roundtable.

As well as regular media releases, the Council has developed a new communications and media strategy which will roll out later this year. Already we have noticed extra traffic on the web site and to the links we have there, as we increase regular briefings and newsletters to the member organisations and the broader network of subscribers to our news services. We are focusing particularly on highlighting the work of member organisations and the achievements of leaders in the HASS sector.

## **Coordinating Forum**

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With the 2008 Illing Review of our operations and at the subsequent 'HASS in the Capital' event, CHASS members were active in the discussions about new directions for the Council and the HASS sector, and had an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the coming changes in policy.

Over the year we have sought membership views on various stages of development of a new four year strategic plan, and surveyed you on your priorities for knowledge transfer, advocacy and communications.

The secretariat has worked to support member groupings around specific issues – such as the Design Dialogue participants, and the National Advocates for Arts Education.

The work the Research and Policy Officer carried out in briefing members on the Excellence in Research for Australia issues was important in building understanding about the initiative, and we brought members into the National Academies Forum seminar on ERA.

We have reworked the program for the HASS on the Hill so that the first day has more opportunities for communications and discussion – strengthening the network that CHASS wants to build as an active network of specialists and practitioners. We have also incorporated two roundtable discussions encouraging knowledge transfer on crucial issues for the HASS sector into the second day of the program.

I want to thank all of you who have participated in this work as we renew and strengthen our networks.

We also strengthened relationships with international peers and colleagues with Board members participating in the Canadian Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences annual meeting, and later Canada's Congress of Humanities and Social Sciences. These forums allowed us to meet with North American and European counterparts, and discover a shared interest in international research linkages in the humanities, arts and social sciences.

We have followed up with discussions about the Congress and hope to develop a model for an Australian equivalent which CHASS can discuss with the sector. The Canadian Congress attracts about 7000 participants each year and provides a focus for media, political and business briefings on new research. Each year a university hosts the congress giving the university major profile and attracting investment from city and state authorities. The critical factor which brings the sector together is the combination of autonomous meetings of the various learned societies and discipline associations, together with an umbrella program of trans-disciplinary discussion and debate. CHASS sees this as a model for supporting its member groups in strengthening both depth and range of their disciplines.

## **New strategies**

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After the major consultations with members, CHASS moved to rework its strategic directions. We have recently endorsed six goals to guide work to the end of 2012, based on the member consultations and consideration of the new policy environment

A significant change is to give the communications and promotion program greater priority over the next few years.

We believe that even with the official recognition of HASS and access to new research resources, there is still a very large task ahead in educating and exciting both public and private sector leaders about the opportunity for them in linking with HASS research and creativity.

While HASS writers and commentators are in the media every day, there is only a hazy public perception of the weight and importance of the research and new knowledge Australia is

producing. We have a new communications and media strategy to reach media and on-line networks and a program to support knowledge transfer.

The second is to move to a coordinating and support function for member organizations. We saw that CHASS could provide members with support in their own advocacy and promotion agendas, if it could build the active network of specialists and leaders across the sector. Government and industry need this network to be strong and lively, if they are to understand the potential of our sector – because it is through the network that they will consult with the broad range of organizations involved.

Again our on-line communications are crucial here.

The discussions with our international peers were important in clarifying our thinking about this issue, and we see a clear need for bringing disciplines together in a range of forums.

We responded to the clear message that you found membership structures confusing and have introduced a new set of categories based around the type of organisations involved and their core interest in promotion and advocacy. We took the opportunity to sort out the multiple memberships in some institutions. The result is fewer memberships overall but an ability to link associations, and identify partnerships across the network.

There has also been work to improve governance and accountability, new budgeting and accounting policies, a review of the skills and knowledge required for effective oversight by the Board members, and of course the proposed changes to the constitution which are designed to give greater continuity to the Board's operations.

The Council warmly thanks Mallesons Stephen Jaques, whose Canberra office gave pro bono support in defining and drafting the changes to the constitution. This generous support allowed us to meet our goals of improving governance at a time of major pressure on our resources.

## **Financial outcomes**

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Times are tough, and the changes we are undergoing necessitates new investment. So this year we recorded a loss – there was no external funding for research projects and a significant staff turnover and limited funding meant that we did not run a full HASS on the Hill event.

In the current financial year and against the background of the global financial crisis we have budgeted for a deficit. We believe this is necessary while we build up our communications and coordination resources. This is possible because of the prudent management of earlier CHASS Boards who built up reserves to allow investment in new projects.

From next year we see opportunities to build revenue through new memberships and sponsorships.

## **Board and staff changes**

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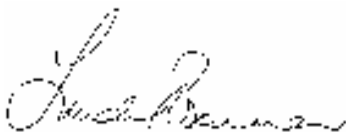
I want to thank each member of the Board for their contribution over this year of major change. Several Board members are leaving or retired earlier in the year and I want to thank them in particular for their commitment. John Byron worked tirelessly through the transition process in 2008 as we restructured the secretariat, while Margaret Seares made a major contribution through her understanding of the research excellence and evaluation issues and her long experience in research policy. Rae Frances has contributed greatly to the membership and governance development.

I want to mention Stuart Hamilton's contribution in particular. Stuart is retiring from the Board after five years of service. His willingness to take on the Secretary's duties is much appreciated, but even more he has brought his considerable management and policy experience to the strategic planning and development of the organisation.

Ross Homel, Astrid Wootton, Meredith Edwards, Catharine Lumby and Stuart Cunningham have offered to stand again for election. I thank them for their commitment and advice over the year, and look forward to working with them as we implement the strategic plan.

Welcome to our new staff Heidi Hutchison, a PhD candidate in International Relations who came on as our second Research and Policy Officer; Avi Amesbury, who moved from Craft Australia to take up the Program Development and Communications role; and Fiona Sivyer, a former graduate student at Charles Darwin and an Indigenous arts specialist who has taken on membership services. Special thanks to Gemma Black, Fenja Theden-Ringl, Phoebe Garrett and book keeper Liz Jermyn who worked with CHASS through the year. Helen O'Neil, our Executive Director, took up the position late last year after several months without a full time director and has worked hard on establishing networks, rebuilding relationships and improving financial control. This year she has also shepherded us through the review of our grant from DIISR. I'd particularly like to thank Helen for all of her work in rebuilding the organisation and her steadfast support of the Board.

Linda Rosenman



President  
October 2009