



21 December

Hon Senator Kim Carr
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

PhDs in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences

Earlier this week CHASS convened a conversation between a dozen of the major players in initiatives aiming to improve the value of a PhD in the humanities, arts and social sciences. We wanted to explore how the PhD might be modernised in terms of the experience it offers and the value to the community of the qualification.

Projects in Australia and overseas have turned the spotlight on the PhD. The purpose of our meeting was to discuss these initiatives and explore the possibility of joint actions and the development of joint recommendations

This moment is particularly opportune, given that the Government has set out a clear agenda for innovation, education and a strengthening of the research effort in Australia (exemplified by the election-time announcement that your Government would double Australian Postgraduate Awards by 2012). Modernising the PhD in the humanities, arts and social sciences would contribute to policy objectives in innovation and research.

The meeting expressed confidence in the value of the current PhD program, a view substantiated by recent research by the Group of Eight showing 79% of recent PhD graduates found their qualification useful or very useful. But there are areas where its value could be increased. For instance:

- Forty-five per cent of HASS PhDs find careers outside research and the university sector: does the system help people acquire skills for jobs in government, industry and the not-for-profit sector?
- Interdisciplinary PhDs are growing in popularity, but research institutions tend to be organised in single discipline silos. How can the strengths of disciplines be maintained while allowing students to work in the fertile territory of cross-disciplinary research?
- Australia's innovative capacity could be enhanced if it were to offer support for foreign students to undertake research degrees.
- A better understanding of retention and completion rates.

CHASS will now organise a one-day workshop early in 2008 to advance these discussions. It will consider research into the PhD both in Australia and overseas; develop recommendations in cases where the evidence is available; and identify areas where we need to conduct more research to provide the answers. We will be writing to you further on this.

The workshop will take place against the backdrop of other discussions already planned by organizations participating in our conversation: Universities Australia, the Group of 8, the Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies; the Council of Deans of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; the Australian Technology Network, the Academies of the Humanities and the Social Sciences, and the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations.

CHASS will invite you to address our workshop and will write to you as soon as the date and venue have been set. We would all be interested in hearing your response to our initial discussions, and are willing to discuss these matters and provide further detail.

I am writing in similar terms to your colleague Julia Gillard, as Minister for Education.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Cunningham', written in a cursive style.

Stuart Cunningham (Professor)

On behalf of participants in the meeting:

Dr John Beaton, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
Dr John Byron, Australian Academy of the Humanities
Ms Jennifer Coulls, Australian Technology Network
Professor Denise Cuthbert, Monash University
Mr Toss Gascoigne, CHASS
Dr John H Howard, CHASS
Professor Max King, Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies
Professor Alan Lawson, University of Queensland
Professor Simon Marginson, University of Melbourne
Mr Nigel Palmer, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
Mr Tim Payne, Group of 8
Professor Mark Sinclair, University of Central Queensland UCQ
Professor Faith Trent, Council of Deans of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Professor Glenn Withers, Universities Australia