

QUALITY RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND LABOR'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences

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Professor Cunningham, Toss Gascoigne, Ladies and Gentlemen - thank you for inviting me to be here today. I welcome the opportunity to speak to you about my views on the place of the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Labor's vision for a future for Australia based on innovation.

Let me begin by giving a firm commitment that Labor values highly:

- The importance of basic research across all disciplines;
- The key role of the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australian intellectual life and society, and also in Labor's vision;
- The goal of a research quality assurance model that is rigorous, transparent and internationally verifiable;
- The concept of peer review, in this context; and
- The independence of research funding bodies including the ARC.

- The need to reconsider our national research priorities, to ensure that they remain appropriate to the second decade of the 21st century.

A context for innovation

Let me note at the outset, too, that as Shadow Minister for Science and Research I take a broad, classical view of the term “science” – my definition is close to the Latin *scientia* or *knowledge*. This is the way the term is used in Europe – to cover knowledge and know-how across the full spectrum of human endeavour.

Here in Australia, I am aware that the term “science” often has a narrow denotation, referring to the natural sciences alone. I sometimes use the word in this narrow, ‘popular’ sense, but I want to make it clear that I regard my own remit, in my portfolio, as a much wider one.

Both as a politician and as one with training and a continuing interest in history, I regard the HASS disciplines as having a vital role in innovation, a vital role in a healthy, just, sustainable and culturally enriched Australia.

That’s a fine sentiment, you might say- exactly what does he mean by that?

Given the enormous challenges faced by Australia, Labor is proposing a major revamp of the national innovation system.

By a national innovation system I mean, in the words of Metcalfe (1995):

"...that set of distinct institutions which jointly and individually contribute to the development and diffusion of new technologies and which provides the framework within which governments form and implement policies to influence the innovation process.. As such it is a system of interconnected institutions to create, store and transfer the knowledge, skills and artefacts which define new technologies."

I argue that creativity is central to an innovation focussed on the most effective use of our human and intellectual capital.

I am suggesting to you that the humanities, arts and social sciences can, and should, assume a central role in what is in reality a \$6 billion annual innovation investment in Australia.

I am arguing that the role of the humanities, arts and social sciences should not be defined by the parameters of ARC funding but rather by its relevance to a wider innovation agenda.

The Australian national innovation system involves the expenditure of \$6 billion of public money per annum. As such, I believe that the public not only has a right to be confident that public money is being well invested and that such money makes a significant contribution to answering social problems.

For my part, I see this as the opportunity to demonstrate the breadth and the effectiveness of social science research.

It is for that reason that I make the point to you that the innovation system that I refer to is a concept that goes far beyond the argument for a knowledge economy: this is not just an argument

about the workforce of the future but more importantly to the shape of our future society.

Why is there so often a gap between what the humanities, arts and social sciences anticipate from the research system and what the public often see as the benefit that they gain from such investment?

Why is it that this government can so easily caricature research in the social sciences, arts and humanities and then proceed to blacklist certain research issues and projects?

Part of the answer lies in advocacy- or the lack of it until recently.

Part of it is due to the reluctance of some political economists and social scientists to engage in public issues.

But part of it is also due to the suspicion with which this government holds universities, and within universities the humanities, arts and social sciences in particular.

Jackie Kelly's throw-away line from 2004 that UWS didn't need additional funding because "no one in my electorate goes to university" isn't a straw in the wind- it reflects an engrained attitude.

Or when the then Minister for Communications and the Arts, Richard Alston, approved funding for National ICT Australia (NICTA) he also deliberately placed it outside established research or university structures.

In his eyes, NICTA needed to be quarantined from such ill influences as the ABC or the academics and researchers against whom the history and broader cultural wars have been directed.

It is just one of the reasons why I oppose the concept of 'impact' as it is now being applied by the government to its RQF proposal.

All research should have impact: good research should have impact.

But as it stands at the moment impact is essentially code for the commodification of research.

For this government, if it is a commodity they understand it, if it's an idea they distrust it.

In their eyes, public benefit research is somehow a lesser form of research than that which creates products and provides immediate cash flows.

Within the government's RQF model, the impact factor remains unverifiable, ill-defined and badly-designed.

Such a measure seems to be a proxy for industry collaboration or community engagement. In our view, it should be funded explicitly.

If applied, it will also have the effect of imposing the language and processes of science on the humanities.

The humanities, arts and social sciences do not need to adopt the language of science to legitimise its participation in the innovation system.

Labor holds a very different view.

Your disciplines bring their own creativity to research- I wholeheartedly agree with the observation made on the CHASS paper, *Collaborating Across the Sectors*, that creativity, in its disciplinary forms, is fundamental to science, politics, business and, indeed, everyday life. (page 57)

I believe that a successful national innovation system is the key to Australia's future.

It represents the means by which we can secure economic prosperity and social equity beyond the mining boom. Australian society faces many challenges.

High-quality universities and high-quality research in all disciplines lie right at the centre of that vision and that strategy.

The question for you and your colleagues is this: do you want to be at the centre of this enterprise, or not?

I hope that you do.

New Direction for innovation

Recently Kevin Rudd and I released a major policy paper on innovation – *New Directions for innovation, competitiveness and productivity*.

The paper includes a Ten Point Plan for *rebuilding Australia's national innovation system*. Integral to that plan is an unequivocal commitment to restoring and building up our universities, and to the centrality of basic research. It commits a Labor Government to a strengthened national R&D effort, one that we want to see doubled over time.

The fundamental challenge we face is how to sustain prosperity and maintain social equity – our social fabric. This is particularly important given the inevitable prospect that the mining boom will end.

Let me briefly give just a few examples.

Perhaps the greatest test of our creativity and resolve is that posed by climate change. This is simultaneously an economic, social, environmental and moral question – all of these.

It is a question that will require sustained, cross-disciplinary research.

In fact climate change presents us with enormous opportunities.

We believe that our researchers can come up with new ways to reduce and manage greenhouse emissions.

We can also deal with the social impact of change in ways that do not impose the greatest burden on those least capable of paying, and we can find better ways to communicate about it.

Similar comments could be made about the ageing of our population: this is an issue with far-reaching economic, social, political and historical impact.

We also face a rebalancing of global economic systems with the rise of China and India.

China is doubling its investment in research every seven years.

We already know that Australia's underinvestment in research has left us with only 7.8 PhDs per thousand of the workforce,

compared with Canada on 8.2, Germany on 20.1 and Switzerland on 27.5.

In short, we are being left behind.

But the solution is not just to fix simple metrics such as these.

I also fully endorse recent arguments from the Group of 8 and others that increased investment must be accompanied by a similar emphasis on quality.

Our research can, and must, match the best in the world.

How will Labor turn things around?

Labor's discussion paper offers a Ten Point Plan for rebuilding the national innovation system, which has at its core a drive for cultural change that will reshape behaviour both in the economy and in the academy.

Among other things, Labor's Ten Point Plan includes the following:

- Labor will strengthen investment in creativity and knowledge generation.
- We will support international partnerships and collaboration in Australian R&D.
- We will strengthen publicly funded innovation and research infrastructure, and develop multiple pathways for industry and the community to reach the expertise of our universities and research agencies. In this context, I am referring to the work of the Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies as much as I am referring to CSIRO.

- We will encourage cross disciplinary and cross-institutional collaboration.

Labor has announced that we will bring responsibility for innovation, industry, science and research into a single Commonwealth Department.

It's an irony that the high priests of market economics, the Productivity Commission, have had to remind the Government that its approach to commercialisation of research is misguided and essentially misinterprets the concept of innovation.

The Productivity Commission's critique is wide ranging. It also argues that:

- the Research Quality Framework is more trouble than it's worth,
- that the Government's approach has undermined what should be the proper role of universities within the innovation system – namely:

the importance of basic research for the creation of new knowledge;

training the next generation of first class researchers and knowledge creators; and

making a serious contribution to civic and community engagement, and

- that the highly-successful CRC program has been corroded, with the result that this program delivers fewer benefits to Australian society than it should.

The RQF

Labor will dump the RQF.

As a policy instrument, the RQF is in Labor's view ill-considered and, I repeat poorly designed.

It does nothing to restore the independence of such institutions as the ARC. It does not strengthen peer review.

Let me say, however, that both here and internationally the debate about the need for a university research quality assurance framework – one that has a role in driving funding – has in fact moved on. It is widely accepted that such a model is required.

It is also accepted that such an instrument will inevitably drive behaviour on the part of universities. This is no bad thing, either. Indeed, the purpose of such a model is just that – to influence how institutions act in relation to research, and to encourage them to nurture and value excellence in research.

Labor favours an approach based on metrics.

I do not mean, however, merely a mechanical measure.

Labor's approach might be called "enriched" or "enhanced" metrics – a verifiable basket of factors that will involve expert peer assessment that, while expert and knowledgeable, is in the end subjective.

The contents of the basket will vary across disciplines.

Recognising the complexity and the sensitivities involved, Labor will engage fully with the research community to ensure that we identify the critical issues in the system we finally adopt.

And we will draw upon the work already undertaken with DEST on the parameters for the metrics to be used in each disciplinary field. That will include the work carried out in 2005 by CHASS.

To this audience, I emphasise that there will need to be special measures undertaken for the humanities, the performing arts and the visual arts, where a crude metrics model does not work well.

We will take seriously the situation of those disciplines where major outputs - such as lengthy books - are produced slowly.

Other measures, to proxy for metrics, could include a publisher index, the nature of reviews, exhibition place and location, and the venue of a performance

Unlike the current Government, Labor will set in place measures that will enable good researchers everywhere to stay active in enquiry and knowledge generation.

At the same time, consistent with our focus on innovation, we will bring that knowledge out of universities so that our economy, our social fabric, and our culture are enriched.

The Prime Minister's Innovation Council

We also want to broaden the role of the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council and are actively considering options to the current, more-focussed model.

We believe that such a Council needs to address innovation across the board. That means the crucial contributions made to innovation by the HASS disciplines.

Conclusion

Australia is at the crossroads.

A vigorous, forward-looking economy is a guarantor for things that really matter – peace; social harmony; social justice; and a fulfilling, prosperous life for all Australians.

In all of these the humanities, arts and social sciences play a vital part.

And underpinning a strong economy and a resilient society is a culture of innovation, fuelled by the ideas and creativity of Australian researchers across the full spectrum of intellectual endeavour.

That's why a Labor Government will strive for excellence in research, and will put in place a means for maximising that goal.