

CHASS was formed a little over three years ago. What was the impetus? Why did the Federal Government provide initial support, and what value does it see in CHASS? How is CHASS different to the Academies?

This is an edited version of a speech Toss Gascoigne will deliver next month at a colloquium in Malaysia, at the Universiti Kebangsaan in Bangi.

### **The problem**

Successful national strategies for innovation and economic and social development require consideration of how to harness the contribution of the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) as well as the natural sciences, technology and engineering. Governments in Australia have, broadly speaking, accepted the importance of the natural sciences and technology. The office of the Chief Scientist is well-established as a high profile source of advice to Government, and the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council meets regularly to discuss issues and problems in Australia.

Departmental and ministerial committees (for instance, to establish national research priorities) are richly populated with natural scientists and technologists, with only token representation from the humanities, arts and social sciences. Ministers make regular statements about the skills shortage, but this is always expressed in terms of scientists and engineers.

People in research, education and practice in the humanities, arts and social sciences are barely represented in the forums mentioned above: they have less influence in the decision-making process, and less access to funding programs.

Australia has a number of peak organizations in the humanities, arts and social sciences. Organisations such as the Academy of the Humanities, the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, or the councils representing groups of Deans or Heads of Departments in universities (such as the Deans of Law, or Education, or Business) may be quite effective in pursuing the agenda of their group, but none of them has the capacity or the remit to make the broad case for our sector: the humanities, arts and social sciences.

CHASS was formed, in large part by those very bodies, to fill this gap.

### **About CHASS**

CHASS represents the interests of people working in the humanities, arts and social sciences. Many of these people are involved in research and education at the tertiary level, while others are practitioners. Our principal interests are in policy advice: in seeking to influence the Government and the bureaucracy in respect of the directions in which policy should be developed.

So our main function is to act as a policy funnel. We consult our sector, test draft policies with them, and then represent these views to Government. When Government responds, we convey those views back to our sector. This function is of significant value to the Australian government, indeed, to any government.

We also aim to strengthen the networks of HASS people through events and symposia. CHASS has run events for the directors of university-based research centres; for early-career researchers from all disciplines; and for Federal Parliamentarians to discuss policy issues with academics. These events allow people to meet, to discuss issues of common interest, and to develop ideas and plans.

CHASS has 100 Member organizations, including the Academy of the Humanities and the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia. It includes peak groups such as the Deans of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, leading universities, and learned societies and groups such as the Australian Sociological Association and the Design Institute of Australia.

(It is important to note that Australia has two separate Academies to deal with the humanities, arts and social sciences, and international groups should correspond with both if they wish to reach all disciplines in this area.)

### **The formation of CHASS**

CHASS was formally established on 16 June 2004, when the constitution was adopted at the inaugural AGM at the National Press Club in Canberra.

An organisation like CHASS had been discussed for a number of years. These plans came to a head when the Academy of the Humanities wrote formally to the Minister, requesting seed funding of \$AU200,000 to allow for the establishment of the new organisation.

This initial funding for CHASS was provided by the Federal Government in the budget of 2003. The then Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson, observed in a media statement that:

*The humanities, arts and social sciences are critically important to the future development of Australia. Not only do they play a key role in supporting the national innovation system, they make a significant contribution to the development of our society, culture and individual identity. It is from this sector especially that the soul is passed from one generation to the next.*

A steering committee, , was established on 12 November 2003 led to the inaugural AGM eight months later. The AGM was the culmination of the first of the annual "Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences on the Hill"<sup>1</sup> (HOTH) events, which bring 150 people to Canberra for personal meetings with members of federal Parliament.

The first President and the first Board were elected at the AGM, and CHASS was now in business.

### **The aims of the organisation**

It was envisaged that CHASS would play a key promotional and advocacy role for the humanities, arts and social sciences, and serve as a coordinating forum for academics, students, business, practitioners and the broader community. It would represent people working in research, education and practice.

The following aims were set out in the constitution adopted at the inaugural AGM:

*The objectives of CHASS are to promote the interests of the humanities, arts and social sciences in Australia. Specifically, the aims of CHASS are to:*

- *represent the interests of the sector*
- *promote the contribution of the sector to government, industry and the public*

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. Capital Hill, where the national Parliament is located.

- *provide a forum for discussion between the humanities, arts and social sciences sectors in Australia*
- *build up the innovative capacity of Australia, through better linkages between this sector, and science, engineering and industry.*

Membership was (and is) open to any organisation in research, education or practice in the humanities, arts and social sciences which shares our constitutional aims.

### **The development of CHASS**

The first Board immediately moved to make representations on behalf of CHASS members, and submissions on issues such as the Research Quality Framework (similar to the British RAE); the Federation Fellows program and the national investment in research followed.

At its launch in 2004, Minister Nelson announced that he was commissioning CHASS to carry out research to inform policy. To this end we have produced a series of policy reports: Commercialisation of research activities in the humanities, arts and social sciences in Australia; Measures of quality and impact of publicly funded research in the humanities, arts and social sciences; and Collaborating across the sectors: the relationships between the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS), and science, technology, engineering and medicine (STEM).

The Board also wanted to create a strong membership base, and create new networks across the sector. Eighteen months ago we wrote to all our Members, who at that stage had paid a nominal amount to join CHASS:

*Now it is time for the Members of CHASS to become the major stakeholders in our own enterprise. The initial stages of our operation have been supported by a grant from the Department for Education, Science and Training, but now we need to move to a new subscription model which makes our organisation sustainable in the long term.*

A national membership drive was undertaken. Subscriptions now make up a significant part of CHASS income (about 45%); and key members include the Academies of the Humanities and the Social Sciences in Australia, the DASSH Deans, leading universities, and peak disciplinary councils.

CHASS has worked with members to develop shared policy positions and organise events. These include annual symposia for directors of university-based centres of research and education enable the most innovative, network-minded and connected directors in universities to discuss matters of common interest.

CHASS quickly established itself as an authoritative source of advice on the views of our sector.

### **Our recent activities**

Over the last year, CHASS has moved beyond the initial stages of establishing itself as a peak Council representing the interests of people working in the humanities, arts and social sciences.

The highlights of this last year include:

- The HOTH event, the third in a series which brings people working in research and education in the humanities, arts and social sciences to Canberra, for individual meetings with members of Parliament
- Convening workshops in Melbourne and Brisbane, to allow a discussion on the Research Quality Framework by the visual and performing arts, architecture and design
- Commissioning and launching a report on collaborations between the HASS and STEM (science-technology-engineering-medicine) sectors
- Helping persuade the Productivity Commission to revise its views on the value of the HASS sector, through submissions to a major inquiry into the public investment in science and innovation
- Convening a two-day symposium at University of Technology, Sydney for the Directors of university-based centres of research and education.
- Two dinners for Members of Parliament and their staffers, to discuss the issues of Australia's Asian edge: the view from Europe; and the "Pathways to Prevention" project
- A public event to explore the role of culture, featuring speakers John Holden, Head of Culture at Demos in London, and Stuart Cunningham, Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at Queensland University of Technology
- Our AGM managed the successful transition from the inaugural President, approved the audited reports and elected a new President and Board
- Increasing the number of subscribers to our newsletter to over 1,100
- Providing advice to the Department of Education, Science and Training on the potential value of metrics in assessing Political Science and History
- Running Board meetings in Sydney, Brisbane and Canberra, each featuring a discussion with other national groups to canvas matters of mutual interest
- Making submissions on the Australian Research Council's Federation Fellows program, and to a review of the Higher Education Support Act
- Employing new staff to increase the capacity of CHASS for research projects and to organise events
- Maintaining our membership base after the implementation of a new subscription system

What follows is an extract from the report by CHASS President Professor Stuart Cunningham to our AGM last October. (The full report can be read on our web site: [www.chass.org.au](http://www.chass.org.au)):

CHASS made a strong case for the value of HASS work in two submissions to the Productivity Commission inquiry into the public investment in science and innovation: initially when the report was being drafted, and later in response to the draft report. We argued

*that the humanities, arts and social sciences are highly relevant to innovation. The HASS sector contributes in a number of ways: not just as a supporting act to science; but also as an equal partner with science, technology, engineering and medicine in collaborative projects; and in the new post smoke-stack era of industry, as innovators in their own right. A study aiming to "cover all key elements in the innovation system" should explicitly recognise the HASS contribution.*

The Productivity Commission has accepted at least some of these points, and in one area significantly changed its mind as the result of our arguments. From the final report:

*The Commission shares the view put by CHASS that research in [the creative arts, humanities and social sciences] is critical to innovation. It plays an important role in many government activities and in those instances it is routinely funded by government. It is also increasingly important in business as the service sector expands and as less technological activities play a larger role in innovation generally (such as business activities that require understanding of complex human behaviours - marketing, business re-organisation, and human resource management). (From the Productivity Commission final report, Page 387*

The CHASS submission to a review of the Federation Fellows program run by the Australian Research Council expressed concern at the low rate of appointment of researchers from the humanities, arts and social sciences, and an even lower rate of female appointments. Our submission contained nine recommendations...

CHASS is one of seven organizations invited to nominate a representative for a review of the Australian Standard Research Classifications. The review is being conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics at the request of [the Department of Education, Science and Training].

We have played an active part in the review. We organised a discussion involving the ABS, the Academy of the Humanities and the Academy of Social Sciences, and subsequently distributed a questionnaire to our subscribers which generated over 40 responses to the ABS....

CHASS President Stuart Cunningham has been invited to give a paper to the Shanghai Jiao Tong expert meeting in November. The current system of ranking universities relies almost exclusively on the natural sciences and excludes the humanities, arts and social sciences. The paper will make a case for the inclusion of these important disciplines in international rankings systems.

CHASS organised two dinners for Members of Parliament and their staffers, to discuss the issues where our sector has particular expertise. The first dinner was led by Professor Rikki Kersten, Dean of the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific. She drew on her experience of living and working in Europe to lead discussion on "Australia's Asian edge: the view from Europe".

The second was a discussion of the Pathways to Prevention Project, an innovative crime prevention partnership between Mission Australia and the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance at Griffith University. Discussion was led by Professor Ross Homel, of Griffith University.

The project works with preschool children, aged 4-6, and their families living in a disadvantaged suburb in the south west of Brisbane. It is based on the concept of "developmental prevention" or intervention at crucial transition points which mark new experiences and relationships in life, such as when a child starts school.

### **The difference between the role of CHASS and the role of the Academies of Social Sciences in Australia, and of the Humanities**

Neither CHASS nor the Academies have any role in disbursing funding for research. This function is handled in Australia by the Australian Research Council or the National Health and Medical Research Council.

The Academies and CHASS were established for different reasons and have different functions within the Australian system. The Academies are made up of elected fellows who represent the elite of their disciplines. By their very nature, they

are elite organisations and are thus able to embody the essence of the value of their respective disciplinary knowledge for the advancement of society. They promote their disciplines through supporting high-quality publications and scholarly pursuits, and concentrate on advancing scholarship and excellence.

They have an international role, maintaining discourses and links across international boundaries. Excellence in research and international scholarly cooperation are priority areas.

They also play a role in national policy-making, within the real limitations imposed by restricted resources. In a statement of goals, both Academies signal their willingness to comment where appropriate on national needs and priorities, and to act as a consultant and an advisory body. The four learned Academies (Science, Technological Science and Engineering, Humanities, and Social Sciences) in Australia regularly meet to discuss issues of national significance from their respective viewpoints.

By contrast, CHASS is mass-based rather than elite. It represents organisations, rather than being made up of elected individual scholars. Subject to the approval of the Board and the payment of an appropriate subscription, any organisation which supports our objectives can join CHASS. Our 100 member groups probably cover 100,000 individuals across research, education and practice across Australia, in contrast to the 450 members of each of the Academies.

CHASS is very wide in its scope. It represents the humanities, arts AND the social sciences, rather than just one section. This breadth requires a careful balancing when it comes to the election of the board, and in the selection of activities and events for CHASS involvement.

CHASS is overtly political in operation. It exists to influence government and business and to serve broadly the sectors it represents. All our activities are aimed at increasing the influence of our sector when it comes to the setting of policy objectives: for instance, we actively advocate for more representation on the internal boards and committees that fine-tune policy settings. Our membership wants to make a greater contribution to national priorities and believes it has the skills and knowledge to do so.

We also want to increase the economic resources allocated to the humanities, arts and social sciences, not by a redistribution of resources away from the natural sciences but by increasing the size of the funding pie.

These interests are essentially shared by the Academies; and CHASS regards the Academies as key allies in this battle for relevance, influence and funding. The strength of our relationship depends to a recognition of our different strengths, priorities and abilities.