

Newsletter 15 for April 2006

In this issue:

1. [Ministerial interference with ARC grants ends](#)
 2. [Expanding Horizons chockablock](#)
 3. [Cross-disciplinary discussions](#)
 4. [Engaging with Europe](#)
 5. [Brain drain - or recirculation?](#)
 6. [Arts degrees under fire in UK](#)
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1. Ministerial interference with ARC grants ends

CHASS welcomes a statement by new Education Minister Julie Bishop that she will not over-ride the grant recommendations of the ARC.

Her views were reported in the Australian's Higher Education Supplement on March 22:

"FEDERAL Education, Science and Training Minister Julie Bishop has expressed strong support for the Australian Research Council and the system of peer review it uses to distribute \$540 million in research funds each year.

"She has also signalled she will not pursue the same controversial practice as her predecessor Brendan Nelson, who vetoed research grants in the past two years.

"I know Dr Nelson exercised ministerial discretion on a very few occasions," Ms Bishop told the HES yesterday.

"My view is that if the peer review process has the independence and integrity to ensure that it's robust, then I would see no need for me to second-guess that process."

This will help restore faith in the integrity of the processes Australia uses to award research funding. CHASS President Malcolm Gillies had written to the previous Minister on this issue.



2. Expanding Horizons chockablock

There was a last-minute tsunami of registrations of early-career researchers and professionals for "Expanding Horizons", and 220 people will attend our event on March 28-29.

The meetings with Members of Parliament have been finalised, and all registrants informed on which MP they are meeting and the name of their partner.

Minister Julie Bishop will address the group at the National Library, and Sigrid Thornton's National Press Club address will be televised by the ABC for those unable to attend.

ALP Finance spokesperson Lindsay Tanner will speak at a session at Parliament House.



3. Cross-disciplinary discussions

"Expanding Horizons" registrants come from science, technology, engineering and medicine, as well as the humanities, arts and social sciences.

One of the drivers behind the event is to promote a discussion on cross-disciplinary work. The experiences and ideas of registrants will feed into CHASS' project on this subject.

It was CP Snow who famously spoke of the divide between the humanities and the sciences, in his Rede lecture in 1959, *The Two Cultures*. He maintained that these two cultures OUGHT to produce creative chances and new thinking:

"The chances are there now," he said. "But they are there, as it were, in a vacuum, because those in the two cultures can't talk to each other ...

"Thirty years ago the cultures had long ceased to speak to each other but at least they managed a kind of frozen smile across the gulf. Now the politeness has gone, and they just make faces."

Our event will test out Snow's claim, 50 years on... .



4. Engaging with Europe

Claus Novotny of the European Science Foundation and Michaela Bauer of the Australian Embassy in Brussels will lead an informal discussion on how Australians can engage with Europe at the "Expanding Horizons" event. This will be at Parliament House on Wednesday March 29.

And Henk Stronkhorst, head of the Social Sciences Unit at the ESF, is speaking on the same broad topic at a seminar on Monday 27 March at 3 pm at the National Europe Centre, ANU.

He is visiting Australia for 8 days from March 20.



5. Brain drain - or recirculation?

Moving Ideas is a new four-year ARC Discovery project to be conducted by Professor Jane Kenway and Dr Johannah Fahey in the Faculty of Education at Monash University.

The study will explore the globalisation of ideas through the movement around the globe of academics in the social sciences and humanities. It will examine the movement of knowledge itself and its implications for academics' ideas and identities, politics and ethics.

It will also explore implications for academic networks and research policies.

If you would like to participate, comment, or would like more information, please contact Jane Kenway, jane.kenway [at] education.monash.edu.au (03) 9905 2071 or Johannah Fahey, johannah.fahey [at] education.monash.edu.au (03) 9905 2776.



6. Arts degrees under fire in UK

"Too many students are wasting their time and money on traditional arts degrees that are likely to leave them jobless, a group of Conservative MPs has warned.

In a new paper, the right-leaning Cornerstone group of Conservative MPs argued universities were becoming overcrowded with students who would not benefit from higher education study.

The paper, written by the Conservative MP for Canterbury and Whitstable, Julian Brazier, suggests that vocational degrees in subjects such as media studies provided students with better job prospects. ...

"Everyone with the educational attainment to benefit from a degree course should have the opportunity to go to university - as [Conservative party leader] David Cameron has rightly said. But this paper will suggest that participation has already passed that point and growing numbers of those entering the higher education system are not benefiting from it."

Mr Brazier said universities were staffed by academics that were seriously underpaid and working under difficult circumstances.

"At the same time, much of the output from some of Britain's universities is unproductive, not just a waste of money but a waste of the students' time; over a third of students who enter higher education either drop out, become unemployed or settle into jobs for which a university degree has little value," he said.

(From *The Guardian*, Wednesday March 08 2006)



Regards

Toss Gascoigne

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For more information, please contact:

Toss Gascoigne

Executive Director

Council of the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences

Phone: +61 2 6249 1995

director@chass.org.au