



8 April 2021

RE: University Research Commercialisation Scheme

As President of the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) in Australia, I write on behalf of the CHASS Board to give our perspectives on the University Research Commercialisation Scheme. CHASS is a peak body with a membership of over 40 HASS organizations, including academic discipline associations, universities and members from HASS associated industries.

In this submission I make two overarching statements before addressing questions raised in the Consultation Paper released by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment. I conclude by noting areas in which commercialisation in the Humanities Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) sector can be supported.

Principles

1. The Council is supportive of new avenues to enhance research commercialisation as long as it is *in addition to and not at the expense of supporting the broader educational, basic research and engagement missions of Australian universities*. As recognised in the Consultation Paper, impact is a much larger concept than commercialisation and resourcing and support for commercialisation should not diminish other research outcomes for the Australian community.
2. Avenues for supporting the commercialisation of knowledge and insights drawn from HASS research are essential to supporting the broader publics our universities serve. This is true for all of our universities but particularly those with a strong place-based mission, for example in regional areas or in the growing outer suburbs of our major cities.

Appropriate mechanisms for supporting commercialisation

The publics that our universities serve face challenges and opportunities involving significant technological, environmental, economic, demographic and cultural change. The Consultation Paper asks whether ‘missions’ are an appropriate mechanism to drive investment in the commercialisation of research. The mission approach sets as a goal the solution of a complex challenge (like those mentioned above) and researchers in the public and private sectors strive to achieve it. A focus on complex challenges that facilitates research engagement across the breadth of the Academy is an appropriate way to channel activity and provide broad support for the commercialization of research. It recognizes the interdisciplinary nature of the solutions required by industry partners and the community today.

The Consultation Paper asks about best approaches to selecting missions, and whether a stage-gated model is suited for the purpose of the Scheme. Recognising levels of risk at different stages and different types of industry-academic collaboration is important, but the model presented (p. 8) is more appropriate to a narrow concept of technological innovation than a broader understanding of commercialisable research.

Australia's cities are regularly ranked as among the most livable in the world, appearing on lists of the top global cities for international students, and for culture and literature. Our global position as an English speaking, cosmopolitan society in the Asia Pacific region, with a world-class higher education sector and vibrant cities and regions, means that our greatest competitive advantage lies in areas closely aligned to our galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) sector, the culture industries and tourism and in the flourishing of sustainable communities that enhance human potential. This is particularly relevant to the question of how to select projects for commercialisation. If the models and criteria for supporting commercialisable research focus on areas that overlook this competitive advantage, significant opportunities will be lost.

Barriers

Making use of this advantage will require investment and upskilling in the HASS sector. The Consultation Paper asks how commercialisation can be incentivised and academics given the right skills to pursue commercial opportunities.

In 2005 CHASS released a publication outlining six interconnected challenges facing the commercialisation of research in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciencesⁱ.

1. Industry lacks understanding of the value of HASS research
2. There are no standard practices for industry engagement in HASS
3. The HASS research sector needs to improve commercialisation skills
4. Our universities are better equipped to support STEM than HASS research commercialisation
5. Commercial work is not well incentivised for HASS researchers in our universities
6. R&D spending on HASS is very limited relative to STEM (related to lack of understanding of possibilities of HASS).

While some progress has been made since, the issues we identified in 2005 are still current and were recently used to frame the **Aspect Initiative**ⁱⁱ in the UK, which has the specific aim of developing avenues to support commercialisation in the Social Sciences. It was launched in 2018 with 5 million pounds funding from Research England. Aspect adds two new items to this listⁱⁱⁱ, which also characterise the Australian situation.

7. Much of the value of HASS research to industry is in the direct expertise of researchers, much more than in product development. This may not be as well captured in commercialisation supports, schemes and legal frameworks (for example, patents are less appropriate, copyright laws have limitations).
8. Definitions and operationalisations of Research and Development are often too narrow to capture substantial areas of HASS expertise, such as data collection and analysis and curation.

Next steps

The Consultation Paper asks how better industry-university collaboration incentives can be developed. To do this requires a multi-pronged approach. The HASS disciplines are diverse and offer diverse opportunities for commercialisation and have different challenges to face. For example, smaller grants and tenders are available in the GLAM sector than in education, business, law and sociology. *The same blanket criteria for accessing commercialisation support should not be applied across all areas of research.*

The Consultation Paper asks which stakeholders should be involved in the governance arrangements. For many in the HASS disciplines, as in other research sectors, there is a deeply held belief in the broader value of the research they do outside of direct commercial applicability. However, a broader commitment to engaging with the community to improve understanding of what makes us human and to improve the quality of our lives does point many HASS researchers in the direction of commercialisation.

For many in HASS, expert consulting work will be a more common pathway to commercialisation than product development, leading to future opportunities for working with industry while bringing additional benefits to universities teaching in HASS, such as improving the delivery of work integrated learning. A broad and flexible understanding of commercialisation needs to be adopted in any new scheme, for example giving due recognition to the commercial value of expertise. To ensure this, HASS sector involvement is critical. The people and place-focused skills that HASS researchers provide the community are central to Australia's competitive advantage and to building the successful Australian society of the future. On behalf of CHASS, I am happy to offer access to its extensive network of HASS expertise to assist further as the consultation process continues.

Sincerely



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ⁱ Gascoigne T & Metcalf J (2005) Commercialisation of research activities in the humanities, arts and social sciences in Australia, CHASS Occasional paper. <https://www.chass.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/PAP20050501TG.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://aspect.ac.uk/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://aspect.ac.uk/resources/now-is-the-time-to-transform-how-we-think-about-social-science-commercialisation/>