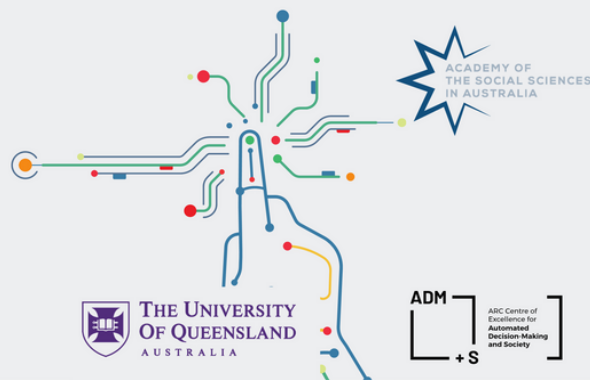


Decadal Plan for Social Science Research Infrastructure 2023-32



Submission # 18

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Response

It is good to see what the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia has come up with and it does some really good things.

It is great that it makes clear the need to include a data science perspective on the social sciences and highlights the importance of examining how we manage data, issues of governance, privacy, and indigenous knowledge rights.

It is also good that it is clear on the need to pay respects to social science concepts, the impact of research on peoples' lives, and the risks and concerns around data mining on both a local and global scale.

It recognises that what we are doing impacts people's lives and that we need to be mindful of social expectations around research and researchers, which is a positive thing.

The matter of indigenous knowledge is something that Flinders University and CBGL could make a strong contribution to, particularly around the data government, management and regulation of indigenous knowledge. This is a hot topic and Flinders have a lot of specific expertise in this area.

Criminology in particular has been focussing on providing good training on codesigning research with indigenous community members, making sure they are paid appropriately, and being careful of who they work with. There are a lot of complexities in this space that still need to be worked out, including the issue of being too tokenistic with indigenous engagements.

One major gripe with the plan is that it is very hard science orientated and lacks the presence of 'people'. It very much mimics a hard science-based report and is pushing a STEM idea of qualitative research.

If this work is to be useful it must be properly communicated and made accessible to stakeholders. Why bother doing all this if no one knows about it or it is not readily accessible?

The plan is basically sound, however it is not inspirational.

There are three big issues that need particular attention:

- The first concerns the rules, expectations, and mutual benefits to be generated via collaborative / co-designed research which directly involves Indigenous participants (whether as co-researchers / lead CIs, or as participants in yarning groups, etc). The processes and systems for establishing long-term relationships with Indigenous organisations (and individuals within) remain ad hoc at best (the AITSIS statement has many good principles within it, but putting them into practice is a completely different and sometimes unworkable ball game). There are significant unresolved issues around data sovereignty and, more pointedly, around appropriate payment / compensation for Indigenous knowledge that need sorting. It is, to be frank, a minefield and we are really only just coming to terms with things in this sphere. The Academy seems increasingly to laud research connected to "quick wins", "definitive results", and demonstrable (immediate) impacts. I could be mistaken, but these conflict sharply with the ethos that, in my experience, seems to matter most to Indigenous people. That ethos is one of careful and lengthy cultivation / nurturing of trust and confidence between relevant parties around common areas of concern. This requires, to use Isabel Stengers' term, the promotion and protection of a 'slow science' (a phrase not to be mistaken with a process that fails ultimately to produce "results"). So here's my point, I think there is a lot of work left to do in this space.
- My second concern is around the whole structure of competitive research—especially competitive funding. While there has been some limited recent signs of shorter times to funding outcomes (witness the Industry Fellowship rounds), the lead time between submission and funding announcements (particularly for the ARC) remains problematic. I suspect that these timelines cause all manner of planning problems in terms academic life (and "productivity") from year to year (e.g., who can truly know what they are capable of taking on and committing to in any annual

- cycle for “fear” of maybe having to add into the mix a large grant (and associated time commitment). There is no good reason why decisions about big grant funding cannot be made within, say, 3 months of submission (big corporations do it, why can’t other bodies?). There are significant inefficiencies here that need addressing. The ongoing debate around how best to fund the true costs of research also need to be brought to the fore.
- My third concern is that I don’t see any forward thinking in the Decadal Plan around building sustainable academic research careers—especially in relation to how to relieve some of the substantial pressures faced by ECRs in Australian universities. There is a lot of technical talk in the plan, but very little relational talk / focus on how to build inclusive and sustained research(er) environments. Perhaps that is something that can really only be tackled on an institution by institution basis. But I think it’s essential to at least signal the importance of the issue in the Plan. I guess I’m thinking of the question: how might we make research for ECRs a more attractive and achievable role?