AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS DEANS COUNCIL

18 August 2023
Email submission: submissions@socialsciences.org.au

Dear Chris,

Re: *Decadal Plan for Social Science Research Infrastructure 2023-32*

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia's *Decadal Plan for Social Science Research Infrastructure 2023–32*. The ABDC commends the Academy for undertaking this important initiative to support the development of critical research infrastructure in social sciences, and to expand our research capabilities, outputs, and impact.

The ambitiousness and complexity of the plan warrants a long-term horizon, and the Academy's proposal of implementing a federated approach to the data ecosystem is welcomed.

In this submission, the ABDC highlights issues for the Academy to consider for successful implementation of the proposed plan:

Deposit and storage infrastructure

As noted in the discussion paper, currently there is no common deposit and storage infrastructure to share data assets — taking a coordinated approach to identifying large longitudinal datasets that can be shared is a welcome step.

Of particular interest is the objective to collect longitudinal data around specific themes that can be used by broad sets of researchers. This will be of immense value for multidisciplinary research collaborations in areas such as climate change and energy transition, which require input across STEM, social sciences, and humanities.

Coordination of datasets by an established body, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), would enhance university and researcher trust in a federated system. This necessarily raises questions about funding, resourcing, and the legislative framework underpinning the bureau's operations.

Ethics, licensing and regulation

Business researchers note that there may be licensing or ethical constraints on data sharing — for example, purchased data may be subject to contractual prohibitions on sharing, or ethical constraints may prevent the sharing of data collected about human subjects. These constraints may limit the usefulness of commonly shared data.

The Decadal Plan raises additional issues of data security, where data is centrally shared, which are not strongly addressed in the document. This challenge will need to be addressed in a holistic manner across organisations for consistency and in developing common understandings and practices around data security and sharing.

Upskilling for researchers

The comments above on ethics, licensing and regulation have implications for the training and education of researchers and professional staff who manage data.

It is important for the Academy and its stakeholders to think about issues such as what skills are needed; who needs those skills; and how to keep training up to date. Also, more specific issues such as how we include such needs in grant and other funding applications.

To support upskilling the Academy could facilitate the development of a national data science and cyber security program for researchers. Taking a collaborative approach across all universities in developing free data science and cyber security training would be of significant value to Australian researchers and support the implementation of the Decadal Plan.

National Science and Research Priorities

It is critical that the Academy's Decadal Plan is tied back to the National Science and Research Priorities (NSRPs) that are currently being finalised. The infrastructure needs that the Decadal Plan identifies are integral to achieving the NSRPs, a point that supports the case for public funding of research infrastructure. The ABDC understands that the draft NSRPs will be released for public comment shortly.

International implications

While the focus of the paper is appropriately on the Australian context, the issues being raised also have direct impacts for international collaborations, and global dissemination

and management of data. Engagement with social sciences peak bodies in other countries will be valuable for developing common principles for the design and management of research infrastructure.

Conclusion

The ABDC again thanks the Academy for the opportunity to provide comment on the Decadal Plan. We look forward to engaging with the Academy as development and implementation of the Decadal Plan progresses.

For any inquiries related to this submission please contact ABDC Executive Officer, Caroline Falshaw: office@abdc.edu.au

Regards,

Professor Keryn Chalmers
President, Australian Business Deans Council

ABDC

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About the ABDC

The ABDC is the collective voice of Australian university business schools, which educate 16% of all domestic students and 39% of the nation's international students.

Our 38 members teach and research the areas vital to the success of the businesses that underpin the economy. The ABDC's aim is to make business schools even better.

As their peak body, ABDC's role is to ensure that those with political, social, cultural, and economic influence appreciate and support how business education contributes to Australia's future.