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UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COMMERCIALISATION CONSULTATION PAPER

ACADEMY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
IN AUSTRALIA SUBMISSION TO:

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,
SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT**

Submission to the University Research Commercialisation Consultation Paper

14 April 2021

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (the Academy) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment's (DESE) *University Research Commercialisation Consultation Paper* (the Consultation Paper).

The Academy is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that draws on the expertise of over 700 Fellows to provide practical, evidence-based advice to governments, businesses, and the community on important social policy issues. Academy Fellows are experts at the forefront of their fields, mostly as active participants in the university research community.

The Academy supports the Australian Government's ambition for universities to work more closely with businesses and governments to translate research into new and improved policy, products and services that grow the Australian economy, particularly during the COVID-19 recovery. The social sciences have a crucial role to play in this regard, as part of a robust cross-disciplinary effort with STEM, health and medical sciences and the humanities.

While the Academy supports targeted initiatives to encourage research commercialisation, we emphasise this should be funded in addition to, not at the expense of, basic research. It is crucially important to ensure Australia continues to invest for the long-term in basic and public good research, which may not lead to a commercial outcome. Not only does this work contribute to a better society and provide the pipeline for future opportunity through making discoveries and creating new knowledge, crucially, it also provides Australia with a seat at the table where innovation is happening across the world.

In response to the Consultation Paper, the Academy makes the following three key points:

- 1. The criteria for selecting university research commercialisation 'missions' should encompass economic, social and environmental impact**

The Academy is supportive of a mission-oriented priority setting mechanism. It makes sense to align areas of national research strength with areas of comparative and competitive advantage.

The Consultation Paper asks *what criteria should be used to select missions?* The Academy queries the narrow focus in general of the Consultation Paper on commercial outcomes, which is framed largely around *new businesses, new jobs and productivity*.

If missions are aimed to address areas of national priority, the criteria used to select missions should seek to not only strengthen our economy – but be based on broader outcomes for Australian society and the environment. Research that results in improved social, economic and environmental impacts will be required to make headway on meaningful national missions, and for this reason it will be important to ensure that the selection criteria are framed appropriately.

The Academy proposes further that mission themes should be cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary, be informed by meaningful engagement across government, researchers, citizens and industry and consider the full value chain of potential national benefit.

2. The scheme should consider the whole innovation and research commercialisation system – including supporting policies, markets and social conditions

In Minister Tudge's speech '[Lifting the impact of universities to strengthen Australia's future](#)' which accompanied the release of the Consultation Paper, he noted:

"While the research commercialisation agenda is our initial focus, I concurrently want to continue our thinking on how universities can make a greater impact on our largest social challenges which don't necessarily have a commercial outcome...The initial focus though is the research commercialisation."

It is the strong view of the Academy that the commercialisation agenda cannot be considered separately from the policy settings, markets, and social conditions which support economic and commercial activity. No potential mission theme can be addressed through a single body of knowledge or discipline and certainly not just by products or technology breakthroughs.

For example, an ACOLA report released in September 2020 on [The Future of Agricultural Technologies](#) highlighted that opportunities for new fields of synthetic biology and production of novel foods will amplify the need for changes in existing regulation and consideration of community perceptions regarding risk, safety, and benefit - all areas traceable to research in the social sciences.

The Consultation Paper also references the Low Emissions Technology Statement as an example of mission-prioritised policy. However, rapidly reducing emissions in a way that supports economic growth – a strategic intent of this policy - will require the parallel development and application of new regulations that support market-based mechanisms and create demand for low emission goods and services. While new technology is important, arguably the need for social and political science insights are now on the critical path to an Australian energy transition – again, all areas traceable to research in the social sciences.

3. The scheme should consider targeted support models to address barriers in the social sciences to further unlock service-based opportunities

Whilst providing a key support to the development and deployment of products and technology, most commercial outputs specifically in the social sciences take the form of services which power key areas of our service-based economy.

Australian Research Council [Research Commercialisation Income](#) data from 2018 demonstrates that insights from the social sciences are already being successfully commercialised, generating significant returns in their own right across fields such as statistics, education, criminology and econometrics. While the Consultation Paper focusses on translating knowledge into *new products or other innovations* the Academy would like to specifically highlight the importance of the role of *services* such as consulting and education and training packages. These services should also feature in the in the design of the scheme.

An example of this is the [Triple P – Positive Parenting Program](#) (Triple P) developed by UQ School of Psychology and Academy Fellow, Professor Matt Sanders AO. Triple P is a unique, multilevel

system of evidence-based parenting support that has had a major policy impact both in Australia and overseas. The program has now been licenced to Triple P International, a global for-profit social enterprise and Certified B Corp, headquartered in Brisbane. Triple P has become a major employer of psychologists as trainers and implementation consultants with over 98,000 practitioners trained to deliver the program worldwide.

To further enhance the opportunities, barriers to research commercialisation in the social sciences need to be considered. The barriers are well documented. In 2005 the Council for Humanities, Arts and the Social Sciences (CHASS) released an occasional paper [*Commercialisation of research activities in the humanities, arts and social sciences in Australia*](#) which outlined six interconnected challenges facing the commercialisation of research activities in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS):

1. the value of HASS research is not understood by industry;
2. there is a lack of standard practices for working with industry;
3. there is a lack of 'business skills' among HASS researchers;
4. institutions are not equipped to accommodate HASS research commercialisation;
5. incentives to undertake commercial work are lacking; and
6. industry is unaware of the possibilities and limitations of HASS research, and industrial Research and Development spend on HASS is minimal compared to industrial Research and Development spend on science.

While progress is being made, the challenges identified by CHASS remain highly relevant both in Australia and internationally and were recently used to frame the [*Aspect Initiative*](#) in the UK. The initiative was launched in 2018 with 5 million pounds funding from Research England with the specific aim of connecting universities, businesses, academics and industry leaders to turn ideas into commercial solutions in the social sciences. Aspect adds two new items to the CHASS list, paraphrased below, which we believe are also relevant to the Australian situation:

1. much of the value of social science 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).
2. definitions and operationalisations of Research and Development are often too narrow to capture substantial areas of social science expertise, such as data collection and analysis and curation.

The Academy encourages DESE to engage with the ASPECT initiative and its suite of projects, events and resources and consider targeted frameworks for the social sciences within the commercialisation scheme design which address barriers identified above.



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In addition to the points raised in this submission Academy Fellows can provide advice and insights from a social science perspective on the broader research translation and commercialisation system – including the barriers in Australia compared to other countries. The Academy would welcome the opportunity to facilitate a meeting between DESE and Academy Fellows, if this is of interest. Please contact Andi Horsburgh, Policy Manager on 0466 123 178, or andrea.horsburgh@socialsciences.org.au for further information.