

# State of the Social Sciences Report

Discussion Paper  
January 2021



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## Have your say on the future of Australian social science

Responses to this discussion paper are encouraged from anyone with an interest in the social sciences as a researcher, academic, teacher, student, or employer.

Have your say by responding to [this survey](#) or make a written submission to: [submissions@socialsciences.org.au](mailto:submissions@socialsciences.org.au).

Note that the online survey does not collect identifiable data, and responses will be treated as strictly anonymous and confidential.

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## Introduction

In 2014, the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (the Academy) partnered with the Australian Academy of the Humanities to produce the report *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia*. This report provided an in-depth review of how the Humanities, Arts and Social Science (HASS) disciplines were faring, their contribution to Australian society and what could be done to ensure their strength into the future. As we enter the 2020s, it is time to look again at the state of the social sciences and create a shared understanding of their role in Australia's future.

Like the rest of the world, the social science landscape has been sharply influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The sudden loss of tens of thousands of fee-paying international

students has had a significant budget impact on our 38 public universities and many hundreds of private education providers. Thousands of job losses have taken place as education institutions seek to adjust to the changing circumstances, with many more cuts expected. At the same time, the Australian Government has substantially increased support for apprenticeships, diploma-level and certificate-level training as part of its economic stimulus package. Together, these factors could permanently change Australia's post-school education and training landscape.

The impacts of COVID-19 are not the only challenges for the social sciences. Structural adjustments to research funding arrangements and the introduction of the Job-Ready Graduates Package legislation are altering

the ratio of student and public funding for university education. The net result of this legislation is that across all disciplines, funding per student has gone down, with dramatic increases in costs for students enrolling in arts, humanities, and several social science fields.

This confluence of changes to university funding and the narrative about 'job-readiness' come on top of a longer-term trend in which the perceived impact and relevance of the social sciences have arguably been falling behind that of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and health sciences.

Effectively, the social sciences are at a crossroads.

One possible future sees the social sciences decline substantially in depth, breadth, diversity, and profile over the next decade – carried along in the wake of the broader adjustment to the tertiary education sector as students, teachers, experienced and early-career academics choose or are forced to seek employment and opportunities elsewhere.

Another future sees the social sciences rise to the challenges; asserting their continued relevance and finding new opportunities to grow, innovate and create positive impact at local, national and global scales.

This second future requires a new social science, focused on understanding and informing modern society, and preparing people to address the challenges facing the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The implications of such a re-imagining are broad, covering not just the utility of the disciplines in addressing 'wicked problems', but also in relation to the training and educational paradigms that we adopt for the future. Taking this perspective seriously raises issues in relation to policy, research, teaching, and social scientific practice, with implications for the training and composition of the social science workforce, and the broader ecosystem within which social science, in all its forms, is undertaken.

*Another future sees the social sciences rise to the challenges; asserting their continued relevance and finding new opportunities to grow, innovate and create positive impact on social issues.*

The Academy has prepared this discussion paper to elicit the views, ideas and concerns of social science researchers, teachers, students, professionals, policymakers, employers and others across Australian society. We want to describe the current state of Australian social science, but more importantly we also want to chart a way forward. What are the opportunities and challenges facing the social sciences? What should the social sciences look like in ten years, what must they encompass, and what could we potentially leave behind?

Most importantly, how do we best articulate the case for the social sciences in Australia, thus ensuring that the social sciences of the future are strong and inclusive?

We invite you to contribute on these issues by completing our survey or making a submission. Your feedback will inform the final report, which will be published in mid-2021 and lay out both the current state of the social sciences and outline the challenges and opportunities ahead.

We thank you for taking the time to read this discussion paper and engaging with us. We look forward to working with you to advance and secure the future of our disciplines.



**Professor Mark Western FASSA**  
Chair, State of the Social Sciences Steering Group

## How to respond and confidentiality of information

We invite you to respond to the questions set out in this discussion paper using [this online survey](#). You may respond to the survey in your own right or on behalf of an organisation. We also welcome written submissions on any issue raised in this paper or other aspect of the social sciences you feel is relevant to the project. Please email submissions in word or PDF form to [submissions@socialsciences.org.au](mailto:submissions@socialsciences.org.au). **The consultation period runs for just over 6 weeks from mid-January 2020, with feedback due by Friday 5 March 2021.** There will be further opportunities to have your say as we draft the report.

Responses to the survey will be kept confidential (included in the report as de-identified comments or aggregated data), whereas submissions on the discussion paper will be published on the project website unless respondents request otherwise. More information on the project approach, timeframes and ethics approval is available at [www.socialsciences.org.au/stateofthesocialsciences](http://www.socialsciences.org.au/stateofthesocialsciences).

## General questions

**Q1.** If you are currently studying a social science discipline, how optimistic or pessimistic are you about your career prospects?

**Q2.** What unique skills and capabilities do social science graduates bring to the wider economy?

**Q3:** Are there current or recent examples of social science research making an impact in policy or society that we might draw out in this report?

**Q4.** How optimistic or pessimistic do you feel about the future of the social sciences? What are the key factors informing your view?

**Q5.** What do you see as the three biggest challenges and opportunities for the social sciences (as a whole or within your discipline) over the next five to ten years? How can we address the challenges and harness the opportunities?

**Q6.** What are the three biggest challenges Australian society will face in the next five to ten years? What role will social science knowledge and expertise play in resolving these challenges?

## Definitions and Scope

### 1. Definition of the social sciences

Social sciences are a broad set of fields that can be challenging to define. For the purposes of this report, we propose a broad definition as follows:

*Social sciences are the collection of disciplines focused on understanding, describing, explaining, or predicting social phenomena, institutions and structures using systematic methods of inquiry. The scope of social science inquiry can range from individual people to nation states and global systems, and the methods can be both qualitative and quantitative; theoretical and empirical. Many social science disciplines intersect with inquiry in the humanities and arts (for example, history and philosophy), STEM and health fields (for example, psychology and statistics).*

**Q7.** Is this definition of the social sciences reasonable? How might it be improved?



# Social Science Workforce

## 2. Social science research and teaching workforce

**Workforce size.** The social science research and teaching workforce comprises researchers and educators from early childhood to tertiary levels and across all industry sectors: academic, businesses, government, and not-for-profit organisations. In the period prior to COVID-19, the academic social science workforce was growing, albeit at a slower pace than other discipline groups (6% growth in teaching positions, and 20% in research positions over the 2011-17 period). In 2017, the social science higher education workforce encompassed the largest cohort of teachers of any discipline group, at 17,405 full-time equivalent (FTE), and the second largest pool of researchers, at 27,663; closely behind STEM (see **Table 1**).

Social science-specific workforce data are currently unavailable for education sectors other than higher education (i.e., schools and vocational education and training) or other industry sectors (businesses, government, not-for-profit). However, it is likely that a significant proportion of Australia's 280,000 school teachers<sup>1</sup> and 46,000 researchers employed outside the university sector have some training in the social sciences.<sup>2</sup>

**Q8.** Is this a comprehensive picture of the social science workforce in Australia? Are there any sources we should consult for more comprehensive data?

**Job security.** In the Higher Education Sector, the increasing casualisation of academic jobs remains a challenge for the social sciences. In the 2011-17 period, the proportion of social science academics in casual appointments grew from 27% to 33%, while the share of casual researchers climbed from 14% to 22%. Other workforce challenges identified as impacting human resource capacity in the social sciences include:

- unbalanced staffing profiles
- declining career opportunities
- an ageing workforce.<sup>3</sup>

**The 40:40:20 academic workload model.** Many Australian university academics have traditionally been employed on the basis that around 40% of their time is spent teaching, 40% on research and 20% in professional service. Financial pressures and other trends such as workforce casualisation, research output demands and, in some cases, outsourcing of course delivery, present challenges to this model, with the potential for both positive and negative consequences.

**Q9.** Is '40:40:20' a viable academic workload model for Australian social sciences in the future? What changes in the structure of academic employment would help to optimise social science research and teaching in universities?

**Diversity.** There are roughly equal numbers of men and women employed in social science positions in universities (see **Table 1**), with some variation across disciplines.<sup>4,5</sup> There is however a lower proportion of women at senior academic levels in most disciplines (only 25% female participation at the highest academic level);<sup>6</sup> albeit not to the same extent as observed in many STEM disciplines.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are underrepresented in education and academia in Australia, with many systemic barriers to participation and involvement needing to be overcome. It is only recently that researchers in most disciplines have begun to prioritise serious engagement with First Nations communities and knowledge across research, teaching and learning methodologies.

In terms of the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the academic workforce, data are not currently available by Field of Research. However, statistics across all

disciplinary groups show First Nations peoples comprised 1.2% of the teaching higher education workforce in 2018, a small increase from 0.9% in 2009.

**Table 1. Australia's academic teaching and research workforce by discipline group, 2011-2017**

	Research / Teaching	Appointment type	2011	2014	2017	Unit	% Change (2011-17)
Social sciences	Research	All	23,123	24,675	27,663	Staff headcount	20%
		Full-time/Fractional	80%	76%	71%		
		Casual	6%	8%	7%		
		Other/unpaid	14%	17%	22%		
	Teaching	All	16,481	16,012	17,405	FTE	6%
		Full-time/Fractional	73%	72%	67%		
		Female	48%	48%	50%		
		Casual	27%	28%	33%		
Creative Arts and Humanities	Research	All	6,949	7,430	8,583	Staff headcount	24%
		Full-time/Fractional	75%	71%	70%		
		Casual	8%	10%	8%		
		Other/unpaid	16%	20%	23%		
	Teaching	All	11,141	11,393	12,108	FTE	9%
		Full-time/Fractional	74%	74%	70%		
		Female	47%	48%	50%		
		Casual	26%	26%	30%		
Medical and Health Sciences	Research	All	16,348	18,767	23,362	Staff headcount	43%
		Full-time/Fractional	65%	61%	53%		
		Casual	7%	7%	5%		
		Other/unpaid	28%	32%	41%		
	Teaching	All	7,503	7,305	6,315	FTE	-16%
		Full-time/Fractional	75%	72%	65%		
		Female	57%	58%	60%		
		Casual	25%	28%	35%		
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics	Research	All	20,616	23,790	28,074	Staff headcount	36%
		Full-time/Fractional	75%	71%	67%		
		Casual	9%	12%	10%		
		Other/unpaid	16%	18%	23%		
	Teaching	All	10,916	11,092	11,494	FTE	5%
		Full-time/Fractional	76%	77%	73%		
		Female	25%	26%	28%		
		Casual	24%	23%	27%		

Source: The Academy, from data published by the Australian Research Council (2012, 2016, 2019)<sup>7</sup> and the Department of Education (2012, 2015, 2018)<sup>8</sup>. Please note the reported figures for 'Research' and 'Teaching' overlap to a significant extent (staff holding 'Teaching AND Research' positions are counted under both categories). The 'Research' category includes people employed in 'Research Only' and 'Teaching and Research' roles, as well as any other persons affiliated to the institutions (paid or unpaid) through at least one research publication during the reported period. The 'Teaching' category, on the other hand, includes those employed in 'Teaching only' and 'Research and Teaching' functions. The difference in reporting units (headcounts vs FTE) reflect the different units used by the reporting organisations. Data were aggregated into broad disciplinary groups, with some fields assigned to two groups (for example: 'History' is counted twice, under 'Social sciences' and 'Creative Arts and Humanities'). Despite mismatching publication dates in the data sources, the actual counts correspond to the same staff census years 2011, 2014 and 2017, and are thus comparable.

**Q10.** What are the critical challenges in the social science academic workforce?

**Q11.** What are the key challenges faced by early and mid-career academics in their career progression? Are they different compared to other disciplines? What strategies might support them?

**Q12.** What are the barriers or enablers to increased participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other minority groups in the academic workforce? Are they different compared to other disciplines? What strategies might support them?

### 3. Impacts of COVID-19 on the social science research workforce

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the higher education and research sectors has been profound, with the extent of the long-term impacts yet to be seen. An analysis published in May 2020 estimated 7,000 research-related academic jobs would be lost in 2020 alone.<sup>9</sup> Another report from September 2020 confirmed 5,600 FTE job losses had already taken place across the higher education sector and estimated further losses of up to 25% of the research-related workforce over the coming year.<sup>10</sup> Women and early-career researchers are expected to be the most negatively affected.

While not related to COVID-19, the Job-Ready Graduates Package legislation that was passed by the Australian Parliament in October 2020 will increase the quantum of student contributions to undergraduate education overall, but with significant variation across courses and subject areas.

For the social sciences, the immediate future will likely mean a significant restructuring of its higher education workforce. Anecdotal evidence suggests job losses might manifest as cuts to entire programs or disciplines. For those who retain employment in the sector, it is likely that there will be a significant reduction in the time able to be devoted to research, with teaching taking priority. Measuring and understanding the collective impacts on our workforce is fundamental to informing more sustainable and strategic responses.

**Q13.** What impact has COVID-19 had on the social science academic workforce and institutions?

**Q14.** Are you concerned about the impact of the Job-Ready Graduates legislation on the social sciences? What do you anticipate the impacts (positive or negative) will be?

### 4. Social science graduates in the broader Australian economy workforce

Employees with social science training are found across many sectors of the economy. More than 4.2 million Australians reported having a social science degree in the 2016 Census (37% of all people with a post-school qualification),<sup>11</sup> with almost 44,000 of those having a doctoral degree and 740,000 with other postgraduate qualifications. Two in three CEOs of ASX200 listed companies have a degree in the social sciences, as do 62% of government senior executives and 66% of Federal Parliamentarians.<sup>12</sup>

The unemployment rate for social science graduates stands at 5% (0.7 percent below the national rate);<sup>13</sup> 49% of social science graduates in the workforce are employed in manager or professional-level roles; and 34% earning a salary of \$78,000 or more (see **Table 2**). Pre-COVID-19, the employment prospects for new social science graduates were also good: 70-80% are in full-time employment immediately following graduation, reaching 85-94% within three years.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, employers consistently report that social science graduates are well equipped to engage with the uncertain and complex problems in their industries, and operate as informed, active citizens.

Data are still insufficient to reliably assess the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment outcomes for social science graduates. The national unemployment rate stood at 7% in the most recent Labour Force survey.<sup>15</sup>

**Q15.** What challenges do social science graduates face in transitioning to employment? Are they different compared to other disciplines? What strategies might support them?



**Table 2. Labour force participation, income, and occupation, by discipline group, 2016**

Labour force category		Social Sciences	Creative Arts and Humanities	Health and Medical Sciences	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)	Other Education categories	No post-school qualifications	Total*
Employed or actively looking for work		3,269,092	1,237,366	824,153	2,445,653	740,293	3,879,626	11,454,937
		29%	11%	7%	21%	6%	34%	
Unemployed (% within discipline group)		5%	6%	3%	5%	7%	10%	7%
Income (% within discipline group)	\$78,000 or more	34%	29%	36%	41%	15%	13%	25%
	\$41,600–\$77,999	35%	32%	37%	38%	36%	32%	33%
	\$1–\$41,599	29%	38%	25%	20%	43%	52%	33%
	Nil or negative income	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
	Not stated	1%	1%	1%	1%	5%	2%	1%
Occupation	Manager or Professional	49%	44%	67%	36%	19%	17%	35%
	Other occupations	51%	56%	33%	64%	81%	83%	65%

Source: The Academy, from data published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics<sup>16</sup>. The count of employed persons includes those employed full-time, part-time, and employed but away from work during the reference weeks. Data reported under 'Other Education' includes persons qualified in 'Food, Hospitality and Personal Services', 'Mixed fields', as well as those who did not state or inadequately described their field of study. Education data were aggregated into discipline groups, with some double counting resulting from assigning 'Society and Culture' to both the 'Social Sciences' and the 'Creative Arts and Humanities' groups. However, the Total\* column on the far right reflects the true total without double counts. The reported total labour force size includes those employed or actively looking for work at the time of the Census.

## Research Funding, Infrastructure and Outputs

### 5. Social science research funding

In Australia, social science research is funded in several ways:

- national government competitive grants (administered by the Australian Research Council)
- other public sector funding (e.g., from local and state government)
- Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) grants (government grants specifically designed to support industry-led, collaborative research)
- private investment (Australian and international)
- philanthropic grants and donations.

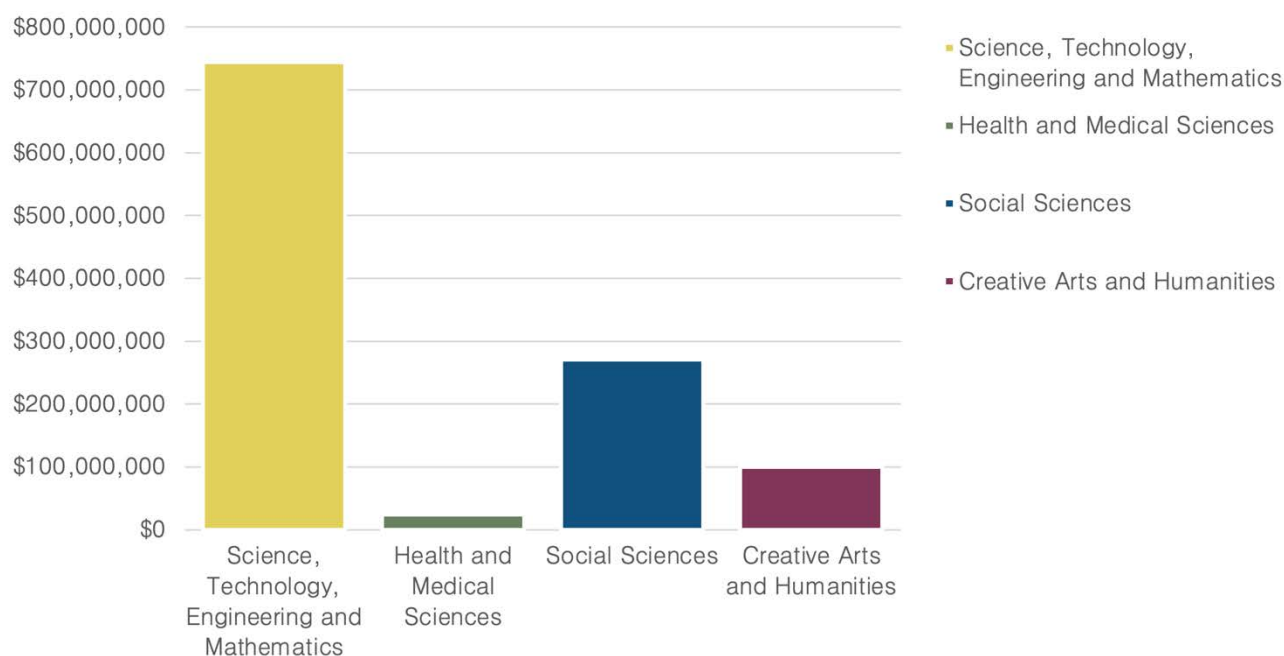
Between 2017 and 2019, social science research received just over 10% of the total funding pool reported by the ABS. The remainder of the total funding was directed largely to STEM and health research (including contributions from the Medical Research Future Fund).

While national competitive grants make up the largest proportion of university research funding overall (see **Figure 1** for total awarded through national competitive grants), the greatest contribution to social science research comes from other public sector funding, equating to nearly 38% (\$365.8 million) of total research income in 2016 (the latest dataset readily available). The nature and quantum of this funding – often commissioned research or schemes targeted to specific programs – is generally less consistent than the national competitive grant funding, and the amount directed to the social sciences declined slightly between 2014 and 2016<sup>17</sup>.

It is expected that there will be changes to the way that research is funded in the future, with more emphasis on industry (including government and the not-for-profit sector) engagement and the removal of cross subsidisation from teaching to research.

**Q16.** What are the barriers to securing research funding in the social sciences?

**Figure 1. Australian Research Council (ARC), project funding by discipline, 2020**



Source: The Academy, from data published by the Australian Research Council (Grant Funding Dataset). Data have been aggregated into broad disciplinary groups. Due to the cross categorisation of some Fields of Research, funds may appear in more than one category. All figures cited are in nominal Australian dollars.

## 6. Social science research infrastructure

Research infrastructure in Australia is funded primarily by:

- institutions (individually and in collaborations)
- specific project or infrastructure grants (for example, the *ARC Linkage Infrastructure and Equipment and Facilities* scheme), or
- national research infrastructure programs (the long-running *National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Scheme* and, more recently, the *National Research Infrastructure Roadmap* and *National Research Infrastructure Investment Plan*).

The *2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap* identified a critical need for HASS research infrastructure focused on physical collections, digital data and eResearch platforms, as well as better infrastructure and governance for Indigenous data. A scoping study on platforms for HASS and Indigenous research was undertaken by the Department of Education and Training from 2018-2020, and the *2020 Research Infrastructure Investment Plan* committed \$8.9 million from 2020-21 to 2022-23 to support the development of data tools and platforms to improve the practices surrounding social and cultural knowledge. The focus of this funding is the utilisation of existing platforms to support a multidisciplinary approach in Australian research.

**Q17.** Is the current research infrastructure fit for purpose? If not, what additional infrastructure do you feel would serve you the best?

## 7. Social science research outputs

In 2020, Australian social scientists published over 22,000 peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers, according to data available from the Scopus research database (a 16% increase from 2015) (see **Table 3**). Importantly, a large part of this increase has taken the form of multidisciplinary collaborations with STEM and medical disciplines. In the year 2020, the data shows what appears as a swift response by Australian social scientists to the COVID-19 pandemic, as a spike in the collaborations with Immunology and Microbiology.

In terms of research quality, 91% of social science 'Units of Evaluation' ranked at or above world standard in the latest *Excellence in Research Australia* (ERA) report (see **Table 4**). However, there is some debate about these metrics. Over time, these metrics show a notable increase in the number of units ranked above or well-above world standard for units assessed with citation-based quality metrics (primary STEM and health sciences). Meanwhile, the units assessed through peer-review (primarily HASS disciplines) have remained relatively stable. These results appear to suggest that the quality of social science and humanities research has remained static, while that of STEM and health research has increased significantly over the past decade. Whether this is an accurate representation or a function of the different evaluation methods (or potentially a combination of both) remains unclear. Given the importance of ERA rankings for universities' strategic planning and research management, and to inform Government's research policy, it does stand as an important issue for university-based social sciences.

**Table 3. Social science research outputs, 2015 and 2020**

Main subject area	Articles published		Change (%)
	2020	2015	
Social sciences are the main subject area			
Social Sciences	15,248	14,008	9%
Psychology	5,041	3,925	28%
Business, Management and Accounting	4,782	4,089	17%
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	2,829	2,819	0%
Interdisciplinary collaborations (other disciplines are the main subject area)			
Immunology and Microbiology	72	3	2300%
Energy	818	229	257%
Dentistry	27	8	238%
Chemistry	64	29	121%
Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology	260	136	91%
Materials Science	20	11	82%
Environmental Science	2,252	1,303	73%
Agricultural and Biological Sciences	665	460	45%
Engineering	1,631	1,186	38%
Health Professions	585	442	32%
Physics and Astronomy	33	25	32%
Earth and Planetary Sciences	483	366	32%
Decision Sciences	832	637	31%
Medicine	3,070	2,402	28%
Mathematics	416	360	16%
Neuroscience	620	567	9%
Nursing	451	418	8%
Arts and Humanities	3,413	3,359	2%
Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmaceuticals	66	68	−3%
Computer Science	1,127	1,232	−9%
Chemical Engineering	26	40	−35%
Veterinary	8	16	−50%
True total (actual number of publications)	22,709	19,637	16%

Source: The Academy, from data available in the Scopus research database [accessed December 2020]

**Table 4. Research quality indicators, Australian Research Council, 2011-2016 and 2018**

	Social sciences	Creative Arts and Humanities	Medical and Health Sciences	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
<b>Research outputs (2011–2016)</b>				
Journal Article	68.8%	42.6%	94.1%	74.0%
Book Chapter	19.7%	30.1%	3.7%	3.7%
Conference Paper	7.1%	6.1%	1.5%	21.6%
Book	2.5%	5.1%	0.2%	0.3%
Other output types	1.9%	16.0%	0.5%	0.4%
<b>Total outputs</b>	<b>164,352</b>	<b>45,038</b>	<b>116,144</b>	<b>231,971</b>
<b>Research outcomes (units of evaluation* ranked 3 or above in 2018) as a % of the total units of evaluation in each discipline group</b>				
5 – 'Well above world standard'	24%	14%	37%	48%
4 – 'Above world standard'	34%	33%	56%	37%
3 – 'At world standard'	33%	39%	6%	13%
<b>Total units assessed</b>	<b>2,334</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>1,208</b>

Source: The Academy, from data published by the Australian Research Council.<sup>i</sup>

\* A 'Unit of Evaluation' is defined by the Australian Research Council as *a field of research in an eligible institution*. As an example, 'Sociology' is defined as Fields of Research in the Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC). Each University delivering 'Sociology' education or research would be counted as a 'Unit of Evaluation'. And so on for each Field of Research–University pair.

## Training and Education

### 8. School education

The social sciences are a vital component of the school curriculum.<sup>18</sup>

In Australia, they are taught as part of the *Humanities and Social Sciences* learning area, comprising eight distinct subjects, which are delivered from Foundation year to senior secondary (see **Table 5**).

**Table 5. Social sciences in the Australian curriculum**

Years	Foundation to Years 6/7	Years 7 to 10	Senior secondary
<b>Learning units</b>	<b>HASS</b> (humanities, arts and social sciences combined as a single subject)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Civics and Citizenship</li> <li>Economics and Business</li> <li>Geography</li> <li>History</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ancient History</li> <li>Geography</li> <li>Modern History</li> <li>Sociology (NSW)</li> <li>Society &amp; Culture (ACT)</li> </ul>

Source: The Academy, based on information published by Australian Curriculum<sup>19</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Research outputs include submissions made by eligible institutions to the Australian Research Council, over the reference period (1 January 2011 to 31 December 2016). Research outputs data were obtained from *State of Australian University Research 2018–19: Volume 1 ERA National Report, Research Outputs by Type*. Research outcomes data were obtained from the *ARC Data Portal > ERA Outcomes* [Retrieved November 22, 2020]. For more details on the rating scale applied in the ERA indicators 2018, refer to ERA's evaluation and peer review guidelines, available at <https://www.arc.gov.au/excellence-research-australia/key-documents>.

In recent years, social science educators in the school system have raised concerns about a relative de-emphasis on social science disciplines and issues.<sup>20</sup> There is a concern that this could result in long-term, negative impacts on educational outcomes.<sup>21, 22</sup> For example, in 2016, only 38% of Year 10 students performed at or above the standard in the National Assessment Program for Civics and Citizenship, the lowest results on record.<sup>23</sup> Participation of senior students in elective social science subjects has also declined in recent years, from 60% in 2012, to 56% in 2018.<sup>24</sup>

**Q18.** What are the barriers to increased participation in social science at school? What could help improve the situation?

## 9. Tertiary education

There are more than 2,500 bachelor level social science courses available through Australian universities, as well as 1,700 master-level courses, and 400 doctoral programs.<sup>25</sup> Social science courses and programs are delivered by 37 out of 38 public universities,<sup>26</sup> as well as a significant number of private universities and other approved higher education institutions, including vocational education and training (VET) providers.

Increasing digitalisation and competition for students has resulted in an accelerating trend in digital course delivery (both degree and non-award) developed and administered by, or in partnership with, Online Program Management (OPM) providers.

Until 2020, the social sciences had the largest share of overseas students, as well as the largest share of students of any disciplinary group (53% of all students enrolled). However, their share of the total population of students has decreased over the last decade (from 60% in 2009; see **Table 6**). Notably, the number of doctoral students has remained near static over the same period, while significantly increasing in other disciplines. Insights from stakeholders in the higher education sector are key to appropriately interpreting these trends.

Data on student diversity are only available at the university level, with specific characteristics of Australia's social science student body presently unavailable. Across all disciplines however, 56% of students are female (896,182 in 2019), up by 42% since 2009; low socio-economic status students make up 12% of the student population (189,455), an increase of 57% over the same period; and regional and remote students make up 14% of the student population (226,006), a 52% increase since 2009.

**Q19.** Where do you see the biggest challenges and opportunities for social science education over the coming years?

**Q20.** Why do you think the number of social science doctoral students has remained near static over the last decade, while significantly increasing in STEM and health sciences?



**Table 6. Students in higher education, 2019**

	Social Sciences		Creative Arts and Humanities		Medical and Health Sciences		Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics		Total
	2019	Change 2009–19 (%)	2019	Change 2009–19 (%)	2019	Change 2009–19 (%)	2019	Change 2009–19 (%)	
<b>All students</b>	<b>854,970</b>	<b>▼26%</b>	<b>429,440</b>	<b>▼34%</b>	<b>265,586</b>	<b>▲75%</b>	<b>434,043</b>	<b>▲70%</b>	<b>1,609,798</b>
% of all enrolled	53%		27%		16%		27%		
Doctorate	19,293	▼1%	14,235	▼6%	9,252	▲49%	28,170	▲52%	58,962
Other postgraduate	252,434	▼39%	79,463	▼36%	61,664	▲117%	104,567	▲133%	427,815
Undergraduate	575,142	▼21%	325,069	▼33%	194,506	▲66%	301,182	▲57%	1,072,870
Other	8,101	▲49%	10,673	▲103%	164	▼58%	124	▼75%	50,151
<b>Overseas</b>	<b>270,472</b>	<b>▼36%</b>	<b>62,965</b>	<b>▲68%</b>	<b>41,394</b>	<b>▲82%</b>	<b>179,608</b>	<b>▲144%</b>	<b>521,948</b>
% within field	32%		15%		16%		41%		32%
<b>Indigenous</b>	<b>11,839</b>	<b>▲83%</b>	<b>8,548</b>	<b>▲108%</b>	<b>4,563</b>	<b>▲153%</b>	<b>2,748</b>	<b>▲165%</b>	<b>21,097</b>
% within field	1%		2%		2%		1%		1%

Source: The Academy, from data published by the Department of Education (2009, 2019)<sup>27</sup>. The green and red arrow icons show whether the proportion of students in each category has increased or decreased compared to their proportion in 2009. In some cases, the total share of students has decreased, despite an increase in total student numbers. Student numbers were aggregated from broad Fields of Education into disciplinary groups, with some overlap between social sciences and creative arts and humanities (leading to some double counting). The totals in the far-right column show the total number of students without double counts. The level of study category 'Other' includes enabling courses and non-award courses.

## 10. Continuing professional education

Several social science disciplines with large practicing professions (for example, law, accounting, and psychology) have comprehensive registration and continuing professional education systems run by professional associations, private providers, government agencies or a combination of these.

Post-degree and non-award training for professionals in many other fields also covers or incorporates education in the social sciences. For example, courses in management and business administration, directorship, public administration, or program evaluation. These offerings are diverse in nature and scope, and cover the full spectrum from universities to private providers and not-for-profit associations.

**Q21.** Is the current structure of Continuing Professional Education in social science-related areas fit for purpose? Is there anything that could help to improve quality and efficiency?

# Consultation Questions Summary

## General questions

- Q1.** If you are currently studying a social science discipline, how optimistic or pessimistic are you about your career prospects?
- Q2.** What unique skills and capabilities do social science graduates bring to the wider economy?
- Q3:** Are there current or recent examples of social science research making an impact in policy or society that we might draw out in this report?
- Q4.** How optimistic or pessimistic do you feel about the future for the social sciences? What are the key factors informing your view?
- Q5.** What do you see as the three biggest challenges and opportunities for the social sciences (as a whole or within your discipline) over the next five to ten years? How can we address the challenges and harness the opportunities?
- Q6.** What are the three biggest challenges Australian society will face in the next five to ten years? What role will social science knowledge and expertise play in resolving these challenges?

## Questions specific to the content presented in this discussion paper

- Q7.** Is this definition of the social sciences reasonable? How might it be improved?

### Workforce

- Q8.** Is this a comprehensive picture of the social science workforce in Australia? Are there any sources we should consult for more comprehensive data?
- Q9.** Is '40:40:20' a viable academic workload model for Australian social sciences in the future? What changes in the structure of academic employment would help to optimise social science research and teaching in universities?
- Q10.** What are the critical challenges in the social science academic workforce?
- Q11.** What are the key challenges faced by early and mid-career academics in their career progression? Are the different compared to other disciplines? What strategies might support them?
- Q12.** What are the barriers or enablers to increased participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other minority groups in the academic workforce? Are they different compared to other disciplines? What strategies might support them?
- Q13.** What impact has COVID-19 had on the social science academic workforce and institutions?
- Q14.** Are you concerned about the impact of the Job-Ready Graduates legislation on the social sciences? What do you anticipate the impacts (positive or negative) will be?
- Q15.** What challenges do social science graduates face in transitioning to employment? Are they different compared to other disciplines? What strategies might support them?

## Research funding and infrastructure

**Q16.** What are the barriers to securing research funding in the social sciences?

**Q17:** Is the current research infrastructure fit for purpose? If no, what do you feel would serve you the best?

## Training and education

**Q18:** What are the barriers to increased participation in social science at school? What could help improve the situation?

**Q19.** Where do you see the biggest challenges and opportunities for social science education over the coming years?

**Q20.** Why do you think the number of social science doctoral students has remained near static over the last decade, while significantly increasing in STEM and health sciences?

**Q21.** Is the current structure of Continuing Professional Education in social science-related areas fit for purpose? Is there anything that could help to improve quality and efficiency?

## About the Academy

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia is an elected body of over 700 of Australia's leading researchers and professionals across the social science disciplines. It was established in 1971 replacing the Social Science Research Council of Australia, which was founded in 1942.



The Academy is an independent, not-for-profit association that draws on the expertise of its Fellows to provide practical, evidence-based advice to governments, industry and community organisations on important social policy issues. It actively promotes understanding of the social sciences and champions excellence across its many fields of learning. The Academy is committed to equity, diversity and inclusion in the social sciences, particularly the involvement and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## Steering Group

The State of the Social Sciences project is overseen by a steering group of Fellows and other experts in the social sciences:

- [Professor Mark Western FASSA](#) (Chair), Director, Institute for Social Science Research, the University of Queensland
- [Professor Deborah Cobb-Clark FASSA](#), Professor of Economics, University of Sydney
- [Professor Deborah Lupton FASSA](#), SHARP Professor, Centre for Social Research in Health & Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW
- [Professor Peter Shergold AC FASSA](#), Chancellor, Western Sydney University
- [Dr Elise Klein OAM](#) Senior Lecturer Public Policy, Crawford School, ANU
- [Emeritus Professor Fred D'Agostino FAHA](#) University of Qld
- [Professor Amanda Davies](#), Head of School of Social Sciences, University of Western Australia

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- <sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) *Schools, Australia 2019*. Retrieved November 20, 2020. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release>
- <sup>2</sup> Researcher counts include human resources employed as 'Researchers', according to the latest ABS publications: 34,576 researchers employed by businesses, 7,570 by government, and 4,703 by private not-for-profits.
- <sup>3</sup> Turner, G., and Brass, K. (2014) *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia*. Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra. <https://www.humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/AAH-Mapping-HASS-2014.pdf>. Retrieved November 24, 2020.
- <sup>4</sup> The number of staff who identify themselves in non-binary gender categories is still too low to report a clear trend.
- <sup>5</sup> Australian Research Council (2019). *Gender and the Research Workforce*. Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2018.
- <sup>6</sup> The participation of female researchers is highest for Level B (Associate Lecturer) (52%), decreasing for higher levels: 44% for Level C (Senior Lecturer, 44%), Level D (Reader/Associate Professor, 36%) and Level E (Professor, 25%). Analysis from figures published in Section 2 of the report *Gender and the Research Workforce: Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2018*.
- <sup>7</sup> Australian Research Council (2019). State of Australian University Research 2018–19: Volume 1 ERA National Report. Staffing Profile; Australian Research Council (2016) Australian University Research 2015–16: Volume 1 ERA National Report – National Profiles by Fields of Research Code (Section 4); Australian Research Council (2012) Excellence in Research for Australia 2012: National Report. Section 3: National Profiles by Fields of Research Code.
- <sup>8</sup> Department of Education (2018, 2015, 2012) Selected Higher Education Statistics, Staff data. The Department of Education has more recent datasets available, however, the above dates were chosen to match those of the most recent releases available from the Australian Research Council.
- <sup>9</sup> Rapid Research Information Forum (2020) *Impact of the Pandemic on Australia's Research Workforce*.
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- <sup>11</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *Census of Population and Housing, 2016* [Online resource]. Dataset: Persons, Place of Usual Residence. Extracted using Table Builder.
- <sup>12</sup> Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (2020) Devaluing Humanities and Social Science Education Will Leave Australia Worse Off (Media Release).
- <sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *6202.0 – Labour Force, Australia, Jun 2016, June Key Figures*
- <sup>14</sup> Results are based on a sample of 40,153 completed surveys, completed by March 2020. Study areas counted as 'Social Sciences' for the purposes of this report include: 'Teacher education', 'Business and management', 'Humanities, culture and social sciences', 'Social work', 'Psychology', 'Law and paralegal studies' and 'Communications'. Quality Indicators for Teaching and Learning (2020) *Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal*, Medium-Term Graduate Outcomes in Australia, August 2020
- <sup>15</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020) *Labour Force, Australia*, Reference period: October 2020
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- <sup>17</sup> Australian Research Council (2019). State of Australian University Research 2018–19: Volume 1 ERA National Report. Australian Research Council, Canberra.
- <sup>18</sup> The eight learning areas underpinning the Australian curriculum include: English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, the Arts, Technologies, Health and Physical Education, and Languages.
- <sup>19</sup> Australian Curriculum (2020) *F-10 Learning Areas – Humanities and Social Sciences*; Australian Curriculum (2020) *Senior Secondary Curriculum – Humanities and Social Sciences*
- <sup>20</sup> Print, M (2019) *STEM, HASS and The Australian Curriculum: The Case for Active, Informed and Critical Citizens*, Professional Educator, Vol. 20, pp. 18–21.
- <sup>21</sup> Hawkins, S (2019) *Unleash the HAMSTER! Putting Humanities First in a Fancy New Acronym*, Professional Educator, Vol. 20, pp. 65–67.
- <sup>22</sup> Henebery, B (2019) *How a Quality Education Can Deliver a Healthy Democracy*, Professional Educator, Vol. 20, pp. 12–27.

<sup>23</sup> The results of the more recent 2019 National Assessment Program for Civics and Citizenship (NAP-CC) are expected to be published sometime in December 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2019) *Year 12 Subject Enrolments*

<sup>25</sup> Figures obtained from the CRICOS course database, for the field of education categories: Education, Management and Commerce, and Society and Culture. Department of Education, Skills and Employment (n.d.) *Course search*. At the time of publication, the reported number of registered courses at the Bachelor, Master by Coursework and Doctoral level were, respectively: Education (302, 233, 58), Management and Commerce (988, 881, 82), and Society and Culture (1245, 678, 285).

<sup>26</sup> From data published by the Department of Education (2019) *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2019 Student data*.

<sup>27</sup> Department of Education (2019) *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2019 Student data* (Sections 2, 5, 6, 7, 11) Department of Education (2009) *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2009 Student data* (various tables)