

# The Humanities Cause: A History of the First Three Decades of the Australian Academy of the Humanities

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[T]he cause of the traditional humanities subjects is less well served by defensive protests or last ditch stands against barbarism, than by constructive re-thinking of the role of the humanities in a modern Australian university.

(R. M. Crawford, 'The Future Development of the Humanities and the Social Sciences in the Australian Universities' 1964)

**K**EY FIGURES IN THE HISTORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES HAVE at times referred apologetically to it appearing to be a kind of gentlemen's club (see Donaldson, 'Idea of an academy' 22-4). While this is in some ways an appropriate representation of features of the Academy's past, this paper seeks to show that it has always been a much more complex institution and has changed over time. Focusing on the first three decades of the history of the Academy, it traces the emergence of different ideas within this institution about the humanities cause—about what the humanities are and how they should be supported. By way of introduction, the paper considers ideas held by leading scholars in the Australian Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Academy's predecessor, as they began to formulate their views about what the humanities cause was and why an Academy was necessary to promote it. It then goes on to describe how the Academy in pursuing this project over its first three decades

became increasingly enmeshed in a changing relationship with the government of the day. The Academy was to rely on its elite, club-like status to influence government but, as will be argued, the basis on which this elite status has been claimed was to shift over time. The paper concludes with a brief reflection on what this history suggests about how the Academy might respond to the challenges the humanities face today.

### **Early Days of the Australian Academy of the Humanities: *What Sort of Beast?***

R. M. (Max) Crawford, Professor of History at the University of Melbourne, was the driving figure behind the establishment of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in the 1960s. An eloquent and energetic advocate, he wrote many reports and speeches about the issues facing the humanities during that decade. He was very concerned, as the introductory quote to this paper demonstrates, that the humanities cause be understood in the context of the rapid changes that were occurring in Australian higher education in this period. He saw his proposed Academy as playing a leading role in ensuring the humanities adapted in an innovative and thoughtful manner to these developments. And he became intensely committed during these years to transforming its predecessor organisation, the AHRC, into an Academy.

A great institution builder as well as a distinguished historian—known as much for the excellence of his teaching as the quality of his research—Crawford took over the role of Chair of the AHRC in 1965.<sup>1</sup> Established in 1956, Council members were initially appointed on the basis of recommendations from universities and subsequently by a process of nominations by members. Its first few years were focused on producing a major survey of the humanities in Australia, *The Humanities in Australia: A Survey with Special Reference to the Universities*, published in 1959 (Price). But from thereon it settled down into handing out small grants for publications, primarily to its members, until Crawford began to shake it up with his focus on becoming an Academy.

In several papers from 1964 Crawford provided key insights into the humanities cause he envisaged for his new Academy. He argued for the importance of promoting the role of the humanities in invigorating the cultural life of Australia and in deepening and extending understanding of our world. His vision drew on what he saw as the traditional values of the humanities associated with a liberal education characterised by a depth and breadth of human learning, by a desire to look at material with fresh eyes and to ask new questions ('The Arts Degree' 5, 17, 18). But he also sought to modernise the humanities by creating a body that

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<sup>1</sup> This included his roles in the formation of the Academy, as Head of Department and Professor at the University of Melbourne, and in the formation of *Australian Historical Studies*.

responded to changes in the institutions and society that supported them. Central to his concerns in the 1960s was the impact of the growing numbers of university students and the implication of this 'bulge' for how the humanities should be understood and taught. In 1964, speaking about the future of the Arts Degree in the twentieth century, Crawford reflected on changes he had observed in the teaching of history in Australian universities. He acknowledged the work of George Arnold Wood, appointed in 1891 as the first Challis Professor of History at the University of Sydney, who he saw as fired by a 'confidence in the public importance' of the humanities. Wood, who Crawford admired greatly, had, he explained, 'no doubt of [history's] utility'. He believed in a university education that must 'fit and inspire men to accept work of responsibility and greatness' and understood the humanities as 'moulding the character of rulers' ('The Arts Degree' 3, 1). But Wood's 'utility', Crawford commented, was a very different utility to the one he now was advocating. He diagnosed three major changes reshaping universities in the 1960s that made such a 'heroic' view of the humanities no longer relevant or appropriate: universities were no longer teaching 'an elite of gentlemen expected to exercise authority'; the ideal of a liberal education had retreated extensively before the advances of technical and vocational education; and the sudden expansion of young people attending universities since the Second World War meant that a far larger proportion were coming from homes that had given them little preparation for university study. These changes, Crawford argued, meant that humanities scholars were no longer certain of their role, lamenting that they now 'get by less because of any general faith in our importance than because of inertia'. His main message was that his colleagues should overcome their apathy and move beyond 'the mere adaptation to successive crises towards an acceptance of the responsibility for taking initiatives' that he hoped would prove 'imaginative enough' for the demands now facing them ('The Arts Degree' 20). These sentiments drove Crawford's belief in the importance of establishing an Academy and his ideas about the cause it should serve.

But Crawford was also pragmatic in his desire to transform the Council into an Academy. The term 'Council', he argued, did not imply any 'particular distinction' for its members. He pointed, by comparison, to how effectively the Academy of Science, founded in 1959, was now able to deploy a sense of distinction to gain publicity for itself and its concerns ('Proposal to Change'). In 1990, in a letter to John Mulvaney, then Honorary Secretary of the Academy of Humanities, Crawford was to recall that in pursuing the idea of an Academy in the late 1960s, he felt very strongly that the humanities should be seeking the same status as the sciences had achieved through their Academy. He was certain that the humanities 'could only do so by the same hard way as the Academy of Science had followed'—through a Royal Charter. It was precisely in this move, as we shall see, to establish the authority of the Academy of the Humanities through claiming 'particular distinction' for its members and recognition for the institution in this traditional

form that tensions with his other ambition of modernising the humanities would arise.

Crawford reported to Mulvaney that the Council's Annual General Meeting in 1967 adopted his proposal for the Academy by a large majority after a 'stormy debate'. This accomplished, Crawford reminisced, he 'walked over to Keith Hancock's house and asked for his permission to nominate him as first President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities'. Hancock's replied: 'I cannot refuse that invitation' (Letter to D. J. Mulvaney). Recently retired from the Australian National University, W. K. Hancock was a brilliant historian and a man of immense gravitas. As soon as his proposed Presidency was announced, Hancock immediately began his public advocacy for the humanities. He was to be a highly skilled advocate, as Crawford had been. In August 1969, he wrote to Sir Robert Menzies, who by now was no longer Prime Minister, to announce that the Academy had been formally recognised by the granting of the Royal Charter by Queen Elizabeth II in June 1969. The Australian Humanities Research Council will conduct 'Operation Phoenix', he declared, in which the 'old bird dies in the fire; the new bird rises from the ashes. An Academy is born' (Letter to Robert Menzies). Hancock confided that he would be seeking to make the Academy 'a much more lively society than the Council had been'. 'Planning for the future', he said, was to be 'the chief occupation of the September meeting', but at the same time he acknowledged the past as he invited Menzies, 'as our colleague and friend', to join them at their annual dinner (Letter to Robert Menzies).

Hancock's chief preoccupation on assuming the leadership role of the new Academy, articulated through his image of the phoenix rising (and at other times a snake with new skin) (Letter to H. C. Coombs), was to create a much more dynamic organisation. Hancock commented to Crawford that the Council in recent years had become primarily focused on 'kindness' to its members through its publications grants program (Letter to Max Crawford). He immediately moved to make the Academy a more externally-focused body with its main preoccupation being with major projects, several of which had commenced prior to the Academy's formation. The projects were admirable: a dictionary of Australian English; an atlas of Australian place names; and a tri-Academy project on environmental control, studying Botany Bay, for which the federal government was to grant one million dollars in 1973. These projects point to the way Hancock believed the Academy could both create and demonstrate social relevance for the humanities. The humanities cause could be best promoted through undertaking 'scholarly enterprises' that brought together a wide range of expertise and engaged with problems of national significance. He was most passionate about the Botany Bay project and its bringing together of expertise across the three Academies of that time—of Science, Humanities and Social Sciences.

While pursuing this agenda for the Academy, Hancock remained a highly regarded scholar, respected for the depth and breadth of his research as well as his moral authority, wisdom, civility and huge personal dignity (Davidson 500-13). As such he personified the traditional virtues of the humanities scholar as they had been understood and performed in Wood's time. He embodied in his character and person, and in the depth of his knowledge and scholarship, what Tim Rowse has referred to as the 'ideal of a properly civilised human being' (65).<sup>2</sup> But Hancock, like Crawford, was acutely conscious that the humanities could no longer rest on an understanding of their role that assumed an elite form of education as their basis. As well as being a man of great moral authority, he was also an exemplar of and advocate for a humanities of professionalised knowledges in which the inner virtues expected of the humanities scholar were being transformed into a set of methodological prescriptions for the acquisition of knowledge (Harrison 42-3). The authority of the humanities scholar was becoming increasingly dependent in the twentieth century on one's labour and expertise rather than the aura of a particular scholarly persona. Hancock pursued a rigorous approach to historical research and placed a great emphasis on the importance of 'discovery' in history, most clearly demonstrated in the title of his book *Discovering Monaro* (Griffiths 42-3). He placed considerable weight too on engaged knowledge in which humanities scholars had a responsibility to the world around them. As Tom Griffiths notes, his lexicon of moral and scholarly engagement included 'words such as "attachment", "craft", "justice", "span" and "witness"' (43). His devotion to these principles was apparent in his seeking to commit the new Academy to focusing on projects of national significance. At the same time his involvement in and advocacy particularly for the Botany Bay project was about his vision for how the Academy could create significance and relevance for the humanities.

The humanities cause, as envisaged by these early leaders of the Academy then, was multifaceted and expansive, a cause to which they devoted considerable effort and careful thought. Together they ensured that the Academy in its early days reflected and was contributing to a complex reconfiguration taking place in the humanities in the 1960s and '70s in Australia (Hunter, 'Mythos, Ethos and Pathos'). As such it was for them a both traditional and modernising agent. On the one hand, they envisaged it as a moral community that should represent certain intellectual and ethical values, retaining a commitment to a humanities that was about producing 'men' of moral purpose, personal dignity and scholarly excellence. But as leaders in the humanities community they were also committed to ensuring that they were responsive to the context in which they were operating—to adapting imaginatively to new demands brought about by the rapid increase in student numbers and by the continuing decline in the significance of a

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<sup>2</sup> Rowse notes in this paper that A. D. Trendall was considered a key figure in the Academy who embodied these characteristics.

liberal education conceived in traditional terms. For Hancock, in particular, the Academy was expected to be outward-looking, taking a lead in demonstrating the responsibility of the humanities to engage creatively and vigorously with the changes in and challenges of their world.

They were not particularly troubled it seems, however, with the gendered, club-like nature of the organisation they were creating to deliver on these ambitions. Women were very much in the minority in terms of membership of the AHRC. The founding members of the Council had a strong sense of themselves as being part of a club in which they frequently referred to each other by their last names 'My dear Trendall', 'Dear Price'.<sup>3</sup> Their annual dinners too, extending into the early years of the Academy, strengthened this aspect of the organisation with the agreement that no wives would be invited (Circular to Fellows). With the formation of the Academy just three women were foundation fellows out of a total of fifty-one. As men of a particular era, Crawford, Hancock and other early leaders of the Academy, such as the poet A. D. Hope, were comfortable operating in universities and related institutions that were the preserve of what Margaret Thornton has called 'Benchmark Men' (Thornton 60).<sup>4</sup>

### **The Australian Academy of the Humanities in the 1970s and '80s: *An Activist Academy***

The Royal Charter for the Academy, as announced in June 1969, stated eight objects and purposes for which it was to be constituted. Relations with government were not explicitly mentioned in these objects; yet this relationship had been central to the activities of the AHRC beforehand and would continue to be so in the work of the Academy. Hancock and Crawford were men of social influence and mixed with ease with politicians and other key public figures of the day. This built on a tradition within the Council in which its leaders were highly adept at using their connections to pursue financial support for this organisation. A. D. Trendall, the distinguished classicist and first Master of University House at the Australian National University (ANU), was probably the most notable figure in this regard. His membership of various boards and national committees, such as the council of the National Library of Australia, the Martin Committee, and the Australian Universities Commission, demonstrate how highly respected and successful he was in building networks of influence for the Council in its early days.

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<sup>3</sup> This mode of address started to disappear in the records of the AHRC by the 1960s.

<sup>4</sup> There was concern among some of these leaders that early members of the AHRC who had been nominated by their universities were not necessarily of sufficient merit to automatically become fellows of the Academy but Crawford and Hancock insisted on the pragmatism of this approach. The only other concerns were about the age profile of fellows and whether practitioners of the arts, particularly poets and novelists, would be appropriately represented.

Similarly, Archibald Grenfell Price, one of the most active founding members of the Council, had close connections with Robert Menzies, in particular, which proved immensely important in gaining his support, personal and financial, for the Council.

These networks meant that the Council, and then the Academy in its early days, was supported by the personal connections and intimate networks of its leading figures with federal politicians and key public officials. Members of the Council were confident in their ability to write directly to the Prime Minister, as someone who would support such an elite club, to recruit him to their cause and seek his personal assistance in securing financial support. Crawford and Hancock in their moves to establish the Academy continued this tradition. Menzies was invited to their annual dinners each year at least until the early 1970s, and he came. But by the mid-1970s networks of influence were changing in Australia. The key figures of the Academy would no longer be able to draw so effectively on such connections with politicians and major public servants to advance their cause.

Change was slow and certain club-like features of the Academy continued throughout the 1970s with only four women out of the total 79 new fellows being elected between 1970 to 1979. In addition, ANU dominated in terms of the number of fellows, followed by the universities of Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. Only two women were members of its Council in this period, Ursula Hoff in 1970-1971 and Leonie Kramer from 1978 to 1979.<sup>5</sup> For a time the Academy was to become a 'quiet affair' in the words of a former Honorary Secretary, Graeme Clarke, in an oral history interview in 2014 (interview with Daniel Connell). J. A. Passmore, the President in 1976, acknowledged this lack of an active profile in his annual report, pointing to the political turmoil experienced by the Commonwealth government in the previous few years as making the Academy's relationship with it 'almost non-existent' (Passmore). B. W. Smith's Presidential Report for the 1979 Annual General Meeting also confirmed this assessment of the Academy but provided a rather different perspective. He commented that the Academy was finding it difficult to have a clear sense of its purpose, to identify useful business in the 1970s that was not already being addressed by universities and other committees such as the Australian Research Grants Committee (ARGC) (Smith). The Academy's dedication to the humanities cause had lost its focus for a time.

This began to change in the early 1980s as the result primarily of major transformations in government processes and frameworks but as the consequence too of the way the Academy itself adapted to these developments.

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<sup>5</sup> The age profile of the Fellows is not possible to determine from the Academy's records but it was not raised as an issue in this context. The only concern that does appear again briefly in the 1970s is about the election of practitioners of the arts, a matter, understandably, of some concern to the poet Judith Wright, who was elected as one of the founding fellows of the Academy.

After the Second World War, the Commonwealth government had become increasingly involved in research funding for universities and in developing national research policies. This began in earnest in 1965 with the establishment of the ARGC and was to become more intense with the reconstitution of the Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC) in 1976. As the government moved to establish a set of national objectives for research through ASTEC, the academies of both the Humanities and the Social Sciences became wary of these developments. In 1981, they sent a joint statement to ASTEC advocating the inclusion of their disciplines in any such considerations (Macintyre 214). This move represented a significant shift for the Academy of the Humanities. Previously its focus had been chiefly on seeking greater support from government for the Academy itself. It was now moving to a major focus on arguing for the importance of the government considering the humanities—and the Academy as representing these disciplines—in any discussions of national research policy.

Within a few years, ‘goaded by the subordinate status’ still being allocated to their two academies, as Stuart Macintyre notes, the Humanities and the Social Sciences began to intensify their pressure to gain representation on ASTEC. The Academy of the Social Sciences of Australia had some success (Macintyre 216). But the arguments by the Academy of the Humanities for recognition in this arena of research policy continued to be ignored. It was not until 1992, as we shall see, that the Academy of the Humanities began to gain some ground on this issue.

In 1986 the government turned its attention to the functioning of the now four learned academies themselves<sup>6</sup>—initially on the particular issue of their funding. This appears to have been prompted at least in part by a letter in 1985 from the then President of the Academy of the Humanities, G. A. Wilkes, to the Prime Minister, R. J. Hawke, complaining about the disparity in the funding provided to the other three academies compared to the Humanities (which received just one tenth of the \$600,000 allocated to the academies as a whole he pointed out) (Wilkes). The *Review of Government Relations with Learned Academies* recommended restoring funding to mid-1970s levels for all academies. But it was also to articulate new guidelines for determining their funding.

The draft report proposed a new principle that the academies were to be expected ‘to undertake activities which are in the national interest’ and ‘contribute to broad Government and Departmental objectives’ (*Review of Government Relations*). In their responses to this draft, the academies were successful in making the final guiding principles more respectful of the purposes for which they believed the academies had originally been established—as organisations promoting research

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<sup>6</sup> The Australian Academy of Technological Sciences was formed in 1975, with ‘Engineering’ being added to its name in 1987.



and scholarship in the various disciplines they represented. But the expectation about contributing to government objectives was retained in the final report (*Review of Government Relations*). While the social sciences and humanities continued to be relegated to minor roles in terms of having little or no representation on the government's major advisory body for research policy, this report signaled that they were nevertheless being drawn into providing an arm of social administration. They were expected to enhance the government's advisory and policy-making capabilities and to increasingly play a service role for government.

The Humanities Academy had actively sought such a role but it is not clear that its officers realised at the time how extensively it would change their modus operandi over the next decade. It meant, in particular, that the humanities cause for the Academy was shifting to being defined for them by government. They were expected to be a highly engaged advocacy body for the humanities, ever ready to make the case to government for the humanities in terms of their value to the 'national interest'. But what constituted that national interest was to be determined by the government of the day in its statements of government objectives rather than the Academy itself actively defining what might benefit the nation within a framework appropriate to the humanities. This was a marked change from the time when Hancock, as we have seen, had sought to establish a socially engaged institution with a focus on what he called 'problems of national significance', problems that he clearly saw the humanities as actively involved in defining rather than simply addressing in terms imposed by the political agendas of the government of the day.

### **The Humanities Cause: Professionalised Policy Advice and Advocacy**

By the second half of the 1980s a reforming Labor government and an activist Minister, John Dawkins, were beginning to develop challenging ideas about how to tie universities to economic and social policy. In this context, the Academy was now providing responses to an exhausting number of policy papers. Key policy documents were produced by ASTEC that had taken on the Dawkins reforms related to research. Others came from the Higher Education Council established by Dawkins, as was the National Board of Education, Employment and Training (NBEET)—under which the Australian Research Council (ARC), which replaced the ARGC in 1988, was to operate. But the documents that were to attract the most attention and alarm from the Academy and its fellows at this time were, first, *Higher Education: A Policy Discussion Paper*, known as 'the Green Paper', published in 1987, and then, *Higher Education: A Policy Statement*, 'the White Paper', published in 1988, through which John Dawkins announced his intention to transform the system of universities, technical institutes and colleges of advanced education into a 'Unified National System'.

With these reforms universities were transformed from being 'elite institutions into a mass system of higher education' (see Macintyre et al.) that had many implications for universities as well as for the institutes and colleges also caught up in these changes. As Ian Hunter has observed, the objective of the Dawkins reforms was to 'harness universities and colleges to the problems of national productivity and national debt'. This was not something peculiar to Australia, he adds, but it was articulated in this country more in terms of making higher education a mass education system and focusing on equality of opportunity ('Personality as a Vocation' 7). The implications for teaching and research in the humanities were profound. In the area of research, government requirements that funding be tied to performance in terms of serving this definition of the national interest became much more clearly articulated and drove policy interventions extensively in universities. They also led to research performance, measured according to instrumental criteria, increasingly dominating university policy, system-wide as well as at the level of individual universities. For humanities scholars it was a very particular model of research that was gaining the upper hand: what they increasingly typified as 'the science model' in which all research was expected to be carried out in teams and on a large scale, and funding for which was to focus on equipment and support staffing, not publications or time (see Nerlich). Council meeting minutes of the Academy from March 1989 reported 'considerable disquiet' being expressed at the 1988 Annual General Meeting about the proposed reforms to higher education in Australia (AAH Council minutes 1989).

The Dawkins reforms were announced at a time of conflicting experiences for the Academy of the Humanities. On the one hand, the Federal Opposition had established a 'Waste Watch Committee' which published a list of 62 projects in March 1987 funded by the ARGC that it described as wasteful. These judgements were made, it seems, simply on the basis of the titles of projects from the Annual Reports of the ARGC over a period of four years. Accusations were made of the projects having no public relevance and the ARGC demonstrating political bias. Many of the projects singled out for ridicule were in the areas of humanities research, with examples such as a study of 'motherhood in Ancient Rome' and 'the study of prehistoric stone tools' providing easy game. The media gave the report considerable publicity with articles in major newspapers and radio commentaries from high profile journalists such as John Laws. The Academy responded but its stance was fairly muted, unconfident. Rejecting the Waste Watch Committee's demand that all research should demonstrate social and economic relevance, the President of the Academy at the time, Stephen Wurm, wrote to the press quoting Robert Menzies who at an earlier date, in discussing the ends served by the humanities, had challenged what he saw as the inappropriate, 'quaint instinct' for dichotomy in which studies were divided between 'the practical and the useless'.

Wurm then went on to describe the Academy's own projects such as Language Atlases focusing particularly on the region and work on Cook's voyages which he concluded 'amply demonstrate the need for research in the humanities'. He did not seem to think it necessary to articulate why he thought this was so clearly the case (Wurm, Letter to the Editor).

The Academy attracted some criticism from its fellows for its low profile in defence of the humanities at this time (Duckworth). This was echoed in relation to the humanities community more generally by Hugh Preston, an officer in the Department of Science, who sought to convey the Minister's 'unhappiness' at the 'rather subdued response from the general Humanities and Social Sciences research community' to the attacks. Writing in reply to correspondence sent to the Minister by Roland Sussex, a Fellow of the Academy as well as Chair of the ARGC Humanities Subcommittee, Preston urged him to encourage colleagues 'to take the matter up on a sustained basis' (Preston). The government in the meantime responded by cutting the ARGC's funding the following year (Sussex).

Despite these clear indications of the precarious nature of even current levels of funding for the humanities, the Academy was at the same time also in celebratory mode as it congratulated itself on the success of the events and publications it had organised for Australia's Bicentenary. It was successful in gaining several major sponsorships for its activities, most notably from Esso Australia. The Academy hosted an international specialist colloquium to great acclaim in France in 1987, with the support of the French Government, on the topic of 'European Voyaging towards Australia'. The major conference at the heart of the Academy's plans for the Bicentenary, 'Terra Australis to Australia', was held in August 1988 in Sydney and in Canberra over a period of two weeks at a range of venues. It was opened by the Governor General, Sir Ninian Stephens; and activities for the second week were preceded with a reception addressed by the Prime Minister, R. J. Hawke. In his Presidential Report for the year, Wurm, pronounced 1988 a very successful year for the Academy. Many of the scholarly and international projects of the Academy had been brought to fruition and staging these major public events provided a 'level of visibility' for the Academy that it will need, he said, to 'try hard to continue in the future' (Wurm, 'Presidential Report').

However, the reality was that the Academy was soon consumed by a variety of activities associated with the Dawkins reforms; its work in enhancing the public profile of the humanities—either by promoting or defending them on their own terms—took something of a back seat. Its council report each year now had a section headed along the lines of 'Representations to' or 'Relations with' government, noting various submissions to government and attendance at meetings with its officers for the year. John Dawkins had announced the formation of the ARC, to replace the ARGC, in mid-1987, and the Academy became

increasingly drawn into its development (Schulz). By 1989 all four academies had members on the nomination committees to select scholars to be on ARC panels. The first chair of the ARC, Don Aitkin, also sought to persuade the humanities and social sciences that their interests were best served by taking an active role in the rapidly changing landscape of research policy and gave as an example the need for the academies to participate in the public discussion of research priority areas (Rawson). The Academy of Humanities took on board Aitkin's advice and in June 1989 wrote to him suggesting four priority areas to be considered for the humanities: Australian cultural studies; language studies; Pacific and Asian studies; and theoretical foundations, an area that was described as important for all disciplines and 'fundamental to human inquiry'. They nevertheless prefaced this proposal by insisting that nominating priority areas should never stand in the way of supporting outstanding work (Jackson and Clarke). By 1991, the Academy's council report was expressing its gratitude to the now Chair of the ARC, Max Brennan, for his willingness to meet with them and for the way the ARC acknowledged the Academy as a source of advice (Council Report 1991).

While the Academy actively sought to respond to the government's move to engage it in a professionalised service role by providing policy-making advice in these ways, it continued to rely on certain traditional features of a gentleman's club. In the 1980s, only 11 out of the 87 new fellows elected were women. Yet the gendered nature of universities was being challenged by State-based legislation, in the first instance, with the passage of sex discrimination acts in the mid-1970s in a number of States and then increasingly by individual universities in the late '70s into the 1980s as they began to scrutinise their staff profiles. By the mid-1980s Equal Opportunity or Equal Employment Opportunity Offices were being established in all universities and affirmative action policies were requiring universities to, in Margaret Thornton's words, 'slough[...] off their pre-modern and patriarchal practices ... to welcome women staff' (Thornton 61). It was not until the 1990s, as we will see, that the Academy was to respond actively to these changes in universities. The expansion of the university system, however, with new universities such as Monash, La Trobe, Flinders, Griffith and so on meant that the dominance of ANU and what were to become known as the sandstone universities was dissipated to some extent. With the Dawkins reforms and the even greater expansion in numbers of universities this would become even more the case in the 1990s.

ASTEAC continued to be of concern to the Academy as it sought to pursue the cause of the humanities being heard by this powerful source of policy advice to government. A delegation of five from the Academy was snubbed in 1991 when it responded to an invitation by ASTEC to discuss its submission to its inquiry into 'Research Directions for Australia's Future'. Only one member of the council of ASTEC attended the meeting, and she was a Fellow of the Academy of Social

Sciences of Australia (Schulz 82). But a turning point was reached in 1992. Initially that year, ASTEC continued its unwillingness to seek the advice of the councils of the humanities or social sciences academies. It simply notified them that it had been entrusted with conducting a review into the role of the social sciences and the humanities in the contribution of science and technology to economic development. No representation from their academies was sought on this inquiry. But a small ASTEC working group did subsequently agree to meet with two council members of the Academy of the Humanities, John Mulvaney and Deryck Schreuder, to hear their concerns about the review. On the basis of this meeting they agreed to receive a further submission from the Academy (Schreuder 84). Schreuder, who was to become President the following year, was pleased to announce in his first Presidential Report that he had eventually been appointed to the 'Reference Group' advising ASTEC on their report which was published in May 1993. He acknowledged that the final report did not 'say all the things we had hoped' but was upbeat about it reflecting 'a more sympathetic approach to the humanities' and acknowledging the 'fundamental role of the humanities in national social and economic development'. He also noted that the Terms of Reference of the review had been changed after the Academy's initial criticisms (Schreuder 75). Schreuder in his reports to the Academy during his three years as President was keen to represent the Academy to its fellows as now highly respected by government and 'repeatedly [being] asked for opinion and advice' (Schreuder 74).

In 1993 the Academy sought to make this recognition and the proactive stance of the Academy in the sphere of government policy-making more widely known. A feature article with a photograph of Deryck Schreuder, John Mulvaney, and Graeme Clarke, as President, Secretary and Treasurer, appeared in the *Canberra Times* in which they announced that the Academy was becoming 'centrally involved with the character of Australian educational debate, with issues in Australian culture and society'. Clearly wishing to point out how the Academy was beginning to modernise itself on a number of fronts, they declared it was no 'academic club for "old boys" and "old girls"' of the academic profession in Australia. Schreuder had spelt this out further for the fellows in his Presidential Report of 1993 in which he celebrated the 'rising standing of the Academy within the higher education and research debates' (Schreuder 74). He explained that this activity was accompanied by the Academy 'taking major scholarly initiatives', supported mostly by ARC competitive funding, 'which will hopefully bury the false image of an "academic social club"' (Schreuder 75). By initiating projects of public intervention which advance the cause of the humanities, he saw the Academy as putting the 'view of humanists in the public sphere'. But he acknowledged that the Academy faced major challenges in addressing the issues of age and gender balance (Schreuder 76). As already noted, in the 1980s only 11 women had been elected as fellows out of a total of 87. The Proceedings for 1993 reported that five

out of 12 fellows elected were women suggesting that Schreuder could have had reason to be optimistic that this issue was now being addressed; but he was right too to be concerned as the numbers dropped again in 1994 and for the 1990s the total figures were 45 out of 187.

In so positioning the Academy as taking initiatives on these various fronts, Schreuder and his colleagues were publicly adopting a new humanities persona that was being actively forged, at least in part, through the interactions between the government and the Academy over the years since its foundation. John Hardy, who had been Honorary Secretary of the Academy between 1981 to 1988, signaled the need for such a development in the Annual Lecture for the Academy delivered in 1989. In response to the challenge posed by the Waste Watch Committee and its denigration of the relevance of the humanities, he questioned whether the humanities had 'proselytized enough' and asked whether this was a matter of temperament, 'a congenital shyness'? But he went on to suggest it was perhaps instead the 'result of a complex of things enjoined on us by our disciplines—a scholarly modesty or humility, a habit of irony, an appropriate tentativeness...'. Instead of being prone to defensiveness and self-absorption, he argued, the greatest challenge the humanities hold out to us may well be for 'us to be less retiring or self-absorbed, and a little more positive about what we profess...' (Hardy 15). At the same symposium, Ian Donaldson, at the time the Director of the Humanities Research Centre at the ANU, also enjoined fellows of the Academy to 'think afresh about the situation of the humanities in Australia, and to develop strategies for redrawing the taxonomies of learning, for recharging political power, within and across the universities in this country'. It was not enough to simply defend the humanities; rather we should be just as focused, he said, on what we should 'by rights enjoy, extend, promote, go out and tell our friends about' ('Defining and Defending the Humanities' 34).

Schreuder's Presidential Report and the *Canberra Times* article show that he and his colleagues were publicly assuming a more outward-looking, politically astute persona for the humanities in which the Academy would begin to move beyond a merely service role to government. The opportunity soon arose for the Academy and some of its key figures to adopt and learn to inhabit this demeanour in a more extended manner. The ASTEC review of the role of the social sciences and the humanities in the contribution of science and technology to economic development published its report in 1993: *Bridging the Gap: The Social Sciences, Humanities, Science and Technology in Economic Development*. It included a recommendation that the ARC commission a broad-ranging study of the social sciences and the humanities in Australia to provide a basis for a strategy in research and training for these fields (12). The ARC commissioned two parallel strategic reviews, to be conducted by the two Academies of the Humanities and of the Social Sciences, to undertake investigations into the research effort in these

fields and thereafter develop a strategy for research and training in the humanities and in the social sciences. For the humanities, Anthony Low, a fellow of the Academy of the Humanities who had also been the Vice Chancellor of the ANU from 1975 to 1982, was to be the convenor. The Academy drew together a large reference group, made up of mostly fellows of the Academy, to participate in discussions over the next two years and contribute to the final three volume report, *Knowing Ourselves and Others: The Humanities in Australia—Into the 21st Century*, published in 1998. The terms of reference called for a mapping of the present nature and scope of the humanities in Australia, including outlining recent developments and areas of strength and weakness. An analysis was also required that looked to the immediate and more long-term future of the humanities and their advancement.

The recommendations of the Report were extensive, directed at state and federal governments, government departments, universities, the ARC, and the Academy itself. It was a forceful statement of the major change in the relations of the Academy of the Humanities with the federal government that had taken place over the previous ten years as it sought to influence government policy about higher education. The work of the reference group also involved exploring how to promote the humanities and to take a more strategic approach to assessing the current state and future of the many disciplines recognised by this review. Published by NBEET, it was a quite different document to the one that had been produced and self-published by the AHRC almost forty years previously. The internally-focused, scholarly self, familiar within the Academy of the Humanities, was being replaced—in this context at least—by a more outgoing, policy-oriented advocate, seeking to promote the diversity, strength and abundance of humanities scholarship being undertaken in Australia (Clunies Ross, 'President's Address 1997' 93).

Margaret Clunies Ross, the first female President of the Academy, acknowledged in 1998 that not all fellows were comfortable with this new 'proactive Academy'. 'Presumably', she speculated, they hold that 'sallies into the "real world" of university management are not part of our brief'. But she saw this proactive stance as consistent with its Charter and the expectation that the Academy should take on 'a general responsibility for the welfare of the Humanities in Australia' (Clunies Ross, 'President's Report 1998' 70). Clunies Ross was to play a major role in the further development of the Academy's activist stance as she was in shaping it as an increasingly professionalised institution. As President, she was intimately involved in the strategic review of the humanities as well as undertaking major activities to promote the Academy and the humanities to government, including appearing with several colleagues before the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training. But she also sought during her term of office, she explained in her final President's Report in 1998, to get the Academy's

processes into what she described as 'good working order'. She was assisted in this move by the increasing professionalisation of the Academy's staffing. Following the retirement of John Mulvaney as Honorary Secretary in 1996, David Bennett was appointed as the first Executive Director, albeit on a part-time basis at this time.<sup>7</sup> Clunies Ross identified the practices involved in the nomination of new fellows as particularly in need of reform to ensure they were establishing a 'fair and representative ... potential pool of outstanding Humanities scholars'. In so doing she was articulating for the Academy commitments to reforming its practices along the lines introduced into universities in the 1980s in large part as a response to the requirements of affirmative action policies. She also linked this concern, however, with an issue that had been creating considerable tension within the Academy over the last few years. To achieve the ambition of reforming its election processes to be 'fair and representative', she urged the fellows to accept that the Academy needed to ensure that 'the broad range of the Humanities disciplines' was acknowledged 'in the organisation of our electoral sections' (Clunies Ross, 'President's Report 1998' 68).

Clunies Ross made this comment in the context of welcoming the first group of scholars elected to the new Academy section, 'Cultural and Communication Studies'. She was clearly aware that the process of agreeing to this new section had been a long, drawn out one. It had commenced informally with Ian Donaldson's address at the 1989 annual symposium and his reference to what he called 'the new humanities' ('Defining and Defending' 31), and, more formally, with the 1991 symposium titled, 'Beyond the Disciplines: The New Humanities', organised by Ken Ruthven (Ruthven). Now that the new section was a reality, Clunies Ross urged her colleagues not to 'be afraid of change if change is warranted for good reasons, because an intelligent response to change can often reinvigorate a discipline' ('President's Report 1998' 68).

The formation of this new section constituted a significant challenge to the traditions of the Academy. Creating new sections had rarely happened up to this point. Sometimes sections were renamed to recognise a broader range of disciplines such as linguistics and in 1980 John Mulvaney was invited by Eugene Kamenka, as Honorary Secretary to the Academy's council, to form a new electoral section in pre-history and classical archaeology, a process which happened very smoothly and without controversy. Cultural and Communication Studies resulted from extensive debate and took over six years of discussion. Gender studies was also contemplated at this time but seems to have disappeared off the agenda by 1997. Lingering doubts persisted for some time about Cultural and Communication Studies with the chief cause of disquiet seeming to be that it could

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<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Margaret Clunies Ross for drawing my attention to this development.



lead to a 'lowering of standards'.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps most revealing of all was the comment by one fellow that more paperwork would probably need to be provided for elections in the future. By comparison, in the past, he noted, the Academy could rely on members of sections knowing the work of potential fellows (Jackson).<sup>9</sup> The expansion of the higher education sector with 36 universities in 1995, following the Dawkins' reforms, compared to 14 in 1969, had already no doubt challenged the extent to which fellows could be confident in their personal networks with other scholars and in their intimate knowledge of potential candidates for election. A whole new section with new candidates, many of whom were to come from the newer universities, drew attention to the extent to which the Academy would need to embrace more transparent bureaucratic practices replacing the personal knowledge, intimate connections and the tight networks that had characterised the Academy in its early days. It was no longer a body that drew simply on existing networks to establish its authority and distinction; it was creating new networks and personal relationships with its processes needing to withstand public scrutiny if it was to carry any weight in arguing the cause of the humanities.

### **Conclusion**

The Academy by the end of the twentieth century was a very different beast to the one that had emerged in its first few years. It had now become a professionalised advocacy body. It continued to rely on its elite nature to lend authority to its voice when speaking on behalf of the humanities, as Crawford had envisaged, but its election processes were increasingly scrutinised to make it more accountable—transparent—to the broader community. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century it has sought to ensure the election of a more diverse set of fellows but this clearly remains a challenge. The emergence of new fields that break down the divisions between the humanities and sciences such as environmental humanities, humanitarian engineering and new developments in cybernetics no doubt will heighten the issues involved in recognising a more diverse community of scholars. So too will other important debates such as those about indigenous knowledges, recognising the work of indigenous scholars and the relationship between the humanities and the creative arts.

In recent decades too, the Academy has worked in various ways to develop a broad focus in arguing the cause of the humanities, often by collaborating with other organisations such as with the GLAM—Galleries, Libraries and Museums—sector. This has led to it resuming a more active role in defining the cause of the humanities rather than this being defined for it by government as had occurred in

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<sup>8</sup> Schreuder gave some indication of this concern in his Presidential Report of 1993 (76).

<sup>9</sup> The Academy's processes of election require initial nomination of possible fellows within the annual meetings of its sections, then input by sections by postal and more recently electronic vote, followed by final election by the whole fellowship. The council has oversight of this process.

the 1980s. One of the most substantial developments for the Academy recently that goes significantly beyond the government's narrow equation of national benefit with economic benefit has been through a set of projects conducted through the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA), the body that now brings the four learned academies together. Funded by the ARC and reporting to the Office of the Chief Scientist, the four academies undertook a series of wide-ranging, multidisciplinary investigations between 2013 to 2017 into the major issues of our time under the title of 'Securing Australia's Future' (see Torok and Holper). No doubt a learning experience for all four academies and for the researchers involved, these projects required considerable adjustments on all sides to come to an agreement about what questions should be asked in the first place as well as to determine how they should be investigated and the outcomes reported. Like the projects of national significance Hancock advocated, the ACOLA projects pointed to the way the Academy of the Humanities could be actively involved in creating the social and political relevance of the humanities through involvement in such joint, multi-disciplinary work. They also signalled that the Academy had a responsibility to encourage humanities scholars to engage with the world around them. Its annual symposia have increasingly become a forum for these sorts of discussions, as was the case for its symposium in 2019 for its 50-years celebrations, 'Humanising the Future'. Through these moves the Academy has re-engaged in recent years with the commitment of its founders to be outward-looking, to take a lead in demonstrating the responsibility of the humanities to engage creatively and vigorously with the changes in and challenges of our world. At a time when public funding for the humanities is yet again under attack and support within universities being massively undermined, it is crucial that the Academy retains and indeed intensifies this emphasis to resist a temptation to retreat to a defensive definition of the humanities cause. A constructive re-thinking of the role of the humanities along these lines within the modern Australian university, and beyond it too, is as much or even more needed now as it was at the time of the formation of the Academy in the 1960s.

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AAHA. Australian Academy of the Humanities Archive  
AGPS. Australian Government Publishing Services  
NLA. National Library of Australia  
UMA. University of Melbourne Archives

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