

New portfolio, new approach

The Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS), of which ALIA is a foundation member, was launched in June 2004. CHASS was established to become the peak council and advocacy body to represent the interests of researchers and educators in the humanities, arts and social sciences sector in Australia. As part of its remit, CHASS has released an election document calling for fundamental changes in government policy, including a call for a new portfolio 'Education, Research and Training'.

Taken together, the changes would unlock the potential of people working in the humanities, arts and social sciences and allow them to play a full part in stimulating new industry and helping formulate new policy.

As well as the new portfolio, CHASS is calling for three other changes:

1. membership for the humanities, arts and social sciences on the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council;
2. expanding the research and development tax concession to allow for work in the humanities, arts and social sciences; and
3. adding a Fifth National Research Priority.

'We are calling for a new national approach, and it has to start at the very top,' CHASS president Professor Malcolm Gillies said. 'These changes add up to a fundamental re-think of the way the humanities, arts and social sciences are recognised in Australia.'

'We are suffering a hangover from the 20th century, when governments thought the future lay only with science and technology. But Australia needs to think bigger.'

Professor Gillies said the search for national research priorities in 2002-03 was led by the Science Minister and the Chief Scientist, with only a minor role for the humanities, arts and social sciences sector. He said the humanities, arts and social sciences are specifically excluded from research and development tax concessions, on the spurious grounds that its work is not patentable and therefore cannot be commercialised and used in the market.

The policy can be viewed on CHASS website: <http://www.chass.org.au>.

CHASS commercialisation study

CHASS is undertaking a study into commercial activity in the humanities, arts and social sciences. The study will gather evidence through focus groups to be held across Australia.

It will contribute to a broad aim of CHASS: to make the case for our sector. One part of this case is by demonstrating the utility (or commercial activity) of people in the sector.

If you are interested in contributing to the study, register your interest at the CHASS website: <http://www.chass.org.au>.

In announcing the study to the media, CHASS president Malcolm Gillies said: 'We want a snapshot picture of what people are doing, who their commercial partners are, and how they got to find each other.'

CHASS will hold focus groups in the capital city of each state and territory, and also in Townsville and Newcastle to gain a regional perspective.

Dates of focus groups:

Townsville: Monday 4 October

Brisbane: Tuesday 5 October

Newcastle: Thursday 7 October

Sydney: Friday 8 October

Canberra: Monday 11 October

Hobart: Monday 18 October

Melbourne Tuesday 19 October

Adelaide: Wednesday 20 October

Perth: Friday 22 October

Darwin: Wednesday 15 December

What is commercial?

For the purpose of the study, 'commercial' is work which can be characterised by one or more of the following:

- it has a market value — someone is willing to pay for it and/or the intellectual property it represents;
- it is useful — it has a potential or realised application may involve a partner from 'industry' (any group which might apply the results of the work, such as a government department, non-profit organisation, corporation or other commercial partner); or
- it is sold, performed or exhibited.

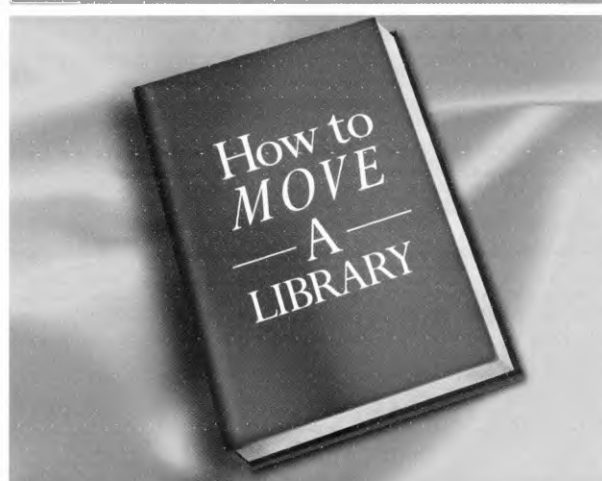
How the focus groups work

Each focus group will last about 75 minutes, and tea and coffee will be served. Notes of the discussion will be sent to all participants for verification, and you will also be sent a copy of the final report.

CHASS will select a representative group to participate in each focus group, so that a diverse range of experiences can be presented. Some people registering their interest may not be selected because of this need for balance: those participants will be asked to contribute their experiences through a questionnaire.

The study is being funded by Department of Education Science and Training (DEST), and will feed in to DEST's policy-making process. It will be completed by the end of the year.

For further information: Toss Gascoigne, executive director, CHASS, director@chass.org.au, ph 02 6249 1995. ■



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