Australasian Association for Digital Humanities
Future Humanities Workforce - Response

We thank the Australian Academy of the Humanities for the opportunity to respond to the Future Humanities Workforce Discussion Paper and consultation questions.

The Australasian Association for Digital Humanities (aaDH) was formed in March 2011 to strengthen the digital humanities research community in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. This was the outcome of a workshop sponsored by the Australian Academy of the Humanities and held at the Australian National University, which brought together 40 leading researchers, project directors and sector representatives to plan for the establishment of an Australasian professional association. Since its inauguration, the Association has hosted four biennial conferences and sponsored smaller events to address its purpose to support and extend links between digital humanities researchers, improve professional development opportunities, and provide international leverage for local projects and programs.

Response to select consultation questions

1. What are humanities researchers' (and humanities graduates' more broadly) most distinctive and important skills and capabilities?

Discussions about the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the future of work, technology, artificial intelligence, and more, invariably include a call for increased skills in areas traditionally associated with the humanities: creativity; lateral and critical thinking; ethical thinking; textual analysis; the ability to process and synthesise disparate information sources into a cohesive narrative or argument; rich cultural understanding; and highly-developed written and verbal communication skills.

These transferable skills are central to the humanities, and have wide-ranging applications across many disciplines and professions. Investment in the humanities, its methodologies and platforms, therefore constitutes investment in the skills that will be required in the coming century and beyond.

2. What are the current skills and capability gaps?
        a. In the academic workforce?
        b. In the wider workforce?

Though digital humanities continues to develop in our region, in general there remains a capability gap in the Australian humanities workforce (and more broadly) related to the rigorous, purposeful use of digital technologies as a research tool.

In stating this, aaDH recognises the rapid uptake of digital technology as part of academic work, including the use of digital journals, websites, aggregators such as the National Library of Australia's Trove, and the use of new media (websites, digital news outlets such as *The Conversation*, podcasts, streaming video) to find research material and disseminate traditional and non-traditional research outputs.

However, technological literacy for humanities researchers needs to go beyond the use of 'fast paper' and digital surrogates. The use of text analysis, visualisation tools, data processing, and machine learning provides the opportunity to open up datasets and areas of research to new forms of analysis, challenging existing ideas and creating the possibility of asking new sorts of questions. Furthermore, beyond merely using such tools, the humanities workforce of the future needs to be involved in *creating* new digital tools and methods that quite literally encode humanities-centred perspectives.

In some cases, this requires new sorts of infrastructure - humanities research infrastructure, going beyond just digitised GLAM[1] collections or online information resources - but the current academic workforce often lacks the skills and experience to plan and develop this infrastructure, or to effectively lobby funding agencies and governments for the funding required to support infrastructure development. The latter requires the ability to effectively communicate the social and economic value of humanities research and humanities research infrastructure in a way which goes beyond simply enumerating the number of researchers working in the field.

Much of this work requires more than individual skills and capability; it necessitates collaboration with others within the humanities, and in other disciplines and professions. This remains a significant capability gap for the emerging academic workforce currently undertaking postgraduate research. Most humanities PhD programs remain focused on individual work and the sole researcher, providing few of the skills related to collaboration, team building, or management required by many contemporary research projects - all skills which are also vital when moving into the workforce beyond academia.

4. What are future knowledge, skills, and capabilities that humanities researchers will require?

More than just digital literacy, in the future humanities researchers will require 'digital metaliteracy': the skill of not only being able to navigate the current digital world, but the ability to move easily to what comes next. At a specific level, this means not only being able to use particular tools or techniques, but also knowing how to learn to use those tools more effectively, how to test and discriminate between emerging technologies, how to adapt practice to start using the next generation of technology which comes along (or to critique and challenge those

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[1] Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums.

technologies on ethical, social, and cultural grounds), how to behave ethically within new technological environments, and how to teach others to do so as well.

5. What can the humanities contribute to the data and digital literacy agenda over the next decade?

A crucial contribution which the humanities can make to this area is in emphasising, analysing and educating about the ways in which data and digital skills are embedded in and transmitted by social structures, from small networks to societal organisation.

Digital humanities as a field has much to offer. Kathleen Fitzpatrick's definition of digital humanities is useful here. She defines the field as: "the work that gets done at the crossroads of digital media and traditional humanistic study. And that happens in two different ways. On the one hand, it's bringing the tools and techniques of digital media to bear on traditional humanistic questions. But it's also bringing humanistic modes of inquiry to bear on digital media. It's a sort of moving back and forth across those lines, thinking about what computing is, how it functions in our culture, and then using those computing technologies to think about the more traditional aspects of culture."[2]

This dual perspective is essential to ethical digital literacy. Data and technology are not neutral or objective; new developments in these areas have the potential to perpetuate, or even magnify, existing prejudices and exclusions with regard to gender, race, sexuality, colonialism, and more. Critical humanistic inquiries into data, data collection, digital media, privacy, and digital inclusion are vital, providing a foundation for the contestation of new ideas as well as their embrace as part of new (or existing) modes of research.

Data literacy cannot be imported from the sciences but needs to develop within the humanities in order for it to be authentic, ethical, critical and adaptable.

6. What are the best practice models for supporting early career researchers (ECRs)?

We are unaware of specific models for supporting ECRs in the academic sector that have been effective to the extent that they could be called 'best practice.' If such models are found to exist, it would be good to promote them more effectively as some ECRs currently feel they are simply expected to 'sink or swim.'

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[2] Andrew Lopez, Fred Rowland, and Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'On Scholarly Communication and the Digital Humanities: An Interview with Kathleen Fitzpatrick', In the Library with the Lead Pipe (blog), 14 January 2015, http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/on-scholarly-communication-and-the-digital-humanities-an-interview-with-kathleen-fitzpatrick/.

We anticipate that best practice models, should they evolve, would include a better balancing of PhD positions with postdoctoral opportunities and other pathways to secure academic employment. Documents like the Postdoc Bill of Rights start to make explicit the expectations surrounding the former, but the need for more (and specifically institutional) action remains. This could include initiatives designed to address concerns around job security, and recognition and career development pathways for the "alt-ac" positions that many ECRs enter (particularly in the digital humanities) as well as pathways for people to flow back and forth between such positions and more traditional academic roles.

7. Do ECRs in the humanities experience different or additional challenges compared to their peers in other disciplines?

While any response to this question will necessarily involve some level of generalisation, postgraduates and ECRs in the humanities can find the research journey more isolating than in some other disciplines due to a lack of collaborative work in laboratory environments or other team-based research. Though most work in Digital Humanities is collaborative and involves teams, the lack of digital humanities infrastructure compounds the broader problem of isolated practitioners. The result is a higher proportion of sole author journal articles and other research outputs across many humanities disciplines, and an expectation (real or perceived) for many ECRs that they conform to this publication model.

Moreover, the emphasis on sole author articles means that ECRs working as research assistants or programmers do not always receive recognition of their contribution through co-authorship, which can make it difficult for ECRs in such positions to build their track record sufficiently to move into a traditional academic career. The sciences, by comparison, tend to have more postdoctoral opportunities which create defined career pathways. Given this orientation, postdoctoral fellowships which are integrated into larger humanities projects are the ideal way to support ECRs, but current funding models in Australia make this difficult.

The lack of broad based digital skills across large parts of the humanities can also pose challenges for ECRs wanting to develop themselves in these areas. Currently our training systems for digital tools and methods make it difficult for many ECRs to upskill or reskill if they are not located in a city with a strong DH community and a summer school or ResBaz (Research Bazaar) presence.

8. Do ECRs experience different or additional challenges compared to mid-career or senior staff?

Casualisation and precarious employment remain significant challenges in the academic workforce, and disproportionately affect ECRs. This is not unique to the humanities. In August

2018 the National Tertiary Education Union released statistics which showed that around 65% of employees in Australian universities were on various forms of contract, sessional and casual employment rather than in permanent or ongoing employment.[3]

Uncertainty about work prospects is accentuated by continued messaging within the academic sector that there are few jobs available, funding is scarce, academics are over-worked, and competition for available positions is fierce. While this may be true, such negative messaging without accompanying support to either transition into academia, or into suitable roles outside academia, is a substantial challenge and can cause or exacerbate anxiety and other mental health issues.[4]

These issues can lead to other challenges more likely to face ECRs and others in precarious employment, including a lack of funding and support for conference and research travel, the inability to be listed as a Chief Investigator or similar on funding proposals, and a lack of access to journals, databases, and other key resources. Yet, despite these barriers, the expectation that ECRs will continue to produce research outputs and be successful in funding applications - that is, to build a traditional academic track record - remains.

10. How do we better track the career trajectories of ECRs?

Data collection is important here, not only through longitudinal surveys of PhD graduates, but also through associations and groups such as the Australian Academy for the Humanities, the Australian Historical Association, aaDH, and similar bodies. It is essential that this data is qualitative as well as quantitative, capturing the texture and specificity of particular experiences; and that data is captured and analysed in a way which helps to reveal and challenge systemic biases affecting careers due to gender, race, class, or socio-economic background.

11. What are the most pressing inequities in the humanities workforce today?

Gender and racial inequality (including with regard to pay) remains a concern. Despite improving participation figures for women, this is often not the case at more senior levels. Disparity in funding exacerbates this. For example, between 2008-2017, 79% of ARC LIEF

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[3] Paul Kniest and National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), The Flood of Insecure Employment at Australian Universities., 2018.

[4] Claire Shaw and Lucy Ward, 'Dark Thoughts: Why Mental Illness Is on the Rise in Academia', *The Guardian*, 6 March 2014, sec. Education, https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2014/mar/06/mental-health-academics-growing-problem-pressure-university.

grant recipients were male.[5] The work of Katherine Ellinghaus et al. has also shown that "Sexism, harassment and discrimination appear to be endemic in Australian universities."[6]

There remain many other inequities. Insecure work and casualisation unjustly favours those with financial support and creates a barrier to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds; many disciplines in the humanities remain disproportionately white (particularly in senior positions); and representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remains troublingly low.

12. What initiatives are most effective in addressing inequity?

While there is great value in supporting people to overcome barriers through scholarships, dedicated funding streams, mentoring programs, and more, many of these initiatives invariably put the responsibility for change on those who have been (and continue to be) systematically excluded and discriminated against.

More effective are those initiatives which create specific quotas, and which make others accountable for gatekeeping and perpetuating inequality. For example, with reference to Deb Verhoeven's work (cited above), stopping funding for men who do not work with women is a more effective way to improve results for women than trying to improve mentoring programs for women. Enforceable quotas (rather than aspirational targets) and criteria requiring mixed gender research teams would similarly produce more rapid change than is currently seen.

Comparable approaches are possible in other areas. For example, projects looking at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should require representation from those communities; or, at the very least, researchers whose research focuses *on* these communities but who consistently fail to include representation *from* these communities in their projects should not be eligible for funding.

In short, the concept of an 'academic track record' needs to be expanded to include a track record for inclusive practice and equitable representation on research teams, rather than focusing just on research outputs and funding history; and 'non-academic' qualities (for example, the values and perspectives a queer researcher brings to research with queer communities) need to be recognised when evaluating suitability for funding or positions.

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[5] Ariel Bogle, 'Australian Research "Has a Daversity Problem"', Current, ABC News, 24 November 2017, https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2017-11-24/australian-research-has-a-daversity-problem/9178786.

[6] Katherine Ellinghaus et al., '"It Destroyed My Research Career": Survey of Sexual and Gender-Based Discrimination and Abuse in Australian Academia' (Australian Women's History Network Working Group, July 2018).

13. What are the challenges to achieving a more inclusive agenda?

Related to the responses provided above, various digital divides exist currently. While we should advocate for a greater presence for digital methods and digital awareness in the humanities, we must be constantly aware of the danger that this can import those existing digital divides into that sphere of activity.

Additionally, systemic issues and long-standing power structures remain in many institutions, with change occurring slowly. There is a continuing need for vigilance and advocacy at all levels of academia if these challenges are to be addressed.

14. Could initiatives within the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, such as the Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charters, serve as useful models for the humanities sector?

While such initiatives have some value, they appear largely aspirational, and are focused more on those who are excluded (women, in the case of Athena SWAN, where the principles listed do not mention men or introduce the requirement that those who are over-represented in academia need to modify their behaviours if change is to occur) rather than tackling systemic issues and gatekeeping practices found in those who currently hold positions of power and seniority.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. If you have any questions regarding the contents of our submission, or would like to discuss, please contact Dr Mike Jones (m.jones@unimelb.edu.au) or the aaDH Secretariat (simon.musgrave@monash.edu).

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