

20 September 2023

Dear Professors Zlatko Skribis, Abid Khan, and Chris Lonsdale, and University Senate,

We write on behalf of Arts and Humanities Alliance UK to echo international dismay at news of the redundancies planned at the Australian Catholic University, which will affect philosophy, history, theology, gender studies, social sciences, and religion, along with the planned closure of the distinguished medieval and early modern studies program, and with it the wide variety of projects with contemporary resonance that it supports: on the medieval global south, racism and conspiracy theories, histories of home and homelessness, histories of religious mobilities, and histories of legal medievalism and medievalism in LGBTQI cultures. Whilst we recognise that any decisions will not have been lightly made, we want to highlight the risks posed to your international reputation. We are also concerned about the impact of your plans on those colleagues from the US and Europe who have been encouraged to join your university, moving long distances, and uprooting families.

ACU faces challenges common to other universities across the English-speaking world with declining numbers in the humanities. There are multiple factors behind this, many of which will be local, and we are well aware of the particular [challenges](#) in Australia, which DASSH has been seeking to address. However, these current challenges must be set against an understanding of what the loss of these subjects will mean for *your* university and the communities you serve: a loss of the capacity to imagine futures with an understanding of diverse, complicated, and often problematic pasts; a loss of the capacity for critical thinking and creative and innovative solutions; a loss of the capacity for advanced understanding of and facility in human languages/s and cultures. If these intellectual, and human-centred arguments don't persuade you, then economic ones should. All indicators point to the value of the humanities to the global economy whatever the political rhetoric of the day. The World Economic Forum could not be clearer about the skills needed for the economies of the [future](#), the majority of which are taught on humanities programmes, with critical thinking and problem-solving – a core skills in the humanities – topping the list. There is also wide-recognition that the arts, humanities and social sciences are needed alongside the sciences to address the human-created challenges of our time, and that an understanding of culture is the first step to change. Foremost among these challenges is AI. The importance of the humanities to address this challenge was clearly made by Andy Haldane, the former Chief Economist, Bank of England, in an interview on Sky News, UK, on 23rd April 2023: 'What will protect us from the rise of AI is our creative capacity as human beings [...] we have seen the dwindling budgets for arts and humanities [...] that is a big mistake for the jobs and skills of the future'.

With a global context in mind, we urge you to rethink your strategy. We need our university leaders everywhere, from the UK to Australia, to honour the contributions made every year to national economies by humanities graduates. Two-thirds of Australia's workforce, after all, is made up of graduates from the subjects you are proposing to cut at ACU ([The Conversation](#), 22nd May 2022). We also need our university leaders to recognise the long-term social and economic consequences of allowing decline in these subject areas. In an ever more connected world that is facing unprecedented problems, we need university leaders to embrace more, not less, multi-disciplinarity, including with the [subjects](#) you are proposing to cut, which teach students '[to analyse, interpret, create, communicate and collaborate with rigour, clarity and energy](#)'. The opportunities are summed up in a recent British Academy report: 'arts and humanities students are the "ideal entrepreneurs" of the future, digitally literate, ready to thrive in a globally diverse world, resilient, confident at analysis and team working, independently minded' ([British Academy's Right Skills](#)). Given ACU's vision, 'to support the development of national unity and identity, improve our understanding of ourselves and our neighbours, and provide our nation with research capacity amongst the best in the world', you are ideally placed to lead. We urge you to recognise that the humanities are an area 'vital for [your] future'.

Yours sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in blue ink. The signature on the left is 'Emma Cayley' and the signature on the right is 'Thea Pitman'. Both signatures are written in a cursive style.

Professors Emma Cayley and Thea Pitman
Co-chairs, Arts and Humanities Alliance

On behalf of the affiliates of the Arts and Humanities Alliance
<https://www.artsandhumanitiesalliance.org/>