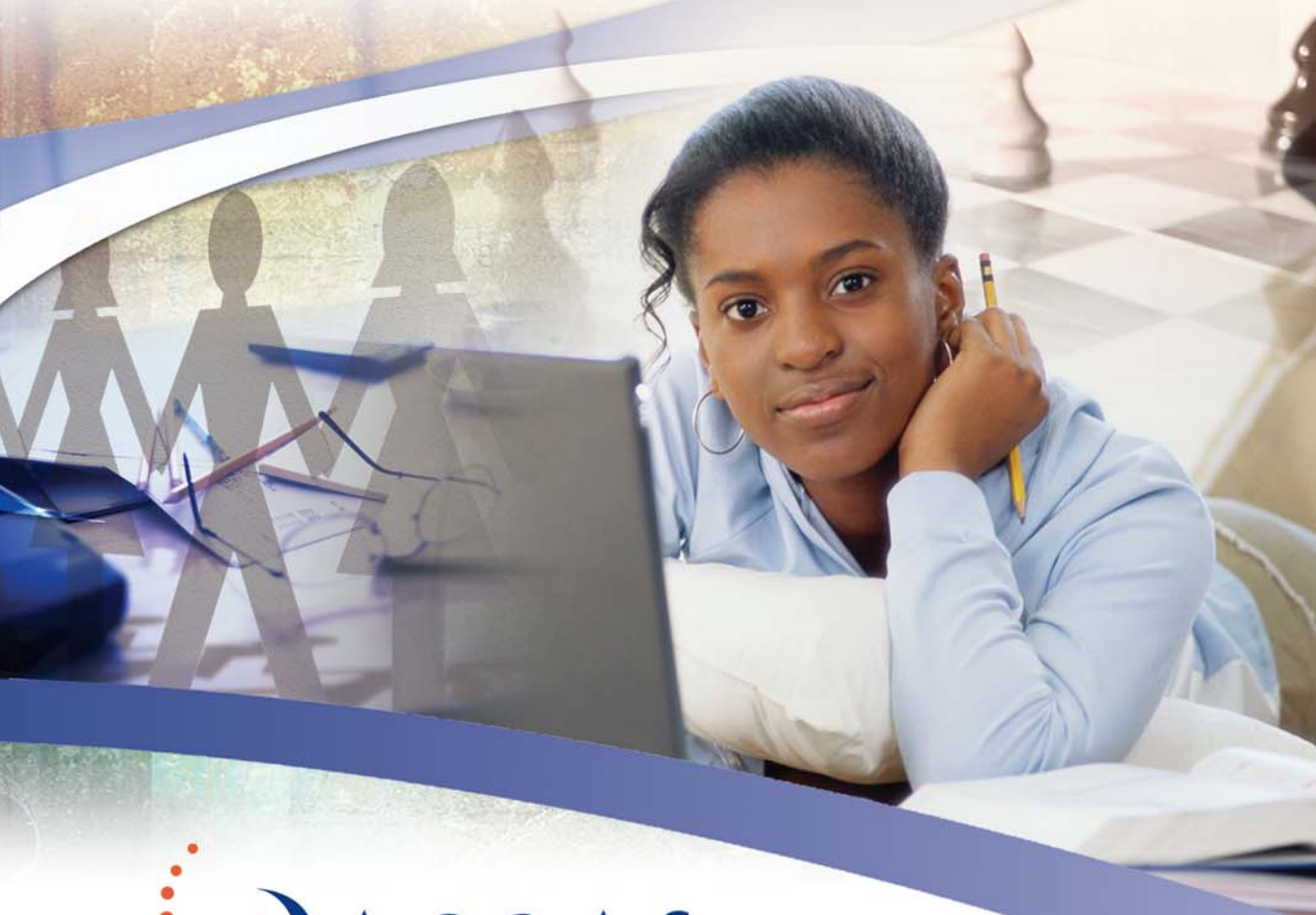


Consensus Study on
**the State of the Humanities
in South Africa:**
Status, prospects and strategies
Concise



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The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) was inaugurated in May 1996 in the presence of President Nelson Mandela, the Patron of the launch of the Academy. It was formed in response to the need for an Academy of Science consonant with the dawn of democracy in South Africa: activist in its mission of using science for the benefit of society, with a mandate encompassing all fields of scientific enquiry in a seamless way, and including in its ranks the full diversity of South Africa's distinguished scientists. The Parliament of South Africa passed the Academy of Science of South Africa Act, *Act 67 of 2001*, which came into operation on 15 May 2002. This has made ASSAf the official Academy of Science of South Africa, recognised by government and representing South Africa in the international community of science academies.

Consensus Study on the State of the Humanities in South Africa: Status, prospects and strategies

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Foreword

The Academy of Science of South Africa is mandated to provide evidence-based advice to government on matters of crucial scientific importance; these evidence-based study project activities are at the core of the Academy's function and are a key area of future development. This Consensus Study on the Humanities is the twelfth in a series of this nature that the Academy has commissioned.

As an independent body that holds the membership of many of the most prominent scientists in the country, the Academy is well placed to address questions of capacity within the national research system and is fortunate to be able to draw on a pool of committed expertise across universities and science-based organisations. Access to this resource proved invaluable in the production of this Report. The methodology used in the preparation of this, and other, reports of this kind is free of partisan interest. As a result, the findings and recommendations are the best possible considered outcomes in the circumstances.

This is the first-ever report on the Humanities in South Africa and, as is the custom, several interlinked studies were carried out to gather and collate both quantitative and qualitative data for it. The Report provides invaluable detail about the challenges and opportunities associated with tapping the many pools of excellence that exist in the country. It should be used as a guideline for policy-makers to do something concrete to improve the circumstances faced by the Humanities, not only in South Africa, but also around the world.

The Report was developed and guided to its successful conclusion by a panel of experts, under the capable leadership of Professor Jonathan Jansen and Professor Peter Vale. The members of the 'Consensus Panel', as it was called and the authors of the various constituent study reports are thanked for the care and attention they gave to their task.

Professor Robin Crewe

President: Academy of Science of South Africa

Introduction

In many parts of the world concern has been expressed over the diminishing role which the Humanities are playing in the so-called 'knowledge chain'. Given these concerns, it is not surprising that in a number of countries – Ireland (Royal Irish Academy, 2007), the UK (British Academy, 2004), Germany (DFG, 2007), Switzerland (SWTR, 2006:25), and the Netherlands (Sustainable Humanities, 2009), to mention a few – initiatives and investigations have been launched into the Humanities, with recommendations on ways to both defend and rebuild them. The Panel's own encounters with different countries, in particular Australia, Brazil, Egypt, Ghana and India, confirm that their experiences with the Humanities are closer to those of South Africa, and that they face a similar set of challenges.

As this Report was being written up, a blue ribbon panel was assembled by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to look into similar issues. The following are some of their concerns: "you can't teach Math(s) and Science to people who can't read"; the goal of our work is "to maintain national excellence in Humanities and social scientific scholarship and education, and to achieve long-term national goals for our economic well-being; for a stronger, more vibrant civil society", and one which is more difficult to test but which all who know the Humanities recognise as true: "the Humanities...(are)... a treasure house of ideas" (Berrett: 2011). So, we can say that concern for the future of the Humanities is global, but the search for solutions is local.

Elsewhere in this country, a number of new initiatives on the Humanities have taken place. In August 2010, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, announced the formation of a Reference Group to develop what has been called a 'Charter for the Humanities' – again the Humanities being broadly defined. The group is led by the distinguished University of Cape Town (UCT) Sociologist Professor Ari Sitas; the deputy chair is Dr Sarah Mosoetsa from the University of the Witwatersrand. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) has workshopped the 'Human and Social Dynamic in Development Grand Challenge Science Plan', which has opened the possibility both of additional funding for the Humanities (broadly defined) and a widening of the scope for research in the Humanities away from the applied end of the knowledge spectrum towards the more theoretical end. A few other initiatives are underway that might touch upon the Humanities in South Africa, an interesting one of which is the 'Frameworks for Africa-UK Research Collaboration in the Social Sciences and Humanities' (also called 'The Nairobi Process' after the city in which the first meeting took place), sponsored by the British Academy and the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU).

Taken individually, or together, these initiatives are crucial for the future of the Humanities in South Africa and elsewhere. One of them aims to influence policy and its making, i.e., the study put in motion by the Minister of Higher Education and Training. We take this intervention to be sign of a deepening interest in the field by those charged with making policy.

Panel Members:

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Prof Mala Singh	Open University, UK	Where do the Humanities come from?
Dr Lis Lange	University of the Free State	
Prof Ian Bunting (Emeritus)	University of Cape Town	How did the Humanities Change over Time?
Prof Johan Mouton	Stellenbosch University	How Productive are the Humanities in Scholarship Terms?
Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology	Stellenbosch University	Where do the Humanities Graduates go?

The Case for the Humanities

The teaching and research in the Humanities contributes to the understanding, analysis and attempts to resolve many of the most intractable social and economic challenges faced by the South African polity. Many of the issues that trip off the tongue of national concern, for instance, violence, corruption, education, service delivery, innovation, the gap between rich and poor, the issue of race, all these have their roots – and therefore their solutions – in the Humanities. Furthermore, the world of work in the Humanities is accessed through the many branches of applied knowledge that core disciplines have to offer, or indirectly, through the training in the advanced analytic and communication skills that form the common base of teaching and research. Understanding this suggests why the Humanities are essential for the development of high-quality public policy, and how the sweep of their interest touches every aspect of our national life.

The Humanities teach people to be ‘human’, and to work and live with other ‘humans’ in ‘society’. This link enables both societies and individuals to promote the idea of ‘community’ and to foster in it a sense of ‘belonging’ and ‘identity’. The various disciplines within Humanities help us understand and explain the range of these characteristics and their myriad complexity. So, the Humanities not only bind all humans in a foundational chain of life, but they also explain how the chain works and, furthermore, they promote ways in which it can be improved by recognising our common humanity. The Humanities and Social Sciences therefore seek to provide all the resources of historical understanding and debate; the concepts to guide empirical research and enquiry; and attention to the dynamics of power and exclusion at work in our everyday thinking.



Most human interaction begins – and ends – with communication. The imperative for communication amongst humans is linked to both the more practical world of the so-called ‘hard’ Sciences – Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Medicine - in a host of ways. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive of these Sciences without access to the knowledge that has been provided by the Humanities, just as access to Mathematics, the key to all the Sciences, is impossible without first accessing a spoken and written language. The Humanities not only observe and report on human communication, they are also charged with studying what it is that humans are communicating and why they are doing so. At the heart of Humanities lies the genius of critical thought: the technique of asking deep-seated questions with the aim of gaining profound insights into the multiple challenges that face the human condition. This questioning spirit of the Humanities was responsible for the emergence of great political and social movements that have changed the world and set millions of people free. Critical approaches have also revealed social worlds that have lain hidden by the hold of orthodox thinking. In short, the Humanities provide socially centred responses to an increasingly complex world.

The Humanities provide both society and individuals with an informed sense of community and a common humanity. They promote intrinsic values that link understanding to ethical values. They explain why ‘the other’ is important, and create an understanding that a better world is possible. Training in the Humanities will be incomplete without the ability to read and understand a complex world, to weigh evidence and to communicate opinions and findings clearly and succinctly. In this process, the ability to communicate is of paramount importance. This begins and ends with the learned facility to make clear and accessible arguments, and to read issues both within and beyond their context. Good Humanities graduates are non-linear thinkers who recognise that most questions have not one, but many, potential answers. They know that change is possible but recognise that both change and continuity in all fields are laden with ethical dilemmas.

Appreciating the importance of the Humanities must begin with recognition that failure to acknowledge the complexity and dynamism of knowledge has been a feature of intellectual life for several decades. As a result, the importance of the Humanities has been badly misunderstood in the pursuit of the utilitarian outcomes of economic growth. Instead of building a community, this goal has atomised society and brought with it a series of problems, from global warming to poverty and pandemics, none of which can be managed or solved without input from community-centred perspectives championed by the Humanities.

At the centre of our nation these seventeen years past has been the idea of Ubuntu: we are human because of other humans. The Humanities provide the glue of Ubuntu, and without them, our history tells us, we are a fractured and a fractious people. This Report now returns to the idea of creating ‘a people-centred society’, and our preoccupation has been whether we can create that society if we fail to give attention to the Humanities, which has been at the centre of all that has previously divided, but now unites, South Africa’s people.

Where do the Humanities come from?

The analysis covers the two line ministries, science and technology (S&T) and higher education (HE), whose policies have direct consequences for the Humanities in terms of policy status and recognition in the domain of 'science' and research, availability of research funding and setting of research directions, and the production of skilled human resources. The predominant focus has been on the S&T department's policies and activities, given its political, symbolic and operational jurisdiction over the different science domains in the country and its allocation of place and value to the Humanities within its parameters for the scientific enterprise. The implications for the Humanities of the policies and activities of other line departments have not been addressed, e.g., the departments where social science research may be undertaken in support of line functions¹.

Some of the key issues emerging from the analysis are as follows:

- The analysis of science policy legislative and policy documents and their implications for and effects on the Humanities, indicates that in the unfolding trajectory of policy positions from the White Paper on S&T (1996) to the DST's Ten-Year Plan (2009), the significance, contributory potential to development and full partner status of the Humanities have been given largely symbolic recognition only. This has not translated into more than handmaidenly roles for the Humanities within the National System of Innovation (NSI), nor into sophisticated research frameworks, which accommodate different types of Humanities research, nor into adequate levels of funding and support.
- The concept of innovation and the NSI, which is the foundation of science policy, is interpreted predominantly in relation to its 'techno-economic' significance. Advocacy for the Humanities and making a case for the Humanities within the current science policy framework requires a simultaneous critical engagement with the prevailing conception of innovation and its implementation strategies.
- There may very well be commonalities of fate and fortune between the Humanities and the pure Natural Sciences in the science policy framework because of the narrowness of the notion of innovation and its privileging of applications-driven research. This could create the basis for collaborative engagement, joint critiques and proposals for new approaches, rather than a ghettoising 'two cultures' approach or claims to Humanities exceptionalism.

¹An investigation, into which line departments' commission and use Humanities research, who undertakes such research, the nature, scale and volume of the research, and how and to what extent the research is used, may yield a useful indication of the possible contribution to and impact of Humanities research upon 'evidence-based' policy-making in the country.

- South African science policy indicates the influence of global paradigms for S&T, with innovation cast as the driver of growth and development in the 'knowledge economy'. To what extent was this global paradigm mediated by the political project of social transformation in the country? A number of elements from the local context are evident in the science policy discourse: the commitments from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) White Paper to democracy, equity and participation; the emphasis on social inclusion in respect of the research and development (R&D) strategy; a technology mission on poverty; the emphasis on indigenous knowledge systems (IKS); concern for the public understanding of science; and the reference to social innovation. A more substantial assessment of the global-local nexus in South African science policy and the resulting benefits for the local transformation agenda requires further analysis of the former Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST)/DST projects relating to the above-mentioned elements. However, a stronger and more central role for the Humanities may have ensured more substantial research and policy attention to these elements from the transformation project in the country.
- The Humanities need champions and organisational spaces for advocacy and profile building. Other countries have dedicated organisations which function as Humanities advocates engaging with government and other decision-makers, e.g. the British Academy in the United Kingdom. What possibilities are there within the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), the National research Foundation (NRF), the Council on Higher Education (CHE), National Council on Innovation (NACI), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the disciplinary and professional associations, DST structures for the public understanding of science (e.g. the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA), the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF)) for championing the cause of the Humanities, including projects for increasing the public understanding of the Humanities? An added consideration is the question of how many senior staff within the DST or NRF have Humanities backgrounds to take up the Humanities cause within line department functions? It is also important to identify who are likely to be the societal stakeholders of the Humanities in the same way that Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) disciplines have business and industry as powerful stakeholders. What projects can be undertaken to 'create' such stakeholders? In this regard, what are the perceptions of students, parents, community organisations of the Humanities as a field of employment and income generation, as a source of R&D support, etc?
- Some non-Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) international reference points for Humanities advocacy, as well as benchmarking the role of Humanities in support of local development agendas, could include the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in India (CSDS), etc.
- What is needed is a new imaginary framework for the Humanities, a positive re-invention of them in the face of new knowledge frontiers in all science domains. Academics and researchers in the Humanities have not always engaged critically with the fundamentals of the new science regime in the country, nor been inwardly reflective enough on possible challenges to the Humanities from new research in science domains. Making a case for the Humanities in South Africa may require, in the first instance, re-imagining the Humanities and their social positioning within knowledge production and application regimes in the country, looking to relevant examples in this regard in both OECD and non-OECD contexts.

How did the Humanities Change over Time?

The chapter uses graphs and tables to present a student-centred analysis of higher education in the Humanities, focussing on changes over time in student enrolments, graduates² and funding. The first level of analysis compares these markers in terms of the four broad scientific domains of Science and Technology (including the Health Sciences; SET), Business and Management Studies, Education (which consists mainly of teacher training), and the Humanities. This level includes enrolments and graduates for the 13-year period from 1996 to 2008, and funding of the public higher education system over the nine-year period from 2000 to 2008. The funding analysis includes government funding, student fees and private income allocated not just to support direct teaching and research, but also administrative functions at departmental, faculty and central administration levels. The second (more in-depth) level of analysis deals with the Humanities only. This is presented in two parts: (i) student enrolments for the five-year period 2004 to 2008, categorised in terms of the constituent disciplines or subfields of study of the Humanities; and (ii) student graduates, undergraduate success rates and the general output efficiency of Humanities higher education.

Analyses of the ratios between their full-time equivalent (FTE) and headcount enrolments show that most Humanities subfields fulfil significant service course roles, in the sense that large proportions of their courses are used in curricula of fields other than their own. The graduate output performance in most of the Humanities subfields has been below the target set by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), which is most probably the result of high dropout rates, as well as of students switching major subjects during their periods of registration. In contrast to the graduate output performance, the average success rates in Humanities courses have been satisfactory. Over half of the Humanities subfields met the DHET target for undergraduate contact programmes.



²A graduate is defined as a student who has satisfied all the requirements of a degree or diploma or certificate.

The government funding position of the Humanities appears to have improved as a result of (i) a change in funding weightings, and (ii) a decline in student enrolments. The nominal block grant total for the Humanities (which excludes earmarked or designated funds) increased from 1996 to 2008, but decreased in real Rands (using the CPI index as the deflator). However, the average annual increases in Humanities block grants per FTE-enrolled student exceeded those of the other three broad scientific fields.

In conclusion, the following possibilities could be considered to increase government funding allocations to the Humanities:

- The most obvious way of increasing Humanities funding would be to improve its output performance. If the outputs of both graduates and research publications could be raised at rates above those of other fields of study, then the Humanities would receive larger shares of the output funding components of government block grants.
- A more problematic possibility would be to amend the Humanities weightings in the funding grid of the new funding formula. However, this will not generate new government funding for the Humanities, since the funding formula is simply a distributive mechanism that divides available government funding (i.e. any increase in the amount received by the Humanities would involve decreases in the funding of other fields of study).
- A further possibility would be to identify, within the Humanities, those subfields which require strategic interventions (African Languages would be an obvious example). A change to the funding grid weightings of the identified subfields would not have the required effect. Successful interventions would have to involve the allocation of specific amounts of earmarked funding to these subfields.



How Productive are the Humanities in Scholarship Terms?

This chapter is devoted to a review of the state of the Humanities in South Africa as measured by standard bibliometric and statistical methods. The strength of such measures is that they allow for comparison across fields (and subfields) and institutions and over time.

We believe that the statistical and bibliometric data presented and discussed in this chapter paints an essentially positive and healthy picture of the state of the Humanities research and scholarship in the country. The 'big' indicators show that Humanities research output, as measured in peer-reviewed articles, constitutes 37% of all scientific output in the country (the same as the Natural Sciences) and this proportion has remained the same over the past twenty years. The statistics on doctoral production shows that the Humanities fields dominate the total numbers of graduates (47%) and has even increased in the past year.

Although publication in local journals is still the norm for most fields in the Humanities, there is growing evidence of increased international collaboration, which means that the 'visibility' of our Humanities scholarship has increased in recent years. This is mainly due to their being more Social Science scholars (rather than traditional Humanities scholars) now publishing in ISI journals. Of course, we should also take into account that more local journals in the Humanities have in recent years been included in the ISI indexes, which has helped this cause!



There is no question that scholars in the Humanities fields benefit more from the DHET research subsidy scheme, as there are many more journals in these fields – compared to the numbers of journals in the Natural and Health Sciences – included in the list of accredited journals of the DHET. The effect of this reality is most clearly illustrated in the relatively high output of two fields (Religion and Law), which together have more than 45 journals recognised by the DHET. This does, of course, raise the question of the quality of some (especially the smaller) journals, which has prompted ASSAf and subsequently the DHET to start with a regular review of all local journals in 2009.

As far as shifts in modes of knowledge production are concerned, it is clear that new spaces for the Humanities have opened up and will continue to do so. Mode 2 production of knowledge is alive and well in South Africa in the form of social research consultancies (especially monitoring and evaluation, organisational development, strategic management, market research and policy studies).

However, this does not mean that there are no remaining challenges for the Humanities fields. The visibility of South African scholarship needs further improvement. The current trends towards increased collaboration and internationalisation need to be sustained and expanded. The demographics of the Humanities workforce is as 'fragile' as it is for all scientific disciplines in the country. It remains perhaps the most important challenge: to ensure that we replenish the current reservoir of human capital in all scientific fields while at the same time continuing to broaden the base of knowledge production in the country through the inclusion of more female and black scholars and academics.

There is also some evidence that Social Science and Humanities scholarship is perceived in some government circles as essentially instrumentalist (refer to the DST 5-Year Strategic Plan). Although Humanities scholarship is appreciated, it is not necessarily for its intrinsic epistemic or intellectual value, but because it complements, augments and adds value to scientific and technological endeavours (e.g. social aspects of technology debates, ethics in business debates, and socio-ethical aspects of health phenomena). This is a challenge that all scholars in the field have to recognise and reflect in their training and mentoring of the next generation of Humanities scholars and academics.



Where do Humanities Graduates go?

This chapter addresses two major questions:

- Where are our graduates now and what are they doing?
- How are they doing and what are their experiences?

The answer to the first question appears relatively straightforward: Most are working (84%) and, of these, most are formally employed on a permanent full-time basis in the public sector. However, there are fairly significant numbers who are self-employed and creating their own employment. This latter category of employment requires additional 'unpacking' as to the motivation behind the self-employment. Is it intentional or do Humanities graduates find it more difficult to find jobs? Why are so many more Humanities graduates working for an employer while at the same time creating their own employment? Is this due to the significantly lower incomes than their counterparts from Science fields that leads Humanities graduates to augment their income?



Concerns about the relatively high proportion of graduates (particularly Master's and doctoral graduates) working abroad also need to be addressed. Without an understanding of the reasons for working abroad or the nature of the work, are these justifiable concerns? Is higher education not required to prepare students for careers in the global economy?

In answer to the second question, Humanities graduates appear to be generally happy and satisfied. They report a positive relationship between their completed studies and current employment and consider their academic training to have been relevant. They generally feel that their studies prepared them well for their current jobs, and that their current employment utilises their acquired knowledge and skills. Humanities graduates are therefore as well prepared for a future place of work as other graduates, and these graduates are overwhelmingly satisfied with their current employment and feel that their jobs are a realisation of their professional ideals.

However, although the study shows a very positive relationship between academic training and the world of work, there is possibly a need for further investigation in terms of preparation for the world of work, particularly at the bachelor's degree level, where a significant proportion of graduates indicated that their studies did not prepare them well for their current employment.

The study found that Humanities graduates perceive a positive and stable relationship between tertiary education and workplace employment. However, such results should be compared with employer perceptions regarding the knowledge, skills and preparedness of their Humanities graduate employees. This would contribute to addressing perceived gaps between employer expectations and HE outcomes.

It would also be interesting to analyse the data from the study further in terms of gender and population groupings, particularly in terms of income, work assignment and interruption of study.

This study and its findings serve as another important step in providing empirical evidence for the relevance of tertiary education. As part of their own accountability requirements, individual institutions should perhaps be required to undertake similar tracer studies to get systematic feedback from graduates in order to improve their Humanities programmes.



The background of the page features a composite image. The top half shows a blue-toned globe with a grid pattern, partially obscured by a white, curved, abstract shape. The bottom half shows a close-up of a stack of books with a pen resting on them, also partially obscured by the same white, curved shape. The overall aesthetic is academic and professional.

Main Findings

Finding 1

There is a crisis in the Humanities reflected in declining student enrolments, falling graduations, and decreasing government funding (in real Rands) within institutions of higher learning.

Finding 2

The evolution and administration of government policy in the post-apartheid period has systematically benefited Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (the so-called STEM disciplines) to the exclusion and even detriment of the Humanities disciplines in the country.

Finding 3

The Humanities within institutions of higher learning is in a state of intellectual stagnation and, singular innovations notwithstanding, has remained in this moribund condition for more than 15 years.

Finding 4

The evidence on Humanities graduates show clearly that virtually all Humanities graduates are employed, that the vast majority (more than 80%) work for an employer, while the rest are self-employed, and that there is a fair spread of graduate employment across the public and private sectors.

Finding 5

The decline of the Humanities has many causes that include government policy and funding, institutional choices and decision-making, school guidance and counselling, and parental and student preferences.

Finding 6

The weight of scholarship in the Humanities lacks international status and standing, with most of the published work appearing in local journals and most of these local publications in non-accredited (non-ISI) publication sources.

Finding 7

The scholarship of the Humanities still strongly reflects the racial inequalities in knowledge production in the national science system, with all but one (Education, at 21%) of the Humanities fields falling well below 20% of total output contributions on the part of black scholars – despite marginal gains over the previous decades.

Finding 8

The single most important threat to the growth of an intellectually vibrant scholarship in the Humanities is the problem of an ageing academic and research workforce, a factor that must be read alongside the evidence of a decline in doctoral graduates in the Humanities fields.

Finding 9

The low proportion of academic staff with doctorates means that the institutional capacity to reproduce and replace high-level scholars and scholarship in the Humanities will remain compromised into the near future.

Finding 10

The performance and prospects of the Humanities varies considerably across different fields of study (Theology and Education *versus* Law and Languages, for example), and this means that any interventions will require fine-tuned strategies among these various fields rather than a blunt instrument of policy change for the Humanities as a whole.

Ten Game-breaking Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Establish with statutory status a Council for the Humanities to advise Government on how to improve the status and standing of the Humanities in South Africa.

Recommendation 2

Review and refine government funding allocations to the Humanities with substantive earmarked funding in critical areas such as African Languages (the Ministerial investigation underway is a positive sign), Philosophy, History and the Creative and Performing Arts. In this context, the advancement of books by the academy and the funding of books by government could significantly enhance the book as a cultural and human asset in both the scholarly and public mind. One possibility would be to link an award for the best Humanities book every year to the annual Alan Paton Award.

Recommendation 3

Commit to the development of a government white paper on the Humanities, to establish in the public mind and in government policy a renewed emphasis on the Humanities, and its full integration into national science policy.

Recommendation 4

Restructure funding for advanced degrees (doctorates in particular) through national funding agencies, such as the NRF, to enable full-time study for top candidates in the Humanities who make the choice of academic careers.

Recommendation 5

Accelerate the establishment of prestigious Research Chairs and Centres of Excellence in the Humanities, appointing leading professors of the Humanities with two clear missions: the pursuit of excellence in Humanities research and the building of capacity for next-generation Humanities scholars.

Recommendation 6

Inaugurate a dedicated National Fund for Humanities Research, to combine earmarked government funding with national and international private and philanthropic funding that fuels top-quality Humanities research within and outside South African universities.

Recommendation 7

Transform the organisation and design of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) so that a more emphatic statement of its commitment to the Humanities becomes self-evident, e.g. the re-naming of the Academy; the investigation of a second premier academy journal specifically for the Humanities; the constitution of 50% Humanities appointments to Council; and other signalling measures for the only recognised academy in South Africa.

Recommendation 8

Initiate, through the leadership of the Department of Basic Education, considered measures to boost knowledge of and positive choices for the Humanities throughout the 12 years of schooling, including progressive ways of privileging the Arts, History and Languages in the school curriculum through Grade 12.

Recommendation 9

Advance the idea of a broad-based Humanities curriculum, ideally in an interdisciplinary core study programme for undergraduates, to expose all university students to some study of the Humanities.

Recommendation 10

Promote in the broader society the value of the Humanities and Humanities scholarship and practice through prestigious awards that draw national and international attention to the Humanities among school students, university students, scholars, and intellectuals in the broad. An Annual National Humanities Lecture, to be televised and linked to a National Medal in the Humanities, would do much to signal the importance of the Humanities in the public sphere.



Concluding Observations

This Study is undoubtedly a valuable intervention in a situation, worldwide, which has seen a diminishing role for the Humanities. Evidence from this Study is important to humanists worldwide, and there are external corroborations to the Report's arguments.

In so far as addressing social problems, the European Commission (EU) accepted that the problems facing 21st century Europe can only be tackled by the Humanities – problems such as insecurity in the face of change and instability in all aspects of life, economy, geopolitics, environment; fear of that change and fear of otherness; the perceived failure of normative positivist science to predict and remedy global threats and danger; increasingly widespread depression and entropy preventing vital change (Parker, 2008). Dame Professor Marilyn Strathern made a strong case for Humanities methods in and of themselves as vital – as skilled and skilling in dealing with multi-vocal, multi-cause and unpredictable conditions. All Humanities teach and inculcate the ability to analyse, think and write in complex and multi-voiced narratives – as important in a digital world as it is in face-to-face confrontations and negotiations. South Africa's rich arts, as well as the Humanities affect as well as effect through dialogue and dialogic experiences.

In the United States, UK and Europe new alliances have been made between the Humanities, industries and business, even in the face of prevailing political rhetoric of employability skills. Major employers are prizing Humanities graduates' abilities to communicate and to be robust, and for their training in seeing the general from the particular while also seeing all generalisations as both necessary and partial.

Thus, despite the crisis situation that the Humanities find themselves in, they are indispensable. The Humanities produce an essential set of analytical skills, along with bodies of knowledge without which our society, and the wider world, would be inscrutable. It is the Humanities that nurture the intellectual lifeblood of a democratic project – powers of informed analysis, judgement and creative critique.

It is also important to bear in mind that the Humanities in South Africa are decidedly 'mixed' – in terms of international standing, social influence, patterns of deterioration and strengths. There are sites and instances of encouraging vigour and productivity, while at the same time there are concerning symptoms of decline with dangerous portents for the future. There is a great unevenness within the Humanities – across age, between institutions and fields of studies. At their best, Humanities departments are producing internationally recognised experts, whose writings have shaped and continue to shape debates and influence future research, and scholars who have played critical roles in informing policy debates; however, there are also extremely worrying signs of decline that need to be arrested and reversed as a matter of urgency.

As this is the first-ever report on the Humanities in South Africa, although comprehensive, it is by no means complete, and should thus also serve to stimulate debate and further research on a number of important questions which a Study of this nature inevitably raises; such as, amongst others:

- Issues related to the quality of teaching and the quality of the scholarship in the Humanities.
- Questions regarding student and staff numbers and reasons why student numbers are declining.
- The nature of employment of recent Humanities graduates.
- What employers want and how they interpret the notion of 'employability'.
- Who the potential stakeholders for the Humanities might be.
- The importance of academics in their engagement with publics and whether or how scholarly work influences society and social change in any way (directly or indirectly).

There is something of a crisis in the Humanities, but a crisis can generate opportunities to do things differently. That the Humanities are indispensable is beyond argument; but there are unexplored possibilities about how the Humanities can contribute to society and the economy. This challenge should be accepted.





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Consensus Study on the State of the Humanities in South Africa: Status, Prospects and Strategies

Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf)

Academy of Science of South Africa

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