Report of RSSS Review provides opportunity to rebuild

The Australian National University has received the report of an independent, external review of the Research School of Social Sciences. The review was commissioned by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ian Chubb, and the Director of the School, Professor Frank Jackson. The ANU Council has authorised the Vice-Chancellor to act on the Report.

The Report was publicly released today. It is in the form it was received from the Review Committee except for two tables in Appendix 2 from which the data were removed prior to public release because individuals could be identified.

The Report of the review of RSSS provides a rare opportunity to rebuild a dynamic research school in the ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences.

The review group that concluded that “the School has enabled work of considerable distinction in the past, and we believe that this can continue to be the case....It can help researchers to produce excellent work that stands up internationally for Australian capabilities and that contributes also to the solution of Australian and wider problems.”

The report noted areas of high quality work in the School but also identified the need to strengthen performance in some areas and respond more flexibly to the highly competitive environment the School now finds itself in.

The review group has drawn attention to some deficiencies in the operation and organisation of the School, and we will be taking the steps needed to rectify them.

RSSS has served Australia well since its establishment. The review recommends that in the future it should play a leadership role in the social sciences, driven by overarching themes and distinguished by the combinations of foundational research that informs its inter-disciplinary approach to major current and emerging issues of global and national concern.

The Review recommends that the School should be evaluated in future with regard to relevance, excellence, impact, innovation and networking.

We can face the future with confidence because of the performance of the School and we will follow up on the issues of performance, strategy and culture raised by the review.

Professor Ian Chubb AC    Professor Frank Jackson AO
Vice-Chancellor     Director, RSSS
13 October 2006
The Research School of Social Sciences:

Report of the 2006 Review

The Australian National University
September 2006
Dear Professor Chubb and Professor Jackson

You appointed us to review the Research School of Social Sciences and to make recommendations for its future development.

We had the opportunity to meet with academic staff from all areas of the School, and with some students. We also had available to us a raft of information about the performance of individuals and groups within the School. Had we more time to analyse the information we may have probed to a greater depth in some areas. Nevertheless, we believe we have focussed on the most important issues.

Our task was a challenging one. Each of us came to it from a different background and perspective but we shared at the outset an impression that the School had a reputation as a scholarly force within Australia and, at least in some fields, a strong academic reputation internationally.

We had not expected to find the School in such a poor condition. We found ourselves in ready agreement that it is in crisis.

There is an urgent need to move beyond selective remembrances of the past and present myths, and to address changing circumstances. Nothing short of a major transformation of the School – its leadership, strategy and culture – will suffice.

We believe our recommendations address our terms of reference, although we have not structured them in precise alignment.

We trust that our observations and recommendations will be of use for rebuilding the School, and that they will form a basis for the constructive dialogue that is needed for envisioning what it could be in the future.

Colin Lucas

Margaret Levi

Gilles Paquet

Derek Volker
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*Letter of transmittal*  

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Introduction

1. The Committee was established by the Vice-Chancellor and by the Director of the RSSS in order to conduct a review according to the terms of reference drawn up by them (Appendix 1). The members of the Committee were: Sir Colin Lucas (Warden of Rhodes House, Oxford), Professor Margaret Levi (Department of Political Science, University of Washington), Professor Gilles Paquet (Centre on Governance, University of Ottawa), and Mr Derek Volker AO (Australian Capital Ventures Limited, Canberra). The Committee was supported by Mr Michael Gallagher from the ANU Chancelry: the Committee wishes to express its gratitude for his considerable work in facilitating the review and the production of this report.

2. We have considered our terms of reference. We understand that we are charged with examining the performance of the RSSS in recent years and with proposing directions for its future development. We are to have particular regard to its disciplinary mix, its role within the University and more widely, its impact on and potential contribution to the social sciences including public policy, and its engagement in research training. While our report does not necessarily follow the order in which our terms of reference are laid out, we do address all the issues listed in them.

3. Before our enquiry, the University undertook two initiatives to help inform our review. First, it arranged for external peer-review assessments of the quality of selected outputs of the research staff of RSSS programmes and for end-user commentaries on the impact of selected case studies (summarized in Appendix 3). We also saw an analysis of relative citation impacts of researchers within the School. The second was the Glenn/Sturgiss review of the School’s budgetary procedures and resource allocation methods (Appendix 4). We have seen and studied this material.

4. We are grateful to the University for this work of self-evaluation and external verification. While we have given consideration to the conclusions that may be drawn from that material and their significance for our own recommendations, we have not felt that we needed to do an independent analysis of the academic quality of the School’s work or to examine in detail its financial situation. This has allowed us to focus more on underlying questions of effectiveness, strategy and organisation.

5. We visited ANU on August 21-25. Our work took two forms. First, in addition to the materials already cited, we were supplied with quite extensive written self-evaluations by each programme (“context statements”) together with supplementary submissions prepared after the external peer-review. The Director also prepared an Overview. These documents, along with background statistics (including a report on the supervision of doctoral students) were put together in a “Brief for the Review Group”. We believe that this Brief could be a public document and serve as a useful companion to our Report. We also received a few additional papers, especially from smaller units. In some cases, we asked for further documentation on various issues. We also had access to submissions from interested parties, internal and external to the University.

6. Second, we conducted interviews with the following: the Vice-Chancellor and senior leaders in the University administration; the Director of the RSSS; each programme in the RSSS (in the shape of either a representative group or the whole membership); some academic staff on fixed-term appointments; a number of post-graduate students; the Deans of three Colleges; some University officers with particular responsibilities for postgraduates; and the heads of three government agencies that make use of social science research.

7. We wish to thank all those whom we interviewed for their willingness to engage with the questions we wished to explore.
Preliminaries

8. The members of the Review Committee did not know each other personally before meeting for the work of the Review. They come from different disciplinary backgrounds and different university systems and, in one case, from outside the university world. Their prior contact with ANU ranged from several periods as an academic visitor through to no prior experience at all. Nonetheless, we should emphasize at the outset that our reactions to what we observed and heard were remarkably and rapidly convergent. This report does represent in all respects the considered view of each of us.

9. This report is certainly critical of the current condition of the RSSS. However, we would not wish to leave an impression that is unqualifiedly negative. We have identified areas of high quality work in the School. The following may serve as non-exhaustive examples. We recognize the current excellence of the academic publications in Philosophy and Law. We are impressed by the innovative combinations of theory and application in the centres grouped in RegNet. We have no reason at all to doubt the national and international significance of the work in Demography. We are encouraged by the initiatives emerging in Political Science. We believe that the units devoted essentially to data infrastructure have considerable merit.

Basic Description of the RSSS

10. The RSSS is organised around eight “programmes”. It contains 162.1 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 89.9 are academic staff and 72.2 are general staff. Their distribution across the School (including the Director's Office and general administration) is shown in the table at Appendix 2.

11. There is no obvious academic or administrative rationale for the School's organisation. Several of the programmes appear to be convenient combinations of related areas of interest, although other areas having similar interests are not combined. Some represent the legacy of growth and decline in different areas, and the merging or disassociation of one area of interest with another either on a disciplinary or thematic basis. The very small Law programme and the Centre for Gambling Research, for instance, are residual elements from the formation of RegNet. Sociology is represented by a single researcher.

12. The RSSS has a total annual budget of around $20m. About half the income is provided by way of a recurrent grant from the University and an equivalent amount is obtained from external earnings such as competitive research grants, contracts and consultancies. For 2006, the total recurrent allocation was $10.38m. A further $2.72m was derived from competitive block funding schemes -- the Research Training Scheme ($1.14m), the Institutional Grants Scheme ($1.05m), and the Research Infrastructure Block Grants scheme ($0.53m). There are other income streams to which the School has access, including available earnings from endowments that can be used to augment capacity in some areas.

13. The School went into deficit in 2002-3. It has managed its way back into a modest surplus in 2006 and is projecting recurrent funding capacity of the order of $0.6m in 2007.

14. We refer later to the Glenn/Sturgiss review of the management of the School's finances.
The Current Situation of the RSSS

15. The RSSS is still strongly marked by its history. It was a core component of the ANU at its foundation after the Second World War. The School like the University was established in order to provide Australia with a leading-edge research institution, which it did not possess at the time. It aimed to attract first-rate researchers back to Australia by giving them conditions of work which would enable them to provide the nation with what social science could offer in the analysis of important Australian problems and to give reputation to Australia by an influential contribution to social science internationally.

16. The official history of the ANU records that the School’s builders understood the need to construct the RSSS in ways to ensure that “it did not degenerate into an aggregate of people myopically focussed upon their own tiny segment of place and time and research materials”. The founders seem to have been in agreement in regarding disciplinary fields, such as History and Philosophy, “less as subject areas than as fundamental training essential to many branches of social research”. However, there were significant contentions between the founding fathers: one sought from the outset to form research teams with clearly defined objectives relevant to serving national needs, and another sought to attract outstanding individuals free to pursue their own interests. These contentions left unresolved fundamental issues of direction and role. Subsequently, the School evolved as “a federation of departments”.

17. We believe that the RSSS is currently in serious disarray and that it has lost its way. The deep root of this condition lies in the unresolved tensions of its earlier history. There has been and still is no clear agreement on how it is to achieve its original mission. There has been an ongoing failure to address the question of how the School identifies and maintains the relevance of its activity in a changing national and international context of university research. There has, therefore, been a collective failure in the School to justify its exceptional conditions of existence.

18. At the most basic level, it is evident that the RSSS no longer exercises the quasi-monopoly on high-quality social science research in Australia that marked its origin. Excellent research and research-led activities exist in other Australian universities. These universities also have access to public and private resources for further growth and specialisation, as well as for collaborative activities involving other Australian and international institutions. The competition for research funding, and for research staff and students is intensifying. Indeed, this is a global phenomenon: excellent staff and students move internationally between universities to a degree not experienced at the time of ANU’s foundation. Similarly, research collaborations and funding are more widespread, speedy and complex than anything imagined at that time.

19. The fact is that the RSSS has lost elements of its former distinctiveness and comparative advantage. In the wider world, the RSSS has prestigious competitors that offer high-salary, low-load positions for eminent and productive researchers. There has been a multiplication of research centres in which social science researchers can spend periods ranging from several months to a year or two. Even as far as ANU itself is concerned, quality social science research is being conducted in the Faculties by academics who have additional obligations. The general review of the University in 2004 examined the outcome of peer review of quality, differentiated between the Research Schools and the Faculties. As far as RSSS is concerned, while some disciplines show considerably higher scores, the gap between the two communities is not uniformly as considerable as one might expect the different conditions of production between them to justify. The peer review of quality and impact prepared for us refines the somewhat broad-brush approach of that earlier review. It would not be unfair to say that the outcome


2 ANU | university with a difference. The Report of the Committee established by the Council of The Australian National University to evaluate the quality of the University’s performance (September 2004), p. 31.
was patchy. We discuss this matter in detail in Appendix 3 and provide some conclusions on quality there, rather than burden the main text of this Report.

20. In this context of a rapidly diminishing comparative advantage and a palpable drift in the quality of its output, we believe that the School now urgently needs to re-evaluate its mission and how to achieve it. We have written our report as a means of helping it to do that.

21. In the short term, the current disarray of the School derives from the budgetary cuts introduced in 2003. This is instructive in itself. Financial constraints and changing methods of funding allocation to universities are a continuing fact of the academic world in Australia and many other places. They require alert and flexible responses. However, the RSSS does not appear to have been able to respond strategically to budget shortfalls.

22. We recognize the difficulties of coping quickly with a mounting deficit. We recognize also that the cuts introduced have now brought the School's budget back into welcome balance. This allows more leeway for constructive examination of the future. Nonetheless, it is evident that the methods used have been damaging. The principal tool has been the freezing of fixed-term posts as they fall vacant and a replacement rate of one for two continuing appointments. If there is no clear envelope of strategic direction, this policy can only have random differential effects on the component parts of the School, depending as it does on the simple mechanism of individual departures. Indeed, we understand that the pre-existing plan of the School has simply been abandoned.

23. The consequence of this is that the School has suffered a grievous loss of morale at almost every level – we even saw some evidence of it among graduate students. The policies and processes used to bring the deficit under control have been widely viewed as opaque and unfair. A number of parts of the School have felt that understandings have been jettisoned without good explanation. Career anxieties among fixed-term staff have been exacerbated.

24. One clear effect of this situation has been the growing retreat of academic staff into their own programme units, producing increasing isolation between individuals and groups and an intensification of group interests and identities in opposition to those of others in the School. This threatens the capacity of the School to promote successfully the social science project.

25. In our interviews, we were astonished to hear repeatedly programmes nominate each other for removal from the RSSS in some sort of cascade of mutual disdain. No doubt, competition for scarce resources is the immediate trigger for such talk. However, it clearly reflects once again the failure of the School over time to identify what the mission of a research school in social science could be, in anything but the most haphazard sense. It reflects a failure to inspect how that composite that is social science can be put together fruitfully. The fault line in the RSSS runs between those who believe that what is worthwhile is determined simply by reference to international peer assessments of the quality of scholarly output and, on the other hand, those who think that academic reputation should be accompanied by an influence of thinking and evidence on practice, particularly in public policy.

26. The tension between theory and application runs through every social science enterprise in universities. Indeed, each individual social science discipline contains examples of both approaches. Work in social science operates along a continuum from theory to practice with many combinations between. Healthy academic social science understands that theory lies at the origin of practice and enhances its success and that applications of practice extend and revitalize the problematics to which theory addresses itself. The absence of such an understanding and the mutual respect that flows from it is a clear symptom of lack of health.

27. We were quickly brought in our interviews to explore whether there should be an RSSS any longer. We asked each group to tell us what they thought the School stood for and in what way they benefited from it that could not be achieved by some other arrangement in the ANU. It is manifest to us that there is very little special sense of the School or identification with it among its members (and none at all among graduate students). The answers we received
represented it in essence as a budgetary mechanism and/or a device for protecting the “research only” status of its members.

28. Nonetheless, we have concluded that the dissolution of the RSSS would not be the right course. The School has enabled work of considerable distinction in the past, and we believe that this can continue to be the case. We believe that, although currently in a trough, a purposeful function for the School can be found afresh. It can help researchers to produce excellent work that stands up internationally for Australian capabilities and that contributes also to the solution of Australian and wider problems. Furthermore, we believe that the RSSS has played an important role in building the visibility and reputation of the ANU nationally and internationally. A decision to dissolve the School would imperil the ANU.

29. Therefore, we recommend:

1. **There should be a Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University as an integral component of the College of Arts and Social Sciences.**

30. In sum, however, our diagnosis is that currently the RSSS is internally fragmented and lacking coherence and balance. Morale is very poor. The School is bedevilled by a breakdown of trust and collegiality. It displays symptoms of a culture of entitlement and an unwillingness to identify challenges and to rise to them collectively. There is an imperative need for transformative change.

**Role and Orientation of the RSSS**

31. It follows from much of what we have said in the preceding section that we believe that the problem facing the School (and, by extension, this Review Committee) is how to redefine its mission within current conditions and how to provide itself with the means to achieve those objectives. As a preliminary step, we believe that it should return unequivocally to the original intention of its foundation. We recommend therefore that:

2. **The RSSS should be the leader in developing the social sciences in Australia.**

32. In what, however, does leadership consist? The RSSS is a relatively small organisation when compared with some of the major social science undertakings in universities elsewhere in the world. In this company, each of the School’s programmes has comparatively few academics, especially in terms of continuing staff who should be the research leaders. None of the discipline-based units in the RSSS can hope to cover the range of its discipline. Finally, even though members of the School have recently shown their ability to gain significant competitive grants, the School cannot realistically hope for the kind of levels of funding to which some of its most direct competitors have access elsewhere in the world.

33. It was represented to us in the interviews that the absence of a common culture in the RSSS was beneficial. It was argued that the School is a loose aggregation of individuals who construct relations with others on an “as-and-when” basis. Unity of purpose is not demanded of all. We understand the personal attractions of such an approach. However, it has not
prevented the disappearance of a spirit of collective initiative and of collegiality that we have noted. We believe that such an aleatory formula as reliance on the simple happenstance of recruitment and retention in an academic world offering increasing numbers of attractive alternatives will not guarantee the success of the School in exercising leadership in social science. It does not follow that we believe that members of the School should be told what to do. That would be absurd. We do, however, believe that the School must establish an ambitious distinctiveness within its means which would itself attract and secure world-class academics, beyond simply the conditions of work.

34. The RSSS needs to draw upon its strengths as a multidisciplinary social science enterprise capable of producing outstanding theoretical and applied work. We believe that leadership in the social sciences can be attained by identifying and addressing a number of major current and emerging issues of global and national concern. It appears to us that concentration on these issues represents precisely the original intentions behind the foundation of the RSSS. Academic and public recognition of leadership will derive from the importance and relevance of the issues to whose analysis and resolution the School attaches its research effort. The identification of what these issues are and which of them are amenable to the array of talents that the School possesses or can acquire demands a high level of skill in the School's collective planning. Much of the future reputation of the RSSS depends upon appropriate choices. However, the significance of the problems and the energy and excitement generated by their pursuit ought to pull exceptionally intelligent and skilled people at every level towards working in the School.

35. Lest there be ambiguity, we emphasize that there should be convergence, not separation of the issues of global and national significance chosen by the School. As our examination of quality indicators demonstrates (Appendix 3), work focussed on the purely local does not gain the reputation of international esteem. The skill of strategic choice involves identifying themes that play equally on both registers.

36. It is clear that the most complex problems in social science demand interdisciplinary approaches. We believe therefore that the future work of the RSSS should be characterised by a more determined interdisciplinary effort around the themes identified. Furthermore, as we have already said, the School cannot contain within itself all the talent and skill required. Therefore, we envisage not simply a greater collaborative approach within the School but also the building of research collaborations within ANU, Australia, and internationally. We are aware that parts of the RSSS do already look to work with colleagues in ANU and elsewhere, sometimes more so than within the School (we may cite as an example cross-disciplinary work in History with environmental studies and with units concerned with Aboriginal issues). We welcome that and believe that it predisposes the School's members to follow the direction we propose. The larger, more complex and significant the problem, the greater is the need for collaborative, networked research.

37. It should also be said – although it appears self-evident to us – that the pursuit of complex problems central to contemporary society demands foundational research of the highest quality. Nothing in what we write here should be taken to indicate a lessening of the requirement for the highest quality of original research. Leadership and reputation depend intimately upon that.

38. It might be thought that an emphasis upon major current and emerging issues of global and national concern implies turning the RSSS primarily or even uniquely towards applied social science and perhaps especially public policy. This is not the case. Of course, social science leads towards applications and, among them, public policy which is the implementation in policy of understandings derived from the work of social scientists. However, as we have said earlier, social science is a continuum from theory to application. No really complex problem that it addresses can be understood without the contribution of academics from across the broad disciplinary front.
39. Part of our mandate is to consider the role of the School in public policy. Public policy should not be defined simply as targeted work on detailed policies of the government, important though that is. It includes equally the broader conception of how public action addresses issues of society. We understand that for quite some period the ANU was rather detached from the Federal Government in both aspects. However, in the last few years, it is clear that government agencies and the ANU have started to rediscover each other. This is important, since the handling of complex issues is less effective than it should be if there are inadequate inputs from knowledgeable people outside the Public Services. The RSSS has participated in this successfully (RegNet, parts of Political Science, Demography, etc.). The impact analysis we discuss in Appendix 3 is quite favourable and we were reassured by conversations we had in Canberra outside the University. Such relationships need to be nurtured and results delivered in a timely manner. However, we are encouraged to think that these relationships will continue and grow. Furthermore, we believe that our proposals for the future of the School will provide further impetus to this. Beyond that, we see no particular action that needs to be recommended.

40. Our vision of the future of the RSSS certainly involves its being driven by a set of overarching themes within whose context the work of individuals and groups is set. We certainly do not propose that there shall be only one theme towards which all are obliged to turn themselves. Once again, such a view would be absurd. We envisage a number of themes which suit the interests of different parts of the School. We certainly think that the members of the School should collectively identify these themes, and we recommend later a mechanism for achieving this. However, we do believe that all members of the School should relate their work to one or more agreed overarching themes.

41. Finally, we believe firmly that leadership in social science cannot be confined to scholarship and research. We believe that leadership and enduring reputation depend upon actively forming future generations of researchers in social science. We are therefore concerned that the RSSS should not neglect the function of training and supervising research students and should pay attention to helping forward the work of post-doctoral students.

42. Therefore, we recommend that:

3. The School should be distinguished by the combinations of foundational research that inform its inter-disciplinary approach to major current and emerging issues of global and national concern.

This requires:

a. that the activities of the School should be driven primarily by overarching themes, and that the activity of the School should be organized flexibly around those themes;

b. high quality foundational research for quality work on those themes;

c. the creation of the next generation of scholars through postgraduate education and the mentoring of post-doctoral fellows;

d. making the highest and best use of collaborations with other scholars both inside and outside the ANU.
43. The direction we propose is ambitious. It demands a considerable level of agreement and cooperation within the School and above all clarity about objectives. We believe that it is essential that there should be an agreed strategic plan for the School which sets out clearly these agreed objectives and the milestones for their achievement. It is also necessary that the School should have an outside review from time to time in order to verify quality, impact and outcomes of its work and the fitness-for-purpose of its strategic plan. Therefore, we recommend that:

4. **The School should be evaluated periodically with reference to the achievement of a strategic plan that implements the tasks described in Recommendation 3, having particular regard to relevance, excellence, impact, innovation and networking.**

44. Furthermore, it is evident that the nature and definition of major issues of global and national concern is not stable over time. Work done on them contributes itself to altering the nature and intensity of problems. Other problems come from time to time to be more pressing. The School will from time to time have run out of what it may usefully do on any one particular theme. There is a danger in any institution that projects outlive their useful life. This direction of the RSSS does therefore imply considerable agility and adaptability. Thus, we recommend that:

5. **Considerations of nimbleness, flexibility, and focus must underpin all discussions of the composition and the organisation of the RSSS.**

45. Our terms of reference instruct us to consider the appropriateness of the present discipline mix of the School. As we have already mentioned, this was an issue raised by School members in our interviews. We discuss below some considerations relating to disciplinary organisation. In the meantime, we see no merit in removing any of the disciplines currently represented in the School. We were encouraged to note that Economics does not now feel that its interests are best served outside the School. Indeed, we feel that Economics is core to the social sciences and that there should always be economists with the RSSS. It is clear that the numbers of economists have been recently depleted and need to be reinforced, in the interests of the viability of the RSSS project. The only exception that we make concerns Law. We understand the argument that this small unit makes for its migration to the College of Law. We believe that Law is a social science but we note that in a number of research-led universities elsewhere (though not all) Law is organised separately in a Law School. We make no recommendation about Law, but we see benefits in having Law expertise readily available to the RSSS. However, we accept that the RSSS would not be damaged by its departure in its present form.

46. Described in classic terms, there are no doubt gaps in the disciplinary provision of the School – Sociology is represented by only one continuing member; Social Psychology and Anthropology are absent. However, we do not believe that there is any predictable financial circumstance in which the inclusion or development of these would not be at the expense of the vitality of other parts of the School. It would be counter-productive to recommend it.

47. We certainly believe that the future work of the RSSS requires the mobilisation of the full range of social science disciplines in a collaborative mode. However, we do not see that this requires all of them to be represented inside the School. As we have noted, existing collaborations already take place with colleagues in disciplines elsewhere. We think that this is the way to remedy any non-provision within the School.
48. Therefore, we recommend that:

6. **All the social science disciplines within the University and elsewhere must be involved in the future work of the RSSS (see Recommendation 8).**

49. Finally, it has been suggested to us that data enterprises such as the Australian Dictionary of Biography and the Australian Social Sciences Data Archive might be more conveniently located outside the RSSS. We do not agree. We believe that this data infrastructure has an important role in the School’s pursuit of cutting-edge thematic research. Other such infrastructure datasets ought to be established in function of the needs of the RSSS. They ought to be more actively integrated into and exploited by collaborative research in the School. Therefore we recommend that:

7. **The capacity of the School to pursue cutting-edge thematic research requires a data infrastructure such as the Australian Dictionary of Biography and the Australian Social Sciences Data Archive.**

**Organisation of the School**

50. We turn now to the formal organisation of the School that would best encourage the direction we have mapped out in the preceding section.

51. We have come to the conclusion that the current organisation of the RSSS into programmes identified predominantly (though not in every case) by discipline has had a large and unfortunate role in the current disarray of the School. The programmes have a strong tendency to act as silos. They have permitted members to shy away from confronting the School’s problems and from thinking collectively about its future. Disciplinary silos on the whole inhibit rather than foster interdisciplinary activity, particularly where individuals or groups feel that the short-term transaction cost of seeking collaborations outweighs their immediate comfort or intellectual horizon. We believe that they entrench patterns of research and thought and thus slow down innovation in all but the most outstanding scholars.

52. It is not the case that disciplinary programmes are the only form of organisation in RSSS. Indeed, we have been impressed by the activity of most of the Centres – in RegNet and elsewhere. These Centres are organised around themes and are generally marked by a fair measure of interdisciplinary work. We recognize in them an attractive degree of flexibility and adaptability. It is our belief that Centres offer an organising principle more favourable to the objectives which, we believe, must be those of the School than do the existing programmes based principally in disciplines.

53. We recognize the importance of disciplines in the grounding of social science. They provide distinctive perceptions of problems and maintain a distinctive methodological rigour with which to approach them. Discipline-defined departments in universities are needed to teach fundamentals to undergraduates and research problems and methods to postgraduates. As contexts for academic research, they remain central. Nonetheless, it is our view that academics of the calibre which the RSSS deserves to attract do not need a discipline-defined base (other
than perhaps for personal comfort). On the contrary, we believe that the kind of high-level of activity which we propose will benefit from a non-discipline-specific environment to which each will bring the insights and skills of his or her disciplinary formation. If the quality and challenges of the work pursued in the RSSS are sufficiently great, the School will attract excellent younger fixed-term academics and graduate students.

54. We recommend, therefore, that:

8. Instead of discrete disciplinary programmes, the School should be organized on the basis of thematic centres, drawing on relevant disciplinary strengths and combinations.

55. It follows, then, that we believe that no member of the School should remain outside a thematic centre. We believe that appointments of academic staff should be made in function of both academic excellence and the ability either to create a new centre or to contribute creatively to one or more existing centres. The centre structure should also encompass all graduate students in the School. We recommend, therefore, that:

9. Each member of the School must belong to one or more of the thematic centres.

10. Each graduate student of the School should be attached to a thematic centre.

56. We recognize the disadvantages of the multiplication of costs centres from an accounting and control point of view, as well as the disadvantages of a flat structure in administration. Nonetheless, we believe that to maintain another shadow structure behind the centres for accounting or administrative purposes would simply blur the focus on the centres and diminish their validity, to which we attach great importance. Therefore, we recommend that:

11. Accounting for the use of resources should be reported in terms of the performance of thematic centres.

57. Finally, we reiterate our belief in the need for flexibility in the thematic approach of the School and for an awareness of the danger of individual centres outliving their utility. Therefore, we recommend that:

12. All centres of the School should be established for a finite period and must be reviewed periodically.
We are aware that major changes have taken place recently in the formal organisation of the ANU as a whole. We understand that Colleges have been formed and that henceforth these will be the primary divisions of the University for the purposes of budgetary and academic management and planning. The College to which the RSSS is formally attached is the College of Arts and Social Sciences. The Colleges are designed, in part at least, to bridge the historical, often acrimonious divide between the Research Schools and the Faculties. The functions and responsibilities of the Colleges have been clearly formulated.

During our interviews, we enquired into the status of the College of Arts and Social Sciences in the perceptions of members of the RSSS and into the degree of functional relationship that existed between the two bodies. The College has very little visibility to most members of the School, who do not adequately understand its role or purpose. At the same time, although the Director of the School has a formal leadership role in the College, there appears to be very little functional relationship between the two. In part, we feel that this situation may reflect insufficient efforts to explain the new College to the members of the School. In part also, we think that it reflects once again the relative isolation into which members of the School have put themselves.

We do not think that the School can possibly stand outside the College as the formal structure which the University has instituted. The College does not appear to us to threaten to submerge the distinctiveness of the School’s activity. The School should embrace straightforwardly the advantages in terms of collaboration and advocacy which the College offers, without believing that it is necessarily sacrificing something of its essence thereby. Furthermore, the College offers the School the advantage of far more efficient administrative support by means of economies of scale and concentration of skills and experience. Indeed, although the term “general staff” covers staff in some quite different categories of activity, reference to paragraph 10 (elaborated in Appendix 2) reveals an unexpectedly high ratio of general staff to academic staff and suggests the possibility of considerable efficiency gains for the budget.

We recommend, therefore, that:

13. **The School should be firmly part of the Collegiate structure of the University. The administrative services for the School should be organized by the College of Arts and Social Sciences. The College should be the route through which the School receives its budget.**

The current disarray, which we have identified in the School, stems in part from the absence of strong leadership. It must be said that the formal arrangements and tacit principles of governance in the School are not conducive to the kind of imaginative leadership that it requires now and for the future. We believe that the Director of the School must have clearly recognized responsibilities, which allow him or her to give direction and consistency to the School. This appears to us to be a necessary condition for its coherence and the avoidance of a dissipation of energy and focus.

In particular, we believe firmly that the Director must be responsible for preparing and implementing the School’s strategic plan, whose major outlines we have discussed. We suggest that this should be a rolling five-year plan.

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3 ‘Operational improvements to the academic structure of the Australian National University’ (16 June 2005).
65. We believe firmly also that the Director must have control of the School's budget, and be responsible for the allocation of resources in a way that supports the strategic plan. We have considered the recommendations of the Glenn/Sturgiss review and we believe that they are appropriate to the needs we identify in the School, subject only to obvious modifications in order to map onto the organisational changes we propose.

66. Finally, we believe that an important part of the Director’s functions and effectiveness will lie in his or her ability to help initiatives to emerge, to support fledgling ideas or younger staff, to implement transition arrangements, to bridge funding gaps between grants, and to meet other unforeseen needs. Clear-sighted decision-making without available resource cannot result in effective leadership.

67. Therefore, we recommend that:

14. The Director of the School must be responsible for the preparation and implementation of a rolling five-year strategic plan.

15. The Director of the School must be responsible for the allocation of resources within the School, consistent with the strategic plan and the recommendations of the Glenn/Sturgiss review of School budgeting, modified as appropriate to take account of our structural recommendations.

16. The Director of the School should have available to him or her a contingency fund for such purposes as incentivisation, bridging, transition management, and other needs.

68. It is equally important to the successful conduct of the RSSS that there should be transparency in both financial affairs and also the formulation of plans and of the policies to implement them. It is crucial that all members of the School should understand the reasons for decisions that affect them. It is crucial that all members should “own” the future of the School by means of some representative voice in its construction. We understand that the pre-existing body endowed with this function has simply ceased to meet during the last few years. However, such a mechanism is indispensable to the taking of difficult decisions and to the maintenance of morale in constrained circumstances. Experience demonstrates that such a body should be small enough to work efficiently but broad enough to be connected to the range of the School. Its first task will have to be to help reorganize the School. We recommend, therefore, that:

17. A School Executive Committee of seven members, chaired by the Director, should be established to assist the Director in the operation of the School. An initial role of the School Executive Committee will be to map the personnel, activities and resources of the School to the thematic centres. The School Executive Committee should be representative of the activities of the School. It should meet at least four times a year.
69. Furthermore, it is our own observation elsewhere that institutions benefit considerably from having an external Advisory Board. The advice of its members is valuable precisely because they are not so close to the daily business. They serve as supporters and advocates as necessary. They bring experience from outside the institution and the ability to add to an institution’s network. We think that the School would be wise not to populate such a Board exclusively or even predominantly with academics, but to reflect that the kind of mission that we propose for the School has a large national and international frame. The Board should meet on a regular basis. Therefore, we recommend that:

18. An external Advisory Board should be established to provide advice and support to the work of the School.

70. We reiterate here our concern that the School should remain flexible and able to modify its thematic activity in light of changing conditions. We believe, further, that new activities must not be identified in a manner that might appear casual or lacking in the most careful evaluation. The choices are too critical for the healthy future of the School. Finally, our own experience teaches us that innovation can be prevented by a determination in existing arrangements to survive beyond their useful existence. We propose, therefore, a mechanism which we consider most important. We would not hope to see these issues become matters of contention; but if on occasion they do, we believe that the presence of a Chairman from the Advisory Board would offer a guarantee of impartiality. We recommend that:

19. There should be a committee convened at least once a year to evaluate proposals for new thematic centres, new activities of an existing centre, and the status of centres as they become due for review. That committee should comprise the Director and three members of the School Executive, two members of the College of Arts and Social sciences, and one member nominated by the External Advisory Board to serve as the Chair.

Research Education

71. We stated earlier in this report that, as part of its leadership role, the RSSS ought to be actively engaged in the research training of graduate students and the production of PhDs. It is clear that at the ANU these activities in the social sciences are quite dispersed. Leaving aside social science in RSPAS, we understand that approximately twice as many PhDs are being prepared in the Faculties than is the case in the RSSS. Furthermore, with the exception of Demography, all postgraduate Master’s degrees by coursework in the social sciences are taught by the Faculties, although we understand that individual members of the School are involved in the delivery of these courses. In 2005 there were 121.1 full-time equivalent students enrolled in educational programmes within the RSSS. Of these, 110.8 were enrolled in higher degree research programmes, primarily PhD, except for RegNet with a higher share of Masters by Research students.

72. We understand that the University has given the Colleges responsibility for the development and implementation of graduate education. The School should not stand aside from participation in the College’s activity. On the one hand, it has a great deal of first-class experience to offer to the business of preparing future generations; on the other, to stand
aside would in the longer-term result in marginalisation. We were puzzled by the current situation in which graduate students from the Faculties were informally welcomed to activities in the RSSS on a basis which did not appear to us to be clearly defined. Our conversation with the School's graduate students left us feeling that while they are moved on one level by a generous instinct of communion, there is also an undertone of self-esteem in their sense of the separation between themselves and their counterparts from outside the School.

73. During our interviews with continuing staff, considerable emphasis was placed from time to time on their status as “research only” academics. In the minds of some of those with whom we talked, the phrase apparently implied a dispensation from all responsibility for students and especially for teaching them. We have to say clearly that we are wholly unsympathetic to this proposition. We think that it implies a level of exceptional and sustained productive research excellence, which can be verified only in a small number of cases. We do not think that researchers can escape the responsibility to train future generations. We think that the term “research-led” is more sensible than “research only”.

74. Let us be crystal clear. We do not insist that continuing staff in the RSSS be involved in the teaching of undergraduates, although there are opportunities (which a few individuals take) to be involved in undergraduate Honours work. We do believe firmly that they should supervise research students and participate in research training.

75. We recommend, therefore, that:

20. The School must implement its responsibility for research training by being involved actively with the College of Arts and Social Sciences in the formulation and development of graduate education.

21. All continuing staff should be involved in the supervision of research students and participation in research training.

76. There are other members of the RSSS, however, for whom more formal teaching opportunities should be encouraged. The title “fixed-term staff” is a portmanteau phrase, which includes people as diverse as experienced academics working through a succession of fixed-term positions at one end through to post-doctoral students at the other. In as much as many junior staff are looking towards a next career move that involves a tenure-track teaching position in a university, the RSSS ought to pay attention to their need for teaching experience. It was also quite clear from our conversation with doctoral students that they are unhappy at the perceived low level of opportunity for the teaching experience that they feel they need for their future career. We believe that this is a legitimate aspiration, which the School ought to heed. Therefore, we recommend that:

22. Opportunities to teach should be offered to junior staff and doctoral students.

77. Indeed, we have to say that we have not been favourably impressed by the School’s handling of postgraduates. We could not discover any uniformity in the way in which PhD students were dealt with. We learned from our conversation with graduate students that while some received formal training, for many supervision appeared to rely on a personal association with a supervisor over a particular object of research, extended by a series of seminars and talks with visitors whose structure we could not identify. We doubt neither the quality of the research students (which we observed) nor the research quality of the supervisors. However, we are
perturbed to discover that most graduate students do not have a clear sense of what ought to be involved in research training and supervision, though we did pick up some dissatisfaction with the lack of courses to help them broaden their knowledge and skills.

78. Furthermore, we understand that there is no formal programme in research training and methodology common to the RSSS. We believe that if the School is to be at the leading edge of social science, its PhD students ought to possess a common knowledge of the fundamental methodologies and analytical tools employed across the social sciences. Quite apart from the fact that we find unconvincing the argument that PhD students ought to know these things before they reach the School, we believe that such training would increase their capacity for flexibility and interdisciplinary self-development. Finally, it would help to bind together what is currently an entirely fragmented population: several graduates told us that they had hoped for a greater degree of interaction than they had enjoyed.

79. Thus, we recommend that:

23. There should be a formal programme for research training specifically in the social sciences.

80. We understand that the School was not very actively engaged in the recruitment of graduate students before perhaps half a dozen years ago. We do not criticize it for that. Nonetheless, we do believe that the School now has too few PhD students for the number of staff available and that they are very unevenly distributed across the School. We examined a report on higher degree research training in the School.\(^4\) It shows that the average ratio of graduate students to research staff in the RSSS was 1.2:1, compared with an overall average ratio for the Institute of Advanced Studies of 1.4:1. Furthermore, it is clear that the activity is spread very unevenly across the School. Student/staff ratios range from 0.2:1 to 3.1. It is remarkable that the lowest ratios are visible for researchers who are most highly peer-rated for the quality of their work, particularly in Philosophy, RegNet, Economics, Demography, and Political Science. The report we cite here concludes: “the low numbers reflect poor utilisation of research capacity and an apparent lack of responsibility for the development of the discipline and the next generation of researchers.”

81. We believe that the RSSS must increase markedly the number of PhD students that it enrols. This is not for crude financial reasons. It is partly for reasons of reputation, as we have adumbrated earlier. Above all, however, it is because only sizeable cohorts of high quality PhDs will create the double virtuous circle of, on the one hand, real influence over the development of social science and the resolution of problems in the world and, on the other, the future flow of good graduate students sent on by those whom the School has formed in the past. It was represented to us that the School was constrained in the recruitment of graduate students by University restrictions on numbers and by the interest of the Faculties in retaining their best students. We understand that the first consideration does not reflect reality, whereas the second consideration appears unadventurous when one considers that a good half of the PhD students in the social science departments are recruited from other universities.

82. We recommend, therefore, that:

24. The School should increase significantly the number of PhD student enrolments.

\(^4\) ‘Higher Degree Research Training in the Research School of Social Sciences during the period 2001 to 2005’, prepared by The Graduate Research School, July 2006.
83. At the same time, on the basis of the report that we have just cited, we note that the School has a poor record in the completion rate of PhDs, especially when compared with the rate in the Faculties. Some 43% of PhD candidates are taking 6 years or longer, yet only 13% of total PhD enrolments are part-time. Our discussions with staff and students confirmed these facts; they also confirmed that there was little acknowledgement by the staff that there is a problem of a dimension greater than individual students. It is true that the lack of a financial incentive (though there is one to the University, we understand) does not incite vigilance in this matter. However, we believe that dilatory completion rates reflect poorly upon the energy and attention that an academic unit devotes to graduate students. It risks being interpreted as a sign (though we do not say it is) that academics are not well committed to the quality of work and career prospects of their students. The likelihood of a total failure to complete rises exponentially in ratio to the number of years from the inception of a dissertation. In any case, the remedy of this pattern is simply a matter of prudence since it would be unwise to assume that the close connection between funding and completion rates that exists in some countries will not be introduced in Australia.

84. Therefore, we recommend that:

   25. The School should give greater attention to improving rates of completion of doctoral students to within five years.

85. On a final, more general note about graduates, the attempt to provide us with information about outcomes for RSSS graduates demonstrated that the University’s alumni database held information about the current employment destinations of only 18 of the 77 former RSSS doctoral graduates over 2001-05. By dint of a simple Google search, the Graduate School tracked down a further 17. It follows, however, that no information could be obtained for 55% of recent graduates. We would normally expect more care to develop enduring relations with former PhD students. It is possible that relationships are maintained at the individual supervisor-to-graduate level, and the apparent inadequacy of information is a matter for the Alumni Office. Even so, the School seems astonishingly unconcerned.

Funding

86. The funding of research is a difficult and often fraught issue. There can be no doubt that the climate, priorities, and processes of university funding have changed radically in Australia as elsewhere. Furthermore, a few years ago the University detached itself in part from a block grant from the Federal Government in order to gain access to competitive grants. There can be no doubt that this has brought pressure in particular on the Research Schools. We recognize with pleasure that individuals and groups in the RSSS have had increasing success in gaining substantial competitive grants for their research. It is nonetheless self-evident that, irrespective of relative parity in fixed costs, some fields can gain larger grants than others simply as a function of the price of their research and/or a greater attractiveness of their kind of work to funders. One of the challenges in the administration of a university lies in finding a reasonable way to smooth these differences without depriving well-earning units of their income. In whatever way this is done, it cannot be achieved in good order and collegial good temper if all groups do not make visible efforts to raise as much external support as they can.

87. Therefore, we recommend that:

   26. To the extent possible, the thematic centres should raise external funds.
88. In particular, we see the data infrastructure of the School as capable in different ways of raising considerable income, even to the point of becoming self-financing. While the creation of these databases has been a major and beneficial commitment by the University through the School, there is no good reason now for their operation to be simply a charge on the budget. For example, it is clear to us that revenue can be generated by the on-line ADB in ways that do not diminish its character as free at point of delivery. Therefore, we recommend that:

27. The Australian Dictionary of Biography and the Australian Social Science Data Archive should be financially self-sufficient within five years.

89. Finally, it is self-evident to us that in contemporary circumstances the RSSS ought to devote energy to a fundraising campaign for the support of activities that notably enhance its capacity. Therefore, we recommend that:

28. The School should actively raise endowments, fellowships and other unrestricted moneys for School-wide activities.

Appointments

90. At the heart of our recommendations lie proposals for a thematic organisation of the work of the School as well as a strong sense of the necessity for flexibility and the avoidance of impediments to change over time. It follows that there must be revision of how appointments are made.

91. In the first place, we believe our proposals imply that future appointments should not be made in function simply of a notion of the “best” scholar, especially where that definition does not include a sense of the broader impact of a person’s work. The appointment process should seek outstanding academic excellence certainly, but within a strategic frame of reference. Therefore, we recommend that:

29. Future appointments should be determined in relation to the functional requirements laid out in Recommendation 3.

92. In the second place, we have emphasized that the thematic organisation of the School must be capable of adapting to the evolution of problems and changes of direction. It is also true that individual academics can find their own interests changing and, moreover, that they can encounter a natural term to their capacity to innovate (as distinct from continuing to produce quality work). Over time, individuals differ from each other in these respects. It must follow, then, that the School would be foolish to commit itself until retirement to any single academic colleague without the opportunity to verify his or her continuing relevance to the objects and quality of the School’s work. Certainly, we would not wish to question here the status of continuing appointments. At present, all staff appointed in this category have continuing
appointments to the ANU. This should continue to be the case, but appointments to the School need to be reviewed periodically.

93. It has been represented to us that it is precisely the prospect of undisturbed enjoyment of favourable conditions over an unlimited period of time that attracts high-quality academics to the ANU. It has been represented to us that a deviation from this would end the ability of the RSSS to recruit such people. We are not convinced that this argument is generally true, although this may be the case for some individuals. We note that there has consistently been quite a turnover of senior staff in the RSSS - that is to say, a significant number of senior researchers leave the conditions which are said to be essential for their recruitment and retention. We believe that if the appointment to the School is for an adequate period and is renewable and is rooted in a general guarantee of employment in the University, the vitality of the school and the challenges of its project ought to fulfil the requirements of many outstanding researchers who are willing to envisage leaving their existing circumstances.

94. Therefore, we recommend that:

30. As at present, all continuing appointments should be made to the ANU. In future, membership of the Research School should be available on a 10-year renewable basis.

95. One of the most regrettable victims of the recent budget cuts has been the visitor programme. Although visitors have not ceased to come to the RSSS, their number has been reduced; above all, the variety of them and the presence of lesser-known people earlier in their career have been drastically diminished. We believe that the visitor programme is one of the major strategies by which the School maintains its reputation, influences the development of the social sciences, and mediates the network which enhances its own work. We therefore believe that it is important to restore this programme as soon as is feasible. We understand the budgetary prudence that must continue to be exercised. However, we do believe that it is in the interests of the University more generally that the issue is addressed, and one might hope for some additional budget for this purpose.

96. We recommend, therefore, that:

31. Subject to budgetary availability, priority should be given to the re-establishment of visiting fellows from within and outside the ANU.

97. Finally, we believe that, subject to finance, the School should take a more systematic, School-wide approach to a number of initiatives that already exist relating to junior scholars. Indeed, the nurturing of junior scholars is a constructive and necessary contribution that the RSSS can make to sustain the academic environment and health of the social sciences. It would also form part of its leadership and influence, as we have already suggested. We believe that the School can develop several different kinds of opportunities for periods of study in the School. We recommend, therefore, that:

32. In addition to what it is already doing in this respect, the School should create opportunities for junior scholars by means of programmes including:
• an appropriate period of residence in the School for eligible tenure-track scholars.

• post-doctoral fellowships.

• other forms of visiting fellowships.

The University

98. Our terms of reference directed us to examine the RSSS. In the process of review, we have encountered a small number of issues, which relate more directly to the University’s administration and on which we have general recommendations to make.

99. In the first place, however, we should say that our report does imply significant restructuring of the RSSS. Restructuring is not accomplished without cost. Inadequate financial support for a transition is, in our experience, a prime cause for its failure. Therefore, we recommend that:

33. The University should provide flexible, non-recurrent funds to facilitate the implementation of the proposed restructuring of the RSSS.

100. Second, our conversation with graduate students in the School made clear to us their unhappiness about quite a range of support services, which they deem to be either inadequate or inflexible or non-existent. We felt that there was substance to what they said. We are not clear that we have heard all that could be said on the subject. Therefore, we are not in the position to do more than draw attention generally to the problem. Nonetheless, we do believe that it requires substantial remedy and therefore recommend that:

34. The University should review and enhance its provision of support services for graduate students.

101. Finally, on the basis of the information we assembled, we are strongly of the view that quality control mechanisms for graduate education in the University need strengthening. We conclude that there is insufficient clarity about responsibilities, uneven and unverified quality of delivery, uncertainty about recruitment processes and standards, a lack of co-ordination, and an inability to apply standards across the University. We believe that it is imperative that the central agency in the University be given more capacity and more authority, including possibly the means to incentivise behaviour. We believe that the Colleges ought to collaborate in this endeavour and have discovered no reason to suppose that they will not.

102. We recommend, therefore, that:

35. The University should strengthen its quality control mechanisms for graduate education.
Conclusion

103. It is our view that the RSSS requires transformative change if it is to recover the vigour and collegial sense of direction that it so manifestly lacks at present. We believe that we have provided the outline of a feasible project for its future and the mechanisms with which to achieve that. This project aims to restore the comparative advantage which has been ebbing away from the School. A change of this size must be led by the University, but in sympathy with the School’s real qualities and potential.

104. As far as our analysis of the current situation inside the RSSS is concerned, it has derived from our own observations during our visit and from our examination of the written material made available to us. However, it is an analysis that echoes also remarks made to us by individuals during our interviews. Here are some comments about the School that we noted down during our meetings:

“an isolationist fortress” ... “impenetrable walls” .... “I see the School as archaic” .... “a narrow discipline-based structure” .... “it is not a collegial place to be” .... “the place is centred on status” .... “there is no common intellectual discourse” .... “the School does not have a consultative management culture” .... “people are bruised and thinking inwardly” .... “they are unwilling to try new ideas” .... “individualist purpose matters most ... the spirit of collective responsibility is gone”.

105. We do believe that the School has a fine tradition and reputation. Current conditions threaten that. There is good work and a number of outstanding academics. However, the School is fragmented. The circumstances of its origin have disappeared and the competitive present and future of universities puts in jeopardy a unit constructed on this basis.

106. We believe firmly that if it is to command the respect and influence that can justify the special conditions in which its members work, the RSSS needs a new definition of itself, a new social science project on an ambitious scale, and the flexibility to continue evolving. We think that staying with conventional disciplinary structures and with traditional habits of work, however productive these have been in the past, will in the future serve only to weaken the RSSS progressively. We believe that resolute innovation will allow the School to punch above its weight in the current and future international context.

107. The implementation of our proposals will in our view serve not only to stimulate challenging and innovative research, but also - if handled properly - make the RSSS an attractive place for major scholars who have left Australia or are considering competitive offers to leave (fulfilling once again, thus, one of the primary intentions of its foundation).

108. We have to say that we believe also that such a transformation cannot be long delayed.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be a Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University as an integral component of the College of Arts and Social Sciences.

Role and Orientation of the RSSS

2. The RSSS should be the leader in developing the social sciences in Australia.

3. The School should be distinguished by the combinations of foundational research that inform its interdisciplinary approach to major current and emerging issues of global and national concern.

   This requires:
   a. that the activities of the School should be driven primarily by overarching themes, and that the activity of the School should be organized flexibly around those themes;
   b. high quality foundational research for quality work on those themes;
   c. the creation of the next generation of scholars through postgraduate education and mentoring of post-doctoral fellows;
   d. making the highest and best use of collaborations with other scholars both inside and outside the ANU.

4. The School should be evaluated periodically with reference to the achievement of a strategic plan that implements the tasks described in Recommendation 3, having particular regard to relevance, excellence, impact, innovation and networking.

5. Considerations of nimbleness, flexibility, and focus must underpin all discussions of the composition and the organisation of the RSSS

6. All the social science disciplines within the University and elsewhere must be involved in the future work of the RSSS (see Recommendation 8).

7. The capacity of the School to pursue cutting-edge thematic research requires a data infrastructure such as the Australian Dictionary of Biography and the Australian Social Sciences Data Archive.

Organisation of the School

8. Instead of discrete disciplinary programmes, the School should be organized on the basis of thematic centres, drawing on relevant disciplinary strengths and combinations.

9. Each member of the School must belong to one or more of the thematic centres.

10. Each graduate student of the School should be attached to a thematic centre.
11. Accounting for the use of resources should be reported in terms of the performance of thematic centres.

12. All centres of the School should be established for a finite period and must be reviewed periodically.

**Governance of the School**

13. The School should be firmly part of the Collegiate structure of the University. The administrative services for the School should be organized by the College of Arts and Social Sciences. The College should be the route through which the School receives its budget.

14. The Director of the School must be responsible for the preparation and implementation of a five-year rolling strategic plan.

15. The Director of the School must be responsible for the allocation of resources within the School, consistent with the strategic plan and the recommendations of the Glenn/Sturgiss review of School budgeting, modified as appropriate to take account of our structural recommendations.

16. The Director of the School should have available to him or her a contingency fund for such purposes as incentivisation, bridging, transition management and other needed.

17. A School Executive Committee of seven members, chaired by the Director, should be established to assist the Director in the operation of the School. An initial role of the School Executive Committee will be to map the personnel, activities and resources of the School to the thematic centres. The School Executive Committee should be representative of the activities of the School. It should meet at least four times a year.

18. An external Advisory Board should be established to provide advice and support to the work of the School.

19. There should be a committee convened at least once a year to evaluate proposals for new thematic centres, new activities of an existing centre, and the status of centres as they become due for review. That committee should comprise the Director and three members of the School Executive, two members of the College of Arts and Social Sciences, and one member nominated by the External Advisory Board to serve as the Chair.

**Research Education**

20. The School must implement its responsibility for research training by being involved actively with the College of Arts and Social Sciences in the formulation and development of graduate education.

21. All continuing staff should be involved in the supervision of research students and participation in research training.

22. Opportunities to teach should be offered to junior staff and doctoral students.

23. There should be a formal programme for research training specifically in the social sciences.
24. The School should increase significantly the number of PhD student enrolments.

25. The School should give greater attention to improving rates of completion of doctoral students within five years.

**Funding**

26. To the extent possible, the thematic centres should raise external funds.

27. The Australian Dictionary of Biography and the Australian Social Science Data Archive should be financially self-sufficient within five years.

28. The School should actively raise endowments, fellowships and other uncommitted moneys for School-wide activities.

**Appointments**

29. Future appointments should be determined in relation to the functional requirements laid out in Recommendation 3.

30. As at present, all continuing appointments should be made to the ANU. In future, membership of the Research School should be available on a 10-year renewable basis.

31. Subject to budgetary availability, priority should be given to the re-establishment of visiting fellows from within and outside the ANU.

32. In addition to what it is already doing in this respect, the School should create opportunities for junior scholars by means of programmes including:
   - an appropriate period of residence in the School for eligible tenure-track scholars
   - post-doctoral fellowships
   - other forms of visiting fellowships

**University**

33. The University should provide flexible, non-recurrent funds to facilitate the implementation of the proposed restructuring of the RSSS.

34. The University should review and enhance its provision of support services for graduate students.

35. The University should strengthen its quality control mechanisms for graduate education.
APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Terms of Reference for an External review of the Research School of Social Sciences, ANU

The Review will examine the performance of the Research School of Social Sciences (RSSS) over the past five years, and report to the Vice-Chancellor and the Director of the Research School of Social Sciences on directions for its future development and on measures to facilitate that development over the next five years.

In particular, the Review will consider:

1. the appropriateness of the present discipline mix (and the relative balance) as the foundation for a future which includes long-term strategic research in the Social Sciences.

2. the future role of RSSS:
   (a) within the University,
   (b) in providing support for Social Sciences researchers in other institutions.

3. the scope for the promotion of inter-disciplinary research that addresses major agendas in the social sciences.

4. the impact of the School's research.

5. the effectiveness of the School's contribution to education within the University, particularly higher degree research training, and ways of enhancing the contribution of the research strengths of RSSS to education at all levels within the University.

6. ways and means of attracting and retaining leading-edge scholars to work in RSSS, including research culture and activities, budget and incentives.

7. the involvement and efficacy of the School with regard to public policy, and ways of maintaining and improving this contribution.
Appendix 2

The organisation of the Research School of Social Sciences, including Full-Time Equivalent Staff as at 31 March 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Academic Staff</th>
<th>General Staff</th>
<th>Total Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Incorporated (ACSPRI)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre for Gambling Research</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demography and Sociology Program</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics Program (incorporating Economics, and Social Policy Evaluation, Analysis &amp; Research (SPEAR))</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History Program (incorporating History, the Australian Dictionary of Biography, and the Australian Centre for Indigenous History)</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Philosophy (incorporating Law, Philosophy, and Social &amp; Political Theory)</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science Program (incorporating Political Science, the Australian and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) and the Research Evaluation and Policy Project (REPP))</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Regulatory Institutions Network Program (RegNet)</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (including Director's Office, Administration, Support Services, and RSSS General)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>162.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3

Appraisal of the School’s performance

We summarize here the outcome of the peer-review of quality and impact prepared for us and to which we make reference in the body of the text.

Research quality

For the research quality assessments each researcher of the School (having a position or a contract with the ANU as at 1 January 2006) identified his or her best works over the period 2000 to 2005. Researchers in the various programmes of the School identified suitable external peer assessors who were asked to rate each researcher on a five-point scale and to comment on the performance of the programme.

The works of 87 researchers were assessed, including 21 early career researchers. A total of 53 assessors had access to a website containing four digitised works for each researcher over 2000-05, together with a listing of their full research career output. It was agreed that their individual ratings and comments would remain confidential and that aggregate evaluations only would be made known to researchers and the wider community. We had access to individual assessments on a confidential basis.

Assessors were asked to provide a rating for each researcher on a five-point scale, where A is “outstanding” research in the top 10% of its field in the world, B is “excellent” research within the top 25% but not the top 10%, C is “high quality” research in the top 40% but not in the top 25%, D is “moderate” quality research in the top 60% but not within the top 40%, and E is in the bottom 40% of its field. Rating scale descriptors were made available to us.

[Note: As the report of assessments identifies individuals it is not replicated here.]

Research Performance Impact

Different programmes of the RSSS prepared case studies of research which they believed had an impact beyond the academic sphere and these were submitted to selected end-users of research for their assessment. The chosen assessors were primarily people in senior positions in government agencies that had sponsored the research or whose functions were likely to have found the research relevant.

The assessors were asked to rate the impact of the cases according to “high”, “moderate”, or “low” impact. High impact was defined as research that “has produced a major identifiable social, cultural, economic and/or environmental outcome, regionally within Australia, nationally or internationally”. Moderate impact was defined by a significant equivalent outcome, and limited impact was defined as having limited or no identifiable outcome.

[Note: As the report of assessments identifies individuals it is not replicated here]

The citation analysis
We appreciate that the citation analysis prepared for us represents an innovation in the field. It sought to overcome the usual limitations (partial capture of data, etc.) of bibliometric analysis based on ISI indexes. This novel method uses “mining” of the Web of Science for citations in media not indexed by ISI. We cannot comment authoritatively on this method of analysis. We have no understanding of the basis on which the new data set was constructed from the “mining” process. We also note that the output of several programmes, including Law and RegNet, could not be included in the comparative analyses and that the time horizons were not appropriate for all fields, notably History.

A summary-level reading of the citation analysis report suggests that for the years 2000-06 the number of RSSS researchers appearing in the Australian top 10 rank of citations per cited publication is, by field of research: 1 in Sociology, 1 in History, 2 in Economics, 2 in Political Science, 3 in Philosophy, and 4 in Demography. The rankings reflect the commitment to the field in Australia and the spread of performance within the field nationally. In comparative terms in that context, this approach reveals the following. For Economics, the major citations impacts are attributed to researchers in other universities, except for one major contributor in the ANU Faculty of Economics, with 3 of the top 10 at the University of Melbourne. For History, the ANU Faculty of Arts is strong, along with a spread of other universities, with 3 of the top researchers at the University of Melbourne. For Philosophy, the ANU Faculty of Arts accounts for one of the top ten citations impact scores, with 3 of the top ten at the University of Queensland. In Political Science, 3 of the top 10 researchers are at the University of Sydney.

Since this is a novel method of analysis, we quote at some length the author’s own cautions on its use (and the use of citation analysis in general):

Bibliometric data answer no single evaluative question in their own right. This information must be seen alongside other measures of esteem, performance, visibility and the testimony of expert peers in the activity being analysed. It is best used in conjunction with peer evaluation process. ..... Where the two methods do not result in consistent views, the reasons for the differences should be investigated to determine whether they result from problems with the numbers, or whether they highlight information unknown to peers in the field.

We did observe some broad convergences of peer evaluations and citations analysis, more particularly in Demography, Philosophy and Political Science, and less high in Economics. The exclusion of RegNet (highly rated in the other evaluations) was unfortunate. Where we found anomalies between the different methods of evaluation, we felt that the explanation lay in the limited visibility of the output. It is beyond doubt that an orientation to issues uniquely Australian is less well regarded by international reviewers despite high national rankings. “Descriptive” work will also not find favour.

Our view of the assessments

We believe that the quality assessments were undertaken professionally and that the results are reasonably robust. There will always be questions raised about assessees nominating their assessors, especially when there is a close fit of assessors to sub-disciplinary fields and when people are well known to each other and may have, at times, worked together. Peer review is bound to be a subjective qualitative appraisal. Nonetheless, familiarity does not necessarily engender fondness, and frequently those who know another’s work well know best about its flaws. The care taken by assessors in their qualitative comments is testimony to the seriousness with which they engaged in the process.

With regard to impact assessments, we appreciate that the University is trialling a method of evaluating the perceived worth to end users of university research, in the context of a possible initiative on the part of the Government to allocate resources among universities on the basis of measures of research quality and impact.

We agree with the sentiment of the assessors of impact who expressed some difficulty with the case studies. One said that clear demonstration of links between activity and policy/ programme outcome “were not shown in a number of case studies presented”. Another commented that “the direct influence of the Programme cannot always be easily isolated, net of other contributory factors”.

The gap between a rating of High for “major” and Moderate for “significant” was not defined and it was not clear that the criteria were applied consistently by different assessors. Hence it is difficult to give much weight to the ratings. The comments were more useful, although we found that they fell into two categories: those that provided detailed accounts of the use and usefulness of the research; and those that gave a broad indication of awareness of the work and its general applicability. The latter were of little value. The former were provided mostly in relation to the SPEAR and RegNet activities, and suggested that those programmes are valued highly by participants in the relevant areas of policy development, implementation and evaluation. In the case of Demography, the assessments spanned the two categories of response.

Any future exercise designed to elicit substantive assessments of research impact might attend more carefully to the definition of the criteria, the design of the assessment instruments, the selection of the assessors and the questions asked of them.

**Conclusion**

The information about the research performance of the School was a useful input into our deliberations. It helped us to understand important aspects of the School’s performance, or at least the performance of its various parts and individuals within those parts, in relation to specific criteria and measures.

Nonetheless, there is a limit to what this material can tell us. In our view, undue weight can be given to quantitative measures of scholarly work. We are rather sceptical of the current attachment to numerical ratings and rankings and view ‘bibliometrics’ as uncomfortably close to pseudo-science. They are at best contextual references for the exercise of judgement and not substitutes for it. Taken too literally, they can produce perverse behavioural incentives.

To some extent, this exercise in quality and impact evaluation interfered in practice with the dialogue we wanted to have with the School’s researchers about the role of the School and its effectiveness. The body of the Report makes clear that we were able to achieve that objective. Nonetheless, it was clear that individuals and groups were anxious about these assessment outcomes. Their response to ratings and assessor comments coloured their presentations to us. Some appeared to be overly defensive while others were overly self-congratulatory. Particularly instructive was the fact that all of the researchers we met referred to the assessment process only in terms of their own area. The School as such did not matter much to them. We discuss this in the body of the Report.

The evidence we have discussed in this appendix indicates that some parts of the School, and individual researchers, are achieving very high standards of research quality. Many others are producing commendable work, although some are not notable. We felt cause for concern in the fields of Economics and History and did not feel that Philosophy was wholly immune from potential slippage.

There appear to be some influential applications of research, and it is evident that a number of research areas have developed significant application networks. However, some areas appear to be unable to demonstrate broader use of their research beyond the academy.
We do have views about how research in the RSSS should be oriented in the future. They are laid out at some length in the body of the Report. However, as they relate to the material discussed here, we would emphasize that, on the one hand, it is not sufficient to rely on local impact alone without a validation of work by international peer review and, on the other hand, it is not sufficient either to confine one's work to an exchange within closed communities of scholarship without making any real effort to link it to social issues. If only through the means of the collective project in whose envelope it operates, social science academic activity must not be isolated from its contemporary environment to which it ought to contribute.

On balance, we found the research performance of the School sub-optimal. It should be generating a greater level of higher quality outputs and it should be making a much more substantial contribution to the development of the social sciences and the tackling of social issues.
Appendix 4

Glenn/Sturgiss Review of the financial administration of the RSSS

The Glenn/Sturgiss Review in 2006 found that the School's budget allocations reflected historical usage, that the full costs of continuing appointments were met from the recurrent fund, and that control was being exercised mainly through the non-renewal of contracted staff appointments. It also found lacking “a strategic plan leading to an agreed research profile, and a distributive mechanism that is linked to agreed research and research training performance”.

The Review’s report recommended that the School adopt “a planning, budgeting and evaluation process” as the basis for the allocation of resources, along with “a clear statement of School priorities and concordant with the College priorities and plans”. It also recommended that the School's budget include “a significant incentive-based operating grant component” including the transfer of competitive research block grants to academic areas on the basis of earnings.

We have been advised that the School has agreed to implement the recommendations and that the Director is awaiting our report before proceeding to do so.

The recommendations of the financial administration review are reproduced below.

**Recommendation 1:** The division of the School’s budget must be the culmination of a planning, budgeting and evaluation process, including performance evaluation, and be a clear statement of School priorities and concordant with College priorities and plans

For the past four years performance has been a key component in determining allocations of the University budget to areas. University funds are taxed to provide central services, recurrent operating grant income is allocated to areas after review, and the residue of RIBG and IGS allocated according to how they are earn. RTS funding received by the University is not taxed and is allocated according to agreed targets. Budget incentives reinforce achievement and accountability of performance indices and agreed targets.

In discussions with department heads, many commented that the School’s allocation model hindered the development of the setting of a strategic direction for the Program due to the short term nature of the budget process. They commented further that income drivers were not well understood and that research and research training performance, at the level of department, did not result in financial reward. There was strong comment from heads that RTS, IGS and RIBG income should flow to academic areas on an earnings basis. Now that the School has addressed its budget deficit, it should move to a reward system and develop a longer-term budget planning process.

**Recommendation 2:** The School’s budget include a significant incentive-based operating grant component
**Recommendation 3:** The Director develops and promotes a set of incentives designed to reward planned ongoing improvement

The Director needs the capacity to invest and fund one-off initiatives that are not supported via the normal budget allocation process. Flexibility is needed to manage change in the School and to respond to emerging opportunities as they present. Good budget practices include allowance for structural adjustment assistance for academic areas adversely affected substitution opportunities, giving proper attention to the management of identified risks.

**Recommendation 4:** The Director establish a Strategic Incentives Fund

Given the School's strong research record and capacity, the opportunity to enter into ARC funding initiatives and access hitherto unavailable funding sources has had an excellent outcome. Increases in external income receipts, by $3,700,000 over the period 2002 to 2005, have exceeded the $891,000 of ARC buy-in cost. While the School is responsible for substitution and EB-related salary gap funding, there is a lack of substitution target setting at the School level, by the Director.

The ARC buy-in presented great opportunities for the School - for the first time, the School's income was not capped. Income generation per se is insufficient if additional new staff is employed to meet external grant requirements. That is, while new staff are doing research, and thereby increasing the School's research performance, there is a need to substitute salary costs at least to the level of the buy-in cost.

The financial skills of School's administrative and department support staff were also briefly considered with a view to enhancing future financial management. While the University has invested heavily in its financial systems and reporting capabilities, much of this capability and modelling remains unused by the School's departments. In general, better financial planning and reporting is needed.

**Recommendation 5:** The School develop, with assistance from the University's administration, models for (i) achieving future increases in research funding and student fees, (ii) managing salary costs, (iii) substitution targets and (iv) better reporting tools

Following discussion with a number of heads of department it is clear that income drivers underpinning the School's funding are not well understood, at least in the necessary detail. That is, there is a lack of understanding as to how departments can, through their actions and performance, increase their overall budget from all income sources.

To improve the financial capacity of departments, some heads had resorted to seeking additional funding directly from the Vice-Chancellor. This practice has now ceased, with all resource matters to be channelled through College of Arts and Social Sciences Executive.
From a budget management perspective, heads of academic areas should know what is expected of them and be aware of the assistance available to them to manage within the School’s operating parameters. The School has now developed a document to assist heads of academic areas with their financial roles and responsibilities.

**Recommendation 6:** The School develop a program designed to familiarise heads of departments with the School's financial systems and reporting capabilities, particularly with the projected introduction of the Research Quality Framework, and assist them with the management of their budget and the identification and securing of external income.