We write in response to the RSHA change management proposal on the disestablishment of IHuG and the proposed co-location of research centres within one of the four AOUs. These AOUs, we note, are primarily organized around distinct disciplinary clusters – named Schools in our university and Departments elsewhere.

We agree with the proposal’s overall vision to enhance critical mass in key disciplinary areas and to make visible areas of academic strength. To that extent, the disestablishment of the IHuG and the relocation of its Heritage and Museum studies group (represented primarily by IPPHA) to the School of Archaeology and Anthropology is a good outcome. We also welcome the proposal’s commitment to fostering research excellence within all AOUs and the active integration of teaching and research at all levels.

The proposal to integrate the Humanities Research Centre within one or other of the four AOUs, however, requires serious reconsideration on the following grounds:

**International Best Practice**

Humanities Centres and Institutes have been established in all major research universities around the world precisely to generate an environment for advanced research in interdisciplinary humanities outside the conventional departmental/school structure. Indeed, no other major Humanities Centre or Institute globally sits in a Department or School.

Established in 1972, the HRC at ANU is one of the world’s first such Centres, and has served as a prototype for similar centres across North America, the UK and Europe. This is widely acknowledged at universities such as Cambridge, Chicago, Brown, Duke and others.

Centres like the HRC work primarily as sites where humanities faculty from ANU and other parts of the world retreat from their core departmental responsibilities in order to undertake a period of concentrated research. This is distinctly different from centres dedicated to advanced research within a specific discipline or specialization – such as the Centre for Indigenous History, for instance. At the same time, the programs of humanities centres such as ours - comprising of projects, fellowships, conferences, symposia, seminars and workshops – foster a research and teaching culture which draws in scholars from across the campus. They bring a cohort of fellows into active contact with scholars and students from all disciplines.

The HRC’s permeable culture of excellence ought to benefit the whole of RSHA and CASS. Realistically speaking academic autonomy and diversity would
undoubtedly be compromised over time if the Centre were to sit under any
disciplinary based AOU.

Not only would a disciplinary framework eventually shape academic orientation
but also it would immediately affect the perception of the Centre externally.

Inevitably, such an action would be represented as a precipitate change in the
Centre’s core mission that would compromise our credibility as a pure
Humanities Centre in the eyes of our international colleagues.

In this respect it is important to learn the lessons of 2008 when the HRC was
disestablished as an AOU and turned into ‘virtual’ Centre.

This action was widely misinterpreted and misrepresented both nationally and
internationally. The implications of the word ‘virtual’ were catastrophic. It was
widely believed that the ANU had effectively abolished the HRC giving up its
leadership role in the Humanities in Australia. It has taken a lot of work to
counter this perception and to convince the international Humanities community
that the HRC still exists as a ‘real’ entity and has the full support of the
University.

Another fundamental change to the status of HRC within the University structure
would take us back to square one. Irrespective of any public assurances, it would
be seen as a reduction of the status of the Centre, compromising its
‘independence’, its interdisciplinarity and an attenuation of its mission in the
Humanities.

**National Role:**
The HRC is nationally recognized as providing ANU leadership for major
networks of humanities scholars and institutions, both in Australia and around
the world. Its membership on the advisory boards of the Australian Consortium
of Humanities Research Centres (ACHRC) and the world Consortium of
Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI) has generated for interdisciplinary
humanities at ANU a precious resource - through grants, projects, high-profile
events and advocacy– that requires careful stewardship.

**Endowment – Freilich Foundation**
The HRC established the Freilich Foundation in 1995 through a major bequest
(between $6-8 million) from Herbert and Valmae Freilich. The Head of HRC is
the Chair of the Freilich Foundation Board and, along with the Freilich Fellows, is
responsible for the delivery of research and programs in accordance with the
primary remit of the Foundation.

Moving the HRC to a School defined by specific disciplines would gravely
jeopardize this endowment. The surviving donor, Valmae Freilich, has a strong
intellectual commitment to the Foundation’s location within an explicitly
interdisciplinary humanities centre. Over these years, our donors have
expressed serious concern about the various administrative changes the HRC has
undergone. Each time we have been successful in reassuring them, by making a convincing case for our academic autonomy as a Centre for interdisciplinary humanities. It will become well nigh impossible to do so if we are administratively aligned with a single disciplinary AOU.

Digital Humanities Hub

We believe that the DHH should be folded into the HRC as separate and clearly identifiable program. We believe that this is important in light of the growing role of digital humanities in interdisciplinary Humanities Centres and Institutes globally. The core international projects in the Digital Humanities are currently linked directly to the HRC. Incorporating the Hub into the HRC would consolidate this leadership role on behalf of the College.

The current Head of the Hub will transition into a continuing position in SCI (or a newly established SLL) at the conclusion of her current contract. There is already a budget line in the SCI budget to facilitate this.

A second academic staff member in the Hub has recently been employed.

The aim of transitioning academic staff of the Hub, present and future, would continue as originally intended. This would, of course, be subject to budget considerations and succession planning at that time.

Academic Integration within RSHA

The case for autonomy from the four proposed AOUs does not preclude active articulation with the teaching and research programs of RSHA. In fact, such academic alignment already exists at the level of graduate training, undergraduate teaching and research programs.

• Our Fellowships Committee is currently represented by members from the School of Cultural Inquiry, School of Art, and the School of Archaeology and Anthropology. Members currently represent disciplines as diverse as literature, law, art history, art theory, history and anthropology
• Our fellowships program hosts two internal fellows every year from one or more of the Schools of RSHA.
• Our annual conferences are convened by colleagues from one or more of the Schools of RSHA
• Our Visiting fellows regularly offer Master Classes and Workshops, which are open to students from all Schools within RSHA (and CASS) and have regularly been attended by a large cross-section of students.
• The Head of the HRC is the convener of the First Year Seminar coursework in the Graduate Program in Interdisciplinary and Cross Cultural Humanities.
• The Head, the Professorial Fellows and the Adjunct Fellows of the HRC are primary supervisors or advisors of up to a dozen PhD students at any one time across RSHA and CASS.
Furthermore, we see this cooperation as being further developed in the years to come. The new double-degree model is being strongly promoted by ANU and is seen as central to its national and international reputation. This provides a unique opportunity for humanities scholars to contribute to the double-degree model in ways not previously attempted either at ANU or elsewhere in the country through the development of genuinely interdisciplinary courses taught dialogically across two or more units. This would enhance the capacity of the ANU to offer an integrated education in the interdisciplinary humanities, from undergraduate offerings through graduate courses and on to doctoral level. The Humanities Research Centre is ideally positioned to contribute to this initiative.

**Governance Issues**

In terms of governance we believe that the Centre should remain outside a School attached to the Directorate. Following the disestablishment of IHUG the supervision of the Head of the HRC would revert to the Director, RSHA. The Director of RSHA would replace the Head of IHUG as the delegated authority.

When it was a separate AOU the governance of the HRC was invested in the Director assisted by an advisory Board appointed by the Vice Chancellor. The Board comprised ANU staff (Director, Deputy Director, Head of Graduate Studies, Director, Centre for Cross Cultural Research) and an equivalent number of external members. It was chaired by an external member.

We believe that an Advisory Board needs to be re-established comprising representatives from the 4 AOUs and chaired by an external member. Two or three external members could be appointed for fixed terms. The Dean would be an ex-officio member.

The Fellowships and Program Committees should be expanded to include representatives from the 4 AOUs.

**Financial viability**

The Headship and the core programs – Visiting Fellows and Conference – Program – of the HRC have traditionally been funded from the Block Grant (or its equivalent), either directly from the Chancellery (when it was an AOU) or via the distributed College budget to RSHA and latterly IHUG.

The provision in the current proposal to continue hypothecate funding for the HRC in the RSHA budget means that, as a consequent, the issue of the financial viability the Centre is not relevant.

Nevertheless, the location of the HRC within a School budget must inevitably increase the risk the to hypothecation of the funding in the long term.

The HRC generates income from teaching and conference receipts. This income is used to offset the costs of administration. This would continue irrespective of
the issue of location and is thus not in and of itself a reason for incorporation into a School.

By
Assoc Professor Debjani Ganguly, Head of HRC
Professor Desmond Manderson, Professorial and Future Fellow.
Professor Paul Pickering, Deputy Director, RSHA