

Studying the Humanities won't improve my life

OH, REALLY?

“ The study of humanities in the schools and universities can at least develop a sense of proportion—the balancing of all special knowledge against general knowledge of the world, of the men in it, and of its problems. ‘Useless learning’, as it has been described, must, I believe, come back into its own in this world if we are to produce a really civilised point of view. The first function of education is to produce a good man [sic] and a good citizen. Its second function is to produce a good carpenter or a good lawyer.”

(Former Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies, 1939–1941 and 1949–1966)

“ Though the hard sciences are a ‘critical infrastructure’, the arts, humanities, and social sciences offer ‘vital knowledge and understanding of our world.’”

(Former Australian chief scientist Ian Chubb, cited in Doidge et al., 2019)

The humanities help us to cultivate the emotional side of our being.

Exposure to the humanities increases your capacity to engage in and perceive the value in cultural experiences.

The humanities can provide us with a sense of connection and camaraderie.

Knowledge is power:

“ Powerful knowledge describes the kind of knowledge that sends signals that you are a cultured, sophisticated, reasoned thinker. That’s how you are identified as someone with leadership potential.”

(Schuller, 2001)

“ When your child can engage in conversations about literature, politics, history, they are showing that they are insiders and are worthy of that kind of role in leadership positions.”

(Laura Newman, Social Education Victoria)



Humanities improves our understanding of:

- Terrorism

“ Perhaps the most notable academic contribution to debates on terrorism has been to emphasise the importance of understanding the subject historically: identifying the characteristic underlying belief systems of terrorist movements, exploring the extent to which legal frameworks can be reconciled with counter-terrorist action, and, above all, developing a sophisticated understanding of how terrorist campaigns actually end.”

(British Academy, 2010)

- War

“ This is above all an area in which decisions about whether and how to get involved need to be based on understanding of a country’s language, culture and history.”

(British Academy, 2010)

- Refugee crises and human rights
- Immigration and foreign policy
- Multiculturalism
- Gender and sexuality.

Studying the humanities builds the skills to be a lifelong learner:

“ Young people will need to be prepared for a journey of lifelong learning and be confident to work autonomously. They need to be critical thinkers and problem solvers, but even more importantly have strong communication skills to interact with people.”

(Foundation for Young Australians, 2017)

“ To be well-educated ... is to have the desire as well as the means to make sure that learning never ends.”

(Kohn, 2004)

“ There is more focus on lifelong learning. Fifty per cent of your time at work will be as a learner, instead of rehearsing the skills you already have. Modern employment is fundamentally a training ground.”

(Janette Poulson, Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools)

“ Today’s young people will need to spend more hours learning on the job than ever before. In fact, Australian workers will spend one-third of their hours at work learning, a 30 per cent increase from today.”

(Foundation for Young Australian, 2017)

Develop your knowledge of global affairs and intercultural understanding:

“ Inter-cultural understanding has perhaps never been more important than amidst the multiple international tensions evident in today’s world. ... The important role played by humanities and social science scholars in enriching and sustaining ‘argumentative democracy’”

(British Academy, 2010)

“ The humanities are ‘an excellent vehicle for building international relationships’.... Studying and engaging with another people’s culture over a long period fosters a deeper understanding and builds more durable bridges.”

(Colin Mackerras, Emeritus Professor at Griffith University, cited in Marks, 2015)

“ ... the fundamental importance of our disciplines for their intrinsic intellectual and cultural depth, for their place in enriching lives worth living and helping to nurture a critical, well-informed citizenry.”

(Peter McPhee, History Council of Victoria)