



20 September 2023

The History Councils of Australia (NSW, SA, Vic, WA) condemn the Australian Catholic University (ACU) for its decision to axe 20 academic positions in history. The ACU is undertaking an unethical ‘spill and fill’ strategy, forcing academics to reapply for a smaller number of new positions, a strategy that will wreak an enormous amount of unnecessary human suffering for the workers (and students) impacted.

Given the quality of these ACU historians – their international standing and their impressive publications – these cuts will have serious long-term consequences for the state of history education and research across Australia. We note for example that the ACU’s medieval and early modern studies research program is producing world-leading research and its disestablishment has been condemned internationally. This is already doing ACU considerable reputational damage.

We further note that some of these positions were only recently created in the past three years, and that these cuts were announced with no meaningful discussion with history and humanities research leaders. This announcement comes only a few years after the ACU announced a new vision for humanities research that it described as “bold and ambitious”, and which attracted scholars from overseas to work at the ACU.

We stress that there are other, more productive ways of resolving budgetary challenges which seek to respond by proactive change rather than the blunt method of reducing staff and subject options, which can only further reduce student interest.

The History Councils’ Value of History Statement emphasises the importance of History in shaping our identities, engaging us as citizens, creating inclusive communities, aiding economic well-being, teaching critical and creative thinking, inspiring leaders and serving as a foundation of future generations. These are propositions that we understood were core to the ACU’s own mission. The ACU’s decision is not only damaging for the University’s reputation and its students and employees, it is also a threat to the health of Australia’s humanities sector and society more generally.