

## **HASS on the Hill** Canberra: 16-17 August 2005. **Dr Deborah Henderson, Faculty of Education QUT.**

Deborah Henderson attended the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (*HASS on the Hill*) event in Canberra during August, as one of two NTEU Representatives. The event was organised by the recently formed peak body, the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS).

The Australian Government allocated funds for the establishment of CHASS in the Federal Budget of May 2003, to play a key promotional and advocacy role for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences sectors, and to serve as a coordinating forum for academics, students, business, and the broader community. This is particularly significant, given that 80% of available funding goes to the sciences and technology. As one prominent Australian academic, Simon During (2005), noted there has been much concern that the humanities are unable to defend themselves against government policies that prioritise science and technology. Peak councils, such as CHASS, are also significant for streamlining and simplifying the consultation process, for once the government has had some form of dialogue with a peak council, it then claim to have consulted the sector.

The NTEU has consistently supported the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) as a peak body representing this sector, and the participation of the National Policy and Research Unit Coordinator, Andrew Nette, in a panel on the Briefing Day for *Hass on the Hill* provided more of a public face to this support. *HASS on the Hill* aimed to open a dialogue with federal Members of Parliament. This forum provided opportunities for people and organisations from the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences sector to discuss ideas and issues, and to have some influence on the national policy-making process. Participants were encouraged to view this dialogue as the commencement of a relationship, for gaining access and influencing policy often depends on accessibility, contacts and personal relationships. As well, *HASS on the Hill* provided an opportunity for people working in this diverse sector to meet informally and discuss cross-disciplinary approaches and possible collaborations. The theme of the two day event was emphasised by the President of CHASS, Malcolm Gillies. That is, how do we position and promote our sector, and demonstrate to parliamentarians that our work is critical to driving Australia's future?

Gillies argued that Australia is playing the innovation game with one hand tied behind its back, and that Australian innovation needs to better engage the arts as well as the sciences. Moreover, we need to build on our strengths and encourage the innovative side of undergraduate and graduate students. Most significantly, our work and research needs to be adequately funded. Gillies emphasised the sector's concerns, that although two thirds of Australia's university students and half of all university staff in Australia are involved in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, the largest proportion of Commonwealth funding goes to the Sciences and Technology. *Hass on the Hill* was a timely reminder that we must build long term coalitions and capture the government's, and the opposition's, support for our work.

During, S. 2005. 'Humanities struggle on the margins', *The Australian Higher Education Supplement*, 31 August: 28.

A full report on this event will be published in the next edition of *Advocate*. For further information, go to the CHASS website: [www.chass.org.au](http://www.chass.org.au)