HERAVALUE: Measuring the Value of Arts and Humanities Research
Regional Research Meeting I – Dublin

Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU)
Center for Social and Educational Research (CSER)
Dublin Institute of Technology
Dublin, Ireland

Cathal Brugha Street, Boardroom
January 16 – January 18, 2011
HERAVALUE Regional Research Meeting I– Dublin

Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU), CSER, Dublin Institute of Technology – Dublin, Ireland
Cathal Brugha Street, Boardroom
January 16 – January 18, 2011

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Wednesday, 22 December 2010

Thank you for accepting our invitation to participate in our Impact of Research in the Arts and Humanities Round-table on Monday January 17th at 2:30 PM at DIT Cathal Brugha Street in the Boardroom. The round-table will be followed directly by a reception at 5:00 PM.

This round-table is part of a European research project entitled: Measuring the societal impacts of universities' research into arts and the humanities (HERAVALUE). DIT is working on this project with Dr Paul Benneworth from the University of Twente (Netherlands) and Prof Magnus Gulbrandsen University of Olso/NIFU-STEP (Norway). The project is funded by the HERA Joint Research Programme, which is financially supported by the AHRC, AKA, DASTI, ETF, FWF, HAZU, IRCHSS, LRC, MHEST, NWO, RANNIS, RCN, VR and the European Commission Seventh Framework Programme.

The purpose of the round-table meeting is to discuss how stakeholders view the impact of research in the arts and humanities, and its contribution to society. The informal discussion will greatly inform our project, help set its direction and provide the first set of data from an Irish perspective on the value of arts and humanities research.

At the meeting, we would be very pleased to hear from you all individually and collectively about how you value arts and humanities research, how you evaluate its impact and benefit for and on society, and how you think its value can best be demonstrated and assessed.

Context of the Project

Despite agreement that arts and humanities research (A&HR) contributes to society, the value of A&HR concerns more than economic value and numbers of graduates, encompassing democratic strength, happiness and well-being, self-expression and cultural struggle. Attempts to enumerate and capture that value in anything more than the broadest terms have failed, with the result that whilst physical, biological and social sciences can demonstrate substantial societal added value, A&H research seems unsubstantial, and worse, a poor return on public investment in the A&HR base.

Summary of the Project

The aim of the HERAVALUE project is to investigate how arts & humanities research (A&HR) is valued by key societal stakeholders in national and European innovation systems. Consideration of these issues are especially timely given the establishment, by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation, of the Research Prioritisation exercise.
being undertaken by Forfás\(^1\), and publication of the *Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes*\(^2\), *Building Ireland’s Smart Economy*\(^3\), and *Playing to Our Strengths*\(^4\).

The 2 year project has five main objectives:-

1. To develop a conceptual framework explaining how a range of societal stakeholders concerned with innovation actively construct the value placed upon A&HR;

2. To systematically uncover the implicit valuations made by key decision-makers underpinning the widespread failure to agree a common approach to valuing A&HR;

3. To map key stakeholder groups’ interactions within wider innovation and political systems which frame how A&HR’s value is socially constructed;

4. To reflect upon alternative methodologies for valuing A&HR, transcending directly quantifiable outputs and economic impacts, reflecting these implicit valuations;

5. To disseminate HERAVALUE’s findings to contribute to designing better policies, instruments and indicators for A&HR valorisation, better contributing to debates concerning A&HR’s wider value in the context of a global economic downturn.

We thank you for your participation and look forward to seeing you. If you have any questions regarding the meeting, please do not hesitate to contact Elaine at elainecward@yahoo.com or at 1 402 4175.

Best wishes,

Ellen and Elaine

Professor Ellen Hazelkorn  
Director of Research and Enterprise,  
and Dean of the Graduate Research School  
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Dr. Elaine Ward  
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Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU)  
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\(^3\) [http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Building_Ireland’s_Smart_Economy/Smart_Economy_Progress_Report.pdf](http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Building_Ireland’s_Smart_Economy/Smart_Economy_Progress_Report.pdf)  
\(^4\) [http://www.irchss.ie/Playing_to_our_strengths_report.pdf](http://www.irchss.ie/Playing_to_our_strengths_report.pdf)
**HERAVALUE: MEASURING THE WIDER VALUE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH**

**Schedule**
Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU), CSER, DIT – Dublin, Ireland  
January 16 – January 18, 2011

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<tr>
<th><strong>Sunday January 16th</strong></th>
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<td>17.00 – 20.00</td>
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<th><strong>Monday January 17th</strong></th>
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| 10.00 – 10.30           | Welcome  
  Prof. Ellen Hazelkorn, Director of Research and Enterprise &  
  Dean of the Graduate Research School |
| 10.30 – 13.00           | Academic Presentation and Discussion on Arts and Humanities Research  
  Moderator, Dr. Paul Benneworth, CHEPS  
  Dr. Marc Caball, University College Dublin  
  Dr. Aine O’Brien, Dublin Institute of Technology  
  Dr. Mick Wilson, Dublin Institute of Technology |
| 13.00-14.30             | Lunch  |
| 14.30 – 17.00           | Wider Stakeholder Discussion  
  Dublin City Council  
  Enterprise Ireland  
  Forfás  
  Higher Education Authority  
  Irish Business and Employers Confederation  
  Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences  
  National Economic and Social Council  
  Trinity College Dublin/Long Room Hub |
| 17.00 – 18.00           | Reception/Cathal Brugha Street |
| 19.00 – 22.00           | Dinner |

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<tr>
<th><strong>Tuesday January 18th</strong></th>
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| 10.00 – Noon            | Reconvene – Morning working session  
  Cathal Brugha Street Boardroom |
| Noon – 13.30            | Lunch |
| 13.30 – 16.00           | Afternoon working session |
| 16.00                   | End of working meeting |

Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU), CSER, DIT, JAN 2011
HERAVALUE: MEASURING THE WIDER VALUE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH

HERAVALUE Research Team – Netherlands, Ireland, Norway

**Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente**

Dr Paul Benneworth, Senior Researcher at the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies at the University of Twente in the Netherlands.

Dr. Adrie Dassen, Research Associate at the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies at the University of Twente in the Netherlands.

Susann Bartels, Junior Researcher at the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies at the University of Twente in the Netherlands.

**Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU), Dublin Institute of Technology**

Prof. Ellen Hazelkorn, Professor and Vice President of Research and Enterprise and Dean of the Graduate Research School, Dublin Institute of Technology.

Dr. Elaine Ward, Post-doctoral Research Fellow, Higher Education Policy Research Unit, Center for Social and Educational Research, Dublin Institute of Technology.

**Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU)**

Prof. Magnus Gulbrandsen, Professor and senior researcher Research Director for Science and Innovation Policy

Dr. Markus Bugge, Senior Researcher, Norwegian Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education
# Meeting Participants

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Organizations and Institutions Represented

CHEPS – Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, at the University of Twente

DIT – Dublin Institute of Technology

FORFÁS – Ireland’s policy advisory board for enterprise and science

HEPRU – Higher Education Policy Research Unit, DIT

HEA – Higher Education Authority

Enterprise Ireland – Ireland’s government organization responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets

IBEC – Irish Business and Employers Confederation

IRCHSS – Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences

NESC – National Economic and Social Council

NIFU – Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education

Trinity College Dublin/Long Room Hub

University College Dublin
Context:
There are huge pressures in the context of the knowledge economy for research, researchers and research institutions to create societal added value, and also, equally importantly, to visibly demonstrate that added value. This is clearly a problem for Arts & Humanities Research and those who study it. Despite agreement that arts and humanities research contributes to society, the value of arts and humanities concerns more than economic value and numbers of graduates, encompassing democratic strength, happiness and well-being, self-expression and cultural struggle. Attempts to enumerate and capture that value in anything more than the broadest terms have failed, with the result that whilst physical, biological and social sciences can demonstrate substantial societal added value, arts and humanities research seems unsubstantial, and worse, a poor return on public investment in the arts and humanities research base. Through our investigation of the implicit values of arts and humanities research by multiple stakeholders we make these implicit values more transparent. Here academic staff contribute to the ‘scientific conversation’ about the value of arts and humanities research from their disciplinary and academic perspective.

Format:
Semi-structured presentation from academic staff members regarding their perceived and experienced value of arts and humanities research. Open discussion and debate regarding the value of arts and humanities research.

Guiding Questions:

- How do you look at research in your field?
- How do you define research in your field?
- What is your research like? How is your research assessed?
- What are the outcomes of the PhD in your field?
- How would you assess the impact of your research?
- How do you distinguish between research, scholarship, creative practice and engagement in your work?

Moderator: Dr. Paul Benneworth, CHEPS at the University of Twente
Marc Caball is Director of UCD Humanities Institute and the UCD Graduate School of Arts and Celtic Studies. A former research scholar of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, he holds a D.Phil. from the University of Oxford and is a fellow of the Royal Historical Society. He is the current chairman of the COST Domain Committee for Individuals, Cultures, Societies and Health (DC ISCH). He is a council member of the Irish Texts Society. Marc Caball has published widely on the cultural history of early modern Ireland. Among his recent publications are ‘Cultures in conflict in late sixteenth-century Kerry: the parallel worlds of Tudor intellectual and Gaelic poets’, Irish Historical Studies (36:144, 2009); ‘Articulating Irish identity in early seventeenth-century Europe: the case of Giolla Brighde Ó hÉódhusa (c.1570-1614)’, Archivium Hibernicum (LXII, 2009); and ‘Gaelic and Protestant: a case-study in early modern self-fashioning, 1567-1608’, Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (110C, 2010); ‘Culture, politics and identity in sixteenth-century Ireland: the testimony of Tadhg Dall Ó hÚiginn (c.1550-1591)’ in P. Riggs (ed.), Tadhg Dall Ó hÚiginn: his historical and literary context (London, 2010); ‘History and politics: interpretations of early modern conquest and reformation in Victorian Ireland’ in S. Berger and C. Lorenz (eds.), Nationalizing the past: historians as nation builders in modern Europe (Basingstoke, 2010). He is co-editor, with Andrew Carpenter, of Oral and print cultures in Ireland 1600-1900 (Four Courts Press, 2010). He is the principal investigator on the IRCHSS and Department of the Taoiseach-funded major research project ‘Protestants, print and Gaelic culture in Ireland, 1567-1722’.

Appointed first director of the IRCHSS in 2001, Dr Caball significantly diversified the Research Council’s range of programmes and activities. Through an interlinked portfolio of research funding schemes encompassing both junior and senior researchers and research teams, the IRCHSS transformed the environment for research in the humanities and social sciences in Ireland. During his term at the Research Council, Dr Caball prioritised strategies that enhanced critical mass and research impact in terms of the broader contribution of the humanities and social sciences to Ireland’s economic, social and cultural growth. By means of thematic focus on research areas which included innovation and society, public policy and social change, and identity and culture, Dr Caball worked to integrate the humanities and social sciences more fully within debates and policy formulation linked to Ireland’s evolution as a knowledge economy. In addition to strengthening infrastructures for humanities and social science research at national level, Dr Caball has also prioritised the development of new platforms for Irish researchers, both intellectually and financially, within the European Research Area. Under his direction, the Research Council secured European Union funding under the Sixth Framework Programme (ERA-NET) to participate in networks of European research councils for the humanities and social sciences. The membership of the Research Council in these networks has provided new funding and professional opportunities for Irish researchers. Involvement in such networks has also enabled the Research Council to benchmark its operational practices, especially with regard to peer review, to the highest European standards. Dr Caball also expanded the Research Council’s involvement in the European Science Foundation’s programmes and networks.
Áine O’Brien is Director of the Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS) and Co-director of the Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice, School of Media, DIT. Before returning to Ireland in 2001, she served as Assistant Professor in Film, Media and Cultural Studies at George Mason University, Virginia from 1993-1998, where she was involved in the establishment of a Doctoral Programme in Cultural Studies. O’Brien then moved to the Photography, Film and Television Department at Napier University, Edinburgh (1998–2001). She joined DIT in 2001 and was Head of the Department of Media Technologies (2002-2004) before taking up her position as Co-director of the Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice. She has published widely on the politics of identity and representation and the role of participatory media in furthering civil society activism and social justice. She has co-directed a documentary film (Silent Song, 2000) on Kurdish lyrical protest in Europe and is co-director/researcher of a longitudinal documentary film on the subject of economic migration into Ireland (Here to Stay, 72 mins, 2006), funded by the Irish Film Board. She is co-editor with Alan Grossman of a combined book/DVD-ROM Projecting Migration: Transcultural Documentary Practice (2007, Wallflower Press). In 2010 she co-directed (with Alan Grossman) a documentary feature-length film - Promise and Unrest - on the subject of gendered migration and long-distance motherhood. She is currently completing a creative documentary on political biography and social activism, titled Union, Ink and Paper (2011). As Director of FOMACS, O’Brien curates and produces a range of public and participatory media projects across the platforms of animation, documentary film, photography, radio, interactive and print media.
Mick Wilson (BA, MA, MSc, PhD) is an artist, writer and educator. He is a graduate of the NCAD and Trinity College Dublin. He is Head of Fine Art at DIT, currently on secondment as the founder Dean of GradCAM (2008-2012). Formerly Head of Research at NCAD, he was recently appointed as an Adjunct Senior Lecturer in the School of Computer Science at TCD. He has lectured internationally on art research, public culture, creative education and urbanism and is the principal investigator for ‘SHARE (2010–2013)’, a major European research network for doctoral studies across the creative arts with participants from 29 different countries. He is also an active member of the European Arts Research Network (EARN) having co-organised a series of major international conferences and exhibitions, including Arts Research: Publics and Purposes (Dublin, 2010) and Tables of Thought (Helsinki, 2010) and led EARN’s Artist as Citizen EU policy grouping (2009-10). He has organized many conferences, exhibitions, summer schools and developed several new undergraduate and postgraduate programmes across creative arts theory and practice. Mick's research and professional interests are eclectic, ranging from the reputational economy of contemporary art to the rhetorical construction of knowledge conflict and from the contested reconstruction of the contemporary university to the general arena of critical cultural pedagogies.


Stakeholder Research Round-table
Cathal Brugha Street - Boardroom
January 17, 2011
2:30 PM – 5:00 PM

Context:
The assessment of university-based research has become integral to the higher education research environment, linked to its key role as part of the national innovation system, and public demand for greater transparency and accountability and, in the current economic climate, for return-on-investment. Thus, university-based research is considered not simply as a driver of economic growth but a vital part of the ‘knowledge triangle’.

In response, questions are being asked about the contribution that publicly-funded research makes to society and the economy, and its purpose. Traditionally assessment has focused primarily input and output factors; for example, on research expenditure or investment by the state or institution, or on the number of peer reviewed publications. However, public and political interest has shifted increasingly to outcomes, and impact and benefits. Insofar as impact has been assessed, the focus has been on commercialization of intellectual property, e.g. patents and licensing agreements, and more recently on high performance start up companies (HPSUs) and employability. This has included using econometric or economic surplus methodologies for measuring cost-benefit analysis. This focus is not surprising given the fact that scientific and technological research has most often been associated with RDI (research, development and innovation). Yet, the concept of impact and benefits is broader than commercialization suggests. Research assessment processes and methodologies have lagged behind these developments.

Assessment processes have struggled with developing appropriate indicators for arts and humanities research, for several reasons: i) Research in the arts and humanities, particularly the former, is poorly understood even by the academic community; ii) The arts and humanities produce a wide range of outputs, e.g. monographs, translations, major art works, compositions, and media productions, which are not easily captured in bibliometric and citation data collection; iii) New research fields and methodologies, including practice-based methodologies, can be complicated to measure; iv) Societal impact and benefits of the arts and humanities is not easily comparable to commercialization-type indicators. Today’s discussion will make a

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significant contribution to establishing a base-line understanding of the impacts and benefits of arts and humanities research from a stakeholder and policy perspective.

**Format:**
Informal roundtable discussion moderated by project PI, Dr. Paul Benneworth.

**Guiding Questions:**
- What do you view as the contribution that arts and humanities research makes to society?
- What do you view as the contribution that arts and humanities research makes to the economy?
- What are the best ways to measure and assess the societal impact and benefits of arts and humanities research?
- Given the extent of the global economic crisis, are there special attributes that arts and humanities research can contribute to society and the economy? How can this be best measured and assessed?
- What are the implications for research policy?

**Moderator:** Dr. Paul Benneworth

**Discussants:**
Mary Canning Higher Education Authority  
Jim Doyle Dublin City Council  
Tony Donohoe IBEC  
Sheena Duffy Forfás/HEA/IRCHSS  
Dick Gleeson Dublin City Council  
Poul Holm Trinity College Dublin/Long Room Hub  
Ian Hughes Forfás  
Martin Lyes Enterprise Ireland  
Lorna Maxwell Dublin City Council  
Rory O’Donnell National Economic and Social Council  
Dipti Pandya Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences  
Michael Stubbs Dublin City Council  
Jennifer Edmond Trinity College Dublin/Long Room Hub
The HERAVALUE team at the University of Twente returned to work this week after a short break, and finally found the time to implement the long-planned project website. The preliminary literature search has found that the questions we are trying to answer are really exploratory, and we are walking along barely-trodden paths. So at the moment, we are trying to think through some interesting debates with which to ‘tie down’ our overall research project.

What we are trying to do with the HERAVALUE project is come up with better ways of measuring the value of Arts & Humanities Research (A&HR)’s impacts on societies. This is part of a wider debate about which kinds of research should be funded by governments, especially given the nature of the crisis which is engulfing many governments across the developed world.

The fundamental tension can be simplified into a tension between scientific disciplines as part of a debate about how public research should be funded. Some scientific disciplines produce outputs which have easily measurable benefits, and that appeals to policy-makers. So if you create a spin-out company,
then it will at some point have definite sales, it will employ a number of people, pay out their wages, and create a wider economic impact.

Other disciplines do not produce easily measurable benefits, or the outputs which are easily measurable are not really what is important about those activities. So if there is a museum exhibition that comes out of a piece of curatorial research on art, then what is quite easy to count is the expenditure that visitors to that exhibition make during the trip to the museum.

You might have a hundred thousand visitors to a museum exhibition, and to track down even a sample of those visitors and find out how they have valued it is an extremely time consuming task. It is much easier just to say each visitor typically spends €6 on a ticket and €20 on a day out, and so the net impact of the museum exhibition – and of the research – has been €2.6m.

But no one would justify a piece of A&HR on the grounds that it might create €2.6m, and support 42 jobs for a year. There is a higher justification for that research, that it is part of being a civilised nation, or a nation that values culture highly, or that it is something that ‘should be done’.

But this raises the initial issue, which is how can you weigh – as a policy-maker – a plea from a scientist which might create a drug that will generate tens of millions of euros profits in the high-technology pharmaceutical industry as well as save human life-years against a plea from an artist for a piece of research that may lead to an interesting exhibition and a few hundred thousand euros in the tourist sector.

There are evidence that there is an increasing readiness from policy-makers to value these direct and immediate economic impacts above the longer-term social and cultural benefits that arts & humanities produces. Arguments are being mobilised that now is the time to invest in science and technology research rather than arts, humanities and even social sciences to help produce economic recovery.

There are several elements of the problem which lead to science and technology being seen as more ‘valuable’ than arts and humanities, of which the immediacy and measurability of outputs is just one.

- The immediacy and measurability of benefits is often higher in science and technology than in arts & humanities, and creates a sense amongst policy-makers that one important quality of a benefit is that it can immediately and unambiguously be measured.
- The ‘pathways to market’ by which university research produces economic benefits are clearly understood in terms of a set of mechanisms and models (technology transfer, licensing, patenting, spin-offs) which are far more applicable to science and engineering than to arts and the humanities.
- Science and technology’s strong advocates in the business community are often key governmental partners around national industrial, technological and economic policy, whilst the arts community supporting A&HR are far more peripheral and ornamental in national political decision-making.
- Science and technology has been able to define what constitutes good research in ways that give policy-makers a clear indication of what is ‘good research’ and how that fits with its exploitation by large firms, whilst A&HR often appears esoteric, individual and far from the market.

Our view in this project is that these problems are not fundamentals, but rather they are symptoms of working assumptions made by groups and networks of key decision-makers. There have been in the last couple of decades strong pressures on public bodies to justify themselves in terms of their outputs, so
they have justified themselves in ways that are easiest to do, and these ‘techniques of justifying’ have transmogrified into ‘justifications’.

So the challenge for us in the coming two years is to start to understand how these assumptions and justifications are operating, and what kinds of things make better or worse justifications from the perspectives of the different stakeholders in A&HR in terms of what they find valuable about A&HR.

- What are governments and social groups prepared to accept as ‘valuable’?
- What do academics and learned societies see as being valuable societal outputs from their research?
- Where is the common ground between these different groups?
- What kinds of ways can we measure this common ground?

These are big questions to address in a two year project, but it is clear that these are not universal or fundamental characteristics, and these debates operate in different ways in different places. By looking at these different debates around the ‘value’ of the impacts of arts and humanities research, we hope to be able to move closer to coming up with understanding what will have to be done to measure in some acceptable way the undoubtedly huge contributions which arts & humanities research makes to social, cultural, economic, political and democratic development.

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One of the values of arts and humanities research is that it produces academics who can write beautifully crafted pieces that manage to convey very complex and influential thinking in beguilingly simple language. At least that was my response when I was passed by a colleague a piece from the recent *Times Literary Supplement*.

It was written by Keith Thomas, latterly Fellow of All Souls College and author of a number of ground-setting books in the field of history. Sadly, the article, entitled “What are universities for?” is not available to read on-line, and I don’t propose to summarise the arguments he makes, as Benzoia has done so here.

The article attracted some criticism in the letters pages of the TLS for – amongst others – claiming that humanities had an automatic civilising effect, and downplaying the contribution of Harvard and MIT in the fields of humanities. But the article is clearly a piece of commentary – setting out an opinion that justifies why arts and humanities are important in their own right.

In the course of that article, he brings together a set of well-understood points, the civilising effect of humanities research, but also makes the point that universities’ pre-eminent role in these disciplines is
not a given, but rather emerged as those interested in humanities migrated into universities and took
over academic positions.
That points to the ambivalence of the role of humanities in universities, on the one hand as a subject
with value as taught subjects, and on the other hand as areas within which people wish to devote
substantial research efforts. He makes the point that humanities research in universities is part of what I
might call a wider “cultural production system” that has largely withered outside universities, but still
exists and indeed thrives in specific subjects – he cites the example of autobiographies.
What for me is very interesting about the article is that he makes two points that appear to me to be
helpful in understanding why arts and humanities research is valued the way that it is.
The first is that he emphasises a distinction of which we are all aware, between that of scholarship
and that of research. He points out that these two different activities have very strong different cultural
traditions. The idea of scholarship he relates to the knowledge transmission activities of universities as
‘training academies’ for the church and national administrative systems, rather than to the knowledge
creation activities which emerged in the early 19th century related to universities’ industrial and
innovation promotion roles.
The second is that he points to the increasing commodification of research activity, and the effect of the
increasing importance of the ability to win funding as a valid part of what is necessary to do research,
and consequently to the definition of what constitutes ‘good’ research.
This inspires in me the idea of what could be thought of as – with all due acknowledgements to Vanavar
Bush and Henry Etzkowitz – as a ‘research-industrial’ complex. That is to say that the situation has arisen
because it is the interests of a number of key players that ‘funding’ – and in particular governmental
funding – becomes part of the research effort.
It is important to emphasise at this point that this is not a conspiracy theory. Certainly, in the science,
technology, and engineering disciplines, as well as the life sciences, funding is absolutely vital to the
prosecution of research. There is clearly a dependency on an ability to win resources, and therefore
those that win those resources will be able to do the research with an advantage that will help position
them at the cutting edge.
But somewhere along the line, it appears that there has been an assumption that this ‘funding’ is an
intrinsic part of what ‘matters’ about research. It is part of a model of research laboratories led by
Principal Investigators or Chief Scientists managing teams of post-docs and post-graduate researchers,
supervising students and delivering blue skies research.
Thomas is quite critical of the effect that this has had on humanities, coming at the expense of the idea
that humanities scholarship has the possibility to be far less dependent on resources than other kinds of
science. But, the availability of funding has been attractive to humanities scholars because of model of
the Principal Investigator.
This provides funds which free academics from their teaching obligations through fellowships and buy-
outs, and to concentrate on the research upon which their individuals performances are judged. But the
model of the PI-led laboratory fits with a whole set of other norms with which arts and humanities does
not necessarily conform, such as the publication of multiple-author journal articles, and the use of
citation scores, as a means of providing with certainty resources only to the best laboratories.
So following Thomas’s line of thinking, there seem to be two interesting corollaries from his position.
The first is that the composition of the ‘research industrial complex’ is somewhat out of kilter with the
needs of arts and humanities, and the instruments that have arisen to manage the substantial sums of money flowing into this complex are not a good measurement of ‘what matters’ in arts and humanities research.

But this brings the second corollary of what he has said, and that arts and humanities research cannot have it both ways in a situation where public money is being spent. Arts and humanities scholars have engaged with research funding opportunities – with national research councils and in Europe with the framework programmes.

This has changed the nature of the arts and humanities research endeavour. It is valid for funders to ask where the value for them lies in funding research above what would be delivered under funding which purely came as part of block university grants.

This is of course not a simple question, and the model of large-scale funding for capital investments and international consortium only covers a selection of those activities which can be considered as ‘excellent’ in arts and humanities research.

It is therefore to understand the extent of the commodification of arts and humanities research, and its resource dependence on external, target driven funding, to understand properly what ‘matters’ in arts & humanities research.

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Last week I wrote about the advantage that humanities scholars have in writing beautifully about their discipline. So I was delighted to receive a link this week to an arts researcher creating a beautiful performance about their opinions on Youtube.

The video shows Dr. Lionel Pilkington, of the National University of Ireland, Galway, reflecting on ideas of performance in the university. And his particular focus was on the tension between the idea of performance in the creative arts, and the idea of performance emerging through new approaches to public management.

A couple of transcribed quotations serve to illustrate his argument quite nicely, which sets out the essence of a justification of arts and humanities at a time when pressure for that justification is certainly increasing.
The basis for his argument is making a connection between the rise of measurement – new public management – and the necessity of justifying what arts and humanities are doing.

“That [performance management] is the way that we are required organisationally to explain ourselves to our paymasters which for a university is the government and the public purse” (13:10)

That measurement and the claims of extrinsic value is necessary in order to make claims for the intrinsic value of arts and humanities research.

“The more resolute we can defend ourselves against the philistines of an often hostile press who view the work we do in a university as quite useless, and want to see the university become a kind of technical school for business, and if that happens we are lost” (14:25).

But in the context of people trained to be creative, there is the risk that that measuring systems fails to capture their creativity which is important, and in particular, the value of things that are created through transitory performances.

“The problem of calibration and measurement is that you can only measure what is measurable, you can only know what is already known, and you can only recognise what is recognisable.” (14:50).

But it strikes at the heart of the issue in terms of trying to explain the value of what arts – as opposed to humanities researchers – do.

In humanities, scholars may work individually, but their research is at least recognisable as research.

Books about history, arts, cultural studies and philosophy regularly fill the book review pages of Times Higher Education alongside (this week) geography, chemistry, medicine and environmental sciences.

But is a lot harder for the performing and creative arts to demonstrate their research activity. Arts research involves experiments and creating new techniques and approaches which are then embedded in practice.

But that is not a reason to argues for the difference of arts or indeed its separate treatment. In a sense, engineering or medical research involve creating new techniques, and then diffusing them in practice as well as demonstrating their ‘efficacy’ through trials.

What is different in the arts is this question of ‘efficacy’: in engineering, a technique for building a bridge is better if it lasts longer or is less likely to collapse. In medicine, survival rates or additional longevity are simple measures of what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in the field.
This question of efficacy is much harder to answer in arts, and in particular, what demonstrates progress or ‘being better’ in arts. At the same time, this question is hard to answer because it is not always easy to answer what is ‘good’ in the arts, other than in very general terms about the importance of expression or culture to society.

My natural inclination in this research is that if we ask the question “what is good arts” then we are doomed, because that is a question that is impossible to answer. But we need to have a better sense of the issue and some of its constituent dimensions if we are able to understand how the ‘arts’ creates improvement which can be appreciated on some level as a societal contribution.

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Dear Participants,

Today’s meeting is the first formal stage of our inquiry into the value of arts and humanities research. The research team views it as imperative to have the input of wider stakeholders both inside and outside of the academy in this research.

Together, we will endeavor to articulate a common understanding of what arts and humanities research is, what it looks like, how it is best assessed and what are its added benefits to the economy and to society. Your input today has helped us begin to more accurately understand the value each of you place upon arts and humanities research. Our collaborative efforts help us to uncover what before now have been implicit valuations and bring wider transparency to how each of us value A&HR.

The outcomes of today’s meeting will be complied and used to advance our goal of influencing the design of better policies, instruments and indicators for A&HR valorization.

We would like to extend our sincerest thanks for your participation in today’s research presentations and round-table.

Sincerely,

Prof. Ellen Hazelkorn and Dr. Elaine Ward
Dublin Institute of Technology
Higher Education Policy Research Unit