

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

Irish Humanities Alliance



## About the Alliance:

The Irish Humanities Alliance is a joint initiative of humanities researchers within eleven higher education and research institutions, including all the universities, North and South and the Royal Irish Academy which houses and supports the Alliance.

The Alliance is working to generate public awareness of the importance of humanities teaching and research in higher education and society at large. Since its establishment, the Alliance has provided a platform for all-island humanities collaboration and consultation thus enabling the diverse range of humanities disciplines across the island to speak with a single voice. In the context of Brexit, the Alliance is especially keen to support an all-island approach to humanities collaboration.

The Alliance actively engages with National Experts, National Delegates and National Contact Points in Ireland and Northern Ireland to bring an effective, co-ordinated humanities response to bear on draft EU Work Programmes in *Horizon 2020* and its successor programme *Horizon Europe*. At an EU level it is an active member of the European Alliance for the Social Sciences and the Humanities (EASSH), a body representing more than 55 members from across Europe.

This short document aims to provide an overview of the Alliance's work during 2020.

## IHA Summary for January– June 2020:

January 2020 began, like any other year, with a visit to an IHA member institution for the first Board meeting of the calendar year. However, those who travelled to NUI Galway for that meeting on 31 January were not to know that this would be our last such gathering of the year. The onset of the pandemic in February 2020 ensured that Covid-19 would dominate the IHA's work in 2020. With the announced closure of HEIs on Thursday 12 March, the IHA Chairs (Prof. Eugene McNulty, DCU and Dr Niamh Nic Ghabhann, UL) and Director made the difficult decision to defer all upcoming IHA events and to commence remote working. Scheduled IHA Board meetings were moved online.

Prior to that first lockdown, the IHA Board approved publication of [The Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in Horizon Europe](#) a report of our 2019 event anticipating the EU's new research funding programme. Moreover, ahead of the 8 February 2020 general election, the Board endorsed the ['Save our Spark'](#) campaign calling for increased core exchequer funding to higher education.

## Covid-19 and the Humanities

By mid-February 2020 there was growing alarm with regard to the spread of the novel Coronavirus. On 25 February 2020 the IHA published ['The Coronavirus Crisis: a humanities perspective'](#) by Dr Ida Milne. This piece, foregrounding the work humanities scholars have carried out on similar past pandemics, quickly became one of the most popular items posted on our website. Different sort of understanding of these diseases, compared to the work done by scientists or medical professional. Dr Milne's post was to be the first of fifteen entries in what became our 'Covid-19 & the Humanities' blog series. Contributors focussed on such topics as past pandemics, depictions of disease, digital learning during the crisis, the role of metaphor and musical performance in the 'new normal'. These contributions represented the vibrant response of the humanities research community to the crisis and underlined the value of humanities scholarship in offering different sort of understanding of the pandemic, compared to the work carried out by scientists or medical professionals.

## Ongoing Policy Work

Throughout the year, the Alliance continued to engage on policy with key stakeholders and agencies at national and European level. Open Access and the transition to an Open Research Environment were areas of concern in 2020 with a new working group being established to co-ordinate the IHA response. A [position paper](#), based on extensive consultation with member institutions of the IHA, was subsequently published in

early 2021. IHA members also participated in the *Horizon Europe* Cluster 2 discussion group and the drafting of Ireland's response.

However, most of our policy work in the first half of 2020 reflected the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. In March 2020 we worked on a response to the [COVID-19 Pandemic Rapid Response Funding Opportunity \(COV19\) 2020](#) to articulate the major contribution that the humanities could make in this area. In April, we also called for a [dedicated funding stream for Humanities research](#) addressing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. This statement again reiterated our support for the rapid response call and went on to articulate the need for dedicated support for AHSS-led responses to the COVID-19 crisis to understand the full impact of the crisis for communities and individuals. In tandem with this, we published a short six point '[strategic response](#)' to the ongoing crisis and a useful document on '[Research Areas in which AHSS can contribute to the ongoing COVID-19 Crisis](#)'. This document demonstrated the range of areas that require attention from AHSS researchers, including:

- analysis of the social, political, cultural, and economic impacts;
- culture and well-being in the crisis;
- documenting and writing the history of the crisis;
- education and research during the crisis;
- ethics and data gathering in the crisis;
- geographies of the crisis;
- information, truth and trust;
- patterns of racism in the crisis; and
- representations and language of the crisis.

## IHA Summary for June–December 2020:

In the period from June to December the Alliance moved from the 'crisis management' phase of the pandemic to focus on the ongoing issues of concern to us. We remained active in the national and European policy scene and welcomed the establishment of a new Government Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. We continued to engage with key stakeholders within the Irish research eco-system and in October participated in a productive meeting with representatives of the Irish Research Council on the research funding landscape within Ireland.

We also remained active in the EU policy scene. In the September, we joined with our colleagues in EASSH to lobby for an increased budget for *Horizon Europe* at a critical period for Europe and the world. We called for an increased budget for the overall programme with a larger allocation for cluster 2 –Democracy, Social Transformation and Cultural Heritage. The IHA also participated in the 2020 EASSH General Assembly in November which took place virtually.

After a difficult start to the year, we decided that the deferred 2020 IHA annual conference would instead take place, virtually, in March 2021. The Director worked closely with Prof. Brendan Dooley (UCC) and his Euronews project colleagues to put together the required technology to make the best of the circumstances.

At this time, after being deferred on account of the crisis, the new IHA working groups in the areas of the digital, environmental and medical humanities held their first meetings and made plans for the future. Arising from these meetings, digital training sessions were planned for the beginning of 2021 and a research snapshot event entitled 'Humanities for the Anthropocene' was pencilled in for May 2021. Furthermore, a new working group on all-island collaboration was established to deepen the cross-border aspect of the IHA's work.

## Doctoral Training

In line with [our commitment](#) to humanities researchers at all career stages, the Alliance also began to prepare for its final event of the year– a training event for [doctoral students](#) in the humanities. This event was about serving the community of humanities doctoral students across the island of Ireland with sessions on the 'Future Directions in the Humanities' and 'Accessing Archives & Libraries & Digital Repositories'. The event was very well attended, with between 90–100 in the zoom room at all times. We hope that the event is the first in a series and that in person training and networking events can resume at some stage in 2021.

The IHA would like to thank all participants for their contribution to an enriching session. We extend a special thanks to all speakers: Dr Ciara Breathnach (UL), Dr Timothy Stott (TCD), Dr Dónal Mulligan (DCU) Dr Ali FitzGibbon (QUB), Kate Manning (UCD Archives), Katherine McSharry (NLI), Martin Morris (Co Longford Archives & Libraries) and Amy Boylan (Marsh's Library). Recordings of the event can be found on the IHA's [YouTube Channel](#).

## Promoting the value of the humanities

We also continued to work to generate public awareness of the importance of humanities through the IHA website and social media. The IHA Blog carried wide-ranging obituaries of [John Hume](#), by Dr Connal Parr, and [Dr Margaret MacCurtain](#) by Prof. Mary O'Dowd as well as excellent analyses of such topics as the RIC [Auxiliary Division](#) by Dr Seán William Gannon and [AHSS postgraduate careers and skills](#) by Ger Lardner. The blog also featured 'Pathways to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research for the arts and humanities' by Dr [Doireann Wallace](#) and a post on the [Public Humanities](#) by Prof. Nicholas Allen.

There were additional short reflective pieces in our '[Humanities and Me](#)' series focussing on what the Humanities means to each of us personally. We also added three new [Impact Case Studies](#) documenting the wider social, economic and cultural impact of humanities research carried out in Ireland and demonstrating how deep and wide-ranging the impact of humanities research can be. Looking ahead to 2021, we expect to add a minimum of four more case-studies.

## Looking ahead to 2021

Looking to the future, the Alliance looks forward to the 'Exciting News: Event Narration and Impact from past to present' conference in March 2021 and will also issue a call for proposals for its next annual conference. This call will again be open to academic staff, at all stages of their career, including post-docs and early career scholars on full-time, part-time or temporary contracts in Higher Education Institutions that are members of the Alliance.

In 2021 the Alliance will mark the launch of *Horizon Europe* with an event focussing on the arts and humanities. We will continue to work with our partners in all areas of national and European policy relevant to the humanities and we will conclude a position paper on Open Access. It will also work to build on the vision laid out in its strategy document, *By Imagination We Live*, both within the Alliance, and beyond.



## **IHA Member Institutions:**

Dublin City University  
Maynooth University  
NUI Galway  
Queen's University Belfast  
Royal Irish Academy  
Technological University Dublin  
Trinity College Dublin  
Ulster University  
University College Cork  
University College Dublin  
University of Limerick

## **IHA Board Meetings in 2020:**

31 January 2020    NUI Galway  
17 April 2020     Virtual  
19 June 2020     Virtual  
9 October 2020    Virtual

## **IHA Executive Members, December 2020:**

Dr Niamh Nic Ghabhann (UL, Chair)  
Prof. Chris Williams (UCC, Vice-Chair)  
Dr Mel Farrell (IHA, Director)

### **Further information**

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