

COVID-19 IHA Statement:

The IHA calls for a
dedicated funding stream
for AHSS research
addressing the COVID-19
crisis

1 May 2020

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The Irish Humanities Alliance calls for a dedicated funding stream for Humanities research addressing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis:

The Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA) reiterates its support for the COVID-19 Rapid Response Research and Innovation Funding Call recently announced by the Irish Research Council (IRC), the Health Research Board (HRB), Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), Enterprise Ireland (EI), and IDA Ireland (see IHA Statement dated 02/04/2020). In particular, the IHA supports the principal commitment to unlock the full potential of Ireland-based researchers and innovators in joining the global efforts to address the public health emergency. It is clear however, that a truly effective response to this crisis, and preparation for possible future pandemics, will require research that supports policy development.

Such a response will, moreover, require the involvement of the full range of perspectives, not just the scientific and the technological, but those that are multi-dimensional. In order to mobilise research in the most impactful and effective way, we need a multi-disciplinary COVID-19 Mission for Research. In this context, we firmly believe that Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences approaches are integral to understanding the full impact of the COVID-19 crisis for communities and individuals. In addition to its immediate health impacts, it is becoming clear that the current crisis is radically reshaping many aspects of our individual, communal, economic, and political lives. The spread of COVID-19 has focused attention on critical aspects of human life and its communal networks. In so doing, the COVID-19 crisis has returned us to key questions concerning the nature of the human and its place in the world. We are being challenged to re-think and rearticulate our understanding of the centrality of communication, culture, knowledge, and education – and to locate these discourses in a rapidly shifting global politics. AHSS researchers bring extensive and essential knowledge and expertise to emerging research processes and frameworks and must be integrated within interdisciplinary projects to support robust, nuanced and sustainable responses from the research community.

In order to truly understand this crisis, in other words, we must engage critically with more than its medical and technological aspects. It will require attention to its impact on the political, social, ethical, cultural and behavioural dimensions of the human experience. Researchers with expertise in past pandemics and global crises can provide comparative frameworks that can inform decision-making in the present. They can also provide valuable insight into political and societal responses, and the dangers around emergent racism and conflict in post-crisis situations. Researchers in the areas of linguistics, communications, literature, and critical media studies can also provide historical and contemporary analysis around public health information campaigns and media reporting. Researchers in family and religious studies can provide insight into issues of death, burial and grieving within different cultural contexts. It is important, also, that we continue to support the fast-growing creative industries which, at this difficult time, have shown how their work has become even more important. Failure to understand the full range of impacts instigated by this crisis will have potentially dire consequences for the values and shared heritages upon which our open democracy rests.

At this time of crisis, it is vitally important that there is parity of esteem between all researchers. We strongly advocate, therefore, for a further funding call directed towards AHSS scholars whose work will help map the impact of this global pandemic. It is in this context that the IHA now urges the Irish Research Council to support a response that builds on the AHSS community across the island and calls for a new funding stream dedicated to facilitating and resourcing AHSS-led responses to the COVID-19 crisis. We also call upon the Irish Government to equip the IRC with the extra funding that is needed to resource the kind of inclusive, multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional research so clearly needed in the face of this all-pervasive crisis.

In particular, we encourage a call which will enable humanities researchers to:

- Map humanities-based research approaches to emerging societal and economic challenges following COVID-19, including articulating key methodologies and databases that can be used to address these emerging challenges and support policy development;
- Invest in all-island networks and processes of engagement between research and policy, in order to ensure that existing and emerging research is integrated with policy-making.
- Develop interdisciplinary research projects related to COVID-19 with colleagues from STEM disciplines;
- Locate the present crisis in the context of other historical precedents and thus develop collaborative research projects that reveal key insights from past pandemics and public health initiatives to forge a better understanding of what has worked and what has not worked in the past.
- Develop collaborative research projects in order to highlight and share key insights around the intersection between structural inequalities, political systems and public health outcomes in order to inform emerging research approaches;
- Adapt existing research structures, methodologies and approaches to enable and continue research during COVID-19 restrictions;
- Develop research projects that will facilitate the collecting of essential data on the lived experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, informing future planning;

Relevant Links:

- British Academy, Funding Call-Special Research Grants: COVID-19, available at: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/funding/special-research-grants-covid-19>
- Dan Carey, 'Why we need more than just scientists to document the pandemic', available at: <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2020/0421/1132824-why-we-need-more-than-just-scientists-to-document-the-pandemic/>
- EASSH papers: *Improving Research Impact Assessment in Horizon Europe: A Perspective from the Social Sciences and Humanities*; *FP9 's ambitious aims for societal impact call for a step change in interdisciplinarity and citizen engagement*; <http://www.eassh.eu/position-papers>
- IHA, *By Imagination We Live: A Strategy for the Humanities, 2020-2030* <https://www.irishhumanities.com/assets/Uploads/By-Imagination-we-live-FINAL.pdf>
- IHA Statement on COVID-19 Rapid Response Funding Opportunity, 2 April 2020, <https://www.irishhumanities.com/assets/Uploads/COVID-19-IHA-Statement.pdf>
- David Matthews, 'German humanities scholars enlisted to end coronavirus lockdown', available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/german-humanities-scholars-enlisted-end-coronavirus-lockdown>
- Juni Katrine Lie and Jeffrey Allan Lugowe, 'Are Measures Designed to Control the Spread of Coronavirus Working? And at What Cost?', available at: <https://www.oslomet.no/en/research/featured-research/are-measures-to-control-corona-spread-working>

Further information

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