

The Humanities and Covid-19: a strategic response

1 May 2020

Irish Humanities Alliance



About this statement

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis the Board of the Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA), a body representing humanities researchers across the island of Ireland, presents this short strategic response on the humanities and COVID-19. The Arts and Humanities study and express how people process and document the shared human experience through history, culture and language – such understanding and context is needed now more than ever. The IHA thus calls for a strong engagement between policy-makers and the humanities research community on the Island of Ireland as we navigate the current crisis and plan for life in its wake.

COVID-19 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 human community, its social structures, modes of expression, and relationship to the natural world. Questions of solidarity, sustainability, and equity are now more urgent than ever in a rapidly shifting global politics. Humanities 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 Ireland the acute consequences of having two jurisdictions on the island have presented new challenges during this pandemic. We have much to consider in how we coordinate our activities in the future.

The AHSS community is critical to ensuring that we understand the social and political conditions underpinning the unfolding crisis. Only by coming to terms with these questions can we hope to avoid future crises on this scale.

Strategic Pillars

1 – Advocate for continued investment in research.

The IHA advocates for the importance of investment in funding in all disciplines and at all levels, including funding responses to the current COVID-19 crisis, while continuing to fund basic frontier research. The current crisis demonstrates the need for continual investment in research and in our research community, in order to ensure that we have the skills and insights to respond to and recover from the challenges posed by COVID-19. In particular, we will advocate for investment in humanities research, as the impacts of the virus are deeply embedded within human society and culture, and require the robust and nuanced responses of arts, humanities and social sciences scholarship in order to be fully understood and overcome.

2 – Advocate for the supportive and equitable treatment of researchers.

The IHA will continue to advocate for the supportive and equitable treatment of researchers at all levels within the humanities. In particular, we will advocate for the supportive and equitable treatment of early career researchers and contracted researchers and scholars who are particularly vulnerable to changes in the funding climate, and to the inevitable disruption to ongoing research and research career paths caused by the COVID-19 crisis. For example, in addition to lobbying for costed extensions for those PhD students whose projects have been impacted by the current crisis, the IHA supports the extension of postdoctoral contracts for colleagues whose research has been adversely affected by the COVID crisis through the closure of libraries, archives and other related institutions and repositories.

3 – Support our international community of researchers.

The IHA will continue to support and advocated for the international community of humanities researchers, who are integral to our work on the island of Ireland. We will continue to engage with European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities ([EASSH](#)) in the development of strategic responses to the current crisis at a European level, and will continue to develop platforms for collaboration, particularly in the ongoing context of Brexit. We will champion academic freedom for researchers across the globe.

4 – Foregrounding diversity in our responses to COVID-19.

The IHA will continue to advocate for research projects, initiatives, and practices that raise awareness of the importance of cultural diversity across society. Individuals, communities, and societies are experiencing the impacts of COVID-19 differently for multiple reasons, including issues of gender, age, class, religion, ethnicity, and the systemic inequalities across society. The IHA will advocate for the importance of understanding the current crisis from these diverse perspectives, in order to develop nuanced and robust responses from our research communities. The IHA will also continue to advocate for research projects and initiatives that promote intercultural understanding, and that highlight the threat of racism and division as a response to crisis, reflecting on historical contexts to inform the present. While this will necessitate the provision of specific funding streams to research the immediate and long-term impacts of the COVID crisis, the IHA argues strongly that it is imperative that current funding streams are maintained to sustain ongoing basic frontier research in all fields.

5. Ethical deployment of technology and media

The IHA advocates for the use and continued development of digital platforms which make possible meaningful interaction between researchers, students, members of the public, and policy-makers. Digital media enables us to continue to collaborate and communicate, and to share research insight and expertise with broad publics during this crisis. The IHA supports digital initiatives that make such valuable sharing possible, and supports the development of further initiatives that will make the creative arts and creative collaboration possible. The IHA also advocates for research projects and initiatives that support critical engagement with media in times of crisis, and on the public engagement with expertise.

6. Advocate for interdisciplinary research

The IHA will continue to advocate for an interdisciplinary research approach to the responses to COVID-19. This crisis impacts individuals, communities, and societies profoundly, and a nuanced interdisciplinary response is essential in order to ensure that our solutions are fit for purpose, and address the complex needs of society, both in relation to the containment of the crisis and the mitigation of its impacts.

Further information

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