



# Research Funding for mid-career researchers in the arts and humanities in Ireland

Irish Humanities Alliance paper, June 2022

## Introduction

The Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA) takes as its premise that humanities research is vital to society in numerous ways and was ‘formed to address the central place of the humanities in the context of a higher education policy landscape that is increasingly shaped by economic imperatives’.<sup>1</sup> The IHA has an all-island remit, and as such represents scholars operating in the two different higher educational jurisdictions that govern institutions in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

In its 2019 statement of strategic vision, *By Imagination We Live*, the IHA asserted its commitment ‘to championing the social, cultural and economic value of humanities education and research’.<sup>3</sup> The IHA’s strategy also advocated for:

- parity of esteem between disciplines;
- support for research excellence at all stages of academic career development in the humanities; and
- secure and adequate funding of humanities research at national and European level.

This paper addresses each of these strategic objectives and arises out of a concern that there remains a significant gap in the current research funding landscape. As things stand, there are few funding opportunities for researchers at the mid-career stage- a phase of professional development that can elude concrete definition (see below). We also have concerns about the recently announced (18 May 2022) proposal to create a new research and innovation funding agency that will bring all research disciplines together under one agency. We are calling for the mission of the Irish Research Council (IRC), ‘to enable and sustain a vibrant research community in Ireland by supporting excellent researchers across all disciplines and career stages’ to be reflected in the new structures. This paper also calls for much greater parity of esteem between disciplines in the Irish research funding eco-system and makes the case for increased levels of research funding in support of excellence at all stages of academic career development in the humanities.

## Core Recommendations

- a) A more uniform system of internal supports, including access to paid sabbatical research leave, within the HEIs represented by the IHA;

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<sup>1</sup> From Irish Humanities Alliance website, available here: <https://www.irishhumanities.com/about-us/>

<sup>2</sup> For clarity, the information contained in this paper covers the ten institutes of higher education in the IHA that operate schemes to support research activities. This excludes the Royal Irish Academy which supports the IHA but does not operate such schemes for academics employed on projects and divisions within the Academy. There are also scholars conducting research that falls within the designation of the humanities but are not yet represented by the IHA and these are also not included in this report. The ten institutions discussed represent the majority of scholars conducting humanities research on the island of Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> Irish Humanities Alliance, *By Imagination We Live*, (2019). Available here: <https://www.irishhumanities.com/assets/Uploads/By-Imagination-we-live-FINAL.pdf>

- b) Adequate and secure research funding for research excellence at all stage of arts and humanities career development that support all kinds of research common in the sector, from individual endeavours to collaborative approaches.
- c) More secure, and predictable, research funding schemes for mid-career researchers in the arts and humanities. This would allow for career planning and would assist in improving the gender imbalance in academia at professor grade.
- d) Bringing Ireland into line with best international practice in terms of research support.
- e) Advocate for a research funding landscape that supports choice and intellectual integrity and caters for researchers who may not necessarily align with EU funding schemes.

### **The value of research excellence in the humanities**

The arts and humanities have been central to creating and maintaining the island of Ireland’s significant cultural reputation, making a significant contribution to the reflective exploration of literary, visual and performance arts which are such a strong part of Irish culture. During the Decade of Centenaries, the humanities have helped us to process, reflect and understand a complex history, while fostering awareness of intercultural differences in a new, multi-cultural Ireland.

The influence of the arts and humanities are also felt in the creative sector – through museums, galleries, libraries, music, performing arts, publishing, tourism and the visual arts, the cultural and heritage sectors and more. The arts and humanities help us to understand the grand societal challenges that face us in the environment, demographics, medicine and rapid technological advances. Attempts to understand, document and learn from the Covid-19 pandemic will be wholly inadequate without the full participation of arts and humanities research.

Arts and humanities scholarship is multi-directional: it creates loops of exchange and dialogue between diverse pasts, contested presents and open futures The varied landscape of humanities research on the island of Ireland means that the value of such endeavours can be traced in multiple ways as Holm et al., *Humanities World Report 2015* demonstrates:

*Intrinsic value:* humanities research has a value in and of itself. Even if it leads to other benefits (as listed below), it should also be pursued for its own sake.

*Social value:* the humanities benefit society in a number of ways. They help create tolerance and understanding between citizens, thereby leading to social cohesion. They aid decision-making, especially on the complex ethical issues that confront society as a

whole. In addition, they can benefit society by challenging established positions (see also 'critical thinking' below).

*Cultural heritage:* the humanities enable citizens to understand, preserve and sometimes challenge their national heritage and culture.

*Economic value:* there are direct economic benefits from humanities research, for example in publishing, media, tourism and, of course, the training humanities scholars provide to their students, who go into the job market across a wide range of professions.

*Contribution to other disciplines:* humanities research feeds into other fields, most obviously the social sciences, but also into medicine, computer science and engineering/design through such emerging fields as the medical, digital and environmental humanities.

*Innovation:* the humanities deal with questions of motivation, organisation and action, which are essential components of creativity and entrepreneurship, and so the humanities promote a culture of innovation.

*Critical thinking:* it is of the essence of the humanities to develop critical thinking. This is epitomised by the Socratic tradition in philosophy, but by no means confined to that discipline.

*Personal and spiritual development:* humanities research can enhance one's personal and spiritual wellbeing through the study of different texts and traditions – religious, philosophical or spiritual.

*Aesthetic appreciation:* literary research, art history and musicology promote aesthetic discrimination, enhancing the appreciation and enjoyment of artistic works

Source: P. Holm et al., *Humanities World Report 2015*. Available at [https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1057/9781137500281\\_2.pdf](https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1057/9781137500281_2.pdf)

### **What has prompted this Working Paper?**

The cultural importance of the humanities in Irish society is widely acknowledged through the compulsory status of subjects such as History, Irish, English and languages at secondary level. In the case of history, a commitment to keeping it as a core timetabled subject at second level in 2019 by the Minister for Education has enshrined its status as an important part of civic knowledge. Research led teaching at third level ensures excellence in the training of teachers at primary and secondary level thus the arts,

humanities and social sciences (AHSS) have a vital role in educating future educators at all levels of education in Ireland. <sup>4</sup>

Heritage sites are frequented by the public and the Covid-19 pandemic has seen an increase in domestic tourism. Despite this, the current research funding landscape in Ireland is unbalanced with the arts, humanities and social sciences receiving much less funding for research related activities than STEM and related fields. For example, The HERD report demonstrates that while research and development funding in Ireland has increased, our levels of funding are well below our EU country 28 peers covered by the report. Furthermore, the HERD report shows that humanities researchers represent 8% of the total pool of researchers and yet receive a mere 5% of the total research funding (a decrease from 8% in 2008).<sup>5</sup> Given the cultural significance of the arts and humanities in Ireland (history, language, literature, philosophy, music, and more), and their success in attracting European funding through the ERC and others strands of the Horizon Europe programme, this imbalance needs to be addressed. Simply stated there are fewer avenues for funding available to AHSS researchers and they are disadvantaged in the current landscape. For the past ten years, the Irish Research Council (IRC) has played a key role in furthering the cause of arts and humanities research in Ireland. It has remained the principal funding body for research in the AHSS with its mission 'to enable and sustain a vibrant research community in Ireland by supporting excellent researchers across all disciplines and career stages' resonating strongly with the core values promoted by the IHA. In the current landscape, researchers in the AHSS have very limited access to funding from other agencies such as Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), the Health Research Board (HRB) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). We note the proposal, announced on 18 May 2022, to create a new research and innovation funding agency that will bring all research disciplines together under one agency. We are calling for parity of esteem between all disciplines in this new agency and recognition of the need for fundamental, open ended research. We hope that the ethos, legacy and work of the IRC is reflected in the new structures.

The current funding landscape for arts and humanities in Ireland, and in the Republic in particular, creates real challenges. Academics in Ireland, across all disciplines, are expected to research and publish in order to maintain excellence in teaching, gain promotion and foster international scholarly networks that are to their own benefit as well as to the benefit of their institution and students. The 2008 financial crisis had a devastating impact on the funding of higher education in Ireland. Funding fell sharply and researchers, across disciplines, have struggled to attract funding for their research.

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<sup>4</sup> For further reflections on this see Jennifer Redmond 'Why the study of history is so crucial for our society', RTE Brainstorm, October 2019, available at <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2019/1003/1080857-why-the-study-of-history-is-so-crucial-for-our-society/>

<sup>5</sup> Higher Education Research and Development Survey 2018-2019, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/00d67-higher-education-research-and-development-survey-2018-2019/>

However, for the reasons outlined above, this has been especially challenging for humanities researchers than for others and is most acute at the mid-career stage.

### **Defining the ‘Mid-Career’ Researcher**

While there are differing definitions for the term ‘early career researcher’ or ECR, the mid-career researcher (MCR for the purposes of this paper) is even less well defined. In the most recent IRC Starting and Consolidator Laureate Awards Programme in 2021, applicants to the Consolidator Award should have been awarded their PhD between 8 years and 15 years prior to 2021. Examining the range of definitions for ECRs is helpful in trying to define the MCR as a stage that logically follows on from the period at which ‘early’ career experiences are deemed to have ended.

Two examples are given here, the first from a national report, the second from a humanities context in the UK. To a large extent, these definitions have been derived from the funding streams controlled by the European Union.<sup>6</sup> The Royal Irish Academy’s report, *Scoping the current system of support for early career researchers in Ireland* (2018) gives the following definition:

For the purpose of this paper, an Early Career Researcher is defined as someone who has been awarded a PhD in the previous seven years. It has become more difficult to define an academic in the early stages of their career. The increasingly casualised nature of academic work means that the definitions of ECRs that institutions use are often outdated and fail to reflect the lived experiences of this cohort of researchers. Throughout Europe, and to an extent worldwide, the term ECR is however generally used when referring to a researcher who has obtained a doctorate in the previous 5-8 years (sometimes including doctoral candidates).<sup>7</sup>

While this definition refers to the award of a PhD as the point from which to count time defined as ECR, other definitions explore job status *as well as* the award date of the PhD. Other definitions can also consider different life stages and possible interruptions to employment or productivity (e.g., grant capture and publications). The Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK give the following explanation of an ECR:

The AHRC’s formal definition of an ECR is an individual who is within eight years of the award of their PhD or equivalent professional training, or an individual who is within six years of their first academic appointment. These durations exclude any period of career break, e.g., for family care or health reasons. The ‘first

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the European Research Council’s Starting Grant is aimed at early career researchers and Researchers of any nationality with 2-7 years of experience since completion of PhD

<https://erc.europa.eu/funding/starting-grants>

<sup>7</sup> Carey et al., *Scoping the current system of support for early career researchers in Ireland* (2018) Available from the RIA’s website at

[https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/scoping\\_the\\_current\\_system\\_of\\_support\\_for\\_early\\_career\\_researchers\\_in\\_ireland.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/scoping_the_current_system_of_support_for_early_career_researchers_in_ireland.pdf) [Accessed 23/08/2021].

academic appointment' is defined as the first paid contract of employment, either full-time or part-time, which lists research and/or teaching as the primary functions. The award of PhD is defined at the point of successful PhD viva.<sup>8</sup>

The mid-career point might logically be posited as seven or eight years after the award of the PhD by these definitions, which accords with the Consolidator Grant funding from the European Research Council which is for scholars seven to twelve years after the award of their PhD (with allowances made to extend this time under special conditions cognisant of, for example, maternity and carer-related leave taken).<sup>9</sup> However, this definition assumes a steady progression in academia from the doctorate into a full-time, tenured position in a HEI. In Ireland, as in many other countries, this is not the case for large cohorts of postdoctoral scholars as the 2018 report also found:

The higher education sector in Ireland has, in recent years, experienced significant budget cuts, a reduction in the number of opportunities for permanent academic contracts and a growing reliance on low-paid, part-time, temporary staff for teaching and research roles.<sup>10</sup>

### **What funding is available for arts and humanities scholars in Ireland in the post-doctoral phase?**

The current funding landscape for arts and humanities in Ireland provides real challenges in terms of supporting research excellence. This is particularly acute at the mid-career stage which comes with high expectations to research, write, teach, publish, mentor and provide services to the field—all at the same time. Evidence for the potential of Irish humanities excellence is to be found in the supports and resources secured by Ireland-based scholars across the European funding landscape (to which success rates in, for example, the European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Skłodowska-Curie (MSCA) actions testify).<sup>11</sup> Maintaining and further developing this level of excellence in research and teaching requires a shift towards providing additional resources and supports.

Furthermore, the rapid increase in student numbers in Ireland since the expansion of the higher education sector has meant that academics have less time to devote to research

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from the AHRC website

<https://ahrc.ukri.org/skills/earlycareerresearchers/definitionofeligibility/#:~:text=How%20does%20the%20AHR,C%20define,of%20their%20first%20academic%20appointment>. [Accessed 23/08/2021].

<sup>9</sup> See the European Research Council's site <https://erc.europa.eu/funding/consolidator-grants> [Accessed 23 August 2021].

<sup>10</sup> Carey et al., *Scoping the current system of support for early career researchers in Ireland*.

<sup>11</sup> Irish Research Council welcomes €12 million in EU funding for six Irish research projects: [research.ie/2018/11/29/irish-research-council-welcomes-e12-million-in-eu-funding-for-six-irish-research-projects/](https://research.ie/2018/11/29/irish-research-council-welcomes-e12-million-in-eu-funding-for-six-irish-research-projects/) [accessed 2 April 2019]; Irish Research Council welcomes success of eight Ireland-based researchers in prestigious European Research Council grants scheme <https://research.ie/2022/01/10/irish-research-council-welcomes-success-of-eight-ireland-based-researchers-in-prestigious-european-research-council-grants-scheme/> [Accessed 14 January 2022]

given the increase in teaching and supervision responsibilities. Therefore, there are currently limited opportunities for the development of focused individual research and collaborative activities that could have a wide impact in the subject area, nationally and beyond. The scarcity of postdoctoral fellowships also means that MCRs have fewer opportunities to mentor early career scholars which is also used by some HEIs as a criteria for promotion.

For clarity we have broken these down to information from national, international/European and internal supports from higher education institutions.

#### (A) National Awards

- Royal Irish Academy - Nowlan Digitisation Scheme (annual); R.J. Hunter Research Bursary; Charlemont Grants scheme (annual with limitations as to eligibility that bridge the ECR/MCR divide); Ireland/Scotland bilateral network grants (annual); Archaeology Legacy Grants Scheme (periodic); Archaeology Research Excavation Grants (annual); Directed Archaeological Research for World Heritage Sites (periodic).<sup>12</sup>
- Irish Research Council – New Foundations (annual); Starting, Consolidator and Advanced Laureate Awards (biannual alternating between Starter/Consolidator with Advanced); Ulysses awards (annual); UK-Ireland Collaboration in the Digital Humanities Research Grants (periodic); COALESCE (Collaborative Alliances for Societal Challenges).<sup>13</sup>
- Enterprise Ireland – supports available for writing large networking and research grants under the Horizon Europe (2021-2027) programme. Supports also available for applicants developing ERC grants (Starting, Consolidator, Advanced and Synergy) .
- National Library of Ireland fellowship.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Eoin O’Mahony bursary, which would have provided annual funds for humanities scholars, finished in 2020.

<sup>13</sup> For the full list of Irish Research Council awards see <https://research.ie/funding-category/principal-investigator-led/>

<sup>14</sup> Available to both pre- and post-doctoral scholars but in reality more of an early career opportunity. See here for more <https://www.nli.ie/en/udlist/current-opportunities.aspx?article=2433d49e-6a2f-4df0-b363-d79b0f81a0d3>



## (B) European Awards

- European Research Council: Starting Grants, Consolidator Grants and Advanced Grants;<sup>15</sup> COST<sup>16</sup>, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions<sup>17</sup>, Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA)<sup>18</sup>, Horizon Europe<sup>19</sup>.
- Wellcome Trust: Career development Awards<sup>20</sup> and Discovery Awards.<sup>21</sup>
- Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry: <https://www.ici-berlin.org/fellowships/>
- Creative Europe:  
<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/crea2027>
- Fondation Maison Des Sciences De L'Homme, Reseaux Internationaux:  
<https://www.fmsch.fr/fr/actions/appel-a-reseaux-internationaux-en-shs-2022>
- Fritz Thyssen Stiftung <https://www.fritz-thyssen-stiftung.de/en/>.
- Europeana Grants: <https://pro.europeana.eu/page/grants-programme>
- Invest EU, Cultural and creative activities with a social goal:  
<https://investeu.europa.eu/what-investeu-programme-en>
- Medici Archive Project fellowships <https://www.medici.org/>.
- Wissenschaftskolleg Zu Berlin <https://www.wiko-berlin.de/en/fellows>
- There are examples of awards that are tailored to specific research interests which some AHSS scholars *may* be able to apply for depending on their specialisation and their ability to travel and stay abroad. For example, European University Institute, National Research Funding<sup>22</sup> and the Humboldt research fellowship for postdocs and experienced researchers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See here for more <https://erc.europa.eu/>

<sup>16</sup> See here for more <https://www.cost.eu/>

<sup>17</sup> See here for more <https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/>

<sup>18</sup> There are currently NO funding opportunities open under this scheme but the programme of activities is still ongoing. See here for more <https://heranet.info/funding/current-funding-opportunities/>

<sup>19</sup> See here for more [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en); While Horizon Europe seeks to embed SSH approaches as a cross cutting theme, evidence from similar efforts to *integrate* SSH in Horizon2020 shows that this was uneven across funding programmes and strongly skewed towards the social sciences (Economics, Business Studies, Public Administration, Law and Sociology) see: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/integration-social-sciences-and-humanities-horizon-2020\\_en#:~:text=The%20integration%20of%20Social%20Sciences,issue%20is%20an%20EU%20commitment.&text=This%20year%20we%20also%20look,SwafS\)%20part%20of%20the%20programme](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/integration-social-sciences-and-humanities-horizon-2020_en#:~:text=The%20integration%20of%20Social%20Sciences,issue%20is%20an%20EU%20commitment.&text=This%20year%20we%20also%20look,SwafS)%20part%20of%20the%20programme).

<sup>20</sup> See here for more <https://wellcome.org/grant-funding/schemes/career-development-awards>

<sup>21</sup> See here for more <https://wellcome.org/grant-funding/schemes/discovery-awards>

<sup>22</sup> See here for more <https://www.eui.eu/ProgrammesandFellowships/AcademicCareersObservatory/JobFundingResources/NationalResearchFundingOpportunities>

<sup>23</sup> See here for more <https://www.humboldt-foundation.de/bewerben/foerderprogramme/humboldt-forschungsstipendium>

### **(C) What internal funding supports for research are available within the HEIs in Ireland?**

An IHA survey of the internal funding schemes (which, of course, can vary from year to year depending on budgets), provided by the ten higher education institutes on the island of Ireland, represented by the IHA, reveal a rather divergent range of supports in terms of frequency of availability, guarantees of funding per annum and the amount of funding available. Some HEIs offer schemes available to academics from all departments, others have these in addition to faculty or school specific grants to support research related activities. This means that scholars have more or less support for research related activities depending on which institution they are working in.

- For example, **sabbatical research leave** is not available in some institutions while the criteria for sabbatical are not uniform in those institutions where it is available. Sabbatical research leave is of critical importance to researchers across the full spectrum of the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Researchers in these disciplines do not by and large work in labs, and therefore require sabbatical research leave in order to find the space and time to complete major research projects. Scholars in some institutions are able to access sabbaticals through a competitive process with full pay, while others have to accept significantly reduced pay to cover the cost of their teaching replacement. This may be an insurmountable financial barrier for some scholars, particularly those with costly care related expenses. Research in AHSS fields often does not require expensive equipment or materials (although there are notable exceptions); the greatest resource needed by many scholars is time, thus sabbaticals are essential to the optimum productivity of many academics.
- **Financial support for research** is also inconsistent across the sector. Support for academic travel and networking ranges from €400 to €750 per annum with different conditions attached to its use and the ability to roll over funding from year to year to cover greater travel costs. Some HEIs automatically allocate this funding to academic staff while others require annual applications. During the pandemic, as travel has been severely curtailed, some HEIs allowed for such funding to be “frozen” with extensions to the usual time periods in which it can be claimed while others did not; some allowed for the funds to be repurposed for other research related expenses than travel, for example in purchasing software or completing additional professional training.
- Specific funding to help support costs associated with the **publication of research** is available in some, but not all, HEIs with the level of supports varying widely. Academics who are graduates or employees of HEIs in the National University of Ireland body of institutions can apply for additional funding for research publications. As publication and dissemination of research is a crucial

factor in promoting and sharing academic research the disparities in the sector prevent the full extent of AHSS scholarly knowledge from reaching the wider community.

- The availability of and financial support attached to **networking** for academics varies hugely and is a key factor in career development, for the personal profile of the academic and for research collaboration nationally and internationally. While some HEIs have specific grants to organise conferences and seminars and host visiting scholars for short visits, others rely on the personal capacity of scholars to network. Support for networking has benefits for the institution and a more uniform approach to grants to aid this would enrich the sector.

### **What are the particular funding challenges for early and mid-career arts and humanities scholars in Ireland?**

The post 2008 financial crisis created a backlog of talented and qualified scholars who were given temporary and fixed term contracts many of which mean that researchers do not qualify to apply for internal or external grants for research and publications. The role of University Teacher or Tutor has emerged in this landscape as a teaching only contract. In some HEIs on the island this role has replaced the traditional recruitment of Lecturers Below the Bar .There is no mechanism for promotion. Many holding this type of role have a PhD and are actively publishing. The role also has a higher teaching load than the Lecturer Below the Bar contract. One of the consequences of this is that early career scholars, as defined by when they obtained tenure, came to such jobs at older ages and longer after completing their PhD than in previous generations. This means that many will have 'aged out' of schemes intended for early career scholars who have obtained tenure. Thus, higher levels of early career research and mid-career funding are needed to remedy the opportunity gap experienced since 2008.

Mid-career scholars are often at a stage of life where they face significant caring responsibilities, either for children or elders, and thus have less time to devote to writing grant applications which have huge time commitments both in preparation and conduct. The preparation of grant applications may attract funding for professional grant writing services but often do not include teaching buy out or support for caring responsibilities. Many research awards do not include care related expenses as research expenses (unless explicitly defined as such by individual HEIs). This could act as a deterrent to applying for such grants as many involve travel and networking or could lead to a more stressful experience for those with caring responsibilities that would deter them from seeking future, larger awards. Some MCRs may not apply for funding opportunities that require significant amounts of time to be spent abroad given their caring responsibilities. While this is a matter of personal choice, there are issues of equality as no similar domestic

schemes exist. Schemes that allow for Short Term Scientific Missions (e.g. COST) may be more attractive for this reason but have less impact on a scholar's career and research output than a longer term fellowship.

There is little opportunity to manage research assistants or postdoctoral fellows within the current funding landscape. Postdoctoral fellows approach potential mentors who may expend considerable time in helping them to prepare IRC applications and/or MSCA, but success rates are low. New Foundations grants, at a maximum of €15,000, do not offer much scope for employing junior scholars. Therefore, mid-career academics have little experience to use in applications for the larger principal investigator level funding that is available.

A final note on the present context of research is needed. The full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the ability to conduct research has yet to emerge. AHSS scholars have been significantly impacted by the closure of libraries, galleries, museums and archives in Ireland and across the world. For many this has essentially been a 'lockout' from the sites of their research with ongoing restrictions on access to these spaces as of the writing of this report. While the pandemic has affected scholars across the HEIs with the pivot to online teaching and supervision, some scientists who could access their laboratories while campuses were generally closed and thus could progress their research. Coupled with this is the impact on those with caring responsibilities as creches and schools were closed for periods of 2020 and 2021 and continued high case numbers mean that, along with other working parents and carers, there are regular disruptions to planned research.

We encourage a full review of opportunities for mid-career researchers as part of any new initiatives addressing the third level sector in Ireland. This will not only benefit MCRs – teaching opportunities and research assistance roles will also benefit early career researchers and create a thriving pipeline for additional professors grade academics. This has the further potential to increase gender balance at that level and to position senior academics to compete for larger sources of European funding.

## APPENDIX

### Working Group Members

Chair: Dr Jennifer Redmond (Maynooth University)

Members:

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