

# Research and Innovation Bill 2023

## Irish Humanities Alliance Position Paper, April 2023



## Introduction

Humanities research is vital to Irish society and our shared intellectual, social, and cultural life, including the dynamic resources of creativity in the economy. The Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA) was formed in 2013 to support the humanities in the context of a higher education policy landscape and to explain its key role.

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. In its 2019 statement of strategic vision, *By Imagination We Live*, the IHA asserts its commitment ‘to championing the social, cultural and economic value of humanities education and research’. The IHA’s strategy advocates:

- parity of esteem between disciplines
- support for research excellence at all stages of academic career development in the humanities
- secure and adequate funding of humanities research, informed decisions on the distribution of government funding, and transparency of research governance.

## Research and Innovation Bill 2023: Core Recommendations

Drawing on these strategic objectives, this position paper responds to the recently announced Irish government proposal ‘Research and Innovation Bill 2023’ (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Bill’) to create a single agency ‘Research and Innovation Ireland’ (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Agency’).

The IHA welcomes the formation of a new agency while recommending that more should be done to reinforce key academic principles and values enshrined in the legislation.

### **1. The Bill needs to provide a meaningful definition of ‘research’ that is inclusive of every sector of knowledge.**

Head 8 (a) refers to ‘fundamental research to applied research activity’ but does not furnish an explanatory note. We believe that it is of utmost importance that there is an agreement between the government and the academic community that the Bill and the Agency serve the interests of sciences and humanities, and promote research in all its forms and disciplines, and in every sector of knowledge.

### **We suggest the following emendation to Head 8 (a):**

to promote and support excellence in research *in all its forms* and innovation, within and across all disciplines *and across all career stages*, extending from ‘*bottom-up*’, fundamental research *that includes discovery, blue skies research, and critical scholarship*, to applied research activity through competitively awarded research and innovation funding.

## **2. The Bill needs to provide for a meaningful and transparent election of the members of the body overseeing the Agency.**

The Bill must ensure European standards of good practice that support appropriate governance in research. Head 15 of Part 3 of the Bill (‘Membership of Board’) does not articulate the principles of trans-disciplinarity, equality and diversity, active engagement with research, and expertise in diverse fields of knowledge as the basis of Board member selection, nor is there a clear understanding that the members of the Board will represent various disciplines and fields of knowledge.

Disciplinary representation on the Board will clearly influence funding decisions; therefore the Minister must engage with leading experts in the sciences and humanities in selecting members since appointments will evidently be made outside the Public Appointments Service (PAS) process in the first iteration of the Board. The range of disciplines which form the core of research and innovation in Ireland should be clearly defined and represented at all times.

### **The IHA proposes the following emendation to Head 15 (1b):**

11 ordinary members, *a majority of whom shall be active researchers from a wide range of disciplines, including representatives from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.*

## **3. The IHA endorses the importance of the principles of the parity of esteem and of academic freedom which are cited in Impact 2030, Ireland’s Research and Innovation Strategy (pp. 7, 15, 49, hereinafter ‘The Strategy’).**

In particular, the Strategy proposes:

“The creation of a new agency represents an opportunity to place Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences research on an equal and statutory footing to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics research ensuring parity of esteem, access to research funding and greater consistency across the research community. In addition, it will strengthen the role of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in contributing to challenge-based research, which is essential to addressing complex problems.”

On the basis of the Strategy, IHA proposes that the principle of ‘parity of esteem’ is included into the Heads 8 (e) and 9 (k) of the Bill with the following emendations:

Head 8 (e)

*to promote parity of esteem and* to advance equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion in research and innovation

Head 9 (k)

*to promote parity of esteem and* support equality, diversity and inclusion in research and innovation

Commitment to the principle of academic freedom is equally important. The principles of freedom of scientific research and research integrity are shared EU values and principles and the Strategy expresses its commitment to forging Irish global strategic relationships based on such principles and values (p. 49). Based on the HEA Act 2022, section 120, the IHA proposes that the principle of academic freedom be included in the Head 8 as a separate item:

*Head 8 (g)*

*to preserve and promote the principles of academic freedom.*

**4. Heads 9 (a-b) and 35 give the Minister broad authority to create, manage, and assess competitive research and innovation programmes and to build a cohesive national system with minimal procedural limitations.**

According to the criteria specified in Head 35, point 7, the Agency must use this authority to collaborate with other organisations that primarily support enterprise. The IHA promotes collaboration between universities and the private sector, but not at the expense of universities' foundational or applied research.

In particular, the IHA suggests the following emendation to Head 35 (1) to read:

*Research and Innovation Ireland shall, in so far as it is consistent with the proper performance of its functions under Head 9, and only to the extent that these collaborations further support and fund competitive research and innovation, endeavour to secure administrative co-operation.*

**5. IHA welcomes the Bill's provision for North-South co-operation in research and innovation**

As the academic alliance representing researchers from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the IHA welcomes the Bill's provision (Head 9 (k), North-South co-operation) that the trans-jurisdictional research and innovation on the island of Ireland is valued, promoted and funded.

**6. Public Consultation**

We in the Irish Humanities Alliance are publicly announcing our position on these issues, in anticipation of a public consultation regarding the Bill. Indeed, we now anticipate the announcement of a public consultation and look forward to engaging with the Oireachtas on this strategically important development that will change the research environment on the island of Ireland.

### **Further information**

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