関西大学学術リポジトリ
Kansai University Institutional Repository

Humanities World Report 2015

Humanities World Report 2015
by Poul Holm, Arne Jarrick, and Dominic Scott

Introduction

The purpose and scope of this report

This is a first attempt to assess the worldwide state of the humanities. We present this report fully conscious that it will be found wanting in important aspects. Yet we believe that an attempt, however faltering, must be made to map on a global scale what humanists think about what they do and how the field is changing. There has been no shortage of commentary on the humanities over the last few years. The topic has been discussed intensively in national reports, essays, books, newspaper articles, not to mention social media. Most of the commentary on the subject to date tends to come from the perspective of a particular country or region. Our aim is to look at some familiar – and some less familiar – questions from a global perspective by listening to voices from all continents.

The report will be of use firstly to the research community and secondly to academic leaders and research policy stakeholders. We aim to set a baseline against which future developments in the world of the humanities may be evaluated. Our main topics are:

- Attempts by researchers and others to articulate the value of the humanities worldwide
- The ways in which humanists describe the nature of what they do and the degree to which it is seen as distinct from the natural and social sciences
- The channels through which humanists attempt to communicate their research beyond the Academia
- Features of the culture of humanities research: attitudes towards interdisciplinary research; responses to globalisation; reactions to the ever-increasing role of digitisation
- Changes in funding patterns and problems of research infrastructure
- Relations between the humanities and the societies that fund them

This report is not a battle cry for the humanities in the 21st century since we

think that there is a need for cool analysis and reflection. We end by making some recommendations about ways forward and challenges to be met. These conclusions are based on our analysis of the state of the art presented in Chapters 2–8. We are, of course, deeply committed to the humanities, but we have tried not to let our findings be occluded by wishful thinking.

Some qualifications

In this introduction we set out in more detail the questions that have framed our work and describe each chapter's agenda. We also detail the sources on which we have relied and describe the process by which we conducted our research over a period of 30 months. But first we need to make three qualifications.

First, this report focuses upon humanities research rather than education. In this respect it differs from much of the commentary on the humanities, whether in national reports or books, which often considers (or laments) the fate of teaching in the humanities. Our main reason for limiting the project in this way is practical since including undergraduate education as one of our central themes would have meant a considerable expansion in the scope of the project. Of course, we do not deny that education and research are connected. Where small group teaching is concerned, seminars with undergraduates allow for an exchange of ideas that can stimulate new research. Even when such a luxury is not on offer, giving a class to a large group of students can lead a researcher to familiarise themselves with an area that may then become a research interest. Finally, there is the basic fact that changes in undergraduate numbers affect the numbers of researchers, since the same people typically teach as well as research (regardless of whether the former activity feeds the latter). So, for all these reasons, there is no denying the link between the two. Nonetheless, it is still feasible for a humanities report to focus on research, introducing undergraduate education only as a subordinate theme. Making teaching one of the principal themes would certainly have added breadth to our work; but it is not as if our conclusions and findings are somehow undermined because we have limited our focus.

Second, there is the old question of how to define the humanities. What is the rationale for grouping together a particular set of academic disciplines as 'the humanities'? This is a notoriously difficult question. An obvious answer – that the humanities study the human – is clearly too superficial, because the medical sciences and psychology also study 'the human', as do the social sciences. Despite all the attempts that have been made to answer this question, there is no consensus; some even suspect that the grouping is merely a contingent fact about the recent history of academia. We take no stand on whether 'the humanities' are a *bona fide* group of academic disci-

plines, whether they constitute a 'natural kind' and what it is that might unify them into a single group. Instead, our approach is entirely pragmatic. We start from the fact that, as things are in most universities around the world, a particular set of disciplines happens to be grouped together under the umbrella term, 'the humanities': history, archaeology, anthropology, philosophy, religious studies, literature, linguistics, musicology, art history, classical studies, media studies and cultural studies. It is true that the grouping differs from one region to the next. The separation between the social sciences and the humanities is more sharply drawn in Europe and the US than, say, in Latin America or Russia. Thus, sociology might well be included among the humanities in some regions, but not in others. But we have, on the whole, limited ourselves to the list of disciplines just mentioned. Finally, we should say something at the outset about who we are as authors of this report. We call this book a report because it attempts to give an account of the state of the humanities, together with some recommendations about the future. Such is the remit of many documents that call themselves reports. However, many such reports are commissioned and funded by national (or regional) bodies and publish their findings and recommendations on behalf of a national agency or some similar body. As such, they need to be representative of the entity for which they speak. For instance, in 1999 UNESCO sponsored and produced the *World Social Science Report*. This project involved the formation of a committee and the selection of several authors from around the world, in such a way as to satisfy the need to be a truly representative body appropriate to UNESCO. The same organisation produced follow-up reports in 2010 and 2013. We applaud the efforts of the editorial board and the authors. However, we are doing something different. We are not claiming to represent any organisation, region or country. We are three academic researchers who sought and obtained funding from different organisations in Europe. Using these funds, we ran our own research project and have written up the results accordingly. Doubtless the product reflects our backgrounds and perspectives. But we hope that it will be judged on its own merits like any other piece of academic research. In short, this is a report about the world, but not (as it were) *by* the world (i.e. commissioned by some kind of world organisation).

Our sources
Our work started in earnest in August 2011. Prior to that, we had written a proposal that outlined the purposes of the project and set out what we intended to cover in each chapter. To begin, we embarked upon a survey of existing national reports into the humanities (though sometimes these covered the humanities and social sciences). For instance, reports existed about the US, Canada, the UK, Germany, France, the Scandinavian countries, India,

sub-Saharan Africa and Australia. In addition, the EU had commissioned an ongoing project of reports into the humanities and social sciences not just in EU countries, but also in other European nations, Brazil, Israel, Japan and Turkey (these are known as the METRIS reports). Our first task was to collate all these reports, mine them for information and data, and compare the results across regions. We then turned our attention to books and articles by prominent advocates of the humanities, as well as commentaries in the press and elsewhere. Perhaps what makes our work distinctive is that we have conducted a series of interviews with leading humanities scholars around the world: 89 interviews, covering 41 countries in 5 continents. These have proved an invaluable source of information and insight, and most of the chapters use the results extensively. Although we interviewed some scholars at the beginning of their careers, the great majority were senior academics: many were heads of departments or humanities deans; a few had taken a leading role in national associations or funding bodies. All showed a detailed knowledge of the state of the humanities in their country or region. Some were also scholars who had worked in more than one country, such as a European now working in Asia, or an Asian working in North America. The guiding methodological principle was to ensure a diversity of opinions, achieved by interviewing scholars from a wide variety of disciplines and from many different nations around the globe. Throughout, we opted for qualitative rather than quantitative analysis. The scholarly community of the humanities in Europe probably consists of more than 100,000 academics and in the world there may be upwards of a million humanists. We did not have a database and manpower at our disposal to do a representative sample and question-naire. Instead, we opted for discursive analysis and carried out in-depth, 45–60 minute interviews based on a fixed set of questions or, in some cases, received written responses to our questions. We tested our preliminary inter-pretations of interviews by bringing informants to regional workshops. The goal was to map the range of opinions and approaches to a strict set of ques-tions. This methodology ensures a depth of understanding of the difference of opinions that are likely to exist in a given community. The methodology works on the principle that within a bounded rationale there is a limited set of positions available and it is therefore possible to map opinions by using a relatively small sample. But the method does not yield results that are quan-titatively representative; we cannot say which statements or opinions are representative of the humanities, but we can say which line of reasoning resonates within a certain region. In a sense, the respondents were chosen at random; sometimes they were contacts we already had, or were contacts of contacts. Sometimes, we identified them as a result of attending a particular humanities conference. But we arrived at the final list of respondents by many different routes. On the whole, the respondents did not know each

other, and so we are confident that we have avoided the risk of 'group think'. Certainly, there is a great deal of variety among the answers.

We compiled a list of questions initially, and then tested it out on a small group of humanists. Having made some revisions, we conducted around 40 interviews in several countries. As a result of this process, we saw that the questions could be changed, so we created a slightly different questionnaire for the remaining half of the process. However, the two questionnaires are so similar that there have been few problems in collating the results of the interviews as a whole. Both sets of questions are reproduced in the Appendix. The questions covered all the main points of our original proposal (and more besides). The interviews were conducted in different ways: sometimes a respondent would simply fill in the questionnaire and send it back over e-mail; in other cases we conducted an interview, recorded it and then wrote up the transcript; in some cases, the interviewer asked the questions, took notes, wrote up the interview and then sent back a draft to the respondent, who was then free to comment and change as appropriate.

The interviewees covered the following disciplines:

- Archaeology 3
- Cultural studies 5
- Classics 4
- History 20
- Linguistics 5
- Literature 17
- Media studies 3
- Philosophy 15
- Religion 2
- Other (mostly a humanities/social sciences blend) 15

The breakdown by region was:

- Africa (Af): 13 (Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia)
- Asia (As): 16 (China, India, Japan, Mongolia, Taiwan and Thailand)
- Australia (Au): 4
- Europe (E): 16 (Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK)
- Latin America (LA): 9 (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay)
- MENA region (ME): 6 (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and Turkey)
- North America (NA): 16 (Canada and the US)

• Russia (R): 9.

Respondents were 28 female, 61 male.

To preserve respondent anonymity we use a code, such as Af1/ME2, when quoting them.

To validate our preliminary interpretation of the interviews, we subsequently held workshops focused on particular regions. In May 2013 we held one in Taipei involving scholars from Taiwan, Japan, Thailand and Asianists from the US. In June 2013 we held a workshop at the University of Cambridge, to which we invited a group of Russian humanists. In October 2013 we held a workshop at the University of Virginia, to which we invited scholars from Latin America (Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru), the workshop also included scholars from the US who were from or were working on Latin American countries. Finally, we co-funded a conference on the humanities in Nanjing, China, in May 2013 involving participants from China, India, Europe and the US. These events gave us the opportunity to go beyond the information we had already received via the interviews. Typically, the workshop participants had done an interview before attending.

Outline of the report
In the chapters that follow, we pursue what we consider to be some of the most important topics for a humanities report.

In *Chapter 2*, we start with perhaps the best-known issue: the value of the humanities. How do people, especially advocates of the humanities, articulate the value of humanities research in different countries around the world? Are there any patterns that come to light when one compares the answers to this question in different countries? We start with a list of the values most typically attributed to the humanities, such as social cohesion, cultural heritage and critical thinking. We then give an outline account of each, and show which values are most commonly highlighted around the world. Although much of our discussion is descriptive, sketching 'the state of the art', we also offer some more critical comments, and warnings, about the risks of espousing certain values.

In *Chapter 3*, we turn to the nature of the humanities and break the chapter into two parts. First, we ask what sorts of themes or approaches are most prevalent in humanities research today and what ones may be emerging. For instance, are phenomena such as digitisation or internationalisation having any effect on the sorts of themes researchers are choosing to work upon? In the second part we broach the question of how humanities scholars conceive of their disciplines. Do they see them as fundamentally different from the sciences (natural or social)? In particular, do they attempt to make advances

in knowledge, to attain findings and make breakthroughs? Or do they consider their role to be more one of raising questions than answering them, or of telling narratives and trying out new perspectives?

Chapter 4 is devoted to another area where recent developments may or may not be meshing well with humanists' attitudes and culture. This is the area of digital humanities (DH). In the first half of the chapter we try to give a snapshot of the sheer scale of activities around the world and the different kinds of digital projects pursued. Based on information available online, we provide a survey of DH centres around the world and give a classification of the kinds of projects they fund and promote. There is no doubting the scale of activity. But what about mainstream humanists? Are they convinced that these new technologies and projects are paying real intellectual dividends? Do they even understand what is going on? In order to answer such questions, we asked our interviewees for their views on the digital humanities.

Chapter 5 considers the ways in which humanists communicate or conduct their research beyond the borders of the Academia. Interestingly, there is not even an agreed term for this. As a starting point we take, by way of comparison, the way in which medical science tackles this issue, as in the process by which research gets from 'bench to bedside' – not to say that the humanities should ape the medical sciences, but because they provide an interesting point of reference. They also provide us with a term to use, 'translation' ('translational medicine' is the expression used for the process of bringing research into clinical use). In this chapter we gather together information about the attempts of humanists to move beyond academic boundaries. There are several quite different modes in practice: reaching out to high schools; consultancy; museum work and public exhibitions; media work (newspaper, radio or TV); and working with policy makers. We have gathered information on such activities from a few national reports (particularly in the US), but most of our data comes from our own interviews, where we asked respondents directly about their attitude to, and their experience of, translation. As well as surveying the different kinds of translation, we raise the question of how far institutional conditions actually facilitate or obstruct it.

Chapter 6 considers some issues about the culture of the humanities and the extent to which it is keeping pace with certain technological or institutional developments. We look at two phenomena from this perspective: interdisciplinarity and internationalisation. Many humanists have long felt attracted to the idea of crossing disciplinary boundaries in their research and there is evidence that funding bodies encourage or even require this. Although the interest in interdisciplinary research is not new, it is important to ask whether the pressure to engage in it actually meshes both with researchers' own inclinations and with basic professional incentives. Is inter-

disciplinary research actually of benefit to researchers as they attempt to rise up the career ladder or is it rather a risk to move out of mono-disciplinary expertise, especially in terms of publication prospects? In short, are professional conditions really aligned with institutional aspirations towards interdisciplinary research? In the second half of the chapter we consider what might be called a parallel question about internationalisation. It is a cliche to talk of globalisation and the breaking down of national boundaries. It is a fact of life everywhere and affects the humanities profoundly. Communications have been transformed over the last few years by e-mail and the Internet (our own project would have been impossible without all this). International networks and publishing outlets have mushroomed. So, the question arises as to how humanists themselves are reacting to this. Is globalisation leading to homogenisation of research, especially through the use of English as a common language?

Chapter 7 is about funding and infrastructure, also issues that we raised in the questionnaire. We were interested first in whether respondents had noticed significant changes in funding in recent years. Obviously, in some countries funding is a great deal better than in others. But what about actual changes for better or worse? This question is particularly salient in the wake of the financial crisis and the subsequent (if slow) recovery. Does economic progress in some developing countries spark investment in the humanities? Are there clear regional differences in the perception of challenges and opportunities? In the second half of the chapter we consider what infrastructure needs our respondents have. It is quite typical for humanists to say that they are cheap and need little funding, but is this actually the case? If offered the chance for more resources, where do our interviewees think they should be spent?

Finally, in *Chapter 8* we turn to the relation between humanities and politics. In many ways, this has been an undercurrent in previous chapters since many think the value of the humanities is precisely its contribution to society (such as social cohesion and social decision-making). Translation (or outreach) is very much about the ways in which academia makes its work known and used by society at large. Issues of funding sooner or later involve references to the taxpayer. But in this last chapter we bring the relation between humanities and society to the forefront. Specifically, we are interested in the expectations that humanists have of their society and, in turn, what their society expects of them, especially as evidenced by the attitudes of governmental bodies towards the humanities. In this chapter we make particular use of national reports (especially from the US, South Africa and the EU). Given the time at which we are writing, we have ended up with a particular focus on two regions: the US, especially the arguments between

Congress and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH); and the EU where, at the time of writing, the Commission is in the process of deciding how to distribute research funds over the next seven years. On the one hand there is the very real prospect of significant funding coming to the social sciences and the humanities; on the other, there is the likelihood that this will come with strings attached – such that only projects focused on quite specific and 'utilitarian' themes will have any chance of being funded.

At the end of the report, we provide a conclusion, to draw out the main themes of our research, and then a list of recommendations.

Although it has taken us considerable time and effort to compile this report, we hope it will not take long to read. Throughout, we have taken a 'straight talking' approach, the organisation of the material is straightforward and the topics have been arranged in a relatively intuitive list. There is no necessity to read the chapters and subsections in order. Instead, the report can be used as a reference compilation or handbook, it invites the reader to dip in and out of sections without reading full chapters.

Prospects for the future

In our research we have had innumerable conversations and encounters, not just in the course of conducting the interviews or giving presentations at workshops and conferences, but also around the fringes of conferences, or as part of soliciting interviews and inviting feedback. Among all the comments we have had, two stand out as the most common. On a positive note, a large number of people commented on the importance of what we are doing, they described a world humanities report as timely and necessary, sometimes even as urgently needed. But there was another kind of reaction when our project was described as 'very ambitious'. After all, we were attempting to survey the state of the humanities worldwide and assess the challenges for the future. That itself is a challenge of almost bewildering proportions.

We agree. Our project is as ambitious as it is worthwhile. But we make no apology, it had to be done, or it is at least one step in a longer-term process that has to be started. Many of the issues we address are already well-known (the value of the humanities, similarities to or differences from the sciences, interdisciplinarity, the digital humanities, funding and the relation between the humanities and society). But to come at them from a global perspective, comparing reports, commentaries and interviews from many countries brings an entirely new perspective to these well-worn issues. Furthermore, the very process of conducting the research – creating the contacts, building the goodwill, setting up a template for future research – might help build a worldwide platform for the humanities.

So we see our effort, substantial as it has been, as a first step. Doubtless

there are all sorts of ways in which future (or follow-up) reports can improve upon what we have done: more interviews, with different questions, covering a larger number of countries; the systematic collection of statistical data. We also explored the possibility of an electronic survey to elicit responses to our issues from a thousand humanists around the world, and have created a pilot questionnaire. This would in itself create a set of important and valuable statistics. In the end we decided not to do this because of a shortage of time and manpower. But it is important for someone to take the first step towards a truly global look at the humanities. If it is distinctive of the humanities to study our humanity, it should study our collective and global humanity. That is the spirit in which we have conducted our work and we trust that it will be read and judged in that way.

Poul Holm, Professor, Trinity College Dublin
Poul Holm is Trinity Long Room Hub Professor of Humanities, Trinity College Dublin, and President of the European Consortium of Humanities Institutes and Centres. In the past he has been Professor of Maritime History at the University of Southern Denmark, and Rector (President) of the University of Roskilde. He has served on national and European committees such as the Danish Research Council for the Humanities (chairman 2001-5), the European Society for Environmental History (President 2005-7), and the EU DG Research METRIS group (chairman 2008-9). His doctoral thesis examined the impact of war on everyday life in Norway, Sweden and Denmark between 1550 and 1914. He has published on fisheries history and marine environmental history; coastal communities and culture; and the Viking settlements in Ireland. He is currently chair of the History of Marine Animal Populations project, HMAP, which is a global project of some 100 associate historians, archaeologists and marine scientists aiming to understand human impact on ocean ecology.

Arne Jarrick, Professor, Stockholm University

Arne Jarrick is a Professor of History, Stockholm University, where he is a member of The Centre for Study of Cultural Evolution (of which he was one of the founders). He is Secretary General for the Humanities and Social Sciences at the Swedish Research Council (2007-2012), and also a member of The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Among his many international research policy activities should here be mentioned that he participated in the European Commission's mapping of emerging SSH research in Europe (The Metris Report). He has written widely on the history of mentalities (see for instance his *Back to Modern Reason*), but is now focused on cultural evolution where he is running a project on the long-term global history of law-making, from the Code of Hammurabi to the Napoleonic Code.

Dominic Scott, Professor, University of Virginia

Dominic Scott is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Virginia. He specialises in ancient Greek philosophy, and has written extensively on Platonic, Aristotelian and Hellenistic philosophy. In contemporary philosophy he works on a range of applied topics, including trust and intellectual property. He earned his PhD in Classics at the University of Cambridge, where he went on to become a Lecturer in the Faculty of Philosophy and a Fellow of Clare College. He has also held visiting appointments at Princeton and Harvard, and been a Fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington DC. While at Cambridge he co-founded the Forum for Philosophy in Business, a research centre dedicated to the study of philosophical issues that arise in business and public life, which brought together academics from various fields and practitioners in business, the professions and government.