

Policy and the Arts & Humanities in Ireland

A position paper by the Trinity Long Room Hub
Arts and Humanities Research Institute



Trinity College Dublin
The University of Dublin

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INTRODUCTION: Why policy?

In the spring of 2021, the Trinity Long Room Hub ran a number of workshops for its Arts and Humanities community on the relationship between Arts and Humanities research and the policy sphere, taking as our series title ‘Bridging the Gap’. The phrase took some people by surprise: what did the academic pursuits of language, literature, history, art or philosophy have to do with the world of government strategy and legislation? What do the arts have to do with policy formation, and what kind of ‘policy’ – local, civic, national, international – were we talking about? Why did we want to bridge the gap in the first place?

These are salutary questions, and this position paper aims to respond to some of them by thinking further about the status and ambitions of Arts Humanities policy-related research in the context of Irish governmental agendas. It offers, first, a brief overview of recent commentary on the increasing pressure for academic engagement with the policy arena, and on the current institutional structure – or lack of structure – for that engagement. It briefly assesses the positioning of Arts Humanities research in the policy sphere, drawing attention to the accelerating discourse of engagement in Ireland and beyond. The paper then reflects on the outcomes of the Trinity Long Room Hub ‘Bridging the Gap’ Roundtable and workshop discussions in order to highlight existing experience of collaborative research for policy, and to foreground certain perceived risks or impediments to the dovetailing of Arts Humanities researchers with policy professionals in the future.

This position paper will, in turn, prompt further questions. The ‘gap’ which we addressed in our workshop discussions is inevitably framed by the global pandemic. Discussions of the Covid-19 crisis have placed renewed emphasis on the idea that the humanities, broadly conceived, have an important role to play across the various field of public administration and health management. But how is this idea to move from aspiration to implementation? If academics working in the Arts and Humanities are to bring their research insights to public service at this level, then how should the status of these disciplines – often seen simply as illustrative or ancillary to the authority of STEM – be reconceived? And what key structural changes are needed to strengthen the connective tissue between policy-making bodies, research funding councils, and Arts Humanities academic practice?

Best Practice and Intellectual Leadership

“To what extent is the academy a thought leader? ... Where is the thought leadership coming from the academy on a wide range of issues? ... What is the role of the academy in shaping public discourse?”

Professor Ellen Hazelkorn (TU Dublin & BH Associates)
TLRH Arts Humanities Policy Roundtable

In terms of the national landscape, many voices have recently been raised in support of a close and collaborative relationship between an academic research culture and the needs of policy-makers. In its section on innovation, the Irish government's Department of Further and Higher Education, Research and Innovation 2021-2022 Strategy Statement outlines explicitly the goal to support: 'a highly collaborative research system – closely connected with enterprise, public policy and practice, community and voluntary, innovation districts, national, regional and local interests; driving knowledge-creation, innovation and human capital; and contributing significantly in addressing major societal challenges.'¹

This emphasis on the fostering of a strategic, challenge-driven research culture, sensitive to the needs of social, civic and national administration and responsive to global issues such as climate change and sustainability, has been fine-tuned in related national responses to research strategy. The 2021 Royal Irish Academy series 'Research for Public Policy', run in partnership with the Irish Research Council, was addressed on this topic by a number of high-profile research and education leaders including Minister Simon Harris and Mary Doyle, former Deputy Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills and Trinity Long Room Hub's Public Policy Fellow.²

Can Arts Humanities researchers and policymakers speak the same language?

"Frequently, the value that was being ascribed to the culture and the arts was an instrumental value: 'what can it do?' Once you admit the question 'what do you contribute?', it very easily becomes 'what are you worth?'. We just don't answer questions in that way. Nobody says, 'that's a really great poem, it contributed €400,000 to the economy.' "

Professor Christopher Morash (School of English, TCD; co-author, Royal Irish Academy Submission to the 'Culture 2025' Consultation, 2015)
TLRH Arts Humanities Policy Workshop 2

¹ Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Statement of Strategy 2021-2023' (2021). www.gov.ie - Statement of Strategy 2021-2023 (www.gov.ie) Goal 2: Connected Research System, p.10.

² For details of this series see Appendix.

The national strategy echoes European calls for the solid, mission-led integration of university-led researchers with public policy, or as the 2019 LERU (League of European Research Universities) briefing paper on ‘Universities and the Future of Europe’ expresses it, for renewed incentives to ‘use the wealth of expertise available at universities across a broad spectrum of policy-making’.³ It also finds parallels in a range of UK initiatives developed to advance the integration of university research and the policy sector, including the Research England-funded [CAPE](#) (Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement) partnership led by UCL, and the Edinburgh University-based [SKAPE](#) (Centre for Science, Knowledge and Policy at Edinburgh).⁴

Within this context of cross-sectoral collaboration, the specific engagement of Arts and Humanities disciplines is given occasional but encouraging reference. Speaking to the LERU briefing paper, for example, Professor Katrien Maes emphasises that in research responses to policy on issues such as dementia and healthcare, ‘the full breadth of a university comes into play, to look for solutions and the right knowledge we need’, and in this regard ‘the social sciences and humanities have a particularly important role’.⁵ In the UK landscape, too, there has been a similar attentiveness to what the ‘right knowledge’ might be, and to the distinct potential benefits of an Arts Humanities policy relationship. This conversation is evident in a range of seminars and guide publications issued by institutions such as [UPEN](#) (University Policy Engagement Network), the Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN), and [TORCH](#) (The Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities).⁶

Irish Researchers working in the Arts and Humanities, meanwhile, have independently called for further integration with the government and policy sector. The Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA) spearheaded this initiative in its strategic plan for 2020–30, ‘By Imagination We Live’ (issued in late 2019 and developed in the context of funding priorities in Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe). It includes the express intention to ‘promote the centrality of the humanities in addressing the pressing social challenges that face us’.⁷ The IHA manifesto builds on the momentum of a challenge-led discourse within Arts and Humanities departments right across Irish institutions, and speaks to a growing research incentive to dovetail with the priorities of current governmental and legislative discourses. Added weight was given to this strategy document when IHA produced a document which addressed the additional demands on government created by the pandemic in its 2020 statement, ‘The Humanities and Covid-19: a strategic response’, and called for full recognition of the value of humanities disciplines in understanding ‘shared human experience through history, culture and language’, in the response to the crisis.⁸

Prior to the crisis itself, the Trinity Long Room Hub had pioneered the discussion of an Arts Humanities policy interface in the 2019 engagement of its two Public Policy Fellows (Mary Doyle and Rory Montgomery), and in the December 2020 ‘Arts Humanities and Policy Round Table’,

3 Kurt Deketelaere, Katrien Maes and Bart Valkenaers, ‘Universities and the future of Europe’, LERU Briefing paper for the EU institutions (League of European Research Universities, September 2019). [Universities and the future of Europe | LERU](#) p.3.

4 Harnessing expertise from a range of disciplines including the arts and humanities SKAPE critically reflects on the production of knowledge for policy, how it is applied and legitimised and can shape political discourse and practice, <https://www.skape.ed.ac.uk/about/>. CAPE aims to better understand and enhance academic-policy engagement in England and help improve engagement between universities and policymakers <https://www.cape.ac.uk/>.

5 Op cit p.13.

6 Recent events include an online seminar ‘What do UK Policymakers want from the humanities and what can humanities researchers offer?’ (4 June 2021) organised by the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN), the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH), and the Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN). For details see appendix. TORCH have produced an introductory handbook, ‘Humanities and Policy Engagement: An Introduction for Researchers’ (2019), https://torch.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/torch/documents/media/humanities_and_policy_engagement.pdf.

7 ‘By imagination we live’: A strategy for the humanities, 2020–2030 (2020), IHA doc number 4. <https://www.irishhumanities.com/strategy/>

8 ‘The Humanities and Covid-19: A Strategic response’ (May, 2020), p. 2. [IHA-Covid-19-Response-1-May-2020.pdf \(irishhumanities.com\)](#) This impulse builds on a sustained momentum within the Arts and Humanities broadly across Ireland, and defined in several earlier interventions and discussions. See, for instance the articulation of the importance of the Arts and Humanities during the global economic crisis, Ellen Hazelkorn, ‘Making an Impact: New Directions for Arts and Humanities Research’, *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 14 (2015), 25–44.

which led to the development and launch of the institute's policy initiative. When the virus struck, the Hub responded immediately with its [Covid-19 Blog Series](#), dedicated to highlighting the perspectives of Arts Humanities researchers on the public health emergency. Indeed, as the pandemic took full grip on the world in the summer of 2020, it became clear to many academics, and to a wider public, that research into subjects ranging from the historical precedents of infectious disease to the pragmatics of social and virtual communication, would provide valuable resources for a multidisciplinary approach to the impacts of the pandemic. The scale of the crisis and its attendant psychological and societal scars reinforced calls not only for the further integration of academic research and governmental needs, but also for the judicious harnessing of the Arts and Humanities disciplines to the improved management of our society and culture, through reflective, informed, and innovative public policy.

STRUCTURES FOR ENGAGEMENT

The current institutional landscape is open and willing, therefore, to closer policy engagement, but for Arts and Humanities researchers the means to achieve this often remain obscure. The 'gap' is still to be bridged. Mary Doyle, former Deputy Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills and Trinity Long Room Hub Public Policy Fellow, in her keynote document for the RIA/IRC 'Research Public Policy' series, notes 'the specific lack of intermediate structures where expertise (particularly in the Arts and Humanities) has any systematic interaction with other disciplines in developing policy advice.'⁹ This observation leads to Doyle's plea for the full integration of the Arts Humanities and Social Sciences community, backed by the revitalised interdisciplinary skills fostered by initiatives such as the European Commission funded SHAPE-ID project (led by the Trinity Long Room Hub), in the perspectives of government.¹⁰

In addition, Doyle highlights the need for structural reform in individual researcher career pathways, with the introduction of mentoring and incentivisation geared to policy collaboration. She underlines the pressing need for a stronger architecture, based on knowledge management and effective brokerage, across three specific terrains: the research community, the Oireachtas and government departments, and the relevant research funding councils. This directive has been broadly welcomed across relevant audiences, and Doyle's discussion paper marks an important step forward in bringing the relationship between policy and academic research, including Arts and Humanities research, under systematic scrutiny.

Career Structure and Incentivisation

"This is the start of a process. If we are going to take this further, people need to be trained and be familiar with the Irish cultural policy landscape."

Professor Ruth Barton (Head of Creative Arts, TCD; PI on the 'Ecologies of Cultural Production' project, 2018-9)

TLRH Arts Humanities Policy Workshop 2

⁹ Mary Doyle, 'Research for Public Policy and Society: Building a Stronger Architecture for Ireland', p.10. This lack of systematic interaction between expertise (including the arts and humanities) and policy and the importance of developing a framework of action to support alignment of the national research landscape and public policy against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic is also made in Mary Doyle, 'Strengthening the Structures to Support Research for Public Policy in Ireland', Administration, 69:3 (2021), 79-92, p. 85.

¹⁰ Doyle, 'Research for Public Policy and Society', p.15; SHAPE-ID addresses the challenge of improving interdisciplinary cooperation between the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) and STEM (Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and other disciplines: <https://www.shapeid.eu/>

Career Structure and Incentivisation

“There isn’t a quick fast route to a policy outcome. It takes time. It’s only when you take a very long view that you start to see the true impact in real terms, in societal terms, of some of those shorter bursts of decision-making.”

Professor Lorraine Leeson (Professor in Deaf Studies and Associate Dean of Research, TCD)
TLRH Arts Humanities Policy Workshop 1

The aims of the Trinity Long Room Hub’s workshop series, including a practitioner ‘round-table’ and three linked workshops on ideology and practice, were to evaluate the current status of Trinity’s Arts Humanities research and policy engagement, and to speculate on pathways for improved collaboration in the future. The consensus was that Arts Humanities disciplines do have an existing presence within the policy sphere, but that this presence is uneven and sporadic. While the integration of the ‘applied’ humanities (in particular, Law and Education), in the work of informing government processes is well established, the engagement of so-called ‘soft’ disciplines – History, Language, Literature, Philosophy, and the Creative Arts – is often confined to areas such as arts funding and public heritage.

These engagements are nonetheless valuable in providing templates for successful collaboration and in stimulating ideas for future initiatives. It was agreed that researchers in Arts disciplines have huge untapped potential to expand their reach across policy in many areas, with the capacity and expertise to inform policy professionals on culture, community and language; the role of public and archival history; the practices of national commemoration; the identities and protocols of a ‘shared island’; contemporary understandings of the democratic process; the ethical and human aspects of technological development; and the conceptualisation of individual and societal futures.

In the course of the Hub’s three 2021 workshop sessions (‘Understanding the Arts and Humanities Policy Arena’; ‘Embedding the Arts and Humanities in the Policy Arena’, and ‘Communication for Policy Engagement’), the protocols around collaboration with policy-professionals were addressed in more detail.¹¹

¹¹ The contributors to the Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Policy Workshops, chaired by Professor Eve Patten, Director of the Trinity Long Room Hub, comprised of members of the Trinity community with expertise in various aspects of Arts Humanities research and policy making: Workshop 1: ‘National Policy Landscape and the Arts and Humanities Community’: Mary Doyle, Public Policy Fellow, Trinity Long Room Hub and retired senior civil servant; ‘The Importance of the AH Voice’: Professor Lorraine Leeson, Centre for Deaf Studies and Trinity College Dublin Associate Dean of Research. Workshop 2: ‘Research-Policy Interface: Professor Christopher Morash, School of English, Trinity College Dublin; ‘Analysis of Arts Policy’, Dr Ruth Barton, Film Studies, Trinity College Dublin. Policy Workshop 3: ‘TCD Research Policy Environment: Sarah Bowman, Director of Strategic Engagement and Impact Assessment, Office of the Dean of Research Trinity College Dublin; ‘How to communicate with Policy Makers’: Dr Kate Smyth, Trinity Research and Innovation, Consultancy Development AHSS, Trinity College Dublin; ‘How to write an AH Policy Brief: Dr Doireann Wallace, Project Manager, SHAPE-ID, Trinity Long Room Hub.

What do you want to achieve?

“The first thing I always do is just get in and fundamentally understand the policy landscape and then decide: is this project around informing policy or setting research priorities that respond to policy? Are we going to be implementing a strategic priority that’s already set forth? Or, are we looking to monitor or to evaluate? As researchers think about what they hope to achieve, an early consideration should be the policy landscape relevant to their efforts and the research-policy interface they are seeking to advance.”

Sarah Bowman (Director of Strategic Engagement and Impact Assessment, TCD)
TLRH Arts Humanities Policy Workshop 3

Collaborative Design

“...involve stakeholders from the very beginning. Design research activity in conjunction with the stakeholders you would like to reach. Bring them out of their comfort zone and make them appreciate what we do.”

Dr Balazs Apor (Director of Trinity Centre for Resistance Studies, TCD)
TLRH Arts Humanities Policy Roundtable

KEY LEARNINGS

1. **The relationship between the academic researcher and the policy-maker takes a long time to establish** and this level of sustained commitment must be recognised on both sides (one experienced contributor gave the example of a successful engagement developed over a ten-year period). While Arts Humanities researchers have often contributed to policy on an adjunct or *ad hoc* basis, it was agreed that **the most effective collaborations are generated in tandem with the policy-maker**, from a strong, shared, initial research/policy challenge, set, for example, in a government-defined ARI (Area of Research Interest).
2. **Academic researchers interested in the policy sphere require more systematic training** in the complex departmental structures, protocols and cycles of government, and in the communication systems of briefing and advocacy.
3. **Policy-aligned academic research does not inevitably produce visible results**: there is a need to accept that briefing material will not always be used, or indeed, useful, at the roll-out stage. This has implications for academic research evaluation and impact expectations, and for a researcher's career profile.

IMPEDIMENTS TO BE ADDRESSED

In the course of the workshop discussions, several connected impediments were considered in relation to the development of closer Arts Humanities policy engagement:

1. **Arts Humanities researchers may be put off by the perception of the policy-sphere as driven by quantitative and statistical methodologies**, at odds with the commitment of the Arts disciplines to nuanced, abstract or qualitative interpretations.
2. **Researchers may be concerned about developing a relationship with the policy sphere that becomes overly utilitarian, imaginatively restrictive, politically compromising, or in some way reductive of their input**. This anxiety coincides with apprehension about the strategic 'cherry-picking' of disciplinary areas seen as relevant to current challenges (such as the harnessing of ethics, for example, within policy on data privacy), and the neglect of other important frameworks of academic reference.
3. A major emphasis across the discussions was **the perception of a 'language-barrier' between academic and governmental discourses**.
4. **Arts Humanities researchers currently lack visible examples of successful collaboration**, particularly at its formative stage, and have little experience of government departmental practice. In turn, **policy professionals may fail to appreciate the values, methodologies and schedules of academic culture in Arts Humanities research**.
5. **There are at present, limited funding resources or initiatives dedicated to Arts Humanities policy collaboration** within national and European higher educational research funding systems (though it was agreed that certain new schemes launched by various funding councils have begun to address this deficit).

1. Support Arts Humanities interest in developing partnerships with policy-makers

The overwhelming consensus resulting from the Trinity Long Room Hub policy initiative workshops is that despite certain conceptual hesitations, **Arts Humanities researchers are keen to expand and refine their engagement with policy professionals, and willing to be more systematically inducted into the processes of policy making**, ideally through early-career mentorship or internship arrangements. Policy collaboration is seen as a valid academic challenge in itself, and one that should be properly supported, evaluated and rewarded in the university career structure. Ideally, engagement should be understood as a two-way relationship between researchers and policy-makers, built across a sustained period of time, and in relation to specific challenges from initial concept stage onwards.

2. Develop a national Arts Humanities Policy Roadmap

While further templates for successful collaboration are urgently required, the rewards and benefits are already in evidence, and the virtues of public service in this regard are fully recognised by an Arts Humanities academic community throughout the island. **Interested parties from both academia and government now require a joint road-map, detailed on the workings of policy professionals and carefully aligned with the capacity of Arts and Humanities researchers**, for the future development of imaginative and innovative collaborations on social and cultural policy. A framework of this kind, underpinned by public investment, will help us move further across the bridge to successful policy engagement.

3. Foster a public expectation that *all* relevant research disciplines, including the Arts and Humanities, have a bearing on the shaping and understanding of governmental philosophy, policy and practice

This final point is key to closing the ‘gap’ with which this paper began. In addition to the structural revision required within academia, government, and funding systems, a conceptual revision is needed, specifically, in terms of the *public* investment in policy formulation and implementation. This apprehension builds on the longer-term commitment of the Trinity Long Room Hub and its wider community to the work of the public humanities, which extend the insights of Arts and Humanities research to a national and international audience.¹² In respect of this endeavour, several contributors to the Trinity Long Room Hub policy initiative agreed that the voice of an Arts Humanities research cohort should be embedded as **a public expectation** (rather than simply an occasional option) in the strategic thinking of government departments.

¹² The Trinity Long Room Hub’s discussion series Behind the Headlines, which has run for the past six years, assembles panels of experts, informed by the long-term perspectives of Arts & Humanities research, to address current issues of public interest. Podcasts of previous discussions can be accessed here: <https://www.tcd.ie/trinitylongroomhub/whats-on/details/behind-the-headlines.php>

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Statement of Strategy 2021-2023, referenced earlier in this paper, describes its own context as one shaped by ‘the importance of a public stimulated and informed by independent voices across a range of disciplines, critical thinkers, engaged with science and research, and equipped to debate and evaluate issues that will increasingly arise with new knowledge, societal change, and technological advance.’¹³ **This discerning statement lends itself to the voluble endorsement of an Arts Humanities role, not only in informing policy professionals, but in the vital communication and interpretation of policy-related themes, materials and outcomes to the wider public.** In the advancement of structural supports for academic policy engagement therefore, the support of the communities subject to such policy must also be factored in. In bridging the gap, we must help foster a public expectation that all relevant research disciplines, including the Arts and Humanities, have a bearing on the shaping and understanding of governmental philosophy, policy and practice.

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Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute 2021

Arts and Humanities Leadership

“Arts and Humanities researchers have the opportunity to be real leaders in this space. We have the skill and capacity in facilitating genuine citizen science participation in a way that goes beyond mere consultation just for the sake of it.”

Dr Niamh Nic Ghabhann, (UL) Chair, Irish Humanities Alliance
TLRH Arts Humanities Policy Roundtable

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¹³ ‘Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Statement of Strategy 2021-2023’ (2021), p. 8.

This paper and the series on which it emerged from was informed by the work of the Arts Humanities Policy Initiative team at the Trinity Long Room Hub: Aoife King, Caitriona Curtis, Caoimhe Whelan, Doireann Wallace, Elaine Pereira Farrell, Elspeth Payne, Eve Patten, Francesca O’Rafferty, Giovanna De Moura Lima, Jennifer Edmond, Mary Doyle, Maureen Burgess, Michelle Doran, Rory Montgomery.

APPENDIX

RIA and IRC webinar series ‘Research for Public Policy’, 2021

The Royal Irish Academy (RIA) and Irish Research Council (IRC) Seminar Series comprised of three seminars on the topic of research for public policy:

- (i) ‘Research for Public Policy: Opportunities for Ireland’
- (ii) ‘Research for Public Policy: Developing the Architecture for Dialogue’
- (iii) ‘Research for Public Policy: The Vital Role of Leadership to Make It Happen’.

All three seminars can be viewed on the RIA’s youtube channel [here](#).

This series is built around the discussion paper on the background and context of this topic by Mary Doyle (Public Policy Fellow, Trinity Long Room Hub), ‘Research for Public Policy and Society: Building a Stronger Architecture for Ireland’ https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/research_for_public_policy_and_society-_m.doyle_.pdf

Another discussion paper emerging from the series by lead authors Mary Doyle, Sinéad Riordan and Daniel Carey, ‘Research for Public Policy: An outline Roadmap’ was published in September 2021 <https://www.ria.ie/news/policy-and-international-relations-research-public-policy/launch-research-public-policy-roadmap>

TORCH | The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities

Professor Joshua Hordern (Associate Professor of Christian Ethics, Faculty of Theology and Religion, Harris Manchester College) shares his thoughts on ‘Humanities and Policy’ addressing what makes for good partnerships and effective policy impact.

This recording 21 October 2020 (6:24) is available to view on the TORCH website: <https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/article/prof-joshua-hordern-humanities-and-policy>

A joint seminar (4 June 2021) by the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) and The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH) and the Oxford Policy Engagement Network (OPEN)

‘What do UK Policymakers want from the humanities and what can humanities researchers offer?’ This seminar brought together UK policymakers from parliament and central government to explore questions about how UK policymakers engage with humanities research and researchers and the relevance of the humanities as well as efforts and opportunities to strengthen engagement between policymakers and humanities researchers.

The seminar is available to view on the TORCH YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/gTLXPiLVWU?feature=oembed>