

Measuring the Societal Impacts of Universities' Research into Arts and Humanities: National Perspectives and International Comparisons

A Symposium Proposal for the
Society for Research into Higher Education
Wales, 7 – 9 December 2011

Submitted by

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Introduction

The purpose of this session is to advance our understanding of the benefits and impacts – both socially and economically – of Arts and Humanities Research. In this European collaborative research project, individual national (Ireland, the Netherlands, and Norway) studies were conducted with academics, policy makers and members of civic society. Comparison of national data was carried out helping advance international understanding the area of arts and humanities research and the benefits of such research to society.

Objective of the session

There are huge pressures in the context of the knowledge economy for research, researchers, and research institutions to create societal added value, and also equally importantly, to visibly demonstrate that added value. This is a problem for Arts and Humanities Research and those who study it. Despite agreement that arts and humanities research contributes to society, the value concerns more than economic values and numbers of graduates. It encompasses democratic strength, happiness and well-being, self expression and cultural struggle. Attempts to enumerate and capture that value in anything more than the broadest terms have failed, with the result that whilst physical, biological and social sciences can demonstrate substantial societal added value, arts and humanities research seems unsubstantial, or worse—a poor return on public investment.

This session explores national and cross-national debates and understandings of what defines arts and humanities research and the benefits and values this research. Each panellist will present their findings from their national research with researchers, policy-makers, and civil society stakeholders in Ireland, Norway, and the Netherlands.

Questions guiding this research include:

- 1) How is arts and humanities research valued by key stakeholders?
- 2) Why the failure to agree on how arts and humanities research should be valued?
- 3) What other interactions, networks and governance systems have shaped the context by which arts and humanities research is valued?
- 4) What methodologies are suitable for addressing the conceptual and policy impasses which have so far hindered reasonable attempts to value arts and humanities research?
- 5) What kinds of performance measures effectively encapsulate the benefits of universities' humanities work for a range of societal stakeholders?

Significance of the topic

The assessment of university-based research has become integral to the higher education research environment, linked to its key role as part of the national innovation system and public demand for greater transparency and accountability and in the current economic climate, for return on investment. Thus, university-based research is considered not simply as a driver of economic growth but a vital part of the knowledge triangle (European Commission, 2005).

In response, questions are being asked about the contribution that publicly-funded research makes to society and the economy, and its purpose. Traditionally assessment has focused primarily on input and output factors; for example, on research expenditure or investment by the state or institution, or on the number of peer reviewed publications. However, public and political interest has shifted increasingly to outcomes, and impact and benefits. Insofar as impact has been assessed, the focus has been on commercialization of intellectual property, e.g. patents and licensing agreements, and more recently on high performance start up companies and employability. This has included using econometric or economics surplus methodologies for measuring cost-benefit analysis (Boyle, 2002). This focus is not surprising given the fact that scientific and technological research has most often been associated with research, development, and innovation. Yet, the concept of impact and benefits is broader than commercialization suggests. Research assessment processes and methodologies have lagged behind these developments.

Assessment processes have struggled with developing appropriate indicators for arts and humanities research, for several reasons: 1) research in the arts and humanities is poorly understood even by the academic community, 2) the arts and humanities produce a wide range of outputs, e.g. monographs, translations, major art works, compositions, and media products, which are not easily captured in bibliometric and citation data collection, 3) new research fields and methodologies, including practice-based methodologies can be complicated to measure, 4) societal impact and benefits of the arts and humanities is not easily comparable to commercialization-type indicators.

Session Moderator

Dr. Elaine Ward

Elaine Ward is an Arnold F. Graves Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Dublin Institute of Technology's Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU). Elaine is coordinator of the Irish HERAVLAUE research project. In this role, Elaine conducts national and international level research related to current understandings of arts and humanities research, designs the qualitative study for Irish academics, policy makers, and members of civil society. Elaine is a Visiting Fellow at the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE), examining the institutionalization of community engagement through a study of colleges and universities that received the Carnegie Foundation for Teaching's Community Engagement Classification.

The Background of the Presenters

Professor Ellen Hazelkorn

Professor Hazelkorn is the vice-president of Research and Enterprise and Dean of the Graduate Research School at Dublin Institute of Technology. She is also head of the Higher Education Policy Research Unit. Ellen is the Project Lead for the Ireland HERAVALUE project. She is a Consultant to the OECD Programme on Institutional Management of Higher Education (IMHE), and is also associated with the International Association of Universities (IAU). Professor Hazelkorn is Rapporteur for the EU Expert Group on Assessment of University-based Research, and a member of National Digital Research Centre (NDRC) Management Board, the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Foresight Working Group [Ireland], and the International Advisory Council of the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Dr. Paul Benneworth

Dr. Paul Benneworth is a Senior Researcher at the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente, Netherlands and is the Principal Investigator for the HERAVALUE project. Prior to this he worked in several research posts at the University of Newcastle in the United Kingdom, from 2005-2009 as a RCUK Academic Fellow in Territorial Governance of Innovation at the University of Newcastle's Institute of Policy and Practice. Paul's research interests focused on the territorial governance of innovation, and in particular the roles played by universities in those networks. He was one of the co-authors of the IMHE Report *Higher education and regions: globally competitive, regionally engaged*, and in the UK *The regional contribution of higher education*. He is currently working with the PASCAL Observatory on developing a benchmarking tool to gauge the regional impacts of higher education.

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