

NEW HORIZONS IN THE HUMANITIES



IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
An Chomhairle um Thalghde In Éirinn



**REPORT OF THE IRISH
HUMANITIES
ALLIANCE**



The horizon for the humanities

The Irish Humanities Alliance held a one-day event on **New Horizons in the Humanities** on 30 January in the Royal Irish Academy. The purpose of the day, which was generously sponsored by the Irish Research Council and the Royal Irish Academy, was to introduce humanities researchers to the structures and resources that exist for Horizon 2020 and to encourage increased numbers of applications for European funding. This report identifies objectives and actions that follow on from this event, taking into account the strategic importance of EU funding and the increasing influence of EU research developments on national research policy and funding.

Engaging with Horizon 2020

The meeting took place following intensive engagement in the humanities and social sciences communities in preparation for Horizon 2020 and it very usefully pinpointed areas where action will be needed in the coming year both to maximize opportunities for humanities research in national and European research programmes, and to embed humanities research questions across the range of the Societal Challenges pillar of Horizon 2020. Key presentations which were delivered focused on the important role played by existing bodies in shaping work programmes from a humanities perspective, including ALLEA, which is the federation of All European Academies, HERA and Net4Society. Members of the IHA are active in several of these bodies. In parallel with these developments, the event highlighted the need to continue the valuable work done to date in planning and coordinating research supports in both jurisdictions. The IHA will work actively with the relevant agencies, including networks of national contact points North and South, to achieve this end.

Mobilizing the humanities community

This was the first such meeting held by the Alliance and the very large attendance testified to the unparalleled mobilization of the humanities community in responding to the opportunities presented by Horizon 2020. The event parallels important recent developments on a Europe-wide basis, including the Lithuanian EU Presidency conference which led to the adoption of the Vilnius Declaration. One of the key conclusions to emerge from the day's

work was the need to provide outlets for research questions which give the fullest possible scope to the expertise of humanities researchers. From this base, the relevant stakeholders — universities and other research institutions, NCPs, policymakers and funders — can all seek to support researchers in responding to opportunities where there is a call to integrate humanities research into transdisciplinary initiatives. The IHA aims to develop the capacity to engage with funders and policymakers on an informed basis to achieve this end.

An agenda: Horizon 2020 and beyond

The day's programme was in three parts, dealing respectively with support for the humanities research as such in Horizon 2020 at national, all-island and European levels; the embedding of the humanities across the full range of societal challenges (using health as an example); and case studies of successful applications. In discussion, the point was repeatedly made that a critical condition of success is effective long-term planning. It is important also to identify key stakeholders for transdisciplinary work, including specialized funders, and to ensure that they are duly briefed on research directions and priorities in the humanities.

Several speakers highlighted the need to maintain the primacy of principal investigator formation and competence as the key basis for the involvement of the humanities in transdisciplinary project design; otherwise, the contribution of the humanities will be unduly diluted. The IHA will aim to enable effective communication between disciplines, for instance, through other workshops like this, to facilitate principal investigators in understanding each other's research questions. The Alliance also aims to build bridges between academic communities and funders, as well as to support researchers in their engagements with national contact points, especially in the expanded sphere of activity that Horizon 2020 represents.

A transdisciplinary engagement

The Alliance is committed to continuing to provide strategic support to the humanities community in its engagement with Horizon 2020 and in particular to meeting the challenges which this programme presents for researchers in Irish institutions. It will also work with strategic partners to ensure that the humanities agenda continues to exert an active influence in the future development of work programmes. In support of developing transdisciplinary capacity, the IHA will engage with SFI and other agencies on behalf of the humanities community. The Alliance will also lobby the Commission to expand the scope and funding of

those elements of Horizon 2020 which are directly dedicated to social sciences and humanities research, which support innovative work; and which support international benchmarking. The Alliance will work with member institutions to develop a capacity to demonstrate the scope and impact of research supported by Horizon 2020 in social, economic and cultural terms. The Alliance supports ALLEA's bid for a flagship transdisciplinary project in 2016. In the meantime, the Alliance will undertake a number of practical actions, including meetings with NCPs at national and all-island levels, with a view to identifying ways in which humanities research can be more widely embedded in Horizon 2020. The Alliance will develop consultative structures to feed into the development of future work programmes, both in those concerned directly with the humanities and in other Societal Challenges.

A long-term approach

Horizon 2020 presents challenges as well as opportunities. The humanities community is committed to contributing to the achievement to the ambitious national targets that have been set for Horizon 2020. At the same time, it will continue to press for national levels of funding which will allow researchers to continue to develop their research questions. The Alliance will also continue to press for funding instruments on a scale that is appropriate to PI-led humanities research. We hope also to learn critical lessons from successful European humanities research systems and to bring these to bear on initiatives in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Attendance on the day

The attendance at this event included researchers from all the universities, but also from funding bodies and stakeholders, which highlights the inclusive nature of the event and the efforts of the humanities community to engage with others on the issues of transdisciplinarity. This commitment on the part of the Alliance will be maintained in future events. The event was organized by the Communication and Outreach working group of the Alliance, led by Professor John Thompson (QUB) and Dr Aoibhín de Burca (IHA). The presenters have kindly agreed to share their slides, which are may be accessed and downloaded from the Alliance's LinkedIn page (<http://tinyurl.com/q6p8q89>).