



Open Letter from the Irish Association of Professional Historians to Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, in response to the General Scheme of Research and Innovation Bill, 2023

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Dear Minister Harris,

The Irish Association of Professional Historians welcomes renewed interest and attention being given to the funding of third level research within the country. Founded in 2013, the IAPH draws together scholars from a wide range of historical fields and practices. It currently has over 150 registered members, representing a wide variety of interests, research activities, and career stages. Historians have always played a critical role in shaping the present and the future by analysing the past. As such, they understand the importance of research and innovation in driving progress and development. The Research and Innovation Bill 2023 is a crucial piece of legislation that seeks to support and advance research and innovation in various fields, including the Humanities. As historians, we recognize the significant impact that this bill can have on the advancement of historical research and scholarship, and the potential it holds for shaping the future of our discipline.

That being said, we hold significant concerns about the upcoming Research and Innovation Bill which merges funding bodies for the Sciences and the Humanities. Here we will outline some of our most pressing concerns.

1. **Funding Equity:** The Irish Research Council and Science Foundation Ireland have, historically, been separate bodies. This split has helped to ringfence and protect Humanities funding, meagre though it often is, from being funnelled towards the sciences. In practical terms, we wish to see a clear and explicit enshrinement of how funding will be directed towards both disciplines. Failure to do so, regardless of how pure intentions may be, poses a real and significant threat to how we fund Humanities and the Arts.

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2. **Defining Research and Innovation:** Stemming from the first point, the lack of clarity concerning research and innovation is worrying. Neither the bill, nor the Minister, have provided clear definitions of terms which are the bedrock of the soon to be created institution's identity. What, we ask, does Innovation mean? The Irish Humanities Alliance have already, and rightly, critiqued the lack of clarity around the term Research. We are equally concerned about how innovation will be deployed within future funding schemes. Will innovation represent changes to established, academic literature or is it conceptualised solely in myopic and neo-liberal terms relating to ever increasing growth? Or something else entirely?

Innovation is defined Head 3 as 'the development and use of new ideas, methods, products, processes, policies and services where they have not been used before.' This interpretation, focused on processes, products and services, does a disservice to the critical thinking and longer-term impact that often defines Humanities work, and the work of historians.

The General Scheme places a heavy emphasis on the commercialization of research, which can limit the potential of Humanities research to have a wider impact on society. Humanities research can lead to social, cultural, and political transformations that may not have immediate commercial value but are essential for creating a more just and equitable society.

3. **Limited Recognition of Interdisciplinary Research:** The General Scheme of Research and Innovation Bill 2023 does not adequately recognize the value of interdisciplinary research that bridges the Humanities with STEM fields and other disciplines. Many of the pressing challenges facing society, such as climate change, healthcare disparities, and social inequality, require interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate insights from the Humanities. At present interdisciplinary is mentioned once within the document (and defined in Head 3 as 'a mode of research which combines the knowledge and methods of different disciplines.'). We seek clarification on what this means substantively. We also seek clarity on whether separate sources of funding will

be highlighted for interdisciplinary work or assurances that funding for the Humanities will not be subsumed for work solely crossing over with Science.

4. **Lack of Consideration for Social and Cultural Impact:** The General Scheme of Research and Innovation Bill 2023 does not sufficiently consider the social and cultural impact of research and innovation. The Humanities play a crucial role in understanding societal dynamics, cultural heritage, and human behaviour, and can contribute to the development of policies and strategies that address social, cultural, and ethical implications of technological advancements.
5. **Inadequate Support for Early-career Researchers:** The General Scheme of Research and Innovation Bill 2023 does not provide sufficient support for early-career researchers in the Humanities. Early-career researchers are the future of research and innovation in the Humanities and need adequate support to develop their skills and contribute to the advancement of knowledge. As historians, we are keenly aware of the paucity of funding for research across all career stages. At present the IRC offers two main funding pots – Government of Ireland postgraduate and postdoctoral schemes. We would welcome more clarity on the funding to be offered to academics beyond a narrowly defined post-doc. Mid-career academics, meanwhile, have been limited to Starting Laureate awards that do not run annually on the same basis and we seek further clarity on funding opportunities for mid-career scholars in the Humanities.
6. **Diversity and Inclusion:** The General Scheme of Research and Innovation Bill 2023 does not do enough to promote diversity and inclusion in research and innovation. Neglecting the Humanities can have a disproportionate impact on underrepresented groups, including women, people of colour, and people with disabilities, who are often underrepresented in Irish academia. It is worrying that an 80page document mentions diversity just twice. Combined with a lack of clarity around how elections to this Body will take place, we lack confidence that the Body’s commitment to diversity and inclusion will be meaningful.

7. Academic Freedom: While Impact 2030 does address academic freedom, the term, and its underlining philosophy, is worryingly absent here. Academic freedom is a foundational principle of academic work. This is especially important when it comes to funding bids which are often proposed with reference to specific outcomes. While the IRC has traditionally been a champion of academic freedom, the new arrangement may potentially destabilize that freedom. Put simply, without a formal enshrinement we are worried that funding will be directed to targeted calls, rather than open ended research programmes which encourage and protect academic freedoms.

The Humanities provide meaning and contexts for the way societies view the world. This was made starkly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when the absence of Arts and Humanities, and the rise of bad actors, highlighted the importance of narrative and critical thinking. STEM disciplines save lives, but the Humanities sustain them. In short, we are concerned that the Minister and the Department have adopted a too narrow, too rigid, and too opaque view of this body. This can represent a new dawn for Irish academia, which has long been beset with inadequate funding and archaic thinking, or it can be a further push towards a grey world where critical thinking is marginalised in favour of products, efficiencies, and vague but powerful ideas about innovation.

The committee of the Irish Association of Professional Historians requests an opportunity to meet with the Minister to discuss the issues outlined above on behalf of the membership of the Association.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Hughes', enclosed in a white rectangular box.

Dr Brian Hughes, Director

On behalf of the Committee of the Irish Association of Professional Historians