Editor's Introduction

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The term "Humanities" originates in the Renaissance period, where it referred to the study of society and culture, and had a special focus on producing a system of education that would elevate and enhance the quality of life for all. By studying cultural texts, Humanities scholars derived insights into the values and anxieties of societies; by engaging with heritage they enabled societies to understand, preserve and sometimes challenge inherited ideas and traditions; by drawing on this knowledge they articulated an exciting new vision for society and informed public policies and political institutions. Reflecting on the goals of a Humanities education, Jonathon Dollimore states that it produces: "a society of people educated for full and intelligent participation in a modern democracy which help(s) us develop a richer understanding of human life" (2004, 26). In their wide-reaching report on the impact of the Humanities on contemporary society, Holm et al draw the following conclusions. The Humanities enhance our ability to articulate ideas, thus easing communication both within and between societies. By equipping us to understand different viewpoints, they make citizens more tolerant of each other. This increased tolerance and understanding leads to social cohesion and facilitates better decision-making, especially on the complex ethical issues that confront society as a whole. Critical thinking is a core value of the Humanities, encouraging the constant questioning of traditions and hegemonies, and the pursuit of innovative, new models of thought and practice. Holm et al argue that the growth of new technologies in areas such as science and communication mean that societies now face immensely complex ethical decisions that Humanities researchers are best placed to advise on, and that in many societies, Humanities researchers are being enlisted to inform public policy directly (Holm et al, 2015, 12-19).

In an address on "Horizons for Social Sciences and Humanities", Máire Geoghan-Quinn, European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, suggests an increased awareness of the social benefits of the Humanities:

> "Europe is still facing many long term and complex challenges. It takes profound knowledge and insight to really understand these challenges and how they affect us, and to guide us to solutions. That is why the Social Sciences and Humanities are more essential than ever, and why we, as policymakers, are keen to have their contribution. We need them to understand ourselves, our society and the challenges we face. We need them to guide politicians and policy makers and to inform public opinion. Research and technology provide many answers to the challenges we face, but technological fixes alone aren't enough to solve our major, complex problems. A knowledge society needs to know itself, and the social sciences and humanities are the keys to this" (2013).

That Humanities graduates are increasingly sought after by employers is also articulated in several recent reports, which emphasize the skills now relevant in the contemporary workplace including: "how to scan large bodies of text and information to detect patterns; how to use language to persuade; how to evaluate and construct arguments" (Holm et al, 2015, 26). Tony Donoghue, head of education and social policy at employers' group Ibec, states that arts, humanities and social science degrees are valued by employers because they: "Develop critical thinking, analytical, logic and presentation skills, and communication" (McGuire, 2016). American billionaire Mark Cuban echoes this in a recent interview on the rapidly evolving workplace "(T)here's going to be a greater demand in 10 years for liberal arts majors than there were for programming majors and maybe even engineering, because when the data is all being spit out for you, options are being spit out for you, you need a

different perspective in order to have a different view of the data…. someone who is more of a free thinker" (Jackson, 2017).

The essays included in this volume reflect the variety, depth and rigour of research carried out over the course of the past year in the Department of Humanities. They also reflect the cross-disciplinary education of the researchers. English, History, Archaeology, Politics, Social Science and Education all have their own distinct priorities, methodologies and even language, but they combine together to deepen our understanding of human society and to challenge inherited assumptions and traditions. Many of the essays focus on specific writers, texts or heritage sites, and yet the emphasis throughout is on the universal insights that can be derived into wider social and political contexts. The use of language as a means of both control and resistance is a key theme, with clear connections evident between 19th century critiques of patriarchal and racist language as a means of marginalizing dissenting voices, and the ongoing tendency of contemporary newspapers to employ lazy, out-dated terms to describe non-Western ethnic and religious groups. The synergy between past and present is also evident in the use by several researchers of developing digital resources to better record and analyze historical documents and archaeological artefacts. Above all, the idea of research as a form of active citizenship is apparent: the essays interrogate social policies, ideologies and institutions, and insist that they be held accountable for failing to protect and enhance the lives of their subjects. Education emerges as a key weapon in the fight for a better world, with several of the essays focusing on groups who for a variety of reasons ranging from their gender, to their race, religion, social background or age, have not been afforded the dignity of being able to express their viewpoints. Without education, it is clear, there can be no citizenship.

This has been a challenging year for the Department of Humanities. The ongoing dearth of investment in Higher Education has taken its toll on the resources available to staff and students. Efforts to break up the Department and suggest that its various courses are but arbitrarily grouped together has caused considerable distress among lecturing staff and students, and has perhaps indicated a fundamental lack of understanding of the nature of the Humanities and the interdisciplinarity that is at its core. It is our hope that the publication of this Journal, which we intend to make an annual event, will highlight the exciting research being conducted by staff and students within the department, celebrate the links that exist between our various specialisms and encourage an Institute-wide conversation on the contribution the Humanities can continue to make to the culture, values and future development of DkIT.

References

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