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The IHA welcomes President Michael D.
Higgins's speech at the launch of the *Cambridge
History of Ireland*

1 May 2018

Irish Humanities Alliance



President Higgins's speech

The Irish Humanities Alliance today welcomes the speech made by President Michael D. Higgins at the launch of the four volume *Cambridge History of Ireland* on Monday 30 April. Volume 2, covering 1550-1730, in this ground-breaking series is edited by IHA Board Member Prof. Jane Ohlmeyer TCD. In the speech, President Higgins referenced issues that have been raised by members of the Alliance as fundamentally important to the humanities community, North and South. We welcome, in particular, the President's highlighting of:

- ✦ the attenuation in the status of history, and of the humanities more generally;
- ✦ the problematic use of metrics in the humanities;
- ✦ the challenging funding context; and
- ✦ the precarious labour conditions that face early-career academics.

Speaking in Dublin Castle, the President acknowledged that the humanities have 'borne the brunt of the vicissitudes of new funding models' and described the 3,200-page work as an 'intellectual riposte to those who doubt the vital importance of the study of history in our universities and in our society'. Despite the prominence attached to history in the state's decade of commemorations, there had been 'a diminution in the status of history, and of the humanities more generally, in our universities and in our education system'. History is a kernel to understanding contemporary society 'intrinsic to our shared citizenship' while the absence of historical training will leave 'citizens desperately ill-equipped to confront a world in which information is increasingly disseminated without historical perspective'.



President Michael D. Higgins

Within the universities, the current funding context – in which resources are channelled into areas that are profitable to the universities in the short-term – had, said President Higgins, been fuelled by the abuse of metrics. This was, he said, ‘an ideological fad’ that viewed academic work ‘not as a contribution or an instrument of knowledge but as a conforming bending of the knee to an insufficiently contested neo-utilitarian mediocrity’.

According to President Higgins, early-career academics had been living with the direst consequences of this new model. They are employed on precarious, short-term contracts within higher education. He believed senior academics ‘owe a duty of care and of solidarity to those at the beginning of their academic career – theirs is a cause that requires persistent advocacy within the university’.

The full text of the President’s speech can be found [here](#)

Further information

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