



**IHA Submission
to the DES
Consultation on
Statement of
Strategy 2016-2018**

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The Irish Humanities Alliance welcomes the opportunity to submit to the consultation paper by the Department of Education and Skills: Statement of Strategy 2016-2018.

In this consultation submission we respond to two of the priority areas that pertain to higher education and the humanities, identified by the Government's *Programme for a Partnership Government*: 'Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students' and 'Meeting the skills needs of the future: Languages'. The second section is our response to the five specific questions as laid out in the online consultation.

Priority Areas identified in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*

5. Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students

The humanities support a critical and informed understanding. They make a fundamental social contribution through the education process by inspiring future generations of innovators and citizens. Humanities disciplines are also Ireland's [highest ranked university subjects](#) in world rankings. An urgent task of our time is to counter the increasingly pervasive instrumentalism and homogeneity in society that threatens the very basis of creative thinking. Broad-based education such as that supported by the humanities can help shape and develop the essential qualities that the workforce of the future will require. Through its role in challenging orthodoxy and questioning established values, the humanities encourage a critical sensibility based on imagination and creativity.

The humanities also have economic impact. The economic value of arts, creative activity, humanities and cultural heritage is highly significant in Ireland and forms a key part of our international profile. The creative and cultural industries have been recognised as among the most important growth sectors of the European and global economies. The creative industries, in conjunction with digital technologies, offer a powerful motor of growth to advanced economies. They account for more than 7 per cent of the world's GDP and in OECD countries are growing at a rate of between 5 and 20 per cent annually. Wealth creation is increasingly dependent upon the capacity to create content, or new forms of widely distributed expression, which depend on human capital. The Cultural and Creative Industries in the EU (4.2 per cent GDP of the EU and nearly seven million jobs) proved to be resilient to the crisis with innovative solutions, in no small part due to the humanities' involvement in the process of creativity generation and production. In terms of jobs, the Cultural and Creative Industries employ as many people as the Food and Beverage Service Industry does, and provide work for nearly two-and-a-half times more people than Automotive Manufactures and five times more than the Chemical Industry ([IHA Impact Report, 2015](#)).

The humanities have a very special role in the public imagination in Ireland, and we are well placed to turn this to strategic advantage with our European partners, if we can address the infrastructural impediments to supporting research excellence in the humanities. The reputation of Ireland internationally is deeply connected to the status of its cultural traditions and the arts, and the humanities are fundamental to maintaining those traditions and educating the next generation of artists, writers, dramatists and their new media successors.

Creativity and Culture cannot be separated from education: culture is a critical practice and the emphasis should therefore fall not so much on consumption as on creativity, engagement, interpretation, and debate.

At third level there are specific educational activities that require support, including conservation training programmes, and courses in film production, dance, theatre, crafts, and digital humanities.

8. Meeting the skills needs of the future: Languages

The importance of a national languages strategy for Ireland has long been recognized and has prompted vital collaborative work with the Council of Europe in developing a Language Education Policy Profile. However, the long anticipated National Foreign Languages Strategy was not published by the last government and languages do not appear in the current *Programme for a Partnership Government*. This is despite the explicit reference to the economic importance of languages in [Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025](#).

The learning of languages is clearly important, as various national and international reports have consistently stated. In a globalized world, our capacity to understand and engage with other cultures depends crucially on the kinds of competence which the specialized study of languages is designed to inculcate. For this reason, too, an increasing range of employers and economic sectors, private and public, are seeking graduates with these competences, as the most recent employment monitoring and language research reports in Ireland and Europe show.

Ireland

- A recent survey in the [Morgan McKinley April 2016 Irish Employment Monitor](#) stated “There is a strong and continuing requirement for candidates with language skills including German, Scandinavian languages, French, Dutch, Spanish and Italian”;

- The [National Employer Survey](#) (2015) confirmed that approximately a quarter (25 per cent) of all employers indicated that they had a specific requirement for foreign language proficiency skills in their organisation in Ireland; and
- The Expert Group report [Key Skills for Enterprises to Trade Internationally](#) (2012) investigated the required skills by industry in Ireland to enable enterprises to complete successfully in overseas markets. It found that foreign language capability and cultural awareness are essential for enterprise to compete in an increasingly global marketplace.

EU

- The Special Eurobarometer report [Europeans and their Languages](#) (2012) found that the UK (61%) and Ireland (60%) had the lowest rate of ability to speak a second language;
- The [Languages mean Business](#) (2007) report stated that SMEs and multinationals need languages and cultural knowledge for their business and can increase their sales by 25 per cent if they have it; and
- The [PIMLICO Report: Language Management Strategies and Best Practice in European SMEs](#) (2011) reported the same. In addition, although it acknowledged English was the default language of international business it said more successful companies adopt a multilingual approach to trade, and “knowledge of a number of languages, rather than one or two, can make all the difference between an average performance and an exceptional one, and can provide that vital competitive edge”.

Any national foreign languages strategy must play a key role in delivering sustainability in language learning at all levels, with robust pathways between levels. Above all, the need to advocate for languages on the basis of their intrinsic significance as well as their vital cultural and social roles in globalized societies is a matter of durable strategic importance, and these priorities form the basis of the recommendations made here. The intrinsic significance of languages is underpinned by the necessity of communication, cross-cultural interaction and understanding, humanistic education and, in a European context, the imperatives of participating in the EU in the widest sense.

As recommended by the IHA and One Voice for Languages (2015) in their [Report of the Languages Roundtable on Higher Education](#) there is a clear need for a National Modern Languages Strategy and it should contain the following policy recommendations:

- Each Higher Education Institute (HEI) should have its own Languages Strategy and Policy, which fits with the national modern languages strategy;

- Ireland needs a National Advisory Group on Languages to carry out research and to advise on languages policies. This would be similar to the [Scotland's National Centre for Languages](#);
- Given its complexity, any decision to include the CEFR in the National Languages Strategy should be carefully examined by the National Advisory Group on Languages. This should be done with the assistance of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) to ensure quality assurance, and ideally it should begin with a research pilot project that can then be rolled out nationally;
- Government agencies such as the Central Statistics Office, SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority should be asked to track data specifically relating to language acquisition and language graduate career pathways. This information should be centralised and made publically available, and should inform further policy-making; and
- Any national foreign languages policy needs to begin at primary school level. It is imperative that a third language be compulsory at primary and post primary level, thus sustaining language learning opportunities at all levels, in keeping with Ireland's commitments made to the Council of Europe.

DES Statement of Strategy 2016-2018 Consultation Questions

How well does the Education service meet the needs of children and students?

1 (a) What improvements can be made within existing resources?

The funding profile of higher education has modified very considerably, with revenue from non-EU sources now an increasingly significant proportion of all income. This additional income has provided an important impetus to innovation and programme development in the sector. Funding from the Exchequer has fallen very substantially and, as income from other sources has increased, it has fallen also as a proportion of the budget of higher education institutions. At the same time, income from other sources has not and will not close the funding gap, in the light of the reputational damage done to Irish higher education through lower international rankings. To consolidate and extend the innovations resulting from additional non-Exchequer income, it will be necessary to increase overall funding to higher education, and to aim for improved quality of delivery and for further intensification of income generation from other sources. In brief, one cannot have one without the other.

We welcome the strategic importance given to Initial Teacher Education, and the dedicated funding through which it is being supported. We would urge that the application of such funding be extended to subject areas where specific Teaching Council registration

requirements may apply (e.g. Languages, Music), thus securing continued improvements in graduate outcomes and in delivery at second level.

1 (b) What improvements can be made through new resources?

We would urge that the funding for the humanities and social sciences through the Irish Research Council be increased. The humanities and social sciences constitute a unique strength in European higher education and have the potential further to raise Ireland's international reputation and also to contribute to the achievement of Horizon 2020 targets (witness high success rates in the humanities and social sciences in the European Research Council). We welcome the emphasis placed on the development of talent in [Innovation 2020: Excellence, Talent, Impact](#) and would urge that an early start is made on channelling the funding required to maximize opportunities to develop and retain talent, and also to stimulate innovation. Funding should also be put in place to anticipate the sharp increase in demand for undergraduate education on the basis of demographic growth; there are opportunities here too to stimulate innovation.

2. Comment on work currently being undertaken by the Department in your area of interest and/or expertise. (What are we doing well, what could we do better)?

We would urge that the commitment to fulfilling learners' potential and to social and cultural as well as economic development be reaffirmed. These are areas where the Department of Education and Skills should take a lead on behalf of the Government.

3. Are there opportunities (e.g. new areas of work) which the Department should consider when developing the 2016 - 2018 strategy which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the continuum of education and skills?

We would urge the early publication and implementation of a national strategy for foreign/modern languages (see above).

4. How should success on achieving our strategies be measured

We would argue that the monitoring of skills needs be reformed, especially with a view to strengthening medium-term strategic planning on the basis of advice and expertise from experts in curriculum design and delivery, especially at third level.

5. Comment on any issues relating to the continuum of education and skills, in addition to your particular area of interest and/or expertise

The humanities in Ireland enjoy an excellent international reputation. In all international rankings, disciplines in the humanities enjoy higher ratings than those achieved overall by Irish universities generally. The humanities make a vital contribution to cultural renewal and to social well-being. Research has shown that the humanities are essential to the qualitative understanding of culture; that they underpin the continuous adaptation of our capacity to make sense of the present we inhabit; that they contribute both to individual happiness and

to the happiness of social groups; and that they have a bearing on the health of democracy ([Small, 2013](#)). In a period of rapid social and technological change, Ireland will depend critically on the capacity of our educational system to equip citizens for the complex and changing world in which they will invest their own potential for creativity and understanding, as independent and inquiring adults. In this context also, the humanities have a key role to play in a strategy which aims for whole-system reform: future teaching capacity at primary and secondary levels is developed in higher education institutions. We call also for a strategic commitment to opportunities for life-long learning in the humanities in higher education institutions, including in particular among part-time students who are markedly disadvantaged by current funding arrangements.

For more information on IHA Policy documents and reports:

[IHA Humanities Interim Strategy Report](#) (2015)

[IHA Submission to the 'Culture 2025' Consultation](#) (2015)

[IHA Impact and the Humanities Report](#) (2015)

[Report of the Languages Roundtable on Higher Education](#) (2015)

[IHA Submission to the DES Consultation on a New Statement of Strategy 2015-2017](#) (2014)

The Irish Humanities Alliance

The Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA) was formed in September 2013. It is a joint initiative of humanities researchers within eleven higher education and research institutions, including all of the universities, North and South, Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal Irish Academy.

The Alliance is working to generate public awareness of the importance of humanities teaching and research in higher education and society at large. It is concerned also to inform and shape public policy in both jurisdictions and in the EU. For more information:

<http://www.irishhumanities.com/>

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