**The HERA perspective on impact**

Prof Sean Ryder, Chair of HERA, speaking at the Irish Humanities Alliance ‘Impact in the Humanities’ event 8 June 2015

<https://soundcloud.com/irish-humanities-alliance/sean-ryder?utm_source=soundcloud&utm_campaign=wtshare&utm_medium=Facebook&utm_content=https%3A%2F%2Fsoundcloud.com%2Firish-humanities-alliance%2Fsean-ryder>

**Impact is defined as:**

* relevance to the call
* the extent to which the research outcomes are likely to be of value for non-academic stakeholders and their communities
* the appropriateness of the measures for dissemination and/or exploitation of the project results and the management of intellectual property

Definition is ‘quite broad’

* we bundle in knowledge exchange, knowledge transfer and engagement, with the idea of impact
* we don’t make such fine distinctions as are made in the REF scheme

From the HERA guidance:

*Knowledge exchange and transfer*

*Knowledge exchange and transfer activities are a crucial dimension to any proposed research project. In addition to the networking that takes place among academic partners and broader dissemination activities aimed at wider academic audiences, projects are also expected to develop links with stakeholders outside the academy in order to maximise the societal benefit of the research. For example, collaborations may include the creative, cultural and heritage sectors, broadcasters, museums, galleries, business, industry, the public sector, voluntary, community and charitable organisations, policy makers and practitioners (e.g. in the creative and performing arts). Collaborations should be meaningful for all partners involved and enable joint learning throughout the duration of the project and beyond. Public engagement activities may also be included, where appropriate, to promote a wide understanding of the nature and impact of “uses of the past.”*

* bundling together societal benefit, joint learning, and public engagement
* very deliberately avoided making an explicit call for economic impact, although economic impact could well be one of the impacts foreseen from these projects

**Common impacts reported from HERA projects:**

* Building transnational communities of researchers linked with creative or cultural practitioners or with NGOs or other organisations
* The staging of public exhibitions and collaborations with cultural institutions
* Examples of policy influence including things like copyright law, language policy, etc.
* Performances, media and broadcasting events
* Educational innovations: research does have an impact on our educational practice in universities. That does need to be registered and it often isn’t registered in these kinds of schemes. You can also imagine and sometimes create very important impacts in other areas of education, including second level education or public education broadly
* Industrial links, especially with areas of design, music, fashion, and ICT
* Building and testing collaboration models between academia and industry, academia and the public and so on; that **one of the most interesting outputs, and therefore impacts, from these projects has been the very modelling itself that takes place, people finding different ways of establishing these relationships and making them work in interesting ways**

**Further thoughts on how impact has been used in HERA:**

1. For HERA, we view impact as a subject for exploration and research, not just as a given. In other words I think **one of the most important findings from our projects will be the different range of possibilities for thinking about impact** and what we would hope is development of a complex and therefore extremely useful and true model for impact.
2. The basic assumption that we’ve been working from is that **impact from humanities research is complex and requires sophisticated analysis**
3. The impact statement that the applicants make when they are applying for funding in the first place are mainly statements of ambition and possibility. In other words, they are not going to be used to punish you if you don’t manage to deliver on them at the end. They’re statements of ambition and possibility and major impacts after three years or ten years or after any period of time may prove quite different to the original plans for impact. There may be unforeseen and serendipitous things that happen, and it’s very important that that kind of information is captured.
* don’t have any formal metrics for measuring impact in HERA
* projects report on impact and are advised on impact during their projects
* HERA run workshops to assist researchers in developing their impact plans and also for sharing information among projects when people have good examples of impact.

Overall view in HERA is that impact is not an adequate proxy for value in any simple sense; rather it’s a complex contributor to the value of the research.

Many if not most of the HERA projects saw impact planning very positively, not as an artificial add on, but as a valuable dimension to the overall research cycle, a source of utility (in other words it did have usefulness), a source of affirmation, of new ideas, of inspiration, and the building of new relationships. In other words, there is a very positive view about impacts within the projects.

**Measuring and recording impact requires significant labour**, and that needs to be factored in. One of the messages we’ve been getting from projects is that impact isn’t just something you can add on without some kind of costs in terms of time and personnel.

Finally impact needs to be defined in open and flexible ways and in partnership with researchers and stakeholders.

**Examples of projects from the first round ‘which did take up this challenge of impact in very interesting ways’:**

HERVALUE: Measuring the Societal Impacts of Universities’ Research into Arts and the Humanities <http://heranet.info/heravalue/index>

Took the value of humanities research and impact as its research focus

Case studies from Norway, Ireland and the Netherlands

* Innovative capabilities not simply measurable in economic terms (strong message from this project)
* Looked at impact of philosophy on policy making (Philip Pettit on Republicanism)
* Holocaust and war crime centre in the Netherlands – framework to model analysis of war crimes, which had the impact of causing the Dutch cabinet to resign over Srebrenica

CULTIVATE Copyrighting Creativity: Creative Values, Cultural Heritage Institutions and Systems of Intellectual Property <http://heranet.info/cultivate/index>

* Led to radical change in music rights policy in Iceland
* Policymakers are often reading the outcome of HERA research

PhotoCLEC Photographs, Colonial Legacy and Museums in Contemporary European Culture <http://heranet.info/photoclec/index>

* Demonstrated that their website had 18,000 users
* Although the challenge then is to track exactly what that means in terms of particular usages and actual usage – what do people do when they go to the website and use it
* Staged exhibitions in 3 major international museums – strong and measurable impact

Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice (ELMCIP) <http://heranet.info/elmcip/index>

* Integrate and enable new digital performances as a direct result of the project

Creativity and Craft Production in Middle and Late Bronze Age Europe (CinBA) <http://heranet.info/cinba/index>

* Craft production as sources of inspiration for contemporary artists
* Traces of textiles from prehistoric mine – reconstructed cloth by craft workers – then archaeologists used that cloth to test strength
* Other findings used as inspiration for product lines, e.g. jewellery
* Relationships were established at the very beginning of the project, and evolved, and the relationships became very productive because the researchers as well as the other stakeholders had been involved from the very start.