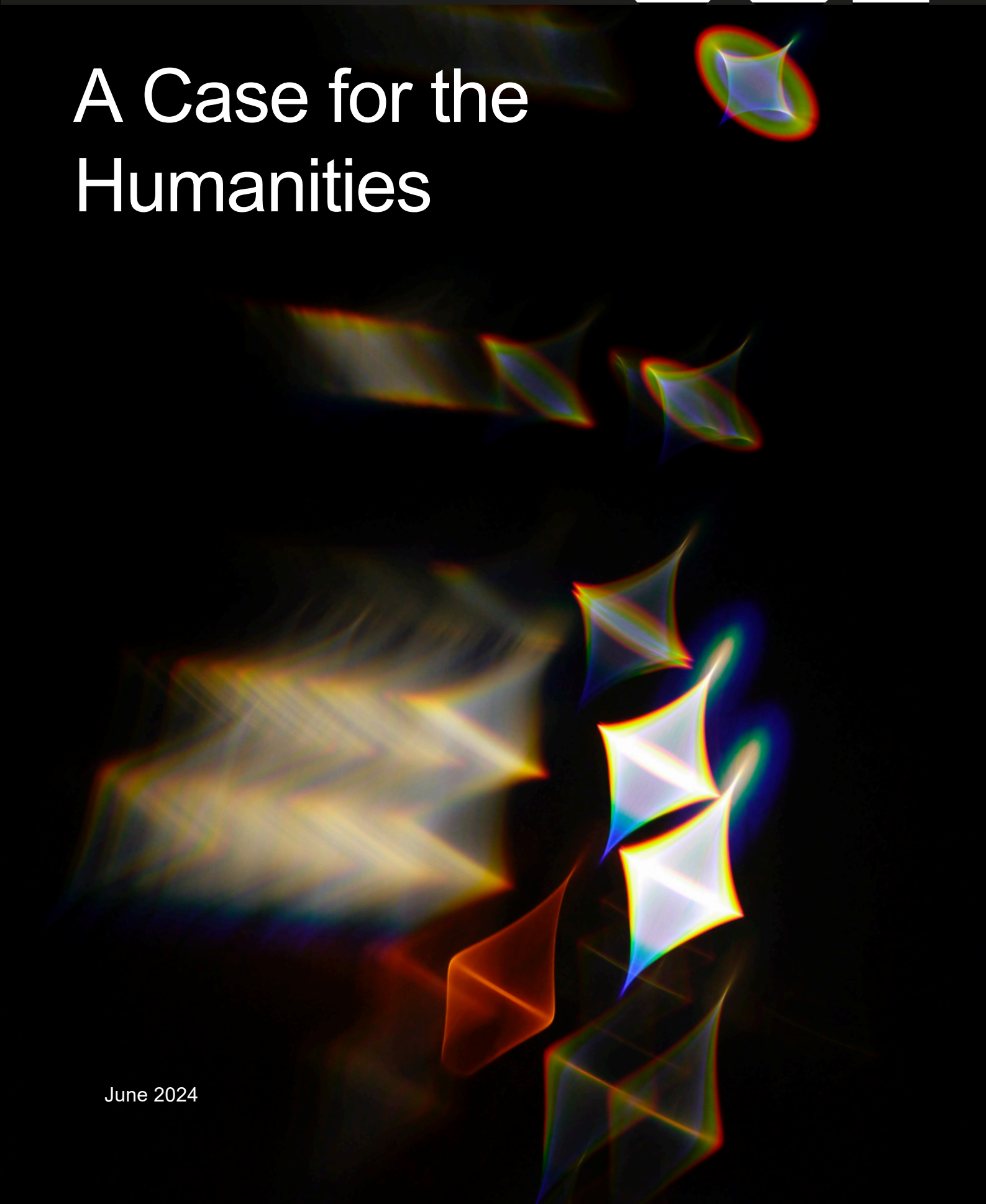
OFFICE OF THE VICE-PROVOST (RESEARCH,
INNOVATION & GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT)
INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

UCL

A Case for the Humanities



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"As this timely, insightful and erudite enquiry states, despite having been amongst the founding disciplines and priorities of all comprehensive universities, the Humanities are now more threatened than ever, as successive governments have, for unfathomably blinkered reasons, lost sight of why we need the Humanities.

This makes no sense. The Humanities open our minds, teach us how to think, how to formulate an argument, how to interpret, how to feel, how to be. They encapsulate the essence of what it is to be human. Society needs the Humanities, so defining and determining their collective worth needs to be a collective endeavour. Our graduates are amongst the most employable, the most versatile and the most socially aware.

For sure, we don't 'need' them in the way we might 'need' a doctor when we're ill; but, as King Lear railed:

> *'O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars*
>
> *Are in the poorest things superfluous.*
>
> *Allow not nature more than nature needs,*
>
> *Man's life's as cheap as beast's …'*

Humans would be no different to animals if they existed on nothing more than life's necessities, the abject Lear argues. The irony being, of course, that we need the Humanities to understand this.

The word 'university' derives from 'universitas': the Latin for the whole, the sum of all things. We need to hold firm to our origins and embrace all disciplines, not lose those that, as this enquiry concludes, help us to make sense of ourselves and the complexities of our world, our universe." **Professor Stella Bruzzi, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, UCL**

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GRAND CHALLENGES

Introduction

The Humanities explore fundamental questions about what it is to be human. Their remit is as simple and as vast as the human, and just as contested: they encompass the study of cultures, values, ideas, beliefs, and systems of thought, as far back as traces of human activity are found. Their objects of study are similarly diverse, from ancient texts to oral history, visual art to social media, historical artefacts to human remains. Inextricable from the range of traditions they comprise – embracing history, philosophy, ancient and modern languages, arts, and literature – is the critique of those traditions. In other words, the Humanities dwell in the relations between people and their cultures, and in the relations between ourselves, others, and the world around us.

Despite being at the heart of institutions of learning since ancient times, the Humanities are currently at risk. At several UK universities, Humanities departments have been cut or closed with an associated loss of academic posts. In a recent government report on the organisation of research and innovation (BEIS, 2023), the Humanities are credited not only for their 'vital contribution to society and culture as well as to knowledge in their own fields' but also for their 'significant role in supporting private enterprise in sectors such as the creative and digital industries.' This is damning with faint praise and simply too narrow a definition of the role and impact of the Humanities. The Humanities are inherently critical disciplines, founded on questioning, appraising and challenging. Thus, as this report argues, they are essential not only for a healthy society and a functioning democracy, but for innovation, business success, and competitive advantage across all fields and all sectors.

Executive Summary

Background and Context

The UCL Enquiry on a Case for the Humanities set out to articulate and advocate the value of the Humanities in the contemporary world. Work began in early 2020, when the wider context was shaped by the marketisation of higher education, the climate emergency, the rise of big data, artificial intelligence (AI), political polarisation, and culture wars. Deliberations continued through the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and their global economic ramifications. In the UK and elsewhere, leading Humanities courses and departments were cut during this short time, and many more are now under threat of closure, amalgamation, or reduction.

Evolving Disciplines and Interdisciplinarity

The broad field of the Humanities has changed significantly in recent decades, with far more interdisciplinary work taking place among Humanities scholars and with their colleagues in humanistic Social Science. Yet the Humanities and the Sciences are still largely viewed as opposing bodies of knowledge with different methods, values and outcomes, as well as distinct subject matter.

However, academics and policymakers increasingly argue that major social challenges will not be addressed successfully without the contribution and collaboration of all fields of knowledge: Humanities, Social Sciences and Sciences.

The welcome rise of interdisciplinary education and research is removing barriers between disciplines - while prompting concerns that, without a strong appreciation of their distinctive contributions, the Humanities could be reduced to little more than an add-on to a Science-based undergraduate curriculum or research strategy. Interdisciplinary research requires firm disciplinary foundations, and single discipline research is as essential in the Humanities as in any other field. The long-established disciplines of History, Philosophy and Literature are as necessary to good thinking about climate change or global health as Environmental Humanities or Health Humanities.

Education

A university education has traditionally been viewed as a means of fostering self-development, a commitment to the

pursuit of truth and moral purpose. Participants in the Enquiry interrogated these ideas and explored if and how Humanities scholars could reframe or transform thinking about the purpose of education and the role of the Humanities. This highlighted the unique value of the Humanities, as well as the Arts, in their focus on imagination, empathy, and creativity, as distinct from a reductionist definition of value as utility and/or economic imperatives.

Use and Value

The political shift from seeing the university as a state-funded public good towards thinking of it as a mixed public-private enterprise raises crucial questions about social conceptions of use and value. Although a good case can be made for the contribution of the Humanities in terms of contributions to the economy and enhancing graduate employability, to focus on the economic case is to accept the prevalent reduction of 'use' to 'economic value'. The Humanities have much to contribute to debates about expanding definitions of value and use to create a richer conception of the way economies and societies operate.

Politics

Politics inform and shape culture. To scrutinise language is to shine a light on unspoken assumptions, prejudices, and perspectives. To examine the soft power of rhetoric, jargon and propaganda is vital in an era of information overload. To analyse institutions, hierarchies and historical legacies is to contribute to a functioning democracy. Humanities research has laid foundations for social reform and helped create a more equal, diverse, and inclusive society.

Grand Challenges

The Humanities bring different forms of knowledge and wisdom to the extraordinarily complex problems of society. Every challenge faced by policymakers demands the Humanities' strengths in critical thinking, understanding difference, studying the lessons of the past, and applying that knowledge to the present.

Championing the Humanities

The Enquiry identified three key areas for action: to raise awareness of the value of the Humanities and to challenge misconceptions; to present a strong case for the Humanities to empower individuals and institutions; and to submit specific proposals to UCL. Thus, the Enquiry has prepared the ground for an exciting next phase of work to champion the Humanities and enable them to flourish.

Background

First proposed in 2020 and supported by UCL's Grand Challenge of Cultural Understanding, the UCL Enquiry on a Case for the Humanities set out to articulate and celebrate the value of the Humanities. This Enquiry places its emphasis on asking questions: it is not an official inquiry or inquest, nor a process designed to come up with a specific, single answer. It is, instead, a thoughtful search for insights, conducted in the spirit of the approach Humanities scholars take to their subjects. Liberated from the burden of serving any particular purpose or interest, those involved in the Enquiry set themselves the task of examining and expressing the vital role of the Humanities in a rapidly changing world.

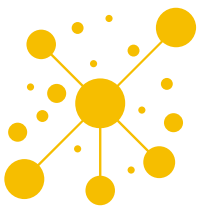
Previous investigations into the merits of the Humanities have tended to dwell on single issues.

Nussbaum's *Not for Profit*, for example, asserts the political importance of these disciplines in developing imaginative, empathetic, and critical citizens of democracy, not 'useful machines' (2016:2). Several UK studies have focused on specific economic arguments: employment, qualification and skills, innovation, or profit in the creative industries. Their titles speak for themselves: *Humanities Graduates and the British Economy* (Kraeger, 2013); *Embedding Arts and Humanities in the Creative Economy* (Comunian, Faggian, & Jewell, 2014); *The Future of Cultural Value* (Warwick Commission, 2015); *The Right Skills* (British Academy (BA, 2017); *Qualified for the Future* (BA, 2020). Others, such as *The Landscape for Humanities and Social Sciences in Higher Education* (BA, 2017), simply aimed to produce an accurate current picture. In 2014, the British Academy launched *Prospering Wisely*, a multifaceted initiative designed to explore the broad value and impact of the Humanities, accompanied by its annual *Being Human* festival. Despite its evident credibility, the emphasis on prosperity speaks to primarily economic concerns.

This Enquiry, by contrast, gathered reflections and insights without being driven by any particular economic, political or institutional agenda. Taking an inclusive approach, the Enquiry invited colleagues from across all UCL disciplines and faculties to question and consider, rather than to define or adjudicate.

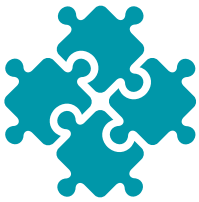
Inevitably, it is impossible to extricate the role of scholarship from the social, political, economic, environmental, and global circumstances in which that scholarship exists. The Enquiry has therefore identified the following factors which shaped the context of its investigations:

Market forces. Since the 1980s, the steady trend towards monetising education has put extraordinary pressure on university funding, bringing into sharp focus the question of which skills, capabilities and domains merit public investment. Universities across the country are shedding Humanities jobs, courses, and often entire departments. Amid patterns of dwindling student recruitment and enrolment, at least ten departments in Modern Languages, and several in Theology and Religious Studies, closed between 2007 and 2017 (BA, 2017). In 2021, the University of Sheffield cut Archaeology; in the University of Sunderland, Languages, Politics, and History have been closed in favour of 'career-focused degrees' (2020). In 2022, the University of Roehampton announced its decision to close a range of Humanities courses, with associated job losses; at Birkbeck College, around eighty academic posts in Humanities subjects were under review by the end of the year. Similar reductions can be seen on an international scale.



Big Data. What constitutes knowledge, or research, has been transformed by the emergence of digital computation, the internet and social media, which together produce new ideas and practices about quantitative data. These lend a superficial yet compelling plausibility to claims that the only knowledge worth having is quantitative in nature. The prioritisation of data and quantitative research by funders and institutions may mean that qualitative research is left increasingly vulnerable to cuts.

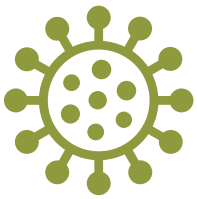
Changing Humanities. The Humanities themselves have rapidly evolved over a matter of decades. In the United States, for example, English Literature has gradually incorporated more discussion in the vein of the Political and Social Sciences. Disciplinary boundaries blur. Key questions of method and approach – what constitutes the Humanities, what canons of texts they should study – are re-evaluated and re-formed, as ideas regarding the very foundations and frontiers of the disciplines change over time.



Multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. New academic approaches, in which disciplines cross pollinate, integrate, and combine perspectives, represent major shifts in university teaching and research. UCL's Arts and Sciences BASc, for example, has been running since 2012. With these developments come questions that challenge and reposition the scope and definition of disciplines, and their role in the life of the modern university.

Culture wars. Changes within academia occur in the context of fiercely fought political and ideological battles – with the Humanities caught in the crossfire. Through their work on a diverse range of subjects including racialisation, imperialism, capitalism, gender and sexuality, Humanities scholars inform current debates about migration, decolonisation, nationalism, and identity. The Humanities provide nuanced and contextualised perspectives. These can be misinterpreted or taken out of context when debates become polarised and can be unfairly weaponised to support extreme opinions.

Climate emergency. In the era of climate emergency, the Humanities have offered nuanced perspectives regarding the role of humanity within a much broader, older ecosystem. Despite these crucial contributions, Humanities research and insights are routinely sidelined in debates about how to tackle the environmental crisis.



COVID-19 pandemic. As the Enquiry progressed, the pandemic quickly became the dominant context. The COVID-19 crisis, and its economic repercussions, have intensified long standing financial pressures on universities, and accelerated trends towards reducing Humanities funding.

Given these dramatic and overarching issues, the Humanities become more relevant, not less. Recognising and understanding diverse ways of life, languages, cultures, and traditions: these are the starting points for society's capacity to co-exist, negotiate difference, and build community.

After the Enquiry steering group produced a set of initial interim reflections in early 2020, the report's full activities took place over the course of the academic year 2020–21. A series of roundtable discussions was structured around five themes, each reflecting a different aspect of the Humanities' contribution: Arts, Education, the Economy, Sciences, and Politics. Together, these thematic groups provided an organising principle for the Enquiry's preliminary investigation.

Based on these sessions, each theme chair authored or co-authored a set of papers fully independent of the steering group. These were edited and structured according to each group rather than predetermined guidelines; their views are their own. Interviews with members of the steering group subsequently informed the Preliminary Findings which were released in March 2022. This final report builds on the Preliminary Findings. It reflects comments and discussion at the launch of the Preliminary Findings, a student consultation exercise that took place during the winter of 2022/23, and the changing local and global context.

Conviction is embedded in Humanities disciplines and those who study them. Profound differences in opinion emerge; politics diverge and clash. Variations in value, tone, style, and approach abound. Rather than a single answer, what emerges is a conversation held between many voices. This willingness to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016) is, we suggest, one of the great strengths of the Humanities.

Insights

Disciplinarity, Interdisciplinarity, and Multidisciplinarity

A number of insights arose from thinking about the Humanities as distinct from, and in relation to, other disciplines, whether in terms of interdisciplinarity (the integration of different disciplines) or multidisciplinarity (using several disciplinary perspectives to address a complex topic of study). These are live issues, as the nature and remit of Humanities subjects continue to shift and border skirmishes arise. Various disciplinary groupings have been suggested – from STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics) to SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy) – to reposition the importance accorded to each field. Meanwhile, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) separates its panels for Arts and the Humanities and for Social Sciences, suggesting a hard border where boundaries are the most porous.

The disciplinary landscape is more complex and more interesting than is allowed by the still prevalent notion of two cultures: the Humanities versus the Sciences. Although each inherits its own traditions, the borders between disciplines are not always fixed or clearly defined. The Social Sciences, in particular, occupy overlapping spaces. Anthropology, Archaeology, History, Area Studies: these intermingle Humanities and Sciences in exploring the relationships between the self and cultural life, and between society and the artefacts of culture. Elements interweave between even disparate fields, and on close scrutiny very little proves exclusive to any single specialty. Certain hallmarks remain – qualitative research within the Humanities; quantitative in the Sciences – but even these are not rigidly maintained. Disciplines might be better considered as musical traditions: jazz or blues, rock or classical. Each tradition is clearly individual, but they have notes and chords in common. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, like a fusion of musical traditions, are only made possible if the strands are sufficiently differentiated.

By focusing on the human experience, the Humanities can encompass many subjects, including those seemingly outside their remit. UCL's Person-Environment-Activity Research Laboratory (PEARL), as an example of Engineering Sciences strongly informed by the person-centred approach of the Humanities, explores how people interact and respond to their environments. This expansive thinking illuminates and lends cultural sensitivity to a range of other areas including medicine, social care, chronic illness, and mental health. In UCL's Performing Arts Medicine MSc, and conferences like the Power of Music in Health and Social Care at the University of Nottingham (2018–19), study of the effects of music and dance interweave with pharmacological therapy and traditional medicine to alleviate the dying body's complaints, or improve social care. Other approaches, such as Deborah Padfield's interdisciplinary work on imaging the body

(2011, 2013–16), have created a visual language to gauge, diagnose, and manage pain.

Humanities research can be far-reaching: the influential UCL-Lancet Commission on the Health Effects of Climate Change (2009) brought together philosophers, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, engineers, geographers, and lawyers, in order to identify the principal challenges and ramifications of potential climate catastrophe. Humanities research can also occupy a smaller, no less effective scale, such as UCL's Crisis Translation project. This translated guidance around natural disasters into local languages, thus enabling those affected by earthquakes and hurricanes to better protect themselves.

Education and Research

Research and education are different and interdependent, with each informing the other at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Research is not a finite process: repeated study of the same texts and artefacts often produces the most startling revelations. Interpretations alter over time, and within the viewer. Often it is documents, records and objects from the most remote times, places and cultures that offer the richest insights. As Mary Beard's television documentaries show, the history of Ancient Rome raises questions that remain pertinent to our contemporary world. Homer's *Iliad* recontextualises ideas of masculinity today.

In previous centuries, the Humanities have been associated with ideas of self-development, the pursuit of truth, and the university as an institution with a moral purpose. The task is now to reframe or transform these concepts. Phenomena that once seemed like solid bases for consensus are themselves contested within current Humanities discourse.

Use and Value

The introduction of tuition fees in the UK in 1998 altered the nature of a university education. No longer was it perceived as a public good funded by the state in the common interest. Instead it came to be seen as a transaction, a means by which young people invest in the cultural capital they need to play high-status roles in future life. Nonetheless, university departments rely on students for their income. When a course costs nearly £30,000, students and their families are likely to have expectations about its purpose, and what they should gain – frequently in terms of potential earning power.

Given the cost of a university education, and the many years most graduates spend repaying this cost, it is not unreasonable that students should want tangible rewards. Nor is it unreasonable that government and funding bodies should expect a return on investment.

The Research Excellence Framework (REF), the means by which scholarship is measured and funded, is thus informed by economically pragmatic policy. Some argue that the REF evaluation process impairs the research the Humanities can produce. Long, difficult thinking is precluded; short cycles may lead to a superficial and simple engagement with materials. Not all scholarship can, or should, conform to timelines or parameters determined by governmental ratings and metrics.

The question itself ('what use are the Humanities'?) risks conflating 'use' with 'economic value', ensnaring arguments in the narrow formulas that these disciplines seek to challenge. Although all knowledge may be said to have use, it is frequently hard to claim any kind of single or predictable use for Humanities research. What application might the marginalia of mediaeval manuscripts have, for example, or the tablets of Mesopotamia? How, then, to determine the relative merits of different areas of study?

By way of comparison, the benefits of speculative medical research underwent similar scrutiny in the early 2000s. The field of 'translational medicine' emerged, in which scientific discovery is rendered into effective clinical treatments and tools; medical research is thoroughly examined, assessed, and prioritised accordingly. Similar debates are now starting to be voiced by Humanities academics, whose work – influenced by multidisciplinarity, and funders' requirements for research to show social impact – is no longer confined to the ivory tower. More than ever, Humanities research is oriented towards contemporary problems, as demonstrated by their increasing integration with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and UCL's own Grand Challenges. The Humanities contribute to rigorous analysis of these problems by helping to identify not only what is truthful or factual, but also what these truths say about humanity and future ideals. Understanding these questions is fundamental to tackling the world's most complex and challenging issues.
In considering how best to evaluate Humanities scholarship, adopting an overly reductive vision of the economy and education misunderstands how an economy works. It is only through expanded definitions of value and usefulness, and through a richer and more realistic conception of the way economies operate, that the Humanities' role and purpose become evident.

Unlike in vocational degrees such as Law, Medicine, or Engineering, studying the Humanities does not usually lead to any particular career. And yet, as reported by a recent British Academy report, the link between the Humanities, employability, and the economy is strong, and the transferable nature of the skills gained is a consistent asset. A 2020 report by the British Academy (*Qualified for the future: Quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills*) reveals that graduates who study Arts, Humanities or Social Science subjects (AHSS) are highly employable and underpin key sectors of the UK economy: of the ten fastest-growing sectors, eight employ more graduates from AHSS than other disciplines. With the exception of STEM graduates in highly paid professions such as medicine and dentistry, there is a limited earnings gap between STEM and AHSS graduates. Although starting salaries are lower, over the longer term AHSS graduates make strong progress up the career ladder into roles attracting higher salaries.

The argument does not lie in whether Humanities students are unemployable, or contribute sufficiently to the economy. It lies in determining the purpose of an education, economy, or government. As the philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey (1939/1981: 229) said, the Humanities rest on 'the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained, so that special results achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the ongoing process.'

The fact that these degrees will never be vocational is an advantage. It is the skills and perspectives they provide that mark their worth: the ability to analyse, construct and deconstruct arguments; to consider evidence from different points of view; to be attentive to the world and others in relation to the self, in both similarities and differences. Additionally, it is skills promoted by the Humanities that are among the most difficult to automate. When we consider our rapidly digitalising world and a future that will likely see us dependent on more forms of AI, these skills acquire even greater social significance.

Politics and Plurality

It is impossible to ignore the politics of the Humanities. Politics informs and shapes culture and its study, even in seemingly apolitical subjects, such as aesthetics, or 18th-century literature. Seemingly simple words like ‘use’ and ‘value’ have proved to mean quite different things to different people. To scrutinise language – a fundamental Humanities tradition – is to shine a light on opinion, prejudice, and perspective. Interpreting the soft power of persuasive words, policy, and propaganda is a key field of study, and ever more vital amid the information, messages, and narratives that bombard us daily.

As in all politics, there are many positions. Some argue that academia should exist separately from politics; others argue for the Humanities as a vehicle for political change; others still, that the Humanities are eclipsed by the explicitly political opinions of their scholars. Since their inception, the Humanities have inspired powerful critiques of doctrine and dogma. In providing a forum for public discussion, and in encouraging diversity of thought and opinion, the contribution of the Humanities to a democratic society is vital. What do we read? What do we look at, and how do we interpret it? Who is thought good, or bad, or irredeemable? What system do we support, and what supports us? These are all Humanities questions.

The Provost and President of UCL, Michael Spence, describes the university as a place that ‘makes everybody feel uncomfortable and wonder if they are wrong’; a place to encounter the other and to experience what it means to live with genuine diversity. Unlike in other disciplines, where a consensus may be necessary (for example, standardising a medical treatment), the Humanities embrace and celebrate difference. As the process of the Enquiry and this report demonstrate, the Humanities are characterised by plurality: a multiplicity of voices and perspective.

Critique and argument challenge echo chambers and silos. Questioning unsettles any single or fixed perspective. What has historically appeared inevitable and immovable, such as slavery or enfranchisement, has been dismantled only when these structures and institutions are re-examined. In the Humanities, nothing is assumed to be natural or inevitable. The apparently irrefutable or solid is revealed sometimes to be arbitrary, contingent or wrong – even the understanding of the scholars themselves. There are limits even to the knowable.

As Spence goes on to write: ‘The university has to be able to challenge students to articulate their position in a way that is thoughtful; faithful to the evidence; able to be heard by the other side; doesn’t, from the beginning, make an enemy of the other; and

chooses language that is commensurate with the goal of increasing understanding – because that's how real social change happens.'

Grand Challenges

By chance, the process of the Enquiry has coincided with an extraordinary period of human history: a global pandemic, an impending environmental catastrophe, and an economic recession. Fighting fires on all fronts, policymakers in government and universities are forced to make difficult and urgent decisions about resources. These immediate pressures tend to overshadow the necessity to include the Humanities in tackling the grand challenges of the day.

Yet the Humanities have never been more necessary, when societies face such extraordinarily complicated problems. Geopolitically, the world is highly volatile, riven by the return of Cold-War-style politics, war in Ukraine, and deep political and religious conflicts. Ideologically, divisions run less along party-political lines – left or right – and more around questions of race, gender, sexuality and identity. Solutions are urgently needed for the climate emergency: how to salvage the planet, and live sustainably on it. The pandemic has raised issues that go beyond science and logistics (how to manufacture and transport the vaccine), to ethical questions about who should be given the vaccine, and geopolitical questions about its distribution worldwide. In revealing the fragility of human health, the virus has forced a radical reconception of lifestyle, work, proximity, safety, and acceptable risk.

The Humanities offer different forms of knowledge and wisdom that can be brought to bear on these questions.

There is a role for critical thinking about our institutions, and our histories; for thinking deeply about the lessons of the past, and for applying that knowledge to the present. Every challenge faced by policymakers demands the Humanities' strengths in understanding difference, in philosophy and ethics, in representation, and in critical thinking.

Championing the Humanities

There are many ways of making a case for the Humanities. Here are some suggestions based on points that came up frequently in the many discussions that took place over the course of the Enquiry.

Clarify what the Humanities are and do. Raise awareness and bust myths

Draw attention to how much the Humanities have changed over the past three decades, with new fields such as Environmental Humanities, Digital Humanities and Health Humanities co-existing alongside the long-established disciplines of History, Philosophy, Literature and Classics.

Challenge the oppositional thinking that pits the Humanities against the Sciences. Humanities disciplines are just as rigorous, specialised and professional as scientific disciplines – they are not an amateur activity. Societies need a mixed economy of knowledge, in which both interpretative and quantitative methods are granted equal value.

Promote understanding that the Arts (creative practice) and the Humanities (critical interpretation) are not the same, but that they co-exist in mutually sustaining relationships. The Humanities are the ecosystem which enables artistic practice to thrive.

Challenge the reductive thinking that assumes disciplines are pure, but narrow and insular, while interdisciplinary work is exciting, 'big picture' and socially relevant. The strength of Humanities lies in its diverse ecologies, with the disciplines and cross-disciplinary initiatives working in creative tension.

Highlight that in both disciplinary and cross-disciplinary work, Humanities scholars offer the combined strengths of attention to particularity and to comparison.

Demonstrate why society needs the Humanities. Key arguments include:

Humanities are fundamental to navigating tensions between the universalising claims of Science and the specificities of local cultures, languages and histories.

Climate emergency and biodiversity loss means that the question of what it means to be human is more urgent than ever; finding ways to survive anthropocentrism requires us to understand and map it.

Likewise, navigating the new world of AI requires understanding how technology interacts with culture, in all its diversity.

The Humanities provide the ecosystem of critical reflection and the knowledge base which enable the creative and cultural industries to thrive.

The eradication of the exclusion and prejudice that weaken institutions and societies requires Humanities methods of critique, empathy and demystification, as well as Humanities understandings of the politics of knowledge.

Humanities create the knowledge base and the critical skills to understand a plurality of experiences, ideas, values and practices, making it possible to overcome misinformation, silos and echo chambers, and thereby strengthening social capacity for coexistence.

In navigating uncertainty, empathy as a disciplinary practice of reaching out without guarantee of success provides a method for contending with failure and unpredictable outcomes, both individually and collectively.

There is strong evidence now that a Humanities education gives individuals the creativity, resilience, conceptual ability, linguistic fluency and independent research skills that non-vocational employers value more than any specific body of knowledge. AHSS graduates have at least as much, and possibly more, choice of careers as STEM graduates.

Outdated conceptions of value and use based solely on financial measures results not only in bad policy-making towards the Humanities, but an impoverished understanding of the economy as a whole.

It is not only that a language of utility, consumption and individual pay-offs dominates social debates but that such terminology is drawn from one particular strain of economic thought, the redundancy of which is increasingly being claimed, in light of environmental crisis and democratic deficit. Humanities' methods of open-ended critical enquiry are a unique resource to develop new frameworks of value for the current times.

Proposals for action

Take every opportunity to bust myths, raise awareness and make the arguments for the Humanities in all sectors of society.

Create opportunities for Humanities students to debate the value of their fields of study and to explore the potential for working with other Humanities subjects, with the Social Sciences and with the Sciences.

Instigate and lead debates on rethinking value and use from the perspective of the Humanities.

Establish mechanisms to embed Humanities in research designed to solve global challenges.

Build alliances with scientists to identify shared intellectual commitments, specific opportunities for intellectual collaboration and common structural concerns, bearing in mind that in the 1990s it was the Sciences that felt the need to justify their existence.

Create incentives for more Humanities in the community work.

Conclusion

The work of the Humanities scholar is to look again, and to look more closely; to engage slowly and carefully with the object of study. In examining others' interpretations and representations of the world through art, literature, history or philosophy, the scholar encounters otherness, and cultivates an imaginative sympathy between the self and those long dead or far removed. This imaginative work expands the possibilities of the present. It extends our knowledge and understanding of other times and places, and thus other people's conceptions of themselves, both then and now. By positioning ourselves in relation to others – even if imaginary, or dead, or distant – we make better sense of ourselves. In our chaotic times, the Humanities' fundamental emphasis on the human facilitates better and richer answers to the complex questions arising in every field: who we are, and why; where we came from; and where we may yet go.

"I welcome the report of the UCL Enquiry about A Case for the Humanities. At a time when the value of the Humanities is being challenged, it is ever more important to highlight the import and employability of Arts, Humanities and Social Science graduates to the UK labour force. Of course, the economy and employability matter, but as the report rightly points out, a narrow focus on 'value' ignores the important role of the 'critical voice' of the Humanities. This is not questioning or criticism for the sake of it, but the act of holding up a mirror to ourselves, to our societies, to our cultures and practices. The Humanities show us how values, culture, and politics shape our lived experiences, and this knowledge is ever more important as society navigates the 'Grand Challenges' facing us. Navigating artificial intelligence, global inequalities, sustainable development, and most of all – climate change – cannot be done through a single discipline or narrow conceptualisation of the challenge and solutions. Today's global challenges require multi/interdisciplinary enquiry and the critical and open-ended methodologies core to the Humanities." **Professor Jennifer Hudson, Executive Dean, Faculty of Social & Historical Sciences, UCL**

"I very much welcome UCL's pro-active engagement in articulating the enduring importance of the Humanities in the modern university and wider society. These disciplines run through the work of the Institute of Education's, as UCL's faculty of education and society – from its research and teaching on media, culture and communication, to its subject-based teacher education, in each case incorporating the parallel field of creative practice in music and art. As an applied linguist myself, this is also an area of personal academic interest to me, not least regarding the satisfactions of exploring new languages and cultures and how this opens up the world for these learners. The Institute of Education (IOE)'s mission is to improve lives and support individuals, organisations and societies in meeting the challenges of change. The criticality, contextualisation and nuance – wisdom and judgement – the Humanities provide, are vital to this endeavour. I look forward to working with colleagues across UCL as the university considers specific actions to support the Humanities to flourish, within its own walls and beyond." **Professor Li Wei, FBA, FAcSS, MEA, FRSA, Director & Dean, IOE, Faculty of Education and Society, UCL**

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