



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

## **AHRC Policy Seminar**

### ***Enabling innovation: creative investments in Arts and Humanities Research***

**5<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

**at The Work Foundation, 21 Palmer Street, London, SW1H 0AD**

#### **Note of proceedings**

##### **Welcome**

Jonathan Breckon, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, AHRC

Jonathan Breckon welcomed participants to the seminar, describing it as an opportunity to share the findings of three AHRC- and NESTA-funded Impact Workshops that were held at the University of Cambridge in 2009. He asked participants to be aware of different cultures and discourses in relation to innovation, and hoped for an open and wide-ranging discussion. This policy seminar forms one of a series of AHRC events that bring the arts and humanities and policymakers together for mutual benefits.

##### **Opening comments from the Chair**

Dr Seymour Roworth-Stokes, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research & Development, University of the Creative Arts

Dr Seymour Roworth-Stokes opened the seminar by highlighting the growing importance of innovation, and how it relates to the arts and humanities. This can be seen in a variety of government reports, such as the Lambert Review (2003), the Sainsbury Review (2007) and Innovation Nation (2008). Seymour used Sir George Cox's (2005) definition of innovation: "Creativity is the generation of new ideas...innovation is the successful exploitation of new ideas" as a starting point.

The UK is in a strong position because of this increasingly sophisticated understanding of innovation and of the significant role played by Higher Education and research. This can be seen in the creative economy, where the arts and humanities make such a large contribution, and which is recognized as one of the leading sectors in the UK by OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). That both sides of the dual support system are now funded through the same government department (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills), coupled with the impact agenda and the development of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), also forms a broader context for these discussions.

Seymour expressed a need to address challenges together and to work towards a shared understanding of the processes that lead to innovation. He outlined the themes of the three impact workshops, and how they served as a forum to engage with these important issues. The aim of this policy seminar was to synthesize those workshop discussions and to consider their implications for policymakers.

## **Enabling innovation: creative investments in arts and humanities research**

Dr James Leach, Head of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen

[There was an apology from Dr Lee Wilson, University of Cambridge, co-author of the provocation paper, who was unable to attend.]

Dr James Leach set out the main points of the *Enabling Innovation: creative investments in arts and humanities research* provocation paper, which formed a discursive conclusion of the three original workshops. The paper argues that foundational conditions for research and innovation are of fundamental importance. It is a combination of the research needs, the processes of research, and the relationships generated, that give value to society. That value is created, transferred and experienced through the process of research.

This model of social processes is widely applicable, and is true for the other disciplines as well as for the arts and humanities. To understand the value of something you also need to know about the relationships that led to that value. Those relationships, which are essential if innovation is to flourish, are encouraged by the open, public and porous nature of universities.

James introduced the concept of citizenship as a way of encapsulating the processes, relationships, and the need for accountability in research. He argued that there is a danger in over-specifying measurements in the value of research as this could distract from the intrinsic processes involved. A critical, descriptive approach would support innovation more than a disengaged system of audit.

As part of the subsequent discussion, it was highlighted that it was not clear in the paper whether it argued that the conditions for innovation were not being met, or whether current policies will prevent those conditions being met, which would make it directly related to the impact agenda. James explained that the workshops were stimulated by how impact is discussed in policy circles, and the possible consequences of those discourses for research and innovation.

It was suggested that knowledge is seen a commodity in some contexts, but that this can be problematic if this ignores the relationships behind knowledge creation. The hidden or personal, rather than institutional, nature of the many relationships between academics and other sectors was also highlighted. It was claimed, for example, that without vibrant connections to the arts and humanities some areas of fine art would not exist. Attempts to formalize or commodify those relations could be problematic. To measure one element of the innovation process may have consequences for other areas and may change the nature of relationships in the longer term.

The need to also consider innovation from a business perspective was also raised, while it was also stressed that arts and humanities research and universities more broadly have collaborated with industry for many years. It was also stated that a scholar's agenda can only be purely his or her own if he or she is not publicly funded. The research community must play their part in the economic recovery. Yet, it was also argued that it is more a question of challenging policymakers to more fully connect with the ways that arts and humanities research and creative practice create value. Together we could adopt a mutual awareness of the roles of public value, citizenship and the effects of measurement.

The findings of another set of workshops on the efficiency and creativity of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) were also discussed. These workshops, which were led by arts and humanities academics and by ICT and technology specialists, sought to answer the question: what is the role of the academy and what is its connection to business? Those

workshops suggested that the principle value of the arts and humanities is their interpretative quality, which is something that other disciplines tend to lack.

### **What academics and business want and get from knowledge exchange in the UK**

Professor Alan Hughes, Director of the Centre for Business Research, Judge Business School, University of Cambridge and of the UK~Innovation Research Centre

Professor Alan Hughes began his presentation by stating that the role of universities is often interpreted narrowly. With this in mind, he wished to explore and understand what public role universities naturally hold in, for example, developing a skilled labour force, in increasing the knowledge base, and in problem solving. The presentation was based on the findings of the University-Industry Knowledge Exchange project (funded by ESRC, HEFCE, HEFCW, SFC and DEL), and focused particularly on that project's UK-wide surveys of academics and businesses. Using the Stokes 'Pasteur's Quadrant' concept, Alan characterised research as being pure basic research, pure applied research, or use-inspired basic research.

Alan described the multi-faceted role of universities in educating people, increasing the stock of 'codified' knowledge and problem solving, as well as in providing a public space for networks and social interactions. He also demonstrated that, while traditional commercialization measures such as spin-outs and patents are important, there is a much wider range of cross-sector interactions that should be considered.

The survey showed that there is evidence for direct commercialization activities related to the arts and humanities, but it is less prevalent than more people-based activities, problem solving and community-based activities. The arts and humanities do have significant links with the private sector, but interactions with the public and third sectors are more common. These interactions in general are more likely to be instigated by individual connections, rather than through formal Knowledge Transfer Offices. Constraints on engagement included the cultural difference between universities and other sectors, disputes over intellectual property, lack of time, bureaucracy and university administration, amongst others.

According to the CBR HEI Business Postal Survey 2008, arts and humanities interactions span the economy, from manufacturing to business services. There are many wide-ranging interactions that reach far beyond STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects and which also engage with the public and third sectors.

In conclusion, Alan highlighted that there are significant interactions between academics and the rest of society, but that forms of evidence which focus on direct commercialization may understate the full range. He also argued that people-based interactions are particularly important, and that the term 'third stream' may be a misnomer as interactions also support teaching and research. Yet there is an issue on whether there is much capacity left in the university system to increase knowledge exchange activities.

During the discussion, it was acknowledged that time pressures in the professions have become more intensified over the years, and academics have been part of that trend. It was suggested that the complexity of the mission facing academics, many of whom would resist moves to fragment their work, may mean that there is a need to accept some level of specialisation. Yet this could hinder the complementary links between research, teaching and knowledge exchange. In relation to commercialization activities, there was also a view that becoming too transactional or overly protective of IP (Intellectual Property) at an early

stage in the process could hinder interaction, and so a more relaxed, flexible approach should be adopted.

### **Marcus Price and the diffusion of innovation**

Kate Oakley, Visiting Professor at the University of the Arts London and City University

Professor Kate Oakley began her presentation by warning of the danger of de-contextualizing innovation. She used 'Marcus Price', a men's fashion shop, as an example of the social importance of place. From Kate's reading of Michael Bracewell's *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming "Roxy Music"*, 'Marcus Price', where Bryan Ferry worked while at art college, was the only high fashion shop for men in 1960s' Newcastle, and it formed an important hub for creative people to come together. Bracewell does not make a link to innovation in his book, but the shop clearly performed a significant role in broadly-defined innovative activities, and one that was probably replicated by other small establishments across many regional cities at that time.

As cities in the UK have become more homogenised, those small, accidental innovative hubs are less likely to emerge. The chances for being oppositional have been reduced and there is less independent retail. Kate described the role of place in innovation and the need to allow for the conditions in which innovation can occur. She argued that we have become pre-occupied with the purpose of innovation, while ignoring the foundations that allow it to flourish. Difficulties can occur when we start to operationalise. The idea that innovation is a new concept, or that change is happening faster now than it has in the past, is false. For example, someone in the first half of the twentieth century would have experienced more technological and social change than we have seen. Most developments now are modifications on what came before.

Kate also described the risks involved in innovation. The current economic crisis, a consequence of unbridled innovation in the financial sector, illustrates that innovation is not always positive. Yet innovation is less critiqued than any other major policy area in the UK, and this makes it difficult to develop a more balanced view. Kate argued that a more problematised, critical approach to innovation is required. There is also a need to recognise a more nuanced concept of slow innovation, where innovation is not the immediate recourse to action. The arts and humanities are well placed to offer the critical viewpoints that innovation discourse needs so much.

In the discussion, it was suggested that innovation should be approached with a degree of care. Charles Eames, the American designer, famously said, "Innovate as a last resort". It was also suggested that the best innovation is likely to come from a deep understanding and the ability to make the broadest set of relationships. Universities in this way make a robust environment for innovation, where students have a fast rate of change, while academics follow a slower tempo, producing a creative balance between them.

That innovation has become a policy-driven rather than a reflective process was also raised as a concern. External partners and policymakers may also need to adopt a more open view of knowledge creation, as academics and business partners achieve very different things and form new objectives as the process develops. For example, it can take a number of years to establish an appropriate goal, and this needs to be recognised in policy. It was also suggested that the use of the language around innovation needs to be unpacked.

## **Who, what & why: ensuring knowledge transfer is also innovation**

Dani Salvadori, Director of Enterprise & Innovation at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, University of the Arts London

Dani Salvadori's presentation started with the definitions of innovation, from Marx, going through Schumpeter, and considering OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) statements in the Frascati (1996) and Oslo (2005) Manuals. This offered a context to the measurements used in the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Study and the HEIF (Higher Education Innovation Fund).

A critique of linear models of innovation then led into a description of more appropriate open innovation models. Using Central Saint Martins as a case study, Dani highlighted the distinctive ways in which the college transfers knowledge, such as through Artakt, which is commissioned to curate pioneering exhibitions. While Archway Investigations & Responses involves a range of cultural activities at Archway in London that have no direct economic impact but do create cultural value. The Design Against Crime Research Centre, in contrast, is fully engaged with open innovation processes and in the social and commercial potential for its research.

At Central Saint Martins, due to the nature of the institution, innovation often comes from the students, rather than research activities. So, for example, it is often Course Directors or teaching staff that are involved in Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs). Plus, there are a lot of Sponsored Student Projects, where companies from a wide range of sectors collaborate with students. This is one of the most vibrant sources of innovation for collaborators with Central Saint Martins, including innovations in products, fashion, PR and marketing. The Sponsored Student Projects are self funding and are more numerous than other knowledge transfer and innovative activities at the college.

In the discussion around the presentation, it was acknowledged that innovation was difficult to measure. That the HEIF is partly funded through the Science Budget may also mean that more traditional science and engineering measurements have been foregrounded. Although, University of the Arts London, of which Central Saint Martins forms a part, received the maximum of £1.9 million from HEIF for 2010/11, and so the current measures do capture at least some of the arts and humanities contribution. Even so, David Sweeney, Director of Research, Innovation and Skills at HEFCE, would welcome suggestions on what could make better things to measure.

In the context of the creative economy, there was an appreciation of the importance of postgraduates and undergraduates in spreading and forging creative connections. In particular, recent graduates are important in the role of boundary spanning, which is of such significance to businesses and to innovation. Professor Alan Hughes cited a report which showed that the academics at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) named their students as the most important mechanism in sharing knowledge with the wider economy. The role of KTPs in solving 'technical' problems was also valuable, and there was acknowledgement of the AHRC's role in refining KT processes for the arts and humanities.

It was also highlighted that the arts and humanities engage with many sectors of the economy in the UK. While there are of course close links to the cultural sector, engagement goes much further. As an example, Dani explained that Sponsored Student Projects at Central Saint Martins were mostly outside of the cultural sector. These included projects related to luxury brands, food and drink, the fashion industry, marketing and communication, and retail visualisation.

## **New Dynamics of Ageing**

Dr Alan Blackwell, University of Cambridge, is a member of the advisory board for 'New Dynamics of Ageing', a collaboration between five Research Councils – ESRC, EPSRC, BBSRC, MRC and AHRC. The programme is a multidisciplinary research initiative with the ultimate aim of improving the quality of life for older people. Initially there were less AHRC-led projects, and community stakeholder groups such as Help the Aged expressed a need for arts and humanities perspectives on issues of old age, particularly around how old people integrate into society.

There are now six AHRC-led projects in the programme, and Dr Blackwell is acting as a mentor. This is an opportunity for the arts and humanities to engage in important policy issues related to ageing. Dr Blackwell asked for assistance in ensuring that these projects reach their potential. Jonathan Breckon, Director of Policy and Public Affairs at the AHRC, and Dr Steven Hill, Head of the RCUK Strategy Unit, both offered their support. Sian Brereton of the TSB also highlighted that the TSB's Assisted Living programme would be interested.

## **Closing comments from the Chair**

Dr Seymour Roworth-Stokes

Seymour summed up the seminar. This started with the provocation paper from Dr James Leach, which argued that the arts and humanities contribution to innovation was founded on shared values and citizenship, and that the right conditions needed to be met for innovation to occur. The discussion emphasised the importance of interpretative skills in the inherent contribution of the arts and humanities to innovation.

Professor Alan Hughes's presentation challenged preconceptions of the interactions between universities and the wider economy. Alan demonstrated where the concentration of interactions occurs, contradicting traditional assumptions of commercialisation and instead showing a much richer set of engagements. These findings offer evidence on how the nature of those interactions create value, and how this has consequences for how that value is understood and measured.

Professor Kate Oakley's presentation reflected on what innovation means, and that innovation is neither new nor always positive. Kate talked about how change has always been a feature of human activity, and, for example, how under-regulated innovation in the financial sector illustrates potential negative effects. From there, she argued for a move away from the current focus towards a concept of slow innovation. The discussion centred on the significant role of interpretation in the arts and humanities, and how there is a need to re-position the language of innovation.

Dani Salvadori's presentation used her institution, Central Saint Martins, as an example of what happens on the ground. The case study allowed for a focus on the issues that directly affect a Higher Education Institution. This was a valuable contribution after the broader and more theoretical discussions, and some of the conclusions from the earlier presentations were borne out from Dani's presentation and the subsequent discussion.

Seymour concluded by emphasising that the seminar offered an opportunity for policy and funding agencies to reflect on the presentations and discussions. This was also a chance to continue the dialogue in the future. The note of the seminar offers the first step in that longer discussion.