



**AHRC Policy Seminar
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Enabling innovation: creative investments in arts and humanities research

James Leach, University of Aberdeen
Lee Wilson, University of Cambridge

Introduction

'Innovation is a shared activity that takes place within a broad setting. It is also subject to uncertainty and risk' AHRC Podium 12, 2009

This provocation paper synthesises the presentations and builds a discursive conclusion from the outcome of three workshops, funded by the AHRC and NESTA, convened at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Cambridge, during spring and summer 2009. The three workshops (entitled 'Risk and Innovation', 'Creativity and Innovation in Groups' and 'Disciplinary Innovation') brought together academics drawn from a broad range of disciplines, practicing artists, and policy makers, to discuss creativity, value, innovation, the contribution to society, and measurement, in arts and humanities research.¹

Below we focus on what kind of 'shared activity' gives rise to creativity and thereby possibilities for innovation, what conditions make it possible, and how we can make visible the value of arts and humanities research.

¹ We refer to Arts and Humanities research in this paper, but would vigorously assert the validity of our argument when considering social science, as well as wish to note the blurred boundary between Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Summary

- The production and consumption of academic knowledge are not located in distinct domains, but overlap;
- 'Value' is realised through relationships, and is not intrinsic to outputs;
- Value is embodied in persons, constituted and sustained through social relations;
- A public accountability is implicit to the relationships created in the knowledge production of arts and humanities research and should be conceived broadly as part of the project of citizenship;
- Modes of assessment should be sensitive to the conditions of value creation;
- Assessment must allow for the modification of goals and aims in accordance with the exploration of differing perspectives and divergent outcomes.

Motivation, people, society

The series of Innovation and Creativity workshops was an opportunity for engagement with the requirements for accountability in the current environment. We were stimulated by the common observation that a pre-definition of the outcomes of research threatens the vital nature of its processes, and therefore the production of genuine value.

Our aim in convening the workshops that informed the writing of this paper has been to develop a conceptual vocabulary to recognise and describe the value of arts and humanities research and its contribution to creative innovation. We have *not* been interested in developing metrics for determining the value of research in this area, nor with mechanisms that mandate or encourage the transfer of value. That is, we make a distinction at the outset between transferring value and our role, which is to observe and comment upon the transfers that are occurring.

We agree that we need to be able to define the value of arts and humanities research, and its relation to innovation and creative practice, without that definition distorting the emergence of value or the possibility for the transfer of this value into other domains.

In our writing of this provocation paper it is the case of arts and humanities research that is uppermost in our minds today. We have been entrusted by the AHRC, as we were when originally awarded funding for the workshops, to produce something. We are obliged to come up with this paper as a reflection on what emerged from the

workshops. There is no contract, no risk assessment, no pre-determined output or measure of impact.

The only way that we could manage to do this writing (one of us is a University department head) was to take Saturday and Sunday to do it. All day, both days. We both have children under 3 years old that we adore and want to spend our time with. We make the choice to work on the paper over the weekend based on a sense of obligation and commitment.

Let us consider where that obligation comes from. Why are we working on this topic now? The answer is that there are normative cultural and social parameters into which we *want* to fit as professional researchers. This work is an opportunity. An opportunity for us to do something we enjoy: think, write, read, discuss, and engage with others who do the same. In other words, the process is one in which we further our own self-development, if you like, while at the same time adding to professional reputation, the possibility of recognition and future funding for research, and the opportunity to have something to say about the 'impact' of our research and so forth.

Now we do not presume that what we will do here is valuable. Just as when we organised the workshops, we have anticipated that something will emerge from the process of collaboration. Where does this anticipation come from? Past experience, what we bring to the task in terms of our experience and memories of other similar processes and interactions.

Well, what does this consideration of the immediate conditions of production tell us?

We want to generalise, based on the findings of our workshops, as follows:

- People *are (already, want to be)* accountable, and that accountability is an aspect of their belonging to a wider community.
- Obligations are based on fulfilling others' needs and desires in mutual recognition of interdependency.

In other words, we do it because of a sense of the duties of active citizenship. That citizenship is best understood as belonging to other people and their overlapping needs and agendas.

Basic to the fact of this citizenship is education. When we say that the value of arts and humanities research is carried in persons, this is what we mean. Responsiveness is an aspect of citizenship, and that is based on the spaces and opportunities for discussion, argument, critique, reflection – all skills taught by arts and humanities research, and facilitated by the multiple perspectives, contexts and understandings that such research generates.

That is what we are arguing for in this provocation paper: that the arts and humanities are intrinsic to the project of citizenship.

To impose structures on the relationship between arts and humanities research and society, to impose demands for visible 'object' outputs from these disciplines as if they were object-production focussed is not only to misunderstand their value creation and transfer, it is to fundamentally recast the relationship between government and governed.

Inclusivity, democracy, and participation, are easily lauded. But what do they mean? For these ideals to be realised, the public spaces for reflection, investigation, play and experiment, failure and re-use, improvisation and recombination are essential. It is nonsense to pre-determine the outputs of citizens and their collaborative work in innovating the forms of engagement that constitute civil society.

It follows that evaluation itself should be a collaborative act in which people work together towards a common aim by exploring its parameters. A mutual definition of value creates co-ownership of processes and commitments, while a sense of worth is instilled through active participation. This notion of participation and collaboration is important to creativity, and thereby to innovation.

We are moving then towards *collaboration as a conception for evaluation*.

Our paper draws on the words and ideas of participants in the three workshops to make our own synthesis without attribution. An appendix lists participants to acknowledge them. The purpose of our paper is to set the scene and provide ideas for discussion; to lead into the presentations of the speakers we will hear at the AHRC policy seminar in January.

The paper is structured in the following way from here on:

- First, we draw on the research presented at the workshops to describe the value created in arts and humanities research and consider how and where that value comes into being;
- Secondly, we move to a description of the problems that are experienced when the creation of this value is over determined or managed bureaucratically;
- Thirdly, we move to a discussion of the negative effects of narrowly conceived models of recognition and measurement for this value.
- Finally, we set out a series of ideas through which recognition of this value can be achieved taking account of the analysis in the second and third sections of the paper.

How and where is value created in arts and humanities research?

There are two aspects to the baseline established by consensus in the workshops. One is that arts and humanities research contributes to a shared, open and accessible pool of ideas, concepts, understandings and modes of analysis. The other is that the differences between approaches and ideas are in themselves a resource for thinking and innovating; their existence as different elements in friction with one another constitute part of the process of innovation itself. People need resources with which to respond, adapt, change and develop. Arts and humanities research creates needs and desires, and points to possibilities. Its methods are processes of innovation in themselves.

Notions of impact imply two distinct entities: a notion underpinned by the (to us, false) assumption of a distinction between the production and consumption of academic knowledge located in separate domains. A civilised society is one in which the population is responsive, and has the resources and ability to critically examine and engage. The research presented at the workshops showed clearly that to have such a population is to have an innovative society. The essence of innovation and creativity cannot be pre-determined in process and composition, or in outcome. Innovation depends on people who think, challenge, reflect, create and improvise. An educated and experimental population has the capacity for responsiveness. Arts and humanities research offers key domains for facilitating these conditions, and thus the processes by which innovation occurs. We are discussing some very fundamental things, then, that have to do with how to enable a democratic and pluralistic society.

The value that is created by research in the arts and humanities includes a common resource of ideas, forms, characters, histories, narratives and so on that are drawn upon, re-used, reassessed and re-made by people developing both themselves as citizens and their projects in response to stimulation and demand. Arts and humanities research provides this material; it also provides a diversity of ideas, conflicting opinions and models of working. It enables an engagement with a range of emotions, responses, ideas and contexts. This is its vital value.

It became clear from the workshop presentations that it is essential to have friction and tension in an innovation economy. Contest, critique, juxtaposition are central to refining ideas and developing new understandings. They enact the positive benefits of competition. The corpus of understanding provided by arts and humanities research provides a resource, the creation of which is a slow but inexorable building of possibilities for present and future thought and action.

We heard that Universities are anything but inward looking institutions. It is through the informal interactions of people within and beyond them that value is transferred to society. Such value *is* being transferred, as we will hear. The multifaceted role of Universities is crucial. Rich accounts of how innovation takes place highlight a series of conditions in which it occurs. Public spaces are vital; time is needed to realise the potentials and outcomes of the exchange and sharing of ideas. Networks and relationships are the source of energy, material and the means of dissemination of innovation. Openness to new possibilities, to changes in direction and understanding are crucial.

It is also important to understand that academia and the arts and humanities in particular are not best understood as producers of knowledge for others to consume. A production/consumption model distorts the practices, processes, methods and modes of transfer of value from arts and humanities research into other arenas. It simply fails to capture what actually occurs.

Given all this, the question becomes what we can do to support the conditions for making an innovative and responsive society where they already exist, and fostering them where they do not. The arts and humanities provide the (public) spaces, the practices of openness and discussion, the time needed and the institutions in which citizens and their projects can unfold and develop.

The effects of value measurement

The three workshops that we convened explored issues relevant to the practice of arts and humanities research, focusing on three topics: risk and innovation; creativity and innovation through collaboration; and disciplinary innovation. We began by looking at the notion of risk in order to meet head on, as it were, the real need for accountability in the use of public funds for arts and humanities research. It was useful to develop some definition here in what is meant by risk, and what kinds of risk management are therefore appropriate for arts and humanities research.

Those who make money from risk do so through risk management not risk taking. Bureaucracies are naturally risk-averse. But what kind of risk is a University, or a research project in the arts and humanities? It was iterated over and again that the idea of a University is that of a self-organising and self-regulating system, one that continually manages risk through academic engagement and scrutiny by peers, by discussions over governance and resource allocation, and so forth. Correctly so. An increasing institutionalisation of risk management is currently being developed—in our view, without sufficient consideration or definition of the different kinds of 'risk' involved in research or in using public money to support research. The workshop focussed on the essential and necessary element of risk for any *experiment* to be conducted. There are risks in all forms of innovative and adaptive activity. Play was cited centrally as both a model for innovation, improvisation and creative engagement, and because play and learning necessarily involve risk, change and development.

A focus on risk avoidance can obviate the possibility for considering the crucial aspects of creative innovation. For example, while writing the paper, Basildon hospital is in the news for having achieved an almost perfect score in audit, while patient's health was being undermined by poor care and hygiene. In that case, the head of the inspection committee blamed other people, and said there would be more robust audit systems developed. But in none of the discussion has the simple necessity of human care, staff motivation, or *desire* to work to a high standard been mentioned: only the need to regulate and determine behaviour more and more closely, reducing the 'risk' to patients of bad care. The demoralising and negative effects of this kind of regime are clearly counter-productive.

Consequently, a sustained critique emerged from the workshops of current audit practices and modes of measuring performance. We heard over and again that

failure, for different timescales for research to come to fruition, for the need to stop seeing failure as waste and to recognise the possibility for the re-use and redeployment of findings, concepts, ideas, approaches; and their honing and conceptual refinement over time.

Innovation should not be conflated with novelty, then, but with responsiveness. To conflate value with novelty is to miss the value of this kind of re-use, and how it is central to creativity.

The narrowing of models and modes for recognition was a concern to all those who spoke at the workshops since the metrics currently used bear no relation to how innovation and creativity occur in arts and humanities research. They also fail to understand what business and others 'users' say they need and want from Universities: that Universities and arts and humanities researchers within them *do different things* to business. Not only can they do different things, they work to different timescales and with the possibility of experiment and failure built in to the process of experimentation. The modes by which Universities engage and transfer understandings are not technology transfer offices, or formalised Knowledge Transfer initiatives, but rather through personal networks, the porosity of Universities as public spaces, relationships established through and around research. There are clearly discernible effects on the practice of research when evaluation is focused on the wrong things, on the easily visible activities of technology transfer and so on. These measures do the opposite of enabling the arts and humanities to achieve their potential and generate value.

Citizenship and formative evaluation

How then is one to recognise this value in creation and transmission, while taking seriously, as we said, the need for accountability and visibility?

Arts and humanities research has the conceptual tools to contribute an answer to this question in their emphasis on reflexivity, debate, and critical reflection. The question then becomes: how is one to build these elements (reflexivity, critical reflection, debate) into modes of recognition and measurement of value, as well as policy formulation for Universities? Reflexivity and an understanding of the temporality of influence and effect in and from arts and humanities research allows freedom for play and experiment, and demands similar reflexivity and evaluation from policy makers and funders.

Here is the distillation of our workshop findings: The value created by arts and humanities research is carried by and in persons. As expertise, as confidence, as understanding and orientation to issues, problems, concerns and opportunities, as tools and abilities. This is best captured for us in the notion of responsiveness. And that, we would argue, is what enables innovation.

Following from the argument above about the problematic nature of a production/consumption model, we argue that the properties of the things created in arts and humanities research are not intrinsic to those things as 'outputs'. The value of the knowledge created is not in objects, but is realised over and again in relationships, in processes of investigation, argumentation and understanding. Value is then elicited in actual relations. Change occurs in and through relationships. The facilitation of these relations is vital. The success of this facilitation by institutions is what should be measured, not what people produce considered as 'knowledge outputs' that can be measured for their 'impact'.

We heard in the workshops that the Science policy community has not subscribed to lineal models of input-output for a long time. Fundamental research with unknown outcomes or applications remains crucial to science research. Arts and humanities research may be less likely to produce a killer application or world changing technological output, but what it is continually producing is citizens who can be responsive. This may well be the way the world changes.

These observations pointed to a question about the value of arts and humanities research to society. What does it mean to be a citizen? That is, there is a need for stating and defining the conditions for citizenship in our society today. As we noted, responsiveness is key, and, we would argue on the basis of our explorations, that it is built on the existence of arts and humanities disciplines and research as part of a wider context of scientific and rigorous investigation.

How does one know what will be of value to someone else? One needs to listen to them. Space for listening is vital, as is reciprocity. That means trust is needed. Not trust in a sentimental sense, but in the sense that the imposition of narrow measures of output value continually focuses on and reveals the unspoken rules of engagement for what it is to be a person. And it is here that the notion of citizenship is so useful. In the classical sense, citizens are those who know how to behave. If someone had to be regulated or controlled, they were simply not a person, not a citizen.

If one is looking for a transactable form of the value created by arts and humanities research, one that carries the relations of its constitution and acts responsively and innovatively, the place to look is in the person and their developing capacities. Making those persons visible is the way to evaluate value transfer.

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