



IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL

An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

Creative Connections Interdisciplinary Research Workshops

Synthesis Report

October 2018

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Foreword

From Peter Brown, Irish Research Council Director

I'm very pleased to introduce this report on the inaugural Irish Research Council Creative Connections workshop initiative. The workshops were funded by the Council under a competitive call to the research community. This report showcases details of each of six workshops funded, and seeks to publicise the learnings arising for both researchers and wider stakeholders, including funders.

The Council's [mandated role](#), funding excellent research within and between all disciplines, places it in a strong position to support the development of interdisciplinary collaboration. This happens organically, as individual researchers come forward with new ideas and novel research proposals, however the Council are acutely aware of the need to also deploy specific instruments to encourage researchers across disciplines together to work on topics and challenges of mutual interest.

We tend to think of the research challenges of our time in terms of scientific discoveries and driving the next leap in the frontier of knowledge, however research and science arguably also face a grand challenge of interdisciplinarity. Breaking down unnecessary barriers between disciplines and recognising new forms of excellence continue to be largely aspirational. It will be important that all stakeholders jointly 'own' this project and there is broad engagement in charting the way forward. Key dimensions of the project of interdisciplinarity include the training of early-career researchers, the recognition of interdisciplinary research in career development, and the status of interdisciplinary research with academic journals.

The Council is pleased to launch, with the publication of this report, a new Creative Connections interdisciplinary workshop Call. The Council will fund a number of workshops in 2019, designed to bring researchers in STEM together with researchers in AHSS to jointly develop ideas and bring tangible 'added value' to collaboration. This report will be of particular interest to parties wishing to make a proposal under 2018-2019 Call.

This report, and the new Creative Connections call, are being launched as part of a wider set of measures on interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration. The Council is publishing a statement on how it will promote STEAM research. A new call under the Council's popular New Foundations programme is also being launched. This year's call includes a new strand designed to bring Art/Design/Humanities together with researchers in the sciences to find new ways of communicating complex topics or ideas.

I want to thank each of the six consortia for the enthusiasm with which the workshops were implemented, and the diligence with which feedback, learnings and recommendations were provided to the Council. Finally, I want to thank Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellows Dr. Fariha Shaikh and Dr. Grainne McEvoy,

who led on drafting this synthesis report, with additional editing by Dr. Nahuel Sznajderhaus.

Introduction

In late 2015, the Irish Research Council (IRC) launched a new call entitled ‘Creative Connections: Workshops to Cultivate Interdisciplinary Research in Ireland’. The purpose of the call was to encourage higher education and research institutions in Ireland to come together and formulate joint proposals for funded workshops on Interdisciplinary Research (IDR), to be delivered during 2016. *Creative Connections* invited researchers to develop innovative proposals for the design, organisation and delivery of IDR workshops, each supported by a maximum budget of €15,000. The workshops were to complement rather than replicate existing measures carried out at individual institutional or regional level, and to provide opportunities for researchers at different stages of their careers to participate and learn from each other.

As explained in the Creative Connections Call, the Council committed to producing and publishing a short report arising from the workshops capturing the key ‘learnings’ and recommendations for next steps for institutions, agencies and others, as appropriate. Successful consortia were required to submit workshop reports to the Council. These reports have been utilised to produce this document, which is being published in advance of the launch of the next Creative Connections call (a strand of the Council’s New Foundations Programme).

Brief Background on Interdisciplinary Research

In recent years, the European Research Area and a number of national jurisdictions have pursued the development of a challenge-based research framework. In Ireland specifically, *Innovation 2020* (the national strategy for research and development, science and technology) has stressed the necessity of research to address societal challenges facing Ireland, at a national and global level. This challenge-based approach does not align along disciplinary boundaries, and the overall focus is on contributing to solving complex societal and other problems rather than primarily adding to the knowledge base within the discipline. The Irish research landscape is a fertile ground for these goals for two reasons. For some time, the existence of institutions of small-to-moderate size by international standards has naturally stimulated inter-disciplinary activity. Secondly, as a small country, Ireland arguably can develop a strong national track record on IDR more quickly than other countries.

It is important that the Irish research system grasps this opportunity, particularly at a time when there is an increasing emphasis nationally and internationally on outputs and the demonstration of impact. IDR presents an opportunity for Irish researchers to develop greater capacity to leverage more funding from Horizon 2020 and the

successor framework programme. Horizon 2020 actively encourages the participation of non-academic entities in project consortia, and, in a broader context, IDR projects can and should include collaboration with partners such as SMEs, civic society groups or government. IDR also provides opportunities for young researchers to gain new collaborative experiences that will help build their skill sets for a range of diverse career paths.

For the purposes of the Creative Connections Call, IDR was defined as follows:

Interdisciplinary Research is a mode of research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice.¹

Summary of funded IDR Workshops

6 out of a total of 22 applications were funded through the Creative Connections Call. Workshops were held at the University of Limerick, Trinity College, Dublin, University College Cork, and the National University of Ireland, Galway. The following is a brief outline of these workshops.

Health Research Futures Lab

Consortium Lead: Ann-Marie Ryan (University of Limerick)

Consortium Members: Niamh NicGhabhann (Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, UL); Muireann McMahon (Design Factors, UL); Marilyn Lennon (Limerick Institute of Art and Design, LIT); Tracy Fahey (Limerick Institute of Art and Design, LIT); Jazmin Choidi (Tipperary Dance Platform)

The Health Research Futures Lab comprised a series of two workshops through which participants were encouraged to collaborate with each other and produce a research proposal. The proposal could either be a response to a specific call that the researchers had already identified, or a general statement of their planned interdisciplinary work. The teams developed and finalised their research proposal before presenting it to a panel of expert judges. Participants were selected through a competitive process, and came from a wide variety of backgrounds, including Food Science; Public Health; Visual and Participatory arts; Art Therapy; Physiotherapy; Medical Humanities; Physical Health; Design; Dance; Management/Business and Psychology.

The Health Research Futures Lab had two primary aims. The first was to facilitate an environment that supported interdisciplinary research. This was progressed through

¹ US National Academies (Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research)

the development of a structured programme for development and co-creation of new research project proposals, which engaged an iterative approach and made changes or introduced new elements where necessary. The second aim was to explore and research the lived experiences of researchers through the interdisciplinary research process, focusing on aspects such as emotions, practices and perceptions. This was achieved through the implementation of a feedback process from participants as they engaged in the interdisciplinary research process, capturing their experience as they worked. This data, together with further interviews will form the basis of a series of research articles reflecting on the process. In addition to building interdisciplinary teams, the workshops allowed the organisers to observe closely the interactions, tensions and pleasures in interdisciplinary teamwork.

Arising from the workshops, six projects were developed to 'pitch stage' and presented to the panel of expert judges on the final day of the four-day lab. Seed funding was awarded to three teams who evidenced the most promising proposals and offered the strongest case for interdisciplinary team working. The project "Ecologies of Informal Care" will pursue an interdisciplinary examination of the caring discourses associated with informal care in Ireland today. It will be the exploratory first step toward a 5-year research effort on the topic. The end goal of the project is to influence the creation of more viable advocacy on behalf of informal carers, and more effective reframing of elderly care policy analysis. The project "It Hurts" will work with twenty working age individuals who suffer chronic pain, aiming to articulate creative and narrative approaches to the understanding and communication of chronic pain experiences. "Mothers over the moon" will offer a novel approach at antenatal care services in Ireland, accounting for psychological and social aspects of pregnancy that current services seem to ignore.

Reimagining Ageing and Memory through Interdisciplinary Research

Consortium Lead: Desmond O'Neill (Professor in Medical Gerontology, TCD)

Consortium Members: Kieran Walsh (Lecturer, NUIG); Noel Fitzpatrick (Head of Department, DIT GRADCAM); Deirdre Desmond (Lecturer, NUIM); Hilary Moss (Director, National Centre for Arts and Health, Tallaght Hospital)

Reimagining Ageing and Memory was a two-day workshop involving over 70 academics, representatives from research councils and research officers. The first day was held at the TCD Long Room Hub and the second at Tallaght Hospital, which has a vibrant arts and humanities programme. The format of the event combined keynotes from prominent researchers in IDR in ageing and memory with presentations of current IDR projects, workshops and pitches for future IDR collaboration. There was a particular focus on understanding how interdisciplinarity develops current understandings of 'cultural gerontology'. The disciplinary spread of attendees was broad, ranging from Psychology; Philosophy; Literature; Music; Engineering; Architecture; Art Therapy; Nursing; Medicine; Speech Therapy; Anthropology; History; Occupational Therapy and Dance. The themes of joint presentations included Gerontology/Aesthetics; Psychology/Gerontology; Design/Gerontology; Aesthetics/Psychology; Music/Gerontology/Dementia; Dance

and Ageing; Gerontology/ Ageing. The themes of workshops across both days were: 'Making Connections' (challenge of finding suitable collaborators); 'Power, ethnography and geography' (maintaining balance between the different disciplines); and 'Engaging with funding bodies' (finding relevant funding cycles within the prescribed research field). Workshop coordinators concluded that there is enormous enthusiasm for IDR in Irish academic institutions and that ageing and memory are excellent topics for IDR, building on existing strengths and relationships in Irish and European research.

'Interdisciplinarity for Impact' Workshop

Consortium Lead: Prof Jane Ohlmeyer (Director Trinity Long Room Hub, TCD)

Consortium Members: Andy Way (Deputy Director, Adapt Research Centre, DCU); Alexander O'Connor (Lecturer in Computer Science, DCU)

'Interdisciplinarity for Impact' was a one-day workshop held at TCD Long Room Hub on 1 June, 2016, with 76 people in attendance. The workshop examined the concept that engaging in IDR can allow researchers to unlock deeper impact for their work than might otherwise be possible. The audience consisted of representatives of the research community (at all career stages), representatives from the research funding community and those working in Irish HEIs with an interest in how to support and foster this kind of research. The morning session constituted a series of papers which outlined the benefits to be gained from engaging in IDR, but also examined the risks in taking part and the barriers that exist which impede researchers from fully engaging. These presentations provided perspectives from the UK system where a number of studies have been undertaken examining the subject of IDR. The afternoon session allowed participants to engage in interactive discussion sessions around topics relevant to all researchers when embarking on their research projects, i.e. Open Access, Ethics, etc. This format proved popular among attendees and was helpful to the event organisers in capturing event feedback for the Irish Research Council. The workshop aimed to demonstrate practical ways in which researchers, representatives from offices of the Vice Presidents for Research, and funding bodies could engage in conducting and supporting interdisciplinary research. The workshop organisers have published a specific report on the proceedings and outcome.²

The workshop and its findings catalysed international engagement with a selection of international COST action members. In late autumn 2017 TCD explored the possibility of leading a consortium in response to the H2020 topic GOVERNANCE-15-2018: *Taking lessons from the practices of interdisciplinarity in Europe*. TCD were alerted by the EC in summer 2018 to the selection of the proposal for funding (€1.5m). The consortium is currently in the process of grant negotiation, with an anticipated project start date of February 2019. The overall aim of the project, entitled *SHAPE-ID*, is to provide concrete guidance and practical recommendations (in the form of a toolkit) for shaping future action - moving beyond expressions of intent or encouragement and into a framework for efficiently achieving the best value from interdisciplinary activities

² https://www.tcd.ie/trinitylongroomhub/media/news/articles/2016-10-10report_interdisciplinary_research.php

that engage disciplines from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) and STEM backgrounds. In addition to TCD as coordinator, the project comprises five other partners from the following countries: Italy, Switzerland, the UK, Poland and the Netherlands.

Palliative Care in Neurodegeneration, with a focus on Dementia: Addressing Complex Questions through Interdisciplinary Research and Reflection

Consortium Lead: Suzanne Timmons (Senior Lecturer and Geriatrician, UCC)

Consortium Members: Siobhan Fox (Centre for Gerontology and Rehabilitation, UCC); Catherine Sweeney (UCC); Kathy Murphy (NUIG); Sandra Galvin (NUIG); Tara Murphy (All Ireland Institute for Hospice and Palliative Care); Suzanne Guerin (All Ireland Institute for Hospice and Palliative Care); Karen Charnley (All Ireland Institute for Hospice and Palliative Care); Emer Begley (Alzheimer's Society of Ireland); Heather Gately (Dementia Research Education Advocacy in Motion); Niamh Clowry (Irish Association of Palliative Care); Marie Lynch (Irish Hospice Foundation)

This invite-only one-day workshop provided an opportunity for interdisciplinary networking through a series of facilitated discussions on "Palliative care in Neurodegeneration, with a focus on dementia." Dementia is a life-limiting condition, and people with dementia and their carers, have been shown to have palliative care needs equal to those of cancer patients. However, many people with advanced dementia are still not routinely assessed for palliative care needs. It is critical that related disciplinary groups work together to develop a common understanding of research gaps, priorities and methodologies in palliative care in neurodegeneration. Cross-disciplinary discussion was achieved by using multiple approaches to encourage active participation and optimise networking, including a 'speed-dating' forum, lightning talks, discussion sessions, as well as formal panels.

By allowing time for discussion between participants, the format of the workshop allowed participants to explore the potential for future collaborations. The disciplinary spread included nursing, geriatrics, psychology, medical researchers, law, ICT for healthcare, and others. Gaps for future collaboration included: observational research studies to better inform interventions in future trials; consideration of how to include people with advanced dementia; better understanding of the lived experience of the person with advanced dementia; how to achieve useful and actionable patient and public participation in research.

ASSEMBLE: Bringing together researchers from Arts, Science, Engineering, Medicine and Business

Consortium Lead: Molly Byrne (Senior Lecturer and Health Research Board Research Leader, and Director of the Health Behaviour Change Research Group, NUIG)

Consortium Members: Mary Tully (Lecturer in Physical Activity and Health, QUB); Catherine Woods (Chair of Physical Activity and Health, UL) ; Abhay Pandit (Director of CÚRAM, NUIG); Martin O'Halloran (ERC Fellow, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, NUIG); Jane Walsh (Director, mHealth Research Group and Lecturer, NUIG); Sandra Galvin (Coordinator of HRB-Trials Methodology Research Network, School of Nursing and Midwifery, NUIG); Geraldine Robbins (Leader of Performance Management Cluster, Whitaker Institute, NUIG); Chaosheng Zhang (Head of the Ryan Institute Geographic Information System Centre, NUIG); Mike Clarke (Director, All Ireland Hub for Trials Methodology Research, QUB)

The consortium prepared a one-day workshop, which provided an excellent opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration and communication between members. The workshop featured 20 expert speakers giving valuable information and advice on successfully leading an interdisciplinary research consortium, and maximizing opportunities for interdisciplinary research funding from H2020. The event attracted over 110 attendees from a broad cross-section of academic, research, industry and healthcare-based organisations. The aims were to identify strengths across the disciplinary divide, opportunities to enrich health-related research through interdisciplinary collaboration, and develop plans for collaborative submission to the upcoming H2020 Health Calls. The workshop included researchers from AHSS, STEM, Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences. Discussion included barriers/challenges to IDR and recommendations to increase IDR success, and activities included a hands-on grant-writing workshop and networking sessions. Attendees were provided with follow-up resources, including presentations and videos available online, and a future follow-up consortium meeting to plan further activities to support IDR and collaboration.

STEAM: A Workshop to Cultivate Interdisciplinary Research in Ireland

Consortium Lead: Armida de la Garza (Senior Lecturer in Digital Humanities and Screen Media, UCC)

Consortium Members: Charles Travis (Research Fellow, School of History and Humanities, TCD); Vikram Pakrashi (Assistant Professor, School of Mechanical and Materials Engineering, UCD); Sam Russell (Acting Head of Product Design, NCAD)

This two-day workshop to cultivate IDR in Ireland was held at TCD on 9-10 September, 2016. Recognising that bridging the gap between science and the arts is a paramount challenge of interdisciplinarity, the workshop focused on the promotion of STEAM research (i.e. research initiatives that seek to integrate Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Humanities as well as Mathematics into

community-based or problem-based projects). The goal was to make knowledge more responsive to social needs while also developing creativity, critical thinking and team working skills in individuals.

This two-day workshop had three aims: (1) to map existing interdisciplinary projects in Ireland (2) discuss the various forms of interdisciplinarity and (3) propose future collaborations. It featured: 3 keynote presentations from national and international experts; 18 case studies providing examples of STEAM at work, or focused on the means to set up STEAM teams; a networking and match-making session, which provided an opportunity for three projects seeking collaborators to introduce their work; a forum to discuss the promises of, and barriers to IDR and the means to overcome these. The workshop drew 33 participants from a variety of institutions and at different stages of their careers, both academic and non-academic. Partly as an outcome to the workshop, UCC is launching its call for the next Fulbright Scholar of STEAM for 2018-19.

The workshop also contributed to the writing of a major new book on STEAM, edited by the consortium lead and one of the consortium members. *Entitled The STEAM Revolution: Transdisciplinary Approaches to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Humanities and Mathematics*³, the book will be published by Springer shortly.

Recommendations for the Future Development of IDR

In their final reports, the six Creative Connections workshop consortia provided some reflections and recommendations on IDR and its future in Ireland. The following is a synthesis of the feedback received.

The recommendations speak to (1) how to address barriers to and improve IDR and (2) how research funders can support IDR.

(1) Recommendations to address barriers and improve IDR

Consortia members provided suggestions for addressing barriers to IDR and supporting collaboration. Certain consortia provided some suggestions that were broad, systemic and structural, while others offered guidelines on the successful development of funding proposals for IDR projects.

(i) Addressing Attitudinal Barriers

Participants in the workshops noted that the most challenging barrier to IDR is that of attitude, which is closely bound to 'self-identity'. This is seen as being most firmly entrenched among senior researchers. To tackle this attitudinal barrier, the following was suggested:

³ <https://www.springer.com/us/book/9783319898179#aboutBook>

- Presenting IDR collaboration in a non-threatening way, emphasising the contribution it can make to society and the potential benefits it holds for individuals' careers.
- IDR experience should be valued as criteria for consideration in career progression and promotion.
- While language may be regarded as a barrier, a shared language system should be seen as an outcome of IDR collaboration, and not an input.
- Deep reciprocity: in order to ensure the success of IDR projects, it is essential that all researchers have something to gain from the collaboration, regardless of disciplinary background or career stage.
- Parity of esteem: all members of the team should be involved from day one to ensure parity of esteem and that all parties are fully signed up to the project's stated aims.
- In order to achieve better evaluation processes and systems for IDR proposals, all researchers, when approached by research councils, are strongly encouraged to participate in evaluation/review panels for IDR.

(ii) Education and Training

Recommendations include:

- Training in IDR and its methods for postgraduate and early career researchers in all fields, *before* they start specialising in any particular field. Training could start with a foundation course common to all students entering postgraduate study.
- Benchmarking: an example of good practice comes from UCC and its university-wide module on sustainability⁴, which is embedded in its green campus community-based strategy. The module draws on expertise across the university to provide an active-learning class on the subject from the perspective of all disciplines, including medicine, law, engineering and media.
- HEIs could invite external examiners who are supportive of IDR to be external examiners on PhD external examiner boards.
- Enhance institutional support for early-career researchers applying for Marie Curie IDR postdocs.
- HEIs should provide more support in the area of post award/project management, e.g. ethics, data management, and Open Access.

(iii) Structural Support

Recommendations include:

- Placement of a humanities scholar in science departments for a semester or a year on a rotational basis.

⁴ University College Cork has become the first institution outside of North America to achieve a gold star rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

- Access to funding that supports STEAM in the long term, including the foundation of a journal, provisionally called International Journal of STEAM.
- Creation of a space to house teams for experimental projects in Dublin and possibly Cork.
- Residences to bring researchers from diverse backgrounds together to devise a common project for collaboration.
- Wider promotion of IDR programmes, such as medical, environmental and digital humanities.
- Suitable platforms for investigating the feasibility/benefit of IDR through a SWAT (study within a trial).

(iv) Knowledge Transfer and Impact

Recommendations include:

- IDR projects must develop knowledge transfer activities, supported by an evidence-based framework, thus ensuring that research translates into the development of policy and practice.
- To ensure they are credited for IDR work and to raise its profile, all researchers should: ensure that they tag their research as being IDR in nature; ensure they have an ORCID ID; carefully consider which journals to publish in, since less obvious journals can be the best places for other disciplinary areas; ensure their work is available through Open Access; use citation-tracking tools in bibliometric databases; engage with alternative impact tools such as Altmetric.com and promote work via social media; network at appropriate conferences and meetings.
- HEIs can do more to recognise and support impact, including:
 - Support standardised metrics, altmetrics, access to tools and resources.
 - Work together to develop standardised reporting and evaluation methodologies, particularly in support of IDR and societal and cultural impacts.
 - Monitor compliance and help develop capacity in support of Open Access policies to Irish research publications and data.
 - Work together to lobby for proper coverage of Irish research in bibliometric databases.

(2) Recommendations to research funders

The following recommendations, specifically for the Irish Research Council and other research funders, were provided by IDR Workshop Consortium leaders and members in their final reports.

Facilitating IDR Networking & Development

- The Council could take the lead in a collaboration with other funders in Ireland to use the IDR workshops as a launch pad for a national network for IDR researchers and projects: this would facilitate better dissemination of information on IDR, opportunities for collaboration and funding; would showcase of best practice across different themes, etc. This network could be supported by a website where researchers could be matched to other researchers from different disciplines with common general research interests in order to be able to initiate discussions on IDR.
- Organize and/or support IDR conferences with “skill-swop” sessions aimed at early career researchers, showing how they could apply their experience and expertise across other disciplines.
- Promote mobility between disciplines through funding mechanisms, similar to Council’s promotion of institutional mobility within postdoc schemes.
- Enhance coordination between research funders (e.g. through a funder forum) to ensure a consistent approach to supporting IDR. An ensemble of research funding agencies should develop a joint policy to foster IDR in their grant policies, with specific emphasis on issues such as developing appropriate reviewer mechanisms and enhanced support for early career researchers in IDR, considered riskier from a career perspective.
- Raise awareness of the need for Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) in Irish government policy documents that researchers contribute to. The absence of DOIs makes it more difficult for Irish researchers to highlight the contribution and impact of their work in the policy realm. The Council could help raise awareness of the need for this with government departments and agencies.

Funding Support for IDR

- Develop a dedicated funding stream to stimulate IDR: establish an annual call, in a manner similar to the call for the IDR workshops, but under specific themes. Themes could be identified in consultation with industry, and the community and voluntary sector.
- Ring-fence funding for early-career researchers to engage in IDR: this would train IDR postgrads and postdocs, include a co-supervisor model (with supervisors from two or more disciplines), and develop collaborations with existing academics through such co-supervision.

IDR Theory & Methodologies

- Develop a focus on “translation” as a metaphor for IDR: the word and concept of “translation” is appropriate to providing a framework for understanding IDR, since science can be “translated” into art and vice-versa in STEAM projects, and one discipline can be “translated” into another for IDR design.

- Support the approach of [“Entanglement” proposed by Felicity Callard and Des Fitzgerald](#) (*Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 32, Issue 1, 2015, 3-32) as a helpful template for developing IDR.
- In developing grants to support IDR, ensure that interdisciplinary work is evident in the framing of the research question, rather than simply “adding on” extra disciplines in order to create the illusion of interdisciplinarity.
- Recognize that the process of IDR should be a focus of scholarship in its own right, recognizing the variations in philosophical anthropology and epistemological approaches of the disciplines engaging in IDR.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This report will be published by the Council and circulated to institutions, research funders and other relevant stakeholders. Research funders in particular will be encouraged to consider the recommendations in the report as part of the further development of research funding programmes and other initiatives.

In addition, the report and recommendations therein will inform the Council’s next IDR Workshops Call.

ENDS

Irish Research Council
October 2018