



Introducing the Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report Dataset*

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Abstract:

The UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network was jointly funded in July 2020 by the Irish Research Council (IRC) and the UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under the ground-breaking Collaboration in Digital Humanities Networking Grant Scheme. The joint aims of the Network were to: a) undertake research and consultation towards the implementation of a permanent UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association; and b) to develop a clear roadmap for collaboration in the field between the two countries. An ancillary objective of the Irish Network members is to provide an up-to-date evaluation of the role and scope of Digital Humanities in Ireland, both past and present, to facilitate longer-term thinking about Digital Humanities so that we might optimise future developments in the field, including the nascent UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association. To that end, the respective partners are developing a Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report. The research informing the Landscape Report will be delivered in two phases. The initial phase took place between March and September 2021 and comprised the identification via desk research, collection and collation of data pertaining to Digital Humanities entities in Ireland. The second phase of the data gathering/collection exercise entails the presentation of the preliminary dataset to the wider Digital Humanities community for input and suggestions. To that end, we have created an Open Science Framework (OSF) repository¹. This contribution introduces the Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report dataset, its methodology and primary sources and offers some preliminary observations and analysis. It concludes with some suggestions for potential use cases and further directions for the dataset.

Keywords: Digital Humanities, Ireland, Irish Research Council, Landscape Analysis, UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network

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¹ <<https://osf.io/bvmkd>> (05/2022).

1. Introduction and Background

Digital Humanities is not some airy Lyceum. It is a series of concrete instantiations involving money, students, funding agencies, big schools, little schools, programs, curricula, old guards, new guards, gatekeepers, and prestige. It might be more than these things, but it cannot not be these things. (Ramsay 2013, 240)

Irish DH is its own DH, made so by the peculiarities of an Irish academy which is in many respects considerably different to its international counterparts, and so we should problematise it in its own right. (O’Sullivan 2020, 4)

In July 2020, the UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network was jointly funded by the Irish Research Council (IRC) and the UKRI’s Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under the ground-breaking “UK-Ireland Collaboration in the Digital Humanities Networking Grant”. The joint aims of the network were a) to undertake research and consultation towards the implementation of a permanent UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association; and b) to develop a clear roadmap for collaboration in the field between the two countries. The network comprised eight third-level institutional members from across Ireland and the United Kingdom, each with an established track record of research and teaching in Digital Humanities, and with specialisms in a range of disciplinary and methodological areas central to the field².

Between December 2020 and November 2021, a series of five online events – four workshops and a final congress – were conducted to build consensus around the key concepts of sustainability, inclusivity, training, advocacy and career progression. Each meeting generated its own publicly accessible output detailing the respective event’s highlights and setting forth key findings and recommendations. At the time of writing (April 2022), three of the four workshop reports are available, with the fourth under review and the network is in the final stages of drafting its three-year *Roadmap for the UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association*, under the guidance of UK Co-PI Prof. Jane Winters. These outputs constitute a wealth of information relating to the current state of the art of our international Digital Humanities community and further details are available in the references section of this piece.

It is well-documented that Digital Humanities (or *the* Digital Humanities) is both “varied and local”³, and that one’s geographical location will more than likely impact upon the individual perception of the field (for example, School of Advanced Studies 2017; Matres, Oiva, Tolonen 2018; Toscano, Rabadán, Ros *et al.* 2020; Treasure 2022). As James O’Sullivan argues in his history of the Digital Humanities in Ireland, “While scholars tend to belong and contribute to international communities of praxis, doing DH in one place might look very different to doing DH somewhere else” (Toscano, Rabadán, Ros *et al.* 2020, 1). That each of the five key concepts are not equally relevant to each country was recognised from an early stage of the network’s activities (Gambell, Gooding, Hughes *et al.* 2021, 13). Indeed, during the network’s second workshop on Digital Humanities and advocacy, the value of a UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association was called into question when Andrew Prescott somewhat provocatively argued that the UK participants should instead focus on the formation of a national network designed to address their specific needs (as discussed in Gambell, Gooding, Hughes *et al.* 2021, 13). Of

² The full list of project members and participating institutions can be found on the Network’s website (<<https://dhnetwork.org/team>> (05/2022)).

³ Edmond Jennifer, in conversation, 16 March 2021.

course, the two are not mutually exclusive and it is entirely possible for national communities to advocate for their needs whilst also engaging in international collaborations (as Prescott is no doubt aware).

It goes without saying that an important issue to consider in developing an Irish Digital Humanities network – either in isolation or in collaboration with our UK colleagues – is the size and shape of the region’s Digital Humanities community both actual and potential. To that end, the Irish Network members partners are developing a Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report. In recent years, Digital Humanities in Ireland has been the subject of several research papers and reports. Studies have focused on the history of the field in the last three decades (O’Sullivan, Murphy, Day 2015; O’Sullivan 2020); national capacity development for Digital Humanities research (Keating 2014; Smeaton, Collins, Harrower *et al.* 2015); and the potential impact of Digital Humanities on the Innovation Ecosystem (Byrne, Schreibman 2015). These studies contribute to a macro perspective of Irish Digital Humanities. It is hoped that the Landscape Report will both complement and supplement these studies through the establishment of an empirical perspective on Digital Humanities in Ireland both past and present, to facilitate longer-term thinking about Digital Humanities to optimise future developments in the field, including the nascent DH Association. A further objective is to provide recommendations to aid the IRC to develop their strategy for funding future Digital Humanities research.

The research informing the Landscape Report will be delivered in two phases. The initial phase took place between March and September 2021 and comprised the identification via desk research, collection and collation of data pertaining to Digital Humanities entities in Ireland (key definitions will be discussed in further detail presently). The second phase of the data gathering/collection exercise entails the presentation of the preliminary dataset to the wider Digital Humanities community for input and suggestions. The present piece has the joint aims of introducing the dataset which formed the foundation of the report and of offering some preliminary observations and analysis. It focuses on the themes of identity and identification of Digital Humanities entities. Whilst these questions are not necessarily unique to Irish Digital Humanities, the collation of a dataset pertaining to Digital Humanities in Ireland does allow us to offer a uniquely Irish perspective.

2. *Conduct of Research*

Our research was funded by the IRC and has as one of its primary objectives the provision of information to aid and support collaborations in the field of Digital Humanities between Ireland and the UK. We therefore captured details of Digital Humanities entities which were either wholly or partially based in Ireland and not Northern Ireland, unless they were affiliated with an Irish Digital Humanities entity (e.g. partners in research projects or networks). This position is not intended as a political statement. Rather, it is simply a response to the fact that such activities constitute part of the UK Digital Humanities landscape and should be documented as such. In alignment with the UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network, the definition of Digital Humanities employed in our study is broad and inclusive. We understand Digital Humanities to exist on a spectrum and to include the application of digital methods to humanities problems, the engineering and maintenance of digital tools, products and infrastructures, theoretical interventions into the relationship between digital technologies and human culture, and participation in the formal field of Digital Humanities via domain specific publications and conferences⁴. Further, as the wider Network held as one of its objectives the

⁴I would like to extend my thanks to my network colleagues and associates Zeena Feldman, Paul Gooding, Órla Murphy and James Smithies for allowing me to use this description of Digital Humanities which was collab-

engagement and inclusion of communities beyond academia, including Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAMs), and the arts and creative industries as well as other industries and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), our research aimed to capture all relevant activities insofar as it was possible.

At present, the study identifies and defines eleven different Digital Humanities entity types as follows (in alphabetical order):

DH_Fellowship	A funded research and training programme at any level.
DH_Programme	Formal credit-bearing degree and certificate courses at any level. For the purposes of the report, the emphasis is on the award and individual modules are not listed. Entities which do not explicitly refer to Digital Arts and/or Digital Humanities may be listed provided that the overall curriculum and objectives are in line with those of Digital Arts and Humanities counterparts (i.e., a combination of digital project building, technical skills and digital culture and theory).
DH_Training	DH training entities are less formal than DH programmes, e.g. workshops, summer schools or seminars. They often relate to practical application of a specific tool or technology, they are often one-off in nature and, for the most part, they are not credit-bearing or associated with a formal curriculum.
GLAM	Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums. Referring to both physical and digital entities.
Professional_Body	A formal organisation which “maintains an oversight of the knowledge, skills, conduct and practice” of a particular profession or occupation. This includes Research Performing Organisations (RPOs).
Research_Centre	More formal than research units and have a wider research mandate. They usually involve activities beyond the scope of a single Faculty and/or involve university resources. They have an on-campus office or similar physical presence.
Research_Group	The most informal entity type. They typically consist of three or more individuals at the same institution who are engaged in or want to pursue a common area of research. Research groups do not require an organisational structure, dedicated physical space on campus, or funding.
Research_Institute	The largest and most formal of all research entities and conduct research into a number of related or different areas of study. They have a definite on-campus presence such as an office.
Research_Laboratory	Similar to a Research_Centre, they usually involve activities beyond the scope of a single Faculty and/or involve university resources. They have on-campus facilities. Noting the differences between Art and Humanities and scientific laboratory spaces, the dataset included any entity that self-identified as a lab(oratory) under this heading.

oratively formulated during a number of conversations throughout early 2021.

Research_Project	We recognise the diversified and complex nature of Digital Humanities research projects. A typical Digital Humanities project will apply digital methods to humanities research data (analogue and digital). However, this is not a hard and fast rule. We include in our list projects which belong to the Critical Digital Humanities and which may not produce a digital output beyond project publications.
Research_Unit	More formal in nature than research groups. They may include members from multiple institutions or organisations and have a broader research focus. In contrast to research groups, research units require an organisations structure and/or dedicated space and/or funding. These units are often organisationally part of their host institution and are subject to institutional management and control.

Insofar as the information was applicable and available, for each enlisted entity we recorded details of the entity type; URL; host institution name; host institution location name; host institution location type; sector; start date; end date; funding type; funding agency; funding scheme; funding amount; contact; role (of contact); discipline (of contact). In addition to recording the URL for each entity, the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine was used to preserve the main webpage on which the entity is described at the time of that the entity was added to the dataset.

3. Relevant Data Sources

In addition to reviewing the relevant literature and manually searching for and gathering information from online sources, one non-public document and two publicly available databases were used to compile our list.

UK-Ireland Collaboration in the Digital Humanities Workshop, 22-23 October 2019, Delegate Pack:

The delegate pack for the scoping workshop convened in Dublin by the IRC and the AHRC in advance of the Collaboration in the Digital Humanities Networking Call listed the details (name, institution, position) and provided brief bios of 31 delegates from Irish institutions with a self-declared interest in the Digital Humanities.

DRAPier Database (Digital Research and Projects in Ireland)⁵:

The now-defunct DRAPier interactive database provides access to an inventory database of Irish Digital Humanities projects surveyed between 2009 and 2013 by the staff of similarly defunct Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO) in conjunction with the Humanities Serving Irish Society Consortium (HSIS). The DRAPier project listed projects that met each of the following criteria:

- the project was affiliated with a higher education or cultural institution on the island of Ireland, or a higher education or cultural institution outside of Ireland that had created digital resources focusing on Ireland or Irish studies;
- the project involved digital arts, humanities, or humanities/science interdisciplinary re-

⁵ <<https://www.ria.ie/research-projects/archive/digital-humanities-observatory/drapier>> (05/2022).

search and;

- the project was mandated to produce, or have produced, substantially extant digital content or deliverables.

Therefore, caution must be exercised when drawing conclusions about the state of Digital Humanities in Ireland during the survey period. As has been noted elsewhere, “these rigid criteria provide a significant limitation in order to recognize successful and delivered projects in a small sector as opposed to speculative or aspirational endeavours” (O’Sullivan, Murphy, Day 2015).

IRC Awardees Database⁶:

Launched in 2012 and operating under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills, the IRC funds excellent research across all disciplines, via individual awards. Its Awardees’ Database⁷ was also a rich, albeit restrictive and somewhat problematic, resource. Digital Humanities awards are dispersed over a wide range of disciplines and because of the way the IRC have indexed the awardees, Digital Humanities is not well represented in the database. For example, *Beyond 2022: Ireland’s National Memory*, the precursor to *Beyond 2022: Ireland’s Virtual Record Treasury*, a flagship collaborative Digital History project is listed under Business & Management with no reference to Digital Humanities. Often, the researcher had to rely on local knowledge of the Digital Humanities landscape for this database to be of use.

4. Preliminary Observations and Analysis

Determining what to include and what to exclude from a list such as this is an interesting exercise when exploring what it means to be a practitioner of Digital Humanities at a time when “all humanistic studies are mediated by technologies” (Keating 2014, 22). To paraphrase John Keating, a prominent member of Irish Digital Humanities community, if you are doing humanities now, you are doing humanities digitally. Whilst the big-tent approach suited our purposes, there must be an awareness that data collected and visualised may or may not reflect how entities label or identify their work with or as Digital Humanities. As Keating argued in relation to Irish Digital Humanities in 2014, “Our perspectives on digital humanities – and our opportunities for funding – are inherently complicated, if also enriched, by this difficulty in tying down a shared understanding” (23). The challenges of identifying and defining Digital Humanities have similarly impeded other national surveys. For example, in their empirical study of Digital Humanities in Spain, Toscano and his co-authors note that the community of scholars in Spain working in the Digital Humanities is undoubtedly larger than the community of scholars who identify as digital humanists. They continue that “problems with defining digital humanities multiplies the difficulties in assessing whether a project or a researcher should be included in the final dataset” (Toscano, Rabadán, Ros, *et al.* 2020, 2).

A subject of much discussion was which digitisation projects should be included in the dataset. A recent report by another of the IRC-AHRC-funded Digital Humanities Networks, A Digital Framework for the Medieval Gaelic World, has highlighted what the authors refer to as an “underlying truth” (Stifter, Cnockaert-Guillou, Färber *et al.* 2022, 5) that Digitisation and

⁶ <<https://research.ie/awardees/>> (05/2022).

⁷ <<https://research.ie/awardees/>> (05/2022).

Digital Humanities are not the same thing. And whilst it may be difficult – if not impossible – to pin down the latter, it may be useful to determine which criteria need to be met before objects in the former category, that is digitised research objects, fall under the umbrella of Digital Humanities. This challenge is not new, in 2013 Dot Porter made a similar argument regarding digital scholarly editions, writing that the scholarly community needed to ensure that there are clear definitions regarding “digital” vs “digitised” editions. However, whilst the digitised object may not itself constitute a Digital Humanities entity, the surrounding infrastructure and the context in which it was created may form a vital part of the Digital Humanities landscape. There is certainly more involved in a digitisation project than merely cranking up the “digital photocopier” (Prescott 2015). Digitisation is not a neutral exercise, particularly when it comes to decisions regarding which materials to digitise and to make available. The difficulties in assessing whether a digitisation project should be included as part of the dataset are further complicated by the fact that methods of digitisation of primary source materials often form part of Digital Humanities curricula. Therefore, digitisation is itself considered a core function of the Digital Humanities. Conversely, a 2017 Landscape Report of Digital Humanities Research Teaching and Practice in the UK found that certain digital skills “such as digital imaging and database technologies” (School of Advanced Studies, University of London, 9) were considered essential to work in the GLAM sector, rather than specific to Digital Humanities. In the end, inclusion was determined based on a digital resource: a) self-identifying as Digital Humanities; and/or b) being identified as Digital Humanities either directly or indirectly by a third party; and/or c) being affiliated with another Digital Humanities entity (this was particularly the case for library special collections).

Thus far, the study has resulted in a sample set of 248 individual entities distributed as follows: 2 DH_Fellowship, 36 DH_Programme, 8 DH_Training, 15 GLAM, 4 Professional_Body, 8 Research_Centre, 10 Research_Group, 4 Research_Institute, 3 Research_Laboratory, 141 Research_Project, and 17 Research_Unit⁸. Although a full analysis on the implications of the data has yet to be performed, a few clear patterns emerge in the dataset. The overall impression is one of a dynamic Digital Humanities community that is both established and emerging. The number of Digital Humanities entities has increased sharply over time. Beginning in 1991 and growing steadily for the first two decades, activity has accelerated in the last ten years. Developments in recent years have been dominated by the formation of research units (in the form of research networks) and research projects, with almost all of the vast majority of Digital Humanities work occurs within Higher Education Institutions. However, our dataset also supports a view of Irish Digital Humanities as both intersectoral and international. Our survey identified 75 national institutions associated with the 248 entities distributed as follows: 1 National Broadcaster, 1 Not-for-Profit Organisation, 1 Professional Network, 1 Public Body, 1 Strategic Partnership, 1 Voluntary Organisation, 2 SMEs, 5 Registered Charities, 5 RPOs, 14 Government Bodies, 17 GLAMs, and 26 HEIs. Beyond the 75 Irish institutions, we identified a further 215 international institutions linked to Irish Digital Humanities entities: 151 based in EU member states; 48 based in the UK; 6 located in non-EU European countries; 3 in the USA; 2 in Canada and 1 in Asia, South Asia, East Asia, Australia and South America respectively.

One of the most encouraging observations of our survey thus far is the embeddedness of Digital Arts and Humanities education in Irish HEIs⁹. We identified 36 Digital Arts and

⁸ This dataset remains a living document. The figures presented here are drawn from Version 2, deposited 10.05.2022, <<https://osf.io/bvmkd/>> (05\2022).

⁹ Additional information specific to DH_Programmes was recorded on a separate spreadsheet, <<https://osf.io/bgdu8/>> (05\2022).

Humanities programmes: 21 Digital Humanities and 16 Digital Arts (in the sense of creative arts)¹⁰. Of the 36 entities, 17 contained the terms “digital humanities”, “digital arts”, “digital arts and humanities” or “digital culture” in their titles. 16 DH_Programmes are at undergraduate level (3 BSc and 13 BA) and 20 are at postgraduate level (2 Cert, 3 MSc, 3 PhD, 5 Dip, 7 MA/MPhil). All 16 of the former appear to be ongoing and 15 of the latter are still available. Taught degree-awarding programmes in Digital Arts and Humanities are presently available in 6 Irish Universities (National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Technical University Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork, University of Limerick), and 7 Institutes of Technology (Dundalk Institute of Technology, Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology) with a diploma or certificate in Digital Methods and Data Literacy taught by prominent members of the Irish Digital Humanities community being offered at University College Dublin. One sixth of the DH_Programmes in our dataset award science qualifications (i.e., BSc or MSc), the remaining qualifications are in the arts and/or humanities.

Considering both the objectives of the Landscape Report and the nature of Digital Humanities work generally, funding is obviously an important remit of the dataset. At the time of writing, we are still deciding the best approach to this information. The following are some headline figures. Of the 141 Research_Projects we were able to ascertain funder information for 127 entities. Of the remaining 14 entities, 3 were student projects and funding information was not considered applicable. In terms of count (i.e., the number of projects funded), the most significant Irish funder of Digital Humanities research is the IRC, with 30% (42) of Research_Project entities being either fully or partially funded by this funding agency. The funding amount was not available for over half of these entities (75). Financial information is particularly limited for entities funded by Irish funding agencies, and it is difficult to say what – if any – meaningful information can be derived from the data as it stands. For example, it would be valuable to know the total IRC contribution to Digital Humanities focused research and to assess how it compares to the contribution of other funding agencies. Information relating to EU-funded projects is more readily available through the CORDIS website. Over one fifth (29, 22.83%) of the Research_Projects with funder information received EU project funding including 6 prestigious European Research Council grants with a total EU contribution €11,358,419.

With this discussion in mind, and considering the aforementioned challenges encountered when using the IRC Awardees database as a data source for this type of study, we would suggest a number of changes to how the IRC might better represent their various funded projects and activities, including details of the IRC contribution. Whilst we recognise that the amorphous nature Digital Humanities means that it is unlikely that all activities that we might consider to be Digital Humanities or Digital Humanities adjacent would be labelled as such, details such as “Project Objectives” would certainly help when attempting to identify relevant activities.

5. Conclusion and Further Directions

The study of the landscape of a diverse and multimodal field such as digital humanities is not a straight-forward task. As with any survey, there are many things not represented, overrep-

¹⁰ The difference in the total figures can be accounted to by the fact that one entity, the PhD in Digital Arts and Humanities at National University of Ireland, Galway, is labelled as both Digital Humanities and Digital Arts.

resented, or underrepresented and I have attempted to highlight these limitations throughout this contribution. As it stands, the dataset is skewed towards the humanities and Trinity College Dublin. It is hoped that input from the Digital Humanities community will counteract many of these shortcomings. To that end, we have created an OSF repository¹¹.

The immediate application of this data is a resource for the Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report. However, we hope that this dataset will be of use to those who might also want to study the landscape of Digital Humanities either locally, nationally or internationally. At the very least, the records of the webpages for the various entities provide a snapshot of how Irish Digital Humanities is represented at the time of writing. Ideally, the dataset will serve as resource for members of the Irish community by facilitating enhanced networking and collaboration.

In conducting this research, the dual challenges of identification and definition have repeatedly emerged. Digital Humanities entities are difficult to find if you don't know where to look. Whilst the various funding authorities could certainly do more to facilitate this kind of research, there is need for an inventory specific to Digital Humanities research and activities. The development and maintenance of a comprehensive information base about the Irish Digital Humanities landscape would support the optimal use of existing and more considered development of future resources and advance the state of the art. Integration of this information by decisionmakers would aid better strategic planning and enable a coherent and strategy-led approach to future research policy and funding. Further recommendations regarding the shape and size of such a database and whose remit it fall under will be made in the final report.

Irrespective of what data is collected, how it is collected and by whom, it is evident that Irish Digital Humanities is presently thriving, and a regional Digital Humanities Association would be a welcome addition to the landscape of Digital Humanities in Ireland.

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¹¹ <<https://osf.io/bvmkd/>> (05/2022).

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