

# Kyushu-Durham Statement on Transformative Humanities

On 24 March 2026, colleagues from Kyushu University and Durham University came together at the JK Choi Cultural Centre to reflect on the present condition and future role of the humanities. This statement reflects our shared conclusions and intentions.

## 1. Challenges we recognise

We recognise that the humanities face a number of connected challenges.

The first is a **challenge of public articulation**. Humanities scholarship often addresses questions of meaning, value, history, identity, interpretation, and judgment that are central to collective life, yet its contribution is not always clearly expressed to those beyond specialist circles.

The second is a **challenge of institutional structure**. In both our universities, participants identified siloed ways of organising teaching and research, limited opportunities for sustained exchange across disciplines, and evaluation systems that can inhibit collaboration and outward-facing work.

The third is a **challenge of curriculum and pedagogy**. Rapid technological change, including the spread of artificial intelligence, is reshaping how students learn, how knowledge is communicated, and what forms of assessment remain educationally valuable.

The fourth is a **challenge of confidence and direction**. The humanities are sometimes pushed into a defensive posture: either retreating into inwardness, or responding too passively to agendas set elsewhere. Neither response is adequate.

## 2. Values we affirm

In response, we affirm the following.

We affirm the **potential of the humanities to enrich, shape and change lives**: to make a positive difference in the world, through both research and teaching.

We affirm that **the humanities need to engage seriously with the wider world**, by holding themselves answerable to needs and purposes besides their own, and adopting an attitude of contribution as well as criticism.

We affirm **the value of intellectual seriousness, clarity, and responsibility** in humanities scholarship and teaching. The humanities should be able to explain their

work, their standards, and their significance in ways that are rigorous without being unnecessarily obscure.

We affirm **interdisciplinarity and intercultural dialogue** as central, not peripheral, to the future of the humanities. Many of the most important questions facing universities and societies do not respect disciplinary or cultural boundaries, and the humanities are strengthened when they enter into sustained dialogue across fields, traditions, and institutions.

We affirm that **teaching in the humanities must be able to identify and articulate the forms of knowledge, understanding, and skill it gives students**, and why these matter. Humanities education should help students see how their learning bears on work, citizenship, culture, and personal life, by making clear how humanistic study equips people to think, speak, and act in a complex world.

### 3. Actions we support

On this basis, we support the following directions for action.

We support **stronger institutional backing for interdisciplinary teaching and research** in the humanities. Universities should reduce unnecessary barriers between departments and faculties, create incentives for collaboration, and provide structures in which interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and research become normal rather than exceptional.

We support **the development of common spaces**, both intellectual and physical, in which scholars and students can meet across disciplinary lines. Interdisciplinarity depends not only on formal strategy but on regular habits of conversation, trust, and cooperation.

We support **curriculum renewal in the humanities**, including renewed attention to oracy, visual and other non-written forms of communication, critical digital literacy, reflection on AI and technology, and assessment methods suited to contemporary conditions.

We support **evaluation systems that better recognise collaborative work**, co-authorship where appropriate, public-facing scholarship, intercultural exchange, and contributions to teaching and institution-building, rather than relying on narrow or imported metrics.

We support **further collaboration between Kyushu University and Durham University** in the field of transformative humanities, especially through shared discussion of curriculum innovation, interdisciplinary research, and institutional practices that enable the humanities to flourish.

## 4. Shared commitment

We understand **transformative humanities** as humanities work that enriches, shapes and changes lives, by connecting disciplinary depth to questions that matter beyond the university. Transformative humanities do not abandon critique, but combine critique with contribution. The problems societies face do not respect disciplinary boundaries, so the transformative humanities often work across them. Transformative humanities are outward-facing, intellectually serious, interdisciplinary where needed, and attentive to the purposes their work serves.

**We therefore commit ourselves to advancing a vision of transformative humanities that is intellectually serious, publicly engaged, institutionally supported, interdisciplinary in practice, and open to collaboration across cultures and academic traditions.**