

THE ARTS AND THE
HUMANITIES:

MULTIPLE PURPOSES AND ONE RATIONALE

Simon Marginson, University of Oxford
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Pieter Bruegel the Elder, The Tower of Babel, c. 1563



DO WE NEED TO PROVIDE AN INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALE?

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A. Do we need to provide an instrumental rationale for life itself?



ARTS AND HUMANITIES ARE CENTRAL TO HUMAN EXISTENCE

For many people all over the world the arts, cultural production and human thought are absolutely central to their human existence. It is a major understatement to say that these disciplines in higher education enrich society. Many of us would not want to live in a world without the arts and humanities

Joan Miro, *The garden* (1925)



STUDENTS WANT TO BUILD THEIR AGENCY IN THESE DISCIPLINES

- All over the world students want to enter these courses regardless of the specific salaries and rates of employment for graduates (many do a second more pragmatic course after arts and humanities)
- Many students want to form themselves in the arts or the humanities, to build their active agency and capabilities as people by immersing themselves in these knowledges and sensibilities and skills, often themselves becoming creators



THE SINGLE OVERRIDING RATIONALE

That many students want to form themselves in the arts and humanities disciplines is the single overriding rationale for these disciplines and it is sufficient

Vincent Van Gogh, *Irises in a vase* (1890)

