

Institution: University of Exeter
Unit of Assessment: Theology and Religious Studies
<p>a. Context</p> <p>Research in the Department of Theology and Religion has long been characterised by rigorous and deliberate engagement with a range of contemporary issues of social, political, ethical and religious importance. Much of the unit’s research is interdisciplinary, forging connections with disciplines such as law, geography, biology, and environmental science. Recent research has been concerned with subjects such as the built environment, farming, criminal justice, human rights, sexual ethics, intersex identities, vegetarianism, environmental ethics, sensory-impaired communities and religious identity. Environmental issues have been prominent in a number of our recent research projects. Such research is undertaken with the intention of informing and changing attitudes and practices beyond the HE academy, and opportunities to communicate research in ways that will achieve such impacts are therefore particularly sought and taken.</p> <p>We have strong relationships with stakeholders outside the academy who have invested in research projects relevant to their core concerns. The main users and beneficiaries of our research are: (a) church-related groups and bodies; (b) educators in schools and theological colleges; (c) organisations, charities, and NGOs whose work is focused on the ethical issues we address; (d) professionals and practitioners in other disciplines, such as urban planners and health care chaplains; (e) the general public, particularly through the communication of research in the media.</p> <p>Impacts have been achieved through: working with practitioners in education and the churches to offer training and to design materials for use in teaching; addressing non-academic, public, and interdisciplinary bodies; working with the media to enable research to enhance public understanding; and membership of external bodies and institutions.</p>
<p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>The structure of the Department’s research activity is designed to build connections across sub-disciplinary boundaries through means such as workshops, seminars, and projects, one of which has been cited by the AHRC as an example of ‘collaborative research within a single discipline [that] can have dramatic impacts’ (<i>Leading the World</i> [AHRC, 2009], p. 28). The desire to shape attitudes and practices in society is a significant driver for such research activity. Major funded research projects engage directly with issues of public importance, such as Gorringe’s AHRC-funded project on the Transition Town movement (see case study) and Reed’s BA-funded project on religion in public life in Britain and Iran. Institutional support to develop connections and facilitate the impact of research is strong, with examples including the Link Fund and the Bridging the Gaps project (£600k, EPSRC-funded). There is administrative support for costing and planning projects, and from the University Press Office in working with the media, as well as technical assistance in developing websites to make research freely available. The College of Humanities also provides funding to develop the impact of research projects and strategic partnerships. Within the Department, the Centre for Biblical Studies, the Exeter Centre for Ecumenical and Practical Theology (EXCEPT), and the Network for Religion in Public Life (NRPL) all serve to maximise the impact of our research, with a strategic aim to interface with different user groups.</p> <p>Research in the Department of Theology and Religion is strongly engaged with stakeholders and users of research outside the academy. There is a long-standing and close relationship with the South West Ministry Training Course (SWMTC), and with the Saint Luke’s College Foundation, a charity whose remit is to promote RE and Theology nationally and especially in the region. There are also a number of collaborative projects ongoing with Bible Society, an international and interdenominational charity whose aim is to promote awareness of and engagement with the Bible.</p> <p>i. Funding from non-HE partners</p> <p>The value and impact of our research is evidenced by the income given by non-academic stakeholders who wish to invest in particular projects that will shape and inform their work. SWMTC has sponsored a research project on contextual Bible study to the value of £67,656, while Bible Society has funded a PhD project evaluating some of their work (value c. £10,000), a project to develop methods for teaching Key Stage 3 RE (£30,000), and a workshop on ‘the Bible in non-literate contexts’ (£1,000). The St Luke’s College Foundation has funded a project on the formation of candidates for ministry (£93,000, with a further £25,000 to support a PG Cert in Practical Theology), a project to develop curriculum materials with Key Stage 4-5 RE teachers (£29,903),</p>

Impact template (REF3a)

and two public events in the Centre for Biblical Studies (£1,200).

ii. Influencing the content of education outside HE

A number of projects have been undertaken to enable research to inform and shape education beyond the University, to train practitioners with materials from current research, and to change current practices within educational contexts. Building on an AHRC-funded research project on the Bible and environmental ethics which included accessible and teaching-related publications, one project, funded by the St Luke's Foundation, has designed web-based resources for RE teachers and A-level students (Horrell); this has received over 3,200 unique pageviews between May 2012 and October 2013. This project also provided resources for the new RE-online website, a national resource which received over 1.5 million hits in 2011. Another project on the relations between narrative and Christian ethics in KS3 RE has produced curriculum materials and proposed a new approach to teaching religion in schools (Reed). Staff have taught a wide range of training sessions for clergy and others, notably in relation to the 'contextual Bible study' research project which worked with diverse communities in the South West, including the Deaf community: Lawrence led eleven training events for clergy on the methods of contextual Bible study, drawing on her research. Southgate ran a three-day Lee Abbey residential for scientists, clergy, teachers and other laypeople. Cornwall has written briefing papers on intersex conditions for healthcare chaplains, led a training session for the Paediatric Chaplaincy Network at Birmingham Children's Hospital, and published a textbook on Theology and Sexuality (SCM, 2013). Hill has published an accessible book on Christianity (Lion, 2010) and given several series of talks at London bookshops. Staff have lectured at schools conferences (e.g., Horrell, Lawrence, Reed, Southgate). A project funded by the Higher Education Academy made audio recordings of key patristics texts that are available for educational use via the researcher's website (Ludlow).

iii. Sharing research with non-academic and public bodies

Staff have accepted many invitations and sought opportunities to work with non-academic bodies to share insights from research, in ways that have helped to inform debate, policy and practice and to enhance public understanding of important ethical and religious issues. Gorringer has spoken on issues of food and farming at farming conferences annually since 1998, and has regularly worked with the Diocesan Social Responsibility Office, as well as the Royal Agricultural College and Christian Aid. Other examples include workshops with Tri-Service chaplains and specialist practitioners on migration and asylum, with international lawyers and military theorists on 'drones' and the use of force (Reed); workshops on intersex with church-groups in London and Manchester (Cornwall); participation in Christian Aid's project on international taxation (Reed); presentations to groups concerned with the dialogue between religion and science, including the Science and Religion society in Copenhagen, on issues of evolutionary science and environmental ethics (Southgate); two teacher training conferences in Exeter and London, and five sixth-form conferences in 2012-13, on the way biblical texts shape Christian approaches to the environment (Horrell); a 'future cube' public event on Christianity and Islam in the public space (Loosley).

The Centre for Biblical Studies has organised public events, e.g., to present the work of the Bible and environmental ethics project, and a day-conference for school teachers and clergy on the KJV. Projects organised by EXCEPT have worked with users of research in the region on issues such as ministerial formation, reading the Bible in diverse communities, and churches' responses to climate change. The NRPL has organised public lectures and multidisciplinary workshops on themes including access to justice, security and human rights, scriptural reasoning as a civic practice, the UN declaration on human rights, and religion and public life in Britain and Iran.

iv. Enhancing public understanding via the media

Our research has been able to enhance public understanding of issues of religious and ethical importance through partnership and work with the media. Stavrakopoulou's documentaries on aspects of the Bible were each seen by over 1.5 million viewers and have been extensively discussed (see case study). A number of staff have acted as expert consultants in advising on media content for documentaries, and have spoken about their research on radio or TV programmes, and written for national and local papers. Such work is encouraged and supported by the Department, and also by the University's Press Office, which drafts press releases, arranges interviews and handles liaison. Notable examples include BBC Radio 4, *Beyond Belief*, discussing hell and universal salvation (Ludlow), and the role of religion in the Syrian civil war (Loosley);

Impact template (REF3a)

panelist on Radio 4's *In Our Time*, on Gnosticism (Logan); interviews on *Rema Radio* (New Zealand), and a series of nine TV interviews for *Closer to Truth* (American PBS) (Southgate).

v. Membership of bodies and consultancies outside HE

As part of our strategy to engage with groups beyond the University, many staff hold positions on non-academic, policy-forming bodies, particularly in the churches. Examples include: Church of England representative in ecumenical dialogue with the Church of Scotland and Scottish Episcopal Church (2010-; Ludlow); Theology Consultant to Operation Noah, which campaigns on Climate Change; member of the Campaign for Enlightened Agriculture; Advisory Group member, Agricultural Christian Fellowship (Gorringe); Council member, Archbishop of Canterbury's Examination in Theology; AQA academic advisor, for revision of the A-level RS syllabus (2013-15, Horrell); Chair of the Board of Studies for the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme; member of Methodist working groups on Faith and Order, Senior Leadership, and ecumenical work on 'Drones' (2008-11; Reed); consultant on intersex to the LGBT Anglican Coalition (Cornwall).

c. Strategy and plans

Our interdisciplinary and applied research focus, and the three research centres/networks, are all orientated towards enabling our research to shape responses to important issues and agendas, in the churches and in society. Theology, ethics and public issues will remain one of our major research areas, and recent appointments (esp. Loosley and Tollerton) are intended to further strengthen our engagement in the dialogue between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and to maximise the potential of collaboration with the University's Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies. The Centre for Biblical Studies will continue to interface with partners including Bible Society to address issues concerning the interpretation and influence of the Bible in the modern world. It will provide a focus for such research, organise public events, and develop relationships beyond the University, for example, in Stavrakopoulou's work with the BBC and other media companies, and Bhayro's work with museums both locally and internationally (e.g., Berlin). EXCEPT has outlined a strategy for its future development that includes projects in partnership with churches and voluntary organisations. The Centre's director (Garrigan) will build in particular on her previous research in the areas of sectarianism, ritual studies, and ecumenical worship. The Centre will interface with stakeholders such as SWMTC and other church bodies and training schemes, offering rigorous research on areas of policy and practice. NRPL will focus on generating religious cooperation and interdisciplinary engagement, with potential policy impact on areas of international significance.

In summary, our strategic aims are:

- To deepen our strategic partnerships with non-HE bodies to maximise the public impact of our research.
- To further develop our collaboration with the School of Education, to extend the impact of our research on the teaching of RE in schools.
- To continue to strengthen our interdisciplinary research focus on issues of ethical, public and religious importance.
- To continue to support staff in impact-related activities, e.g. through work-load allocations, training, and financial support.

d. Relationship to case studies

The two case studies detail examples of the ways in which the Department's research addresses issues of contemporary relevance and has international public impact. One exemplifies the impact of our research in biblical studies in enhancing public knowledge and debate via the media, and particularly in connecting study of the ancient world and texts with contemporary ethical and religious issues. Focused on Stavrakopoulou's work, the case study shows how research on ancient Israelite religion led to media productions which highlight the relevance of this research to contemporary religious beliefs and western culture more broadly. The other case study illustrates the impact of our concentration on theology, ethics and public issues, and the ways in which our research brings theological perspectives to bear on ethical issues and policy-decisions in society. Focused on Gorringe's work on urban planning, and his recent work with the Transition Town Movement, this study shows how theology can inform and shape the values and commitments that underpin approaches to town planning, particularly in a time when environmental considerations – particularly climate change – call for fundamental rethinking.