

<p>Institution: University of Gloucestershire</p> <hr/> <p>Unit of Assessment: UoA 33 Theology and Religious Studies</p> <hr/> <p>a. Context</p> <p>The staffing of the UOA is described in REF5. The composition of the UOA reflects the institution's historic commitment to both Christian Theology and secondary education, rooted ultimately in its C19 beginnings in Teacher Training Colleges. The development of Theology and Religious Studies during the period of the RAE exercises was related to the interests of teacher education. The growth of research in TRS may be traced in general to the strength of the subject in the institution, and its character has been influenced by its orientation to practice.</p> <p>In Theology, a specific strength developed in Biblical Studies during a period of intensive investment in research in the 1990s, beginning with the Old Testament and culminating in the establishment of the Portland Chair of New Testament in 1999. The establishment of the Chair is expressly linked to the maintenance of the subject of Theology.</p> <p>The orientation of Theology, as both taught and researched, and within University policy, has been shaped by a sense of its place in the wider community. It has played a part in ministerial and other practitioner education through Collaborative Partnerships with institutions engaged in ministerial and missionary training. Members of the UOA are directly involved in such partnerships, taught for a period on one such course (WEMTC), and have engaged in joint seminars with them. Some of their written work is also geared towards the needs of students on such courses (as is documented below).</p> <p>On the side of Religious Studies, the development of the programmes in Religion, Philosophy and Ethics has been designed to correspond to modern secondary curricula and, to a considerable extent, research in the area is geared towards the needs of teachers and students in secondary education.</p> <hr/> <p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>The Unit's approach to impact is in line with the University's commitment to orient research to the end-user, its declared intention to focus on research that answers to needs beyond the academy and its encouragement of developments with non-academic partners.</p> <p>TRS has a long-standing commitment to these aims. The primary user groups of the research in TRS at the University of Gloucestershire are practitioners in the Christian Church (for Theology), and in secondary education (for Religious Studies, or Religion, Philosophy and Ethics), as well as those who have a more general interest in religious ideas.</p> <p>Our research in Theology is intended to influence theological thinking and spiritual practice in churches at local, national and international level, by means of its focus on biblical and theological interpretation, and on the use of the Bible in spirituality. It intends also to be a resource for individual church leaders and ecclesiastical organizations in their programmes of personal and professional development. It also aims to influence policy and attitudes in the cultural and political arenas. In Religious Studies, the research primarily aims to resource both teachers and students in relation to A-level studies in philosophy and religion. Here too, a broader impact is also in view in the area of public attitudes to inter-religious issues, especially perceptions of Islam and in the public understanding of philosophical ideas.</p> <p>The Unit's orientation towards research for the end-user is exemplified by its priorities evident before and during the current REF period and continuing to the present. Regarding its work in Biblical Studies, it has been in partnership with Bible Society in two long-running projects. Bible Society's mission is to promote the knowledge and understanding of the Bible in churches in popular culture and in public life. A Bible Society-sponsored project on biblical hermeneutics with</p>
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the University of Gloucestershire as the original and leading partner, and involving its Biblical Studies staff, ran from 1998 to 2007. The project's work was undertaken in annual international symposiums and resulted in eight published volumes.

This major project has been followed by recent and still-current projects (an international symposium in 2010 and a larger and longer project in 2011-13), again sponsored by Bible Society, on the topic of Biblical Spirituality. The lens shifts here from hermeneutics broadly understood, to focus on lived experience in the religious life and the use of the Bible in that context, employing all the tools of critical biblical interpretation. The collaboration with Bible Society, continuing now for over a decade, thus exemplifies a marriage of academic rigour with a belief in and a commitment to its capacity to make an impact on the lives of individuals and on society more generally. The academic rigour of the project is evident in the volume of essays published following the international symposium held in 2012 (referenced in REF 2 and REF 5) and is intended to enhance the discipline of Biblical Spirituality in the context of academic Biblical Studies, as well as in the academic study of Spirituality.

Equally, its essential concern to be a resource for people beyond the academy is exemplified in other specific components and outputs. First, the staff involved in the project are the editors of an issue of Bible Society's journal, *The Bible in Transmission* (to be published in spring, 2014), devoted to the topic of biblical spirituality. The journal has a wide general readership (of about 20,000). Second, the project includes a PhD studentship held by a professional artist, whose work is on the interface between visual representation and biblical spirituality. Her thesis includes critical reflection on own exhibited work, extant and in preparation, which has a reach beyond academic circles. Third, the project culminates in a day-conference on 1 March 2014, with an external keynote speaker and workshops led by University staff, and the intention to build expressly on research done in the current project.

In Religion, Philosophy and Ethics, the concern for the end-user is shared by all the teachers in that area. The area's blogsite, www.r-p-e.blogspot.com, has between 1,000 and 2,000 page views per month, while its more specialized video-blog, philosvids.wordpress.com, has had over 10,000 visits since it began in late 2012. It is used mainly by FE teachers, but also by many others. Dr. David Webster also has a blogsite, <http://dispirited.org/blog> which has had 21,000 views in the last 18 months. He is also on the team that produces <http://tarosaproject.wordpress.com/> - a scholarly resource site.

The orientation of RPE to impact may be further exemplified in the work of Dr. Roy **Jackson**, who was appointed Reader in the current period. Dr. **Jackson** uses his research to promote western philosophy as a field of study and interest for the general public and younger people, having written a number of accessible works in philosophy and in Islam. He also writes regularly for journals and magazines aimed for the general public, gives talks at schools and colleges, and is interviewed by BBC Radio Gloucestershire on matters relating to Islam. He has also broadcast Q&A Revision podcasts for teachers of philosophy and religion, which have been used in the classroom and are also accessible to the general public via various blogs and websites, as well as Twitter. Dr. David Webster also uses Twitter for course-related materials, and has 1,100 followers. Finally, the Philosophy staff in the School are closely involved in the Gloucestershire Philosophical Society, which meets in the University, and whose purpose since the 1980s has been to involve the public in research in philosophy, or, in its own terms, 'to provide a forum for debate on issues of current interest alongside informative lectures from specialists in many areas of philosophical, political, social, scientific and artistic thought'.

c. Strategy and plans

The capacity for impact is entailed in the structural support for research offered by the University, which is described in REF5. The Faculty Research Committee has supported the kind of research that is described in the present section, that is, orientated towards use by practitioners and wide audiences. It does so by distributing funds from QR and other University sources, and by remitting time, for research and activities designed for impact. The two case studies contain documentation

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of these kinds of activities. Another example, in terms of time allowed for the purpose, is Prof Gordon **McConville** who was one of the key speakers along with Prof David Ford of Cambridge at a conference of the Church of Ireland in Dublin, whose aim was to initiate a programme for the enhanced knowledge and use of the Bible in church life (2012). He also contributed to a conference in Norway on theology and violence (2012), with pastors and church leaders as well as academics, in the aftermath of the massacre at Utøye in 2011. He has participated in two conferences in Oxford (2012) with the organization Sabeel, a Palestinian advocacy group for human rights.

A further important factor has been the organization of research in Research Centres throughout the present REF period. This has benefited the TRS Unit in particular through the Bible and Spirituality Centre. The University's commitment to this Centre was a factor in its obtaining external funding for the projects described above.

The University's continued prioritising of research aimed at user outcomes facilitates plans for further development in this area. In the present period, an international collaborative network has been put in place including, but not limited to, the participants in the 2012 symposium and discussions are under way about further work on Biblical Spirituality beyond the end of the present project. A meeting of the participants in the 2012 symposium is planned for the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Baltimore in November 2013. Preliminary plans are in place for a further international symposium to be held in 2015 for which further international partnerships, especially in Asia, are being built.

d. Relationship to case studies

The Unit's approach to impact, and its strategy regarding it, is exemplified in the two case studies chosen. The Unit considered a number of options. The case of **Lincoln** was selected to represent its strength in Biblical Studies. An alternative would have been to offer a combination of the work of **Lincoln** and **McConville**, as Professors of New and Old Testament respectively and members of the two Research Centres in Biblical Studies (the International Centre for Biblical Interpretation and the Bible and Spirituality Centre). They share a commitment to constructive and theological interpretation of the Bible, as reflected in the aims of the latter Centre in particular, and their work is accessed by similar readerships. It was decided that it would be possible to make a more focussed case, with **Lincoln's** work presented separately. It is intended to be read, however, as embedded within a context of shared values and aspirations among the biblical scholars in the Unit.

The UOA also considered how to represent the research that is not expressly biblical. A genuine option was to select **Jackson**, because of his penetration of the world of secondary education, as well as more general readerships (as noted above). That choice would have represented the work of colleagues in RPE, and their shared concern to promote philosophy and the study of religion among wide audiences. This would have corresponded to the historic commitment of the Unit to serve the teaching community. However, **Raphael's** work was selected for a number of reasons. By its nature, it sits firmly within both Theology and Religion and, in fact, Prof **Raphael** contributes to both in her teaching. Aspects of her research also draw explicitly on biblical wellsprings, and she has presented research papers to the Bible and Spirituality Research Centre, of which she is a member. Thus while her work is somewhat unique, it also says much about the nature of the endeavour across the Unit.