

Institution: University of Oxford

Unit of Assessment: 33

a. Context

The wide variety of disciplinary approaches to religion practised within the UOA has facilitated a variety of different opportunities for impact. Key beneficiaries are Christian ministers and their congregations, but research has also affected civil society, cultural life, policy making, and education. This emphasis on impact is not new but has been integral to the UOA's work over the last century or so. The identity of the Faculty of Theology was formed in the context of training for the established church, and the diversification of that activity to embrace a variety of Christian churches has been central to its work but has evolved over time. Several members of the UOA have served on key committees and representative bodies of their faith communities and in dedicated theological roles have contributed to theological education in different parts of the UK as canon theologians and members of commissions of enquiry. There has always been an extra-curricular dimension to this activity in the provision of courses, seminar training and related work in professional development by which the Faculty's research has been disseminated to a wider audience.

During the reporting period, research carried out in the OUA has benefited the public in various ways. Firstly, it has reached out to civil society. Members of the UOA have contributed to contemporary debates within UK faith communities, on subjects as diverse as recent debates in the Church of England over its relationships with other parts of the Anglican Church; the ethics of forgiveness and reconciliation; religion and the new atheism; and involvement in Christian-Muslim dialogue. For example, Chapman, an expert in Anglicanism, has contributed to debates about the Anglican Covenant.

Secondly, members of the UOA have contributed to cultural life in the UK and beyond. Through participation in television programmes (and in one case two highly successful TV series, subsequently released and marketed worldwide on DVD) their work has increased awareness of the crucial role that religions in general, and Christianity in particular, have played throughout history. For example, Cameron's work on religion in late antiquity has led to her being interviewed for the BBC programme *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, and Flood was interviewed by the BBC World Service on Tantric Hinduism. Thirdly, research on issues such as warfare and euthanasia has influenced policy making.

Finally, members of the UOA have made significant contributions to education via the incorporation of their research in RS A-level exam syllabuses.

b. Approach to impact

Throughout the reporting period, the UOA and its members have seen impact outside academia as an essential part of their mission. In many instances, the results of published research have been the basis of media appearances, of private or public consultations. Academics have regularly disseminated their ideas in public lectures and talks in front of various audiences. Their approach has in general been one of the following.

Firstly, impact has emerged that was not anticipated when the research was first undertaken. One of the UOA's case studies (Rowland) is a classical example of research prompted by its own intrinsic value, which then came to be of relevance to a specific group in civil society. Similarly, Leftow had for years pursued philosophical research into the question of God when his publications triggered broader public discussion and created media interest in the US and Australia. For this reason, the UOA's approach to impact has been inseparable from the evolution of its research strategy as both research and impact strategies have developed in tandem with each other. *The UOA believes that an intellectual environment providing stimuli for creative and innovative research should in itself be conducive to impact.*

Secondly, in some cases, research by some members of the UOA has aimed from the outset at potential impact. For example, ongoing public debate about female ministry in the CofE prompted Maltby's research on the historical background of parliamentary involvement in this issue. Her work was subsequently acknowledged by Ben Bradshaw MP as 'incredibly useful' in the debates about the ordination of women bishops. Similarly, McGrath and K. Ward wrote their contributions to the debate about the 'new atheism' with an eye on their contribution to this important public debate. *The UOA has, where appropriate, supported and encouraged applied research which is more immediately geared towards an audience beyond the academy.* Ways in which this support is given have included the generous provision of paid and unpaid leave enabling the completion of such work. MacCulloch was given a total of three years' leave in recognition of the unique potential his project had to bring substantial research in Church History to the broader public. The UOA similarly offered its support to Hausner's project with a clearly recognisable impact component right from the outset. Much of her work was carried out in the course of paid leave funded by the AHRC.

Thirdly, an important institutional gateway for the UOA's impact strategy have been its research centres, in particular the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion, the McDonald Centre for Theology, Ethics, and Public Life, and the Centre for Reception History of the Bible. They have helped researchers cultivate relationships with extra-academic beneficiaries of their research. By disseminating findings and by systematic attempts to identify individuals and groups for whom these results could be relevant. For example, the McDonald Centre has hosted several high-level events in collaboration with Chatham House on topics such as 'The ethics of intelligence gathering', 'The ethics of national interest', and 'The ethics of remote warfare'. The IRC has attracted funding from the Templeton Foundation to build up and develop a network of science-and-religion research across Latin America, an example of the global reach of the UOA's impact.

c. Strategy and plans

The UOA sees impact as closely aligned to research, and its support for impact therefore as an integral part of its research strategy. Three fundamental principles govern its approach:

Firstly, the Faculty continues to encourage research primarily on the basis of its intrinsic merits in the hope and expectation that, given its experience, *impact will often emerge from the very best research.* Building on a strong track record, it will continue to support, and seek to improve, a culture in which researchers' engagement with a extra-academic audiences continues to be an integral aspect of their work. This link is suggested to all members of the UOA in the Annual Research Questionnaire, which explicitly asks for evidence of impact that has resulted from their research. The UOA will make full use of the new Knowledge Exchange Programme developed in the Humanities Division. A Knowledge Exchange Fellow and a Knowledge Exchange Officer will support researchers in formulating their approach, and implementing activities that seek to engage with audiences, constituencies and beneficiaries outside the academy. Specific emphasis will be put on the provision of support for Early Career Researchers (ECRs). As part of a broader package of training and other support provided for junior researchers, mentoring will increasingly include help in identifying potential impact and assisting in impact strategies. The University is in the process of adapting its mentoring guidelines accordingly.

Secondly, the Faculty is committed as part of its mission to *applied research with a more obvious emphasis on engagement outside the academic community.* Its structural development, which includes new posts in ethics and the study of religions, will help ensure that such research projects represent a larger part of the Faculty's research profile in the future. Brekke's current project, which looks comparatively at the use of military chaplains in various armies, is an example, as is Hordern's work on the role of Christianity for the Conservative Party.

Third, the Faculty continues to see its *research centres as ideal sites for the results of research to be regularly injected into public debates.* It is committed to their further development and the strengthening of their closer integration into the broader institutional structures of the university which will strengthen the link between research and its beneficiaries outside the academy reached

through the seminars, series of lectures, conferences, special events with video recordings posted on the web. In addition, collaboration with and through the new Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities (TORCH) will become a pivotal means to broaden and deepen the potential for impact.

d. Relationship to case studies

The case studies demonstrate the quality and breadth of the contributions made by the UOA's research. They are not meant as isolated, stand-alone examples but as particularly pertinent illustrations of how the research and impact strategy of the UOA has borne fruit. One (Biggar) falls in the area of public discourse and policy making. It demonstrates the potential for research in ethics to contribute to ongoing debates about some of the most controversial topics in contemporary British society and globally. It illustrates how work done in this UOA has extended the range and improved the quality, of evidence and arguments employed by key participants in public discourse and decision-making (politicians, journalists, the military). It also shows the role played by the UOA's research centres in its attempt to ensure the results of research are effectively disseminated beyond the academy as well as the increasing significance of private funding at the interface of research and its public dissemination.

Impact from the Rowland/Lockley (*'From private religion to public interaction'*) and the MacCulloch (*'Promoting a historically informed understanding of Christianity'*) cases falls squarely in the area of cultural life. Both illustrate how the UOA's traditional focus on Christianity continues to be of relevance in today's society. Yet otherwise they are very different: Rowland and Lockley show how impact arose from research which originally was inspired by the intrinsic interest in the modern history of prophecy in Britain, but which then facilitated collaboration with the Panacea Society, in the course of which a public museum has now opened in Bedford. MacCulloch's research, by contrast, has been conducted with its dissemination to a wider readership in mind and the resulting collaboration with the BBC soon became entwined with the originally envisioned research. This case study is a paradigmatic instance of theology's ability to reignite public awareness of the breadth and variety of Christian history. It also exemplifies the UOA's commitment to and support for applied research.

The Hausner case study (*'Vernacular religion'*) exemplifies the UOA's impact on public services, specifically the empowerment of the small but rapidly growing minority of British Nepalese. It shows how the UOA's recent broadening of its focus has led immediately to new opportunities for impact. It is the result of an AHRC-funded, interdisciplinary project, on Vernacular Religion, and thus underscores the UOA's belief that impact is most likely to emerge from excellent research. The benefits of the project to the Nepali community were, from the outset, a driving factor in the development of Hausner's project which, therefore, is an example of research carried out with an eye to public benefit from its inception.