

Institution: Newman University

Unit of Assessment: 33 – Theology and Religious Studies

a. Overview

The current UOA in Theology is part of the multi-disciplinary School of Human Sciences. The Theology subject staff team consists of five full time academics, two of whom are entered in this REF. In both its teaching and research, the subject area maintains a clear focus on Christian theology. Within this broad field, staff are encouraged to pursue their own areas of interest and expertise, but all research forms part of the shared over-arching goal of making links between the critical academic study of Christian theology and contemporary society, impacting, for example, on the teaching of Religious Education in schools and on the work of Christian churches and charities. Staff research specialisms lie in the fields of Biblical Studies and Patristics/Late Antiquity.

Dr Docherty is Reader in Biblical Studies and Director of the Newman Research Centre for the Bible and its Reception. She researches the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New Testament and early Christian literature, with particular emphasis on its Jewish context, and has published a monograph and several articles in this field. Dr Hunt is an Early Career Researcher, appointed to the Department as a full time permanent Lecturer in Theology from 01/09/2013. His publications address asceticism, authorship and theologies of reading and writing in Latin Late Antiquity, focussing in particular on the early work of Jerome of Stridon. Another member of staff researched in eighteenth century philosophy, and has published several pieces on the development of the Platonic tradition and its influence on the political and theological thought of the eighteenth century Dissenters. Her research encompasses a consideration of how the intellectual history of this time has shaped contemporary debates in the philosophy of religion. Of the other two members of staff, one works in the area of Religious Education with an emphasis on the Roman Catholic philosophy of education, and the other in the field of systematic Christian theology, in which he is active as a theological consultant to a number of Christian organisations (e.g. CAFOD, the Catholic Worker Movement). In addition, the research culture of the subject area is supported by two Visiting Professors in Biblical Studies, one Visiting Research Fellow in Biblical Studies, and a Visiting Research Fellow in Black Theology.

Newman University College became Newman University in 2013. As when it was a University College, the research mission of the University is to continue to broaden the base of research active staff across all areas of academic activity, facilitating staff research and scholarly activities through the development of an inclusive culture and supportive environment. The Theology UOA has benefited from the University's policies on supporting research through, for example, financial assistance to attend international conferences, teaching relief to increase research time, and the award of scholarships to help attract postgraduate research students. Within the census period, the capacity for PhD supervision has been expanded with new permanent and visiting appointments, a Research Centre has been established, and the head of subject has been promoted to a Readership. These measures have made possible the development of research within the Theology subject area over the last five years and led to a significant rise in the number of peer-reviewed outputs and conference papers produced such that it is submitting to the REF for the first time.

The University's Research Committee oversees the supervision arrangements for postgraduate students and the development of a research strategy for academic staff. The budgetary system of the University gives financial responsibility to the Research Committee. A number of measures have been taken by the University to bring about a significant change in the profile of research in order to situate it as an integral feature of institutional activity. These included a substantial increase in the resources available to support staff scholarly activities, the development of a new institutional research strategy to encourage and facilitate research, and a programme of training and staff development to support and refine research practices. These measures culminated in the appointment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Scholarship in 2013 to take a leading role in promoting research across the institution for the future. As has always been the practice, funding

towards the cost of further academic study is offered through an annual bidding process managed by the Research Committee, and monies secured in the last Research Assessment Exercise have been used to expand the University's areas of research excellence recognised in 2008.

b. Research strategy

This is the first submission to the REF from the Theology Department at Newman University Birmingham. At the conclusion of the last RAE in 2008, the decision was taken to grow this subject area in terms of both size and research expertise. This led to the current requirement for all newly appointed staff to hold a PhD and to be able to demonstrate at interview a clear research plan, and also to a greater level of encouragement and facilitation for existing staff to complete their Doctorates. The strategy of appointing Visiting Research Fellows to develop a stronger research culture within the Department and to provide mentoring for less experienced staff will continue. Staff within the UOA have had some success in securing external income during the latter part of the census period, and providing support for further bids is a key part of the research strategy for the future.

As set out in its Research Strategy for 2012-2015, Newman University aspires to be recognised regionally, nationally and internationally for the quality of its research and scholarship. The research vision is underpinned by the University's core values as outlined in its Strategic Plan, and its mission to make a positive difference to individuals and communities through the contribution of its staff, students and graduates. Building upon the positive outcome of the RAE in 2008, the Research Strategy has particularly focused investment funds on units submitting to the Research Excellence Framework, whilst enabling Early-Career Researchers to develop their capacity. Against a background of tighter fiscal constraints, links are also being forged with other aspects of third stream activity. Knowledge transfer, consultancy and related forms of employer engagement are creating opportunities and funding for research and income generation, as well as broadening the student experience and providing staff development.

The University's Research Committee takes a strategic role in all aspects of developing a successful research culture and sustaining research performance. The Committee's major function is to ensure that the University's areas of research strength and comparative advantage are protected and enhanced, that research potential is recognised and nurtured, and that resources are strategically targeted to build an externally-recognised research presence. A detailed action plan for the implementation of these objectives is set out and reviewed annually. Since the last RAE, Newman's general academic leadership has been strengthened through the internal promotion of four further staff to the position of Reader, including Dr Docherty in Theology, and through the external appointment of several new professors, who have extensive successful PhD supervision experience; two new professors have been appointed as Deans of School and other professors have been appointed as senior academic leads, such that the University now has a Professoriate which meets periodically throughout the academic year to advise the Vice Chancellor on matters of research.

c. People, including:

i. Staffing strategy and staff development

The Theology Department at Newman University consists of five members of staff, all of whom are on full-time permanent contracts, as there is no tradition of employing staff on a short-term basis. The age-range of the staff is from 30-60, and two of the five are women. Staff turnover is historically very low, so that three of the current members of the Department have worked at Newman for over ten years and a further colleague has been employed here for eight years. One is an Early-Career Researcher, employed from September 2013 to replace a retiring member of the Department (who was not working towards a REF submission). Until 2007, the staffing level of the Department was four full time academics, but this was increased to five at that point due to a sustained increase in undergraduate student numbers from 2003 to the present. Throughout most of its period of existence (since 1968), the Department has had within it at most one member of staff holding a PhD and with an active commitment to research; this was due mainly to Newman's

historic commitment to the work of training RE teachers for schools and educating church ministers, for which professional experience was required as much as academic expertise. The journey towards the award of TDAP and then University status really began in 2004, and opened up new possibilities for the Theology Department. Since 2005, therefore, a completed PhD has been made a requirement for appointment to the Department, and greater support has been given to existing staff to complete Doctorates, so that now three of the five staff have a PhD, and one has been promoted to a Readership. At interview, applicants are required to demonstrate a clear and achievable three-year research plan. Discussion of progress towards research goals forms an important part of the annual appraisal process, and Early Career Academics are assigned a designated mentor. No staff member has had an extended period of study leave during the census period, but one has benefitted from teaching relief for one module in each of three years.

Financial support available within the institution to support staff research includes a Small Grants Scheme, operated by the University's Research Committee, which offers sums up to a maximum of £600 to subject areas, research groups or individuals through a highly competitive bidding process. In addition, the Research Committee invites research groups to bid for a maximum of £3,000 as a contribution towards more substantial research projects. The University has also operated when possible a scheme of negotiated sabbatical support for staff, who must identify clear and measurable targets to be achieved at the end of the sabbatical period. Financial support up to £2,000 is provided for staging conferences at the University and funding is also given for conference presentation to a maximum of £400 per conference; support may be given to multiple presentations in any one year.

The Research Office Administrator, based in the Graduate School, assists with the organisation of research training workshops and inaugural-professorial lectures. All matters relating to staff and student research ethics are overseen by the Research Ethics Committee, which scrutinises several hundred research proposals each year. Regular staff research seminars are held throughout the year, with contributions from staff from across the University, research students and invited speakers from other institutions. The University has long maintained a Visiting Professor scheme for distinguished scholars. As well as delivering research seminars and workshops, the Visiting Professors play a pivotal role in developing the research and scholarship potential of staff through appropriate forms of advice, training and support.

ii. Research students

Newman University's research degrees are validated by the University of Leicester, and robust procedures are in place for the admission, training and monitoring of PGR students, following the University of Leicester guidelines. Students also benefit from the supportive culture of Newman, which offers dedicated facilities, a Postgraduate Research Coordinator providing pastoral support and mentoring, effective Staff-Student Consultative mechanisms, and student representation on the institution's Research Committee. Newman's Graduate School has the primary responsibility for postgraduate research student training and social and intellectual integration, and plays a key role alongside Schools, Subject Areas, and Programmes in developing career pathways for research students, which includes the opportunity to gain teaching experience. Students are also eligible to attend all the research training and career development workshops offered at the University of Leicester.

Newman University has operated an intermittent policy of offering research studentships through a competitive bidding process. The Theology subject area gained one of these in 2009, and Dr Docherty supervised the recipient to successful completion in the expected time frame of a little over three years; his thesis on The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews is about to be published in an international monograph series. An externally-funded PhD studentship was also gained by Docherty in 2012 on "The Use of the Bible in Schools", and she is co-supervisor of a PhD student working on the early Jewish context of the Gospel of Mark at the University of Tilburg in The Netherlands (due to complete summer 2015). During the census period Docherty has been external examiner for three PhD theses in aspects of New Testament Study, at the Universities of Aberdeen, Liverpool Hope and Wales Trinity St Davids.

The four Visiting Professors/Visiting Research Fellows play an important role in strengthening the supervisory teams for research students. The subject staff are very aware of the need to provide PGR students in a small Department with access to wider networks, so they are expected to engage with the postgraduate student networks at other institutions in Birmingham, such as the Queens Foundation for Ecumenical Theology and the University of Birmingham. Students and supervisors are also able to access the resources of the CREST network, a consortium of 22 small HEIs which supports research within the member institutions, provides opportunities for cross-institutional collaboration, offers training to PGRs and their supervisors, and enables PGR students to present their work in the early stages to a wider audience through regular research symposia.

d. Income, infrastructure and facilities

As outlined above, staff are able to apply through the Research Committee for internal funds to support their research activities if these lead to REF-able outputs, and members of the Theology UOA have received such funding annually for conference attendance and teaching buy-out. In addition to this, staff have been successful in securing competitive internal and external research funding during the census period as follows:

£60,000 Plater Trust: collaborative bid with three other Universities to make Catholic Social Teaching accessible to a wider public through e.g. the development of a new web-based resource and public conferences/events (September 2009-June 2011)

£6,000 Bible Society: to Susan Docherty to part-fund a PhD studentship on "The Use of the Bible in Schools" (awarded March 2012)

£5,000 HEA: to Susan Docherty for a project entitled "Podcasts as a Pedagogical Tool for Enhancing the Teaching of Biblical Studies" (September 2012-August 2013)

e. Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base

Members of the Theology UOA work in close collaboration with other researchers locally, nationally and internationally:

Local

As noted above, research students in the Department and their supervisors are full members of regional collaborative networks in Theology, including those based at the nearby Queens Ecumenical Foundation and the University of Birmingham. Dr Hunt, for example, will shortly be presenting an invited paper at the Texts and Cultural Constructions Seminar at University of Birmingham. As part of the work of the Newman Research Centre for the Bible and its Reception, several events have been run in conjunction with Birmingham's Barber Institute of Fine Art examining the history and symbolism of religious paintings.

National

The Department is home to the Newman Research Centre for the Bible and its Reception, established in September 2009 to engage with the academic study of the Jewish and Christian Bible, its later reception (in e.g. art, music, literature and culture), and its relevance to contemporary society. Dr Docherty is founder and Director of this centre, and two leading Biblical Scholars based on other UK Institutions (Liverpool Hope University and the University of Wales Trinity St David) serve on the steering group. Two series of public seminars were held, in 2009/10 and 2010/11, attracting leading scholars from around the UK to present their research; speakers included Professor Philip Esler (then at the University of St Andrews) and Professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok (University of Wales Trinity St Davids). These events led to some successful collaboration with the Bible Society of the UK, who have funded the Theology Department at Newman to offer a PhD studentship on "The Use of the Bible in Schools". Docherty is a regular book reviewer for a

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number of academic journals, particularly *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, and has reviewed new book proposals for OUP and CUP. She has been invited to present papers at a number of Universities in the UK and Ireland during the census period, including at the Universities of Durham, Aberdeen, Liverpool Hope and the National University of Ireland in Maynooth. She was an invited participant at the Manchester-Sheffield-Lausanne Colloquium on Hebrews in 2011, and is due to give a keynote address at the forthcoming *St Andrews Symposium for Biblical and Early Christian Studies* (June 2014). Dr Hunt has co-organised a workshop on the reception of Patristic Theology in Early Medieval Iberian Chant to be held at the School of Music, University of Bristol in December 2013. He has also peer-reviewed submissions for the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*. Another member of the team is currently an advisor to a project on Visions for Educational Leadership funded by the Catholic Education Service, and a participant in an ongoing AHRC funded project *Revisioning Cambridge Platonism: Reception and Influence*.

International

Dr Docherty is currently Chair of the International Seminar on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament and in that role organises its annual conference. She is also on the Steering Group of the Hebrews section of the Society of Biblical Literature and an invited participant in a German-Scandinavian research project on the Septuagint. She is a Research Associate at the Department of New Testament Studies at the University of Pretoria in South Africa, and has been invited to guest lecture in several European countries, most recently (30/03/13) giving a public lecture at the University of Tilburg in The Netherlands entitled: "New Testament Scriptural Interpretation in its Early Jewish Context: Reflections on the *Status Quaestionis* and Future Directions." Docherty was also one of only two UK-based researchers asked to act as peer reviewers for Theology submissions to a pilot RAE in Romania in 2011, and is also a reviewer of projects submitted to the European Science Fund. She is guest editing a special issue of the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, devoted to her specialist area of the Use of the Old Testament in the New (issue in preparation, due out spring 2015). Dr Hunt is in the early stages of preparing a panel for the next conference on Origen studies (*Origeniana duodecima* to be held in Israel, 2017), collaborating with a colleague at the University of Mainz.