

Institution: University of Birmingham

Unit of Assessment: 33 Department of Theology and Religion

a. Context

The four research clusters that make up the Department of Theology and Religion (T&R), namely Texts, Inter-Religious Relations, Intercultural Theology and Contemporary Religious Studies, are each engaged in projects that either have gained public attention already, or assume engagement with the public sphere as a prerequisite. Our **main audiences and beneficiaries** include: local schools, educational policy makers and examination boards in the UK and abroad; local and national religious organisations; cultural and heritage bodies; civil society and public discourse.

We have been **particularly successful** at: bringing innovations in textual analysis to public attention; changing approaches to teaching in schools and colleges; interpreting religious issues to general audiences; influencing public policy on wealth, and church policy on interfaith relations; explaining the spiritual dimensions of health issues; clarifying the impact of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches on wider society and helping these denominations to understand their historical and contextual heritages. The impact we have exerted in all these areas results organically from the aims and focuses within our four clusters.

b. Approach to impact

T&R aims to further the University's application of its resources to 'societal needs, through knowledge development and transfer, and strategic partnerships in the intellectual, commercial, cultural and policy spheres' (*Shaping our future: Birmingham 2015*, p. 16). Ever since T&R was formed in 1999, we have recognised impact and engagement as **integral to our work**, and we have made our principle: **engagement to challenge and be challenged**, signalling our research has a reciprocal relationship with people of faith in the UK and abroad. Academic staff are encouraged to forge **links with external users and beneficiaries**, with support from College and School funds. These efforts have recently been given formal shape in the *Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion* (CPUR), opened in 2013.

This principle of 'engagement to challenge and be challenged' is demonstrated by our many external activities in which we seek to influence and in turn are influenced.

- a) We have had notable effects on **teaching in schools in the UK and abroad**: in 2007, based on research in RE curriculums that derived from his response to the challenge of deficiencies in schools RE teaching, **Felderhof** wrote the Agreed RE Syllabus for Birmingham City Council while on secondment from the Department, starting a small revolution in approaches to RE (see the Case Study); in 2008, answering requests for fuller evaluative components in Islamic studies teaching, **Thomas** revised the Cambridge International Examinations O level syllabus for Pakistan, which brought about dramatic increases in take-up and prompted CIE to revise other Islam syllabuses (he helped make further changes in 2013); **Anderson**, who regularly speaks to large general audiences, has challenged the accepted history of Pentecostalism, and advised on changes to theological training for institutions in a number of places (see the Study Case). In addition, **Wollaston** has given key-note addresses on the Holocaust at a succession of A/AS level conferences, while **Cheetham** and **Davies** have led sessions for the South-West Ministerial Training Course and for Exeter diocese Continuing Ministerial Training Course.
- b) We **advise and inform public bodies**: in response to the dire poverty he witnessed as Director of Christian Aid, **Taylor** developed the concept of the wealth line, which has been incorporated into the 2012 report of the UK High Pay Commission, and is also being used by the WCC in its work on poverty and wealth in preparation for the Tenth Assembly, 2013; in reaction to Muslim schoolgirls withdrawing from PE, **Jawad** worked together with Birmingham Advisory and Support Service to increase girls' participation in sport; **Pattison** advised the North-East Strategic Health Authority on the spiritual aspects of health care – in 2013 he was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of General Practitioners 'for distinguished contributions to the work of the College'; **Jhutti-Johal** was a member of the London-based Family Justice Council Domestic Violence Working Group until 2012, and responded to the Forced Marriages Bill regarding the age of the spouse on its behalf, she is an advisor on the East Midlands Area Ethnic Engagement Board (Law Courts), and is a member of the Commission on Multi-Faith Britain: Community, Diversity and the Public Good, a House of Lords commission to examine the role of religions in the public realm, and to make recommendations on policy issues in such areas as education; **Webber** chairs the Galicia Jewish Museum UK Board of Trustees, and was on the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

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Council until 2012; in 2011, **Boehle** co-convened a workshop on interfaith collaboration at the Annual Global Forum in Doha.

- c) Our **participation in religious organisations** results in wide impact on people and policy: most obviously, ordained ministers, about half of T&R staff, routinely apply results of their research in regular sermons in local churches, where they both challenge and are open to challenge; further, in response to a local need, **Thomas** as Honorary Canon Theologian of Derby Cathedral works to a brief to enhance interfaith relations, and in 2012 started a Christian-Muslim conversation group; **Hempel** and **Wollaston** are the main resources of *Mosaic: The Birmingham Society for Jewish Studies*; **Draper** is academic liaison at the Small Heath Mosque, Birmingham; **Shannahan** advises Birmingham District Methodist Circuit on urban theology; **Chesworth** and **Thomas** are on the Anglican Communion Network for Interfaith Concerns (NIFCON) management committee; **Davies** is secretary to the Assemblies of God Ministerial Ethics Committee; **Cartledge** is practical theologian on the Church of England Ministry Division Research Degree Panel; **Jhutti-Johal** has a brief at the Soho Road Gurdwara to work for greater equality for Sikh women, and is engaging with politicians to address issues such as domestic violence and female foeticide.
- d) We regularly apply our research expertise in **publications and showings** for general audiences. The most impressive example is **Parker**, who is a leading exponent of the text of the Gospels, taking a leading part in a project to produce a digital edition of *Codex Sinaiticus*. This involved collaboration with the British Library and six other international organisations to complete a website in 2009 that in its first few days attracted thousands of visits from a wide range of general users, and by 2013 was averaging more than 800 visits a day. Further, until early 2013 **Chesworth** and **Thomas** produced the online *Christian-Muslim Digest* for NIFCON, a quarterly summary of world newspaper coverage of Anglican-Muslim relations; from 2005 to 2011 **Wenell** co-edited *The Expository Times*, which brings the latest academic insights to clergy and practitioners; in 2012, with a grant from the School, **Shannahan** led a project to give youths from Bromford estate Birmingham ways of expressing alienation through art, producing an installation that was seen on several sites in the city; and until his death in 2012, John **Hick**, whose key insights are staples of A level syllabuses, continued to communicate his ideas to general audiences through books and YouTube.
- e) T&R connects locally with the public through our **lecture series**. In the most impressive, the **Cadbury Lectures**, started in 1948 from an endowment for an annual series for the public, lecturers, who are always internationally known, relate their specialism to the wider context from which their Birmingham audience comes. In 2013 the lectures were given by alumni of the Department, and each showed how their theological research has deep implications for current aspects of public life. The Department used this occasion in 2013 for the first time to exhibit elements of staff research activities, and also arranged seminars led by some of the lecturers for school groups, additions we will build on in future through CPUR.

The series typifies T&R's general approach to impact in emphasising the importance of **communicating challenging research and seeking challenging responses**. Other lecture series are: the **Rabbi Tann Memorial Lecture**, organised by **Hempel** and **Wollaston** annually since 2009; and the **Walter J Hollenweger Occasional Lectures**, run by Anderson, with Cartledge and Davies, since 2011 to focus on the impact of Pentecostalism.

These lecture series are supported by funds administered by T&R. In addition, in the last five years **School grants for impact-related activities** have been given to **Shannahan** for his project among youth on the Bromford housing estate, and to **Davies** for work to collect images of religious buildings and artefacts for use in schools. In addition, **Felderhof** was seconded by T&R to Birmingham City Council while writing the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus.

We formally address issues of connecting research and potential impact in **continuing professional development** days and, since 2012, through one to one **mentoring sessions** in the Department. From March to September 2013 we also set up an **Impact Development Group** with a brief to draw out impact elements in staff research; this group's work is now being absorbed into CPUR. In these ways, we seek to implement the University policy that states: 'Researchers will be ... encouraged and supported to take the outcomes of their research out into the wider community'.

c. Strategy and plans

We will further develop systematic attitudes to the relationship between research and impact by a) identifying potential impact elements in our work, b) including plans for impact in grant applications,

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c) seeking collaboration outside academia for new projects, d) inviting local politicians, faith leaders, business leaders and other non-academic individuals to join in our debates concerning the future direction of academic enquiries. Our priority here is to enhance the impact potential that is already inherent in our work and strengthen links with non-academic users and beneficiaries. We will be supported in this by the CAL R&KT office and the Impact Officer.

a) Identifying potential impact is frequently a matter of identifying elements that are already implicit in the work of individual staff and centres. T&R is accomplishing this through 1) regular Department Meetings where impact is discussed as a standing item and where it is being embedded in the Department's vision; 2) formally recognising it within T&R staff-development structures and building it into the annual Performance Development Review; 3) drawing together existing impact elements and honing their potential. For example, a major project will be to extend the scope of the Cadbury Lectures by building into the series informal talks and workshops for local people and schools; CPUR will take on responsibility for this.

b) Impact and project development/grant capture: We recognise that project planning and grant applications with built-in impact elements take time to realise, and that staff time spent with non-academic groups merit greater professional recognition. We will incorporate an impact factor into the Work Allocation Model to take into account individual staff time spent with religious groups, local schools and other groups. T&R staff can already apply for grants from PTR School funds to assist towards impact-related activities, and we will seek to capture external grants that are explicitly focussed on disseminating research and expertise into the local communities. For example, we are directing a £6,000 award that was made to **Hempel** and **Wollaston** in 2012 towards developing an annual Masterclass in Jewish Studies for local community groups, in 2013 for Sixth Formers from King Edward VI High School for Girls.

c) and d) Project collaboration and widening our 'circle': This concerns the appropriate exploitation of implicit impact work for the purposes of mutual partnership and collaboration with the wider public. We will expand individual initiatives into the work of CPUR and other centres, and invite Birmingham faith leaders, political figures (local and national) and business leaders to participate in an Advisory Panel which will 1) challenge us to identify key areas of public concern: e.g. inter-religious co-operation, the relationship between religion and the secular space, and the plight of minority groups; 2) assist us in embedding a wider public perspective into our work; 3) develop our ability to act in a consultative capacity towards policy makers and media groups. The minutes of the Panel will serve as a record of our impact initiatives, and an annual audit will give evaluation.

d. Relationship to case studies

In their impact activities, both **Marius Felderhof** and **Allan Anderson** provide excellent examples of our principle of 'engagement to challenge and be challenged'.

The invitation from Birmingham Education Department to **Felderhof** to write the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus was the direct result of his research on the status of school RE. He developed his distinctive ideas, which challenged current attitudes, through reflection based on discussions over more than 10 years with T&R colleagues specialising in the philosophy of religion and of education, and he was expressly encouraged to articulate his thoughts in successive annual PG taught modules on the Philosophy of Religious Education and in supervision of UG students on placement modules in city schools. During the time he was engaged on the work of actually writing the Syllabus and steering it through to adoption, he was seconded by the University to Birmingham City Council, and given office space in T&R for himself and partners from the Education Department.

For 20 years, **Anderson** has been engaged in pioneering work in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in T&R and before that in the Selly Oak Colleges. His work, of which a distinctive part has been to challenge received accounts of the origins of modern Pentecostalism, forms part of the intercultural theology cluster, one of four that make up T&R, and it is complemented by the work of colleagues on modern movements in religion in many parts of the Department. Through his global reputation as a leader in his field, he has enjoyed immense success in recruiting research students from throughout the world, and former students are now leaders of churches (as well as academic institutions) throughout the world. Anderson is **Director of the Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies** within T&R, supported by two academic colleagues. Major resources in their work are the Harold Turner Collection on New Religious Movements and the Church Missionary Society Archives, both kept in the Cadbury Research Library at the University.