

Institution: University of St Andrews



Unit of Assessment: 33 – Theology and Religious Studies

a. Context

The School's research has impact for two overlapping constituencies. First, upon the public's understanding of religious history, ideas and challenges, and of the significance of religious and moral issues in cultural, political, legal and economic life. The results are evident in concrete changes to public attitudes, awareness, policies, and practices in each of these spheres. Second, upon the activities, attitudes, awareness, policies, and practices of Christian churches, para-church bodies, and other religious organizations. Here the results are attested in specific changes to belief, behaviour and organization, enriched forms of religious expression, and more sophisticated approaches to contemporary cultural questions.

The nature of the impacts in both cases is wide-ranging; their reach is international, national, regional and local. The evidence includes both quantitative data and qualitative testimony. Sometimes (e.g. Case 1 – Pilgrimage) impacts are direct and tangible; more often the evidence is indirect and incremental, visible in the on-going effects of contributions to critical debate on matters of policy and practice. While sustained programmes of outreach and engagement do not in themselves effect change, they are essential instruments of it.

The results have been evident in interactions with research 'users' in the following contexts:

- * The practice and appreciation of the creative and performing arts – the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts (*ITIA*)
- * The public understanding of religious and cultural heritage – spirituality, pilgrimage and tourism (*Bradley*)
- * Public discussion, public policy and legal practice on human rights and the dignity of the person – contributions by members of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics (*CSRP*), on asylum seekers (*Aguilar*); human privacy in a surveillance society (*Stoddart*); the protection of children and young persons (*Stoddart*).
- * The church and sexual ethics – the ordination to ministry of those in same-sex relationships (*Torrance*)
- * The church and music – the appreciation of hymns and carols in liturgy (*Bradley*)
- * The church in politics – approaches to public advocacy on matters of economics, social justice, ecology, religion in schools (*Holmes*); public debates on religion and nationalism (*Bradley*)
- * The churches and the military – influencing the work of armed forces' chaplaincy on the moral and pastoral challenges of military service (*Wright, Bradley*)

b. Approach to impact

Impact, for Divinity, is a natural agenda. A desire to change the world rather than merely interpret it may not be found in all of the discipline's researchers, but within the School there is a well-established interest in pursuing and sharing research in ways that benefit those beyond the academy's walls. RAE 2008 acknowledged the particular significance of ITIA; since then the School has consolidated that activity and developed other areas in which interactions with 'users' of research have shown potential for expansion, particularly in practical theology, CSRP and at the interface of biblical studies and political theology. The approach has had 4 assumptions:

- (1) Research in theological and biblical disciplines ought to be public-facing, since these disciplines variously investigate matters of the largest conceivable range – the nature of all reality.
- (2) Research in Divinity continues to have particular obligations to the Christian churches; it honours such commitments through the collaborative provision of training and CPD opportunities for clergy, leaders or religious professionals, but also through research projects that connect with and shape the thinking of ordinary members, adherents, and those on the margins of the churches' life in contemporary society.
- (3) Research needs to be rendered in terms useful to non-academic audiences; this requires

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researchers to invest time and energy in the fostering of external networks, the acquisition of new skills and the exploration of emergent resources.

(4) Divinity has everything to gain from collaborating with such conversation-partners. By listening to their needs, concerns and insights, researchers refine their questions and methods, and contribute more successfully to the common good. Such engagement is best undertaken as an iterative process, where knowledge is pursued and practice developed in social and interactive contexts.

The School has sought to engage with the interests and expertise of its non-academic partners, at both leadership and ordinary levels, through a wide array of activities:

Expert reports, consultancy and advice: A commissioned report for the London political think-tank Theos is discussed in *Case 2 – Politics*, and typifies advisory work for bodies such as the British and Foreign Bible Society, for whom *Holmes* has been formally contracted to provide regular work over several years. Elsewhere, *Aguilar's* research on religion, ethnicity and politics has led to growing numbers of invitations to produce specialist reports and appear as expert witness in the cases of asylum seekers from Central Africa; in 2012-13 alone, 12 determinations by UK immigration tribunals drew upon his testimony; one of these led in May 2012 to a revision of UKBA guidelines on the judicial threshold for the assessment of risk in respect to asylum seekers from the DRC. *Stoddart's* work on surveillance led in late 2012–early 2013 to round-table conversations with politicians, political researchers and social workers at public policy fora in London and Edinburgh, and formal submissions on draft parliamentary legislation on data communications and child and youth protection. These contributions were acknowledged by parliamentary researchers to be of specific weight in the critical assessment of the issues.

Memberships of influential committees: *Torrance's* research expertise on sexual ethics played a key role in the work of the Church of Scotland's Special Commission on Ordination and Same-Sex Partnerships (2009-11), a group of 9 commissioners appointed by the Church's General Assembly in 2009 and convened by Hon. Lord Hodge, Court of Session Judge. The committee researched and drafted a major report, the reception of which at the General Assembly of 2011 has had substantial (and on-going) implications for the future shape of the Church of Scotland.

Public events, workshops, and collaborative ventures: *ITIA* has since 2008 held 5 major collaborative conferences, bringing together practitioners in painting, music, literature and theatre with theologians of art, culture and aesthetics; it has hosted poetry readings, musical events, theatrical performances and educational ventures (e.g., an 8-month programme in 2010-11, 'Casting Call', introducing local young people to current research on the modelling of religious praxis as improvisation earthed in faithful 'performance' of a tradition; 'Theatrical Theology in the Classroom' (2012), aimed at senior high-school students and teachers). Since 2012 it has been working on a joint project with Leith School of Art in Edinburgh, in which practising artists and theologians will collaborate on a series of creative responses to a theme ('Breakdown and Renewal'), climaxing in a high-profile public art exhibition. In other areas, residential courses and workshops for army and navy chaplains by *Wright* (2010) and *Bradley* (2012) have led to testimonies of changed reflection on the ethics of conflict, courage, grief and loss, and new approaches to pastoral care of combatants, including their readjustment to civilian life following active service.

Media activities: *Bradley* (a former journalist and broadcaster) has enjoyed a high media profile in disseminating his research on hymnody and carols. Previously a consultant for new hymnals for both the Church of England (2003) and the Church of Scotland (2005), he has served for the past decade as principal advisor on hymns for BBC TV's 'Songs of Praise' and BBC Radio's 'Sunday Half Hour', and has made numerous national and regional TV and radio programmes. He has been interviewed over 30 times on TV and radio (3 times at Christmas 2012 alone), contributed to TV series in the USA, Australia and elsewhere, and written more than 12 significant newspaper articles on his research on hymns in the past 5 years. He has also taken part in high-profile public events at the Royal College of Music (2011) and the Queen's Chapel of the Savoy (2011), been an advisor on CD recordings, and served as interviewer for a 10-part series on the history of carols, due to be broadcast later in 2013. His recent research project on the sacred and secular music of Sullivan (2013) has generated further public activities. There are numerous testimonies of changes to understanding and practice in churches in consequence of this dissemination of *Bradley's* research on music, from clergy and individual church-members. Within *ITIA*, *Hopps's* work on

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popular music has also involved significant media activity, with Radio 4, Radio 5 Live, Radio Tay, the BBC World Service, *The Times*, and *NME*. Feedback on the effects upon popular understanding has been substantial. Further testimonies to change through media activity are cited in *Case 2 – Politics*. ITIA's award-winning blog, 'Transpositions', established in 2010, has had remarkable international impact among a wide range of non-academic users, many of whose contributions specifically attest its effects on their creative practices.

Staff have been supported by flexible arrangements, leave or relief from other duties to further impact activities; there have been regular travel grants and financial awards from School resources to support public events, particularly in connection with ITIA and CSRP. Several staff have been supported in external grant applications for impact-related projects (*Aguilar, Bradley, Holmes, Stoddart*), and a number of other applications are currently pending.

c. Strategy and plans

The School aspires to be a community of scholars for whom impact is an instinctive and essential aspect of research planning. On-going pursuit of that aspiration means continuing emphasis on the suitable matching of projects and stakeholders. Success will be measured by the diversity and extent of external engagement, and an increase in evidence that such work yields genuine benefits for its target audiences. Over the next 5 years, the School will pursue the following priorities:

- * Ensure that the impact agenda is shared across all major areas of the School's research, including those where it has not yet had such substantial results (such as some areas of textual studies, systematic and philosophical theology, or church history), and bring to successful conclusion emergent impact projects being launched in 2013-14, such as a major Templeton Foundation-funded project (£509k) on 'Scientists in Congregations', directed by *Davidson*, which will work with practising scientists and clergy in a range of Scottish churches over the next 3 years to foster deeper understanding of core issues of science and faith at popular levels.
- * Encourage a differentiated approach within the School to impact themes and their ends, suitable to the diversity of the School's expertise and interests. Some impact projects will be essentially affirmative of external assumptions and values, others will directly counter them; research will seek to be variously encourager, critic and conscience of its larger cultural settings.
- * Endeavour to internationalize impact activities further, extending the reach of such research to audiences beyond Scotland and the UK.
- * Seek to sustain critical mass in established high-impact research fields (such as ITIA) and aim for greater strength in others (practical theology, theological ethics), factoring such considerations into recruitment and retention plans.
- * Build in greater attention to impact in the mentoring of early-career researchers, in personal development plans, and pursue the incentivizing of impact work in career development.
- * Encourage grant applications and post-doctoral applications for projects likely to generate strong impacts.
- * Adopt workload modelling which supports and rewards impact activities, allowing flexibility for regular consultancy work, secondments, and greater networking with external partners.
- * Work further with the University to enhance infrastructure to support impact activities, in media and communications, research finance, conference services, enterprise, human resources and staff development, so as to maximize opportunities for external collaborations and effective service to non-academic audiences.

d. Relationship to case studies

These have been chosen to illustrate impact upon the public and the churches. Though the work of individuals (both with long-standing investments in impact activities), they are reflective also of wider interests in the School, and *Case 2 (Politics)* in particular draws upon a significant body of underpinning work locally. *Case 1 (Pilgrimage)* has a particular focus in Scotland, but reaches out internationally through its concerns with Europe-wide pilgrimage, its connections with Norway, and the significant reach of its underpinning research. It typifies the concern to deploy an innovative combination of consultancy, collaboration with non-academic bodies, public events, and media work so as to effect results. *Case 2* demonstrates the capacity of a report produced in the UK to transcend geographical boundaries, with major uptake internationally. It illustrates the potential of consultancy, strategic links with policy-makers in public and church life, and the vital effects of research dissemination at popular levels. Both studies are concerned with themes in which the authors continue to pursue work, with further impacts likely in the years ahead.