

Institution: University of Sheffield
Unit of Assessment: 33 - Theology and Religious Studies
<p>a. Context</p> <p>There are a number of established collaborations between the Department and religious groups due to the shared object of interest: the Bible. The departmental emphasis on the ways in which the Bible is embedded in the arts, politics, popular culture, and cultural heritage has proven to be both popular and more helpful than anticipated in feedback received from local, non-confessional community groups. Engaging as wide-ranging an audience as possible without confessional or non-confessional bias has been central to the departmental approach to impact.</p> <p>The Department has various audiences for public engagement, including religious believers, cathedral visitors, internet users, TV and radio audiences, concert goers, school students, activists, and community groups. Staff have engaged with such non-academic audiences through exhibitions, festivals, public lectures, departmental blogs, social media, and booklets for group study. Through these activities the Department is able to provide the latest readings of biblical texts to confessional audiences and challenge assumptions about the supposedly alien nature of the Bible in contemporary culture, particularly to those unfamiliar with the ongoing impact of the Bible outside church settings. The Department is able to provide cultural impact through musical and poetic performances, cathedral exhibitions and expert online guidance, particularly relating to continual sensationalist stories concerning the Bible. Educational impact is achieved by presenting a distinctive range of typically ignored material and expertise to schools and cathedral outreach officers and publishing in open-access journals. Social and political impact is made possible through engagement with a local feminist collective, LGBT groups, and international organisations such as Christian Aid. Economic impact is generated through departmental involvement in the success of Sheffield-based publishing houses. These wide-ranging and varied impacts are made possible by the departmental focus on the Bible in a variety of historical and cultural contexts spanning 3000 years and in national, international and postcolonial settings, as well as engagement with a diverse range of establishment and minority groups.</p> <p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>To enable engagement with these diverse audiences, the Department has a Director of External Relations (DRE) who sits on the University's External Relations Committee and chairs the departmental External and Community Relations Committee. The latter Committee includes the Head of Department and other nominated staff members, and reports back to the weekly Staff Meeting. The Director of External Relations also liaises with the departmental Director of Research and Innovation (DRI) to discuss plans for research impact and public engagement, including the latest developments from the Arts and Humanities Research and Innovation Committee. Impact is also integral to staff development. The Staff Review and Development Scheme (SRDS) and promotion planning include reviews and acknowledgement of public engagement. For instance, during the present REF cycle, impact played a significant role in Crossley's promotion. Impact is discussed as part of planning for research funding proposals in collaboration with the departmental DRI and DRE, and is part of the internal peer review process.</p> <p>To help further facilitate impact, the University and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities have provided financial support and experience for public engagement projects. Since 2012, HEIF funding has been channelled through the Arts Enterprise scheme which has supported the Department in two projects: <i>Hidden Perspectives</i> (£19,490) and <i>Jerusalem in European Imagination</i> (£750). The Department was previously awarded HEIF money totalling £20,488 for its <i>Changing Perceptions of King James' Bible</i> project in 2010-11. The Department has also benefitted from £400 Rapid Response funding from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in order to further collaborate with the Bible Society.</p> <p>Specific examples of successful public engagement and cultural, educational, and economic impact over the present REF cycle include:</p> <p>Engagement with Cultural Heritage: Through <i>Changing Perceptions</i>, the Department provided a series of cathedral exhibition resources for the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible that the Church of England would have been unable to create itself in an anniversary central to its history. The main focus of the exhibition was the cultural impact of the King James Bible in British and</p>

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colonial history based on departmental research expertise. Through regular meetings with Museums Sheffield and Sheffield Cathedral, the Department was able to develop means of assessing the impact of its research (see REF 3b D33-2).

Engagement with Religious Groups: All staff have given lectures and led discussions at local church groups. The departmental interest in issues of class, gender and race have meant that the Centre for Radical Christianity at St Mark's Church and the Urban Theology Unit have been ongoing partners. Staff have also given public lectures at the Sheffield Jewish Studies Workshop and 'refresher' courses for Methodist ministers in the York and Hull District. In 2009, the Department began to collaborate with the Bible Society on issues relating to UG and PGT programmes that developed into research-led project *Challenging assumptions about Jesus the Jew in Christian Churches* (see REF 3b D33-1).

Engagement with Schools and Education: In the present REF cycle, Pyper was seconded to the HEA as the Discipline Lead for Philosophical and Religious Studies. Part of his remit has been research-led teaching, the provision of information and resources for pedagogic research activities and influencing the development of policy relating to religious and biblical studies. The Department has also had an influence on education beyond university level. As part of the *Changing Perceptions* project, Iona Hine (a PhD student and former teacher) liaised with cathedral outreach officers to extend the cathedral exhibition resources to provide learning and teachings resources for school visits and adult education. In 2012 the Department developed 'Religion in the City' whereby staff would visit local schools to give classes relating to their research. Edwards has also delivered 'Discover Arts and Humanities' taster lectures (based on her research) for Widening Participation students from 32 schools in and around the Sheffield region. These lectures were also delivered as part of Edwards' (RE)Thinking Religion project which introduces WP students to the Bible in popular culture.

Engagement with Activist Groups: Christian Aid were a lead partner for the Bible and Justice conference (2008) which involved financial support for visiting speakers and a seminar led by Christian Aid and including members of staff, on the use of the Bible in aid work. Engagement with activist groups has been taken up most extensively in Edwards' ongoing (2013-18) *Hidden Perspectives* project. *Hidden Perspectives* – a project on the Bible and marginalised identities – is also run in partnership with the local feminist collective LaDIYfest Sheffield and a range of local LGBT activists. For the first *Hidden Perspectives* festival (June 2013) these groups provided music, poetry, comedy, and storytelling to complement academic presentations on issues of gender and sexuality.

Engagement with Publishing Houses: The Department has long ties with publishing houses which have continued since the sale of Sheffield Academic Press in 2000. Sheffield Phoenix Press is housed in the Department and owned/directed by departmental emeriti (David Clines, Cheryl Exum and Keith Whitlam). Philip Davies was involved in the founding of Equinox Publishers which moved to Sheffield in 2011 for greater consultancy with Davies and Crossley. Both Sheffield Phoenix Press and Equinox have generated their reputation explicitly through the Sheffield 'brand' of biblical studies which in turn provides book sales and employment for approximately ten staff, including former PG students from the department.

Engagement with Media and Media Audiences: Crossley has been a consultant for, and appeared on, the TV programmes *The Secrets of the Twelve Disciples* (Channel Four, 2008) and *The Bible: A History* (Channel Four, 2010). In these programmes he discussed his research on the history of Peter and origins of the Roman Church and Jewish identity in Paul's letters. In the present REF cycle, Pyper has been a regular expert participant on BBC Radio Sheffield, discussing the latest news concerning religion and the Bible.

Engagement with Social Media: The Department has its own blog (Sheffield Biblical Studies) designed specifically to promote and disseminate research associated with the Department. Its most popular topics have included research into the 'Jewishness' of Jesus and Philip Davies' account of his involvement in the Lead Codices controversy which attracted 7000 hits in two days. Blog posts and research are further promoted by departmental Twitter and Facebook accounts. *Hidden Perspectives* has its own blog (and accompanying Twitter and Facebook accounts) which has hosted interviews with participants from a range of different backgrounds (academic, arts, activism), as well as providing opportunities for students to engage with research questions through film reviews and tackling controversial issues concerning the use of the Bible in

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contemporary political debates about gender and sexuality.

Engagement with Open Access Publishing: The Department has been active in promoting and contributing to the free Open Access and peer-reviewed journal, *Relegere*. Since its first edition in 2011, researchers (staff, PGR, emeriti) from the Department have published four articles. Two articles by Crossley have already been downloaded over 2500 times. Crossley has also discussed the significance of *Relegere*, Open Access publishing and their significance for public engagement in (freely available) interviews with the *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* debating the role of academic activism.

c. Strategy and plans

The Department will continue to develop its current and projected engagements and evaluate the successes and lessons from the present REF cycle, particularly in areas of collation and analysis of feedback. The appointment of new staff since the RAE has provided an opportunity to develop public engagement as a key feature of strategic planning. The appointment of Edwards in 2012 was partly on the basis of her extensive experience of, and expertise in, public engagement and impact, as she had previously used her research on the Bible in popular culture and the media to engage with various non-academic groups (e.g. youth groups, churches, schools, community groups). Edwards has since been appointed Public Engagement Ambassador for the National Centre for Public Engagement which puts her in an authoritative position to lead departmental impact strategies beyond the present REF cycle. The appointment of Strine (2013) as a Vice Chancellor's Fellow includes civic engagement as part of his three-year research plan. Under the auspices of *Hidden Perspectives*, Strine, with the guidance of Edwards, has already begun to develop a public engagement programme on forced migrations and ethnic identities. Public engagement and impact will become increasingly important in the annual Staff Review and Development Scheme (SRDS), both as a way of mapping out targets for the forthcoming academic year and potential routes for future promotions, and in line with University strategies for promotions and staff development. Training in, and understanding of, public engagement and impact are also becoming more embedded at postgraduate level, particularly in the forthcoming MA in Public Humanities (which will include contributions from the Department) and PGR training.

d. Relationship to case studies

Both case studies evolved as part of the Department's goal of reaching both confessional and non-confessional audiences. *Changing Perceptions* was ideal for these purposes because it was in collaboration with English cathedrals and their educational outreach programmes. Cathedral exhibitions obviously reach a confessional audience but their function as a site of national cultural heritage meant departmental research was able to reach a wider audience of people from a range of perspectives and interests. Similarly, educational outreach is designed around cultural heritage and education rather than interested religious groups or faith schools alone. Initial feedback from schools has indicated that the title 'Biblical Studies' has a negative connotation, but the Department's engagement with schools has consistently shown the ability to change that perception and to demonstrate the importance of religious literacy to teachers and students. This began with *Changing Perceptions* and has since developed into further engagement with schools and Widening Participation. Similarly, the engagement with the Bible Society on the *Jesus the Jew* booklet provided access to an extensive network of church groups in England and Wales in order to provide challenging readings of biblical texts. In addition, the Bible Society also has extensive online networks which have promoted the contents of the booklet to a wider international audience which also moves beyond church groups. The booklet has been further publicised on the Sheffield Biblical Studies blog, thereby reaching an audience which is known to be international (most visitors access it from North America) and a mixture of confessional and non-confessional. In both case studies, the interaction of the Bible with issues of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and class was significant and these emphases were taken up further in other public engagement projects, notably *Hidden Perspectives*.