

**Institution: Newman University**

**Unit of Assessment: 33 – Theology and Religious Studies**

**a. Context**

The main non-academic user groups/beneficiaries/audiences for our research are:

- Christian ministers (of various denominations) in the West Midlands
- Lay members of various Christian churches in the West Midlands
- Serving and trainee teachers in the Midlands
- Visitors to the Barber Institute of Fine Art, Birmingham

The principal types of impact relevant to our research have been:

- Impact on the understanding and approach to using the bible in Christian churches in the West Midlands
- Influence on the professional practice and effectiveness of teachers in the Midlands so that their teaching of the Jewish and Christian bible is better informed by current scholarly thinking
- Impact on the cultural understanding of visitors to art galleries in the West Midlands of paintings with a religious theme, helping to preserve this element of Europe's cultural heritage

These principal types of impact are related to the spectrum of research activity in the unit in the following ways:

- As outlined in the UOA Environment Statement, all staff research activity falls within the broad field of Christian theology and philosophy.
- Staff within the UOA share a common over-arching goal of making links between the critical academic study of Christian theology and contemporary society, as demonstrated by, for example, the aims of the Newman Research Centre for the Bible and its Reception, the Department's funded work in making Catholic Social Teaching accessible to a wider audience, and the involvement of staff members with organisations like the Bible Society of the UK and the Syneidon Project.
- Members of the UOA are all actively engaged in sharing the fruits of their research with both teachers (through their input into the design and delivery of the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies course and other CPD programmes) and Christian churches and charities (e.g. CAFOD, Catholic Worker Movement).

**b. Approach to impact**

The unit's approach to interacting with non-academic users/beneficiaries/audiences during the period 2008-2013 has been characterised by building upon already established networks of influence and making use of technology to reach a wider audience. For example, to develop impact from our research, staff in the unit have developed relationships with the Barber Institute of Fine Art in Birmingham, with the Bible Society of the UK, and with professional fora for Christian ministers. Evidence of this wider engagement is demonstrated by, for instance, the two public seminar series run by the Newman Research Centre for the Bible and its Reception (2009-2011), the funding attracted from Christian charitable organisations like the Bible Society (2012) and the Plater Trust (2009), and the development of a set of podcasts and other open access web-based resources (<http://biblicalstudies.podbean.com/>). Follow-through from these activities to identify resulting impacts is evident in the evaluation questionnaires completed (and referred to in the related Impact Case Studies), and in plans to hold a one-day event in May 2014 for Christian ministers and parish workers to take forward these activities. This approach is in line with the institutional mission of Newman University Birmingham, which aims to make a positive difference

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to individuals and communities through the contribution of its staff, students and graduates.

Staff in the unit have been enabled to achieve impact from their research by the institutional backing for the establishment of the Newman Research Centre for the Bible and its Reception, which has served as the hub for much of this activity. They have also been supported to bid for external research funding, some of which has been used to engage non-academic audiences, by, for example, funding public seminars and the creation of an open-access internet resource.

Other mechanisms deployed by the UOA to support and enable impact include the appointment of Visiting Professors and Research Fellows with specific expertise in aspects of Theology and Biblical Studies and/or in practical and applied theology. In undertaking these activities, the unit has made use of the institution's support facilities and expertise in the Graduate School and Marketing Department.

### c. Strategy and plans

The Theology UOA has developed its strategy for impact in the future by working with the institution's recently appointed Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Scholarship and other units in the field of the Humanities (specifically History, English and Drama) with a view to designing and implementing a long-term shared approach for the Humanities at Newman. This strategy rests on, but is not confined to, developing the reach and significance of our impact on the public and heritage sectors by building on existing strengths, such as the established relationships already in place between the institution and voluntary groups, churches, and public organisations (such as libraries, museums and art galleries) in the West Midlands region.

The Theology unit's specific plans to support impact from our research in the future are to:

- Maintain support for the Newman Research Centre for the Bible and its Reception
- Continue to support the roles of Visiting Professor/Visiting Research Fellow in order to strengthen the unit's capacity to deliver on impact
- Continue to prioritise the fostering of links with community groups and Christian organisations
- Provide staff within the UOA with further training and support for bid writing in order to attract more external funding to support engagement with the community and the impact agenda

Our goals for impact from the unit's research in the future are to:

- Extend the number of individuals and organisations influenced by the research of staff within the Theology UOA
- To implement more effective evaluation mechanisms to better measure impact (in both the short term and over a longer period).

### d. Relationship to case studies

The two case studies relate to the unit's approach to achieving impact, as described in (b) above, in that, firstly, they build on already established contacts, such as local schools, churches and the Barber Institute and seek to further develop these partnerships. Thus, seminars and other free events were offered, with the aim of both informing the biblical understanding of the general public and developing the professional practice of teachers and Christian ministers.

Secondly, Case Study 1 (The Impact of the Bible on European Culture and Society) in particular also makes creative use of technology to reach a wider non-academic audience, through the development of podcasts and an open-access internet resource (<http://biblicalstudies.podbean.com/>). The case studies informed aspects of the approach in as much as staff within the UOA sought to respond to the needs of these audiences, in creating and refining the podcasts and in choosing the topics for public seminars, for example. The

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effectiveness of these resources was evaluated with the audiences, and this feedback is already informing the planning of future events and activities.