

Institution: The Open University

Unit of assessment: D33 Theology and Religious Studies

a. Overview

All selected researchers in this submission are in the Department of Religious Studies in the Faculty of Arts. Research in Religious Studies at The Open University (OU) is focused on contemporary religion and modern religious history (since c.1800) and includes individual and collaborative projects, utilising historical, sociological and ethnographic methodologies, and developing partnerships with academic and civil society institutions and stakeholders. The interactions between a small and diverse - and highly productive - group of researchers generates distinctive and innovative approaches around an overarching theme of 'Contemporary Religion in Historical Perspective'.

b. Research strategy

With a view to achieving coherence, the OU has had a longstanding strategy of focusing research on particular areas of Religious Studies, especially contemporary religion and the religious history of the last two centuries. Within these fields, we have sought to nurture and support the interests and aspirations of individual researchers, while purposefully seeking to establish and develop synergies between them. An integral part of our research work has been the development of a strong emphasis on impact and public engagement activities.

In our 2008 RAE submission, we identified five themes as foci for our research in Religious Studies. All of these have seen significant development and generated substantial published outputs and PhD theses. Illustrative highlights include:

- **Contemporary spiritualities:** a monograph by *Harvey* has built on his re-evaluation of the concept of 'animism' to draw wide-ranging implications for the critical study of religion.
- **Protestant evangelicalism:** a book co-authored by *Wolffe* has explored the development of evangelicalism as an interlinked global phenomenon from the eighteenth century to the present day.
- **Religion and locality:** *Bowman's* work on Glastonbury has been complemented by *Maiden's* and *Wolffe's* on London, with published outputs and innovative knowledge exchange activities relating to both locations.
- **Religion, identities and citizenship:** *Beckerlegge's* work on contemporary Hindu movements in India and *Tremlett's* work on the recent 'Occupy' movement in the UK have resulted in substantial journal articles.
- **Religion in material, visual and performance culture:** *Beckerlegge* has published substantial research on Hindu iconography and *Tremlett* on Philippine and Taiwanese sacred sites.

During the current review period, our work has increasingly explored the creative tensions inherent in two central perceived dichotomies in Religious Studies – those between past and present, and between 'official' and 'vernacular' forms of religion. Although colleagues have diverse substantive specialisms, all share an interest in different approaches to bridging, reformulating and transcending these categories.

Those who work on contemporary religion (*Beckerlegge, Bowman, Harvey, Tremlett*) pay particular attention to the historical claims and roots of the movements they study. Those who focus on the past (*Maiden, Wolffe*) have a strong commitment to drawing out contemporary implications from their research. Studies of sometimes tightly structured religious organisations by *Beckerlegge, Maiden* and *Wolffe* nevertheless point to their populist roots and appeal, while *Bowman's* and *Harvey's* research exposes the cultural, financial and legal constraints that impel many indigenous and vernacular religious movements towards some degree of institutionalisation. The department's previous research group, 'Belief Beyond Boundaries', was instrumental in stimulating these lines of enquiry, both within the OU and in the wider subject community. However, especially in the light of the interests and approaches of more recently appointed members of staff, it became timely to

articulate an alternative focus.

From 2011 the overall linking theme for our research became 'Contemporary Religion in Historical Perspective'. 'Belief Beyond Boundaries' highlighted the 'official'–'vernacular' dynamic noted above. Emphasis has now shifted to the past–present dynamic. This emphasis has, for example, been central to *Wolffe's* Research Councils UK Global Uncertainties Ideas and Beliefs Fellowship, 'Protestant–Catholic Conflict: Historical Perspectives and Historical Realities' and to Naomi Stanton's PhD thesis, relating the history of the Sunday School Movement to analysis of contemporary Christian youth work.

Substantial attention continues to be directed to the various interfaces between institutionalised and lived religion, but with a growing emphasis on practice, ritual and material culture rather than on 'belief'. For example, *Harvey* has engaged in close participant observation of groups such as Anishnaabeg, Druids and Maori. In addition, *Bowman's* work on Glastonbury explores both the importance of particular sites and objects in the diverse rituals practised in the town, and the growth of a 'spiritual economy' to service the needs of physical visitors and to supply a wider online community with literature and artefacts. PhD theses in this field include Mika Lassander's on changing social values and religion, and Amy Whitehead's comparison of Spanish Catholic and English Pagan material religion.

The public engagement that has grown out of the good working relationships with research subjects, built up through ethnographic and participant observation methodologies, has been complemented by planned and funded knowledge exchange work (notably by *Maiden* and *Wolffe* with the Church of England in the diocese of London) and has served to stimulate and inform new research agendas. (Full details are provided in the impact template and case studies.) Synergies between our respective specialisms enhance our capacity to engage critically with major debates about long-term 'secularisation' and religious change in the modern world. For example, we would highlight historically informed awareness of long-term fluctuation and change in religious practice rather than irreversible secularisation or substantive religious resurgence. Our research on vernacular and indigenous religion provides an empirical foundation for constructive critique of more narrowly institutional understandings of religion.

These insights featured prominently when 'Contemporary Religion in Historical Perspective' was publicly launched at an international interdisciplinary conference attended by over 70 delegates in May 2013, with a specific emphasis on engagement beyond academia. Eight academic members of staff (including five of those selected for this submission) presented papers, together with six current and recent PhD students. Interactions with external researchers at this event demonstrated that we have established a distinctive intellectual focus, which facilitates conversations across a wide interdisciplinary range and stimulates modes of thinking about religion that do not readily take place elsewhere.

Alongside the strategic refocusing of research agendas, the review period has seen striking success in meeting aspirations for increasing both PhD completions and research income.

- There were 13 successful PhD completions in 2008–13 (including 2 by Offshore students who are not counted in REF4a), compared with 5 in 2001–07.
- External research income in 2008–13 was £645,509 compared with £28,243 in 2001–07.

These achievements are indicative of a rising profile of research activity, of an enhanced contribution to the future of the discipline through the nurturing of junior scholars, and of increased capacity to succeed in a highly competitive funding environment.

Plans and aspirations for the period 2014–19 include the following.

- Building on our recent trajectory, to make a substantial and distinctive contribution to academic and public understanding of 'religion' through theoretical and definitional analysis of the concept itself. *Wolffe* will initially take this forward through a symposium (in January 2014) and outputs arising from his Global Uncertainties Leadership Fellowship, 'Religion, Martyrdom and Global Uncertainties 1914–2014'. Further developments will be pursued by *Bowman*, *Harvey* and *Tremlett* drawing out the theoretical implications of their empirical work.
- To sustain and grow research student numbers, matching or exceeding in future years the recruitment in October 2013 of three new PhD students (one full-time, two part-time), building

on our growing experience of obtaining and supervising collaborative doctoral awards (CDAs) and other full-time funded students. We shall take full advantage of the OU's participation in the Consortium for Humanities and Arts, South East England (CHASE), to which the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) has recently awarded substantial funding for a doctoral training partnership and doctoral studentships, to provide high-quality supervision and training in partnership with other institutions. The OU will be a leading partner in developing Religious Studies provision within the consortium.

- To maintain the trajectory set by our existing knowledge exchange work and the successful May 2013 conference, establishing ourselves as a centre of excellence for practical and critical reflection on publicly engaged research in Religious Studies, and holding a further major conference in 2017. More specifically, we shall continue the work in London led by *Maiden* and *Wolffe*, with a view to achieving sustained community engagement with religious history, both maximising the impact of academic research and generating data (for example, oral history recordings) that will provide a basis for wider critical analysis (see Impact Case Study 1).
- To highlight the contemporary implications of research on religious history. Examples include work by *Beckerlegge* linked to the 150th anniversary of Vivekananda's birth in 2014, and work by *Wolffe* on martyrdom and sacrifice linked to the centenaries of the outbreak of the First World War, the Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising (2014–16).
- To continue to build on our distinctive strength in contemporary religion, notably through *Harvey's* study of indigenous religious traditions as they adapt to global and diaspora contexts; *Tremlett's* work on religious change in the Philippines and on intersections of religion, citizenship and locality; and *Bowman's* multi-faceted analysis of Glastonbury. *Waterhouse* (not submitted this time) will resume her research on, and in collaboration with, Soka Gakkai International, exploring its response to contemporary changes in religion and society.
- To raise our profile internationally. Activities include *Harvey* and *Tremlett's* participation in a Norwegian Research Council-funded international project entitled 'Re-assembling Democracy: Ritual as Cultural Resource'; *Wolffe's* leadership of a major joint conference between the Ecclesiastical History Society (EHS) and the American Society of Church History in April 2014; *Maiden's* work on transnational Anglican charismatic networks in collaboration with scholars in Australia and Canada; and *Beckerlegge's* collaborative examination of Hindu nationalism in north-east India.

c. People, including:

i. Staffing strategy and staff development

University policies reflect a research-intensive academic culture. There are rigorous fair selection procedures to ensure equal opportunities in the appointment of staff. All new members of staff go through an induction process, including briefing on support for research. They are encouraged from the start to take their full allocation of research leave, and are often given a lower teaching and administrative load in the early years of appointment. Objectives for probation are set in consultation with their line manager (the PI for research assistants; the Head of Department for other staff), and they are assigned a mentor.

All existing staff are required to go through an annual career development and staff appraisal exercise: reviewing their work over the past year and setting objectives for the coming year. In addition, professors are required to submit an annual report on their work. Research achievements, plans and objectives form a substantial element of these processes. The OU holds an 'HR Excellence in Research Award' from the European Commission, demonstrating its strong commitment to improving working conditions and career development for research staff.

The University Research School provides an extensive programme of training events for all researchers, but especially for those in the early stages of their careers. Training in the effective use of library resources and ICT is also available. Subject-specific guidance on developing research projects is provided informally by senior colleagues (especially *Wolffe*) and more formally by the Research Steering Group (RSG), chaired by *Harvey* until he became Head of Department in May 2013, and since then by *Tremlett*.

Invaluable advice on external bidding is also provided at faculty level by the Research and

Environment template (REF5)

Enterprise Support Team (REST) and the Associate Dean (Research), currently Dr Paul Lawrence. (*Wolffe* previously served in this role, from 2007 to 2009.) The Faculty Research Sub-Committee, on which the department is represented by the RSG Chair, is responsible for developing research policy and for the allocation of internal funds for research projects, conferences and research-related travel.

Although the distinctive nature of academic work at the OU means that there is no vacation system, all central academic staff are entitled to allocate at least 79 working days to research each a year (44 days research leave and an average of one day per week for the rest of the working year). The dynamics of OU teaching mean that study leave can, by agreement, be taken at any time of year, ensuring flexibility in attending conferences and undertaking research. Additional time is allowed for doctoral student research supervision.

Since 2008 there have been significant changes in staffing in Religious Studies. Three colleagues then submitted have since left the University: David Herbert was appointed to a professorship at the University of Groningen in 2009; Melanie Wright retired in 2010 and Gerald Parsons in 2011. (Jovan Byford, who also submitted in Religious Studies in the 2008 RAE, is submitted this time in UOA 30, History.) Two younger researchers were appointed to the permanent staff during the review period: *Tremlett* in 2010 and *Maiden* in 2012 (following previous employment as a research associate), both of whom are selected for this submission, and whose expertise both expands and consolidates existing areas of research strength.

Wolffe's success in securing external research and knowledge transfer funds enabled the appointment as research associates of Maiden (from 2009 until his appointment to a Lectureship in 2012), Philomena Sutherland (2009–12) and Gavin Moorhead (2012–date). The skills and experience Maiden developed while he was a research associate laid a strong foundation for his subsequent career progression. It enabled him to emerge as the successful candidate for the Lectureship, which was publicly advertised and attracted a strong field. Sutherland progressed to the research associate post following successful completion of a PhD in the department. Moorhead is currently being supported in exploring the longer-term development of his career in research and public engagement. All three have been closely involved in the delivery of AHRC- and/or ESRC-funded research projects and have played an essential role in enabling the department to deliver its research strategy.

Colleagues not currently selected for the REF are strongly encouraged to develop their own research and contribute to research culture, particularly through involvement in the supervision, assessment and examination of research students.

ii. Research students

The department's Research Steering Group processes applications from potential doctoral candidates. The steering group assesses their value and makes recommendations according to the synergy between applications and departmental expertise, and on potential sources of funding for such applications, either internal or external. Students are able to carry out their postgraduate studies full- or part-time. During the review period two full-time research students (*Corio* and *Stanton*) were externally funded. Seven (*Coggins*, *Flew*, *Fras*, *Lassander*, *Nita*, *Sutherland* and *Whitehead*) held internal studentships. An internally funded full-time student (*Alison Robertson*) starts in October 2013.

The faculty will continue to support part-time doctoral study and provide internal funds for a limited number of studentships but is also seeking to add to its numbers of full-time, externally funded students. We shall do this through participation in the CHASE consortium, with the Courtauld, Essex, Kent, Goldsmiths, Sussex and UEA, and through bids to CDA schemes.

The University infrastructure for PhD research meets or exceeds the requirements of all Research Council and Quality Assurance Agency specifications. The University fosters its postgraduate community through a comprehensive induction programme, including workshops and seminars pertinent to every stage of the doctoral programme, as well as opportunities to present research papers. It has recently developed a Virtual Research Environment, live from October 2013, which provides an online skills audit, and other materials and discussion fora to enable effective training and supervision. An annual poster competition contributes to cross-faculty postgraduate

community building.

All students have at least two supervisors and progress is monitored through six-monthly reports with initial MPhil registration, only upgraded to PhD following a satisfactory performance at a mini-viva that is assessed independently of the supervisory team. All reports are scrutinised by the Associate Dean (Research) or Director of Research Students and these processes are overseen by the Research School. Pastoral and financial support are also available via the Research School to postgraduate students.

Within such a supportive and collaborative framework for postgraduate research and study, the Religious Studies department, with its reputation for excellence in recent UK religious history and qualitative studies of contemporary global religiosities and spiritualities, has substantially grown its research student community. The trend looks set to continue. The department currently has seven research students. Collaborative co-supervisions with History and Music reflect the department's ongoing interest in developing interdisciplinary approaches. Research students are actively encouraged and supported to take part in wider research networks, for example participation in the annual conferences of the EHS and the British Association for the Study of Religion (BASR). Students also participate in the Modern Religious History seminar at the Institute of Historical Research (University of London), of which *Maiden* and *Wolffe* are co-convenors.

d. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Wolffe has secured four major research and knowledge transfer/public engagement awards during the REF period: 'Modern Religious History and the Contemporary Church' (AHRC, 2008-2011, £233,547), 'Protestant-Catholic Conflict' (ESRC, 2009-2013, £349,000), 'Building on History: Religion in London' (AHRC, 2012-2013, £95,071) and 'Religion, Martyrdom and Global Uncertainties 1914-2014' (ESRC-Global Uncertainties Programme, 2012-2014, £287,682). He also secured two doctoral studentships – an ARHC/ESRC CDA under the Religion and Society programme to supervise a doctoral research project entitled 'Sunday Schools to Christian Education' and an AHRC/ESRC studentship (2009-2012) linked to the 'Protestant-Catholic Conflict' project cited above.

Other colleagues (including all those submitted) have been successful in obtaining smaller grants from a variety of sources. *Harvey* and *Tremlett* have secured £34504 from the Norwegian Research Council to look at 'Ritualising Diaspora and Re-occupying Kåfjord' and 'The Rites of Citizenship' on the Occupy movements in London and Hong Kong (2013-16). *Harvey* also secured a research grant from the British Academy (2010, £6,123) for a project called 'Food, Sex and Strangers: Redefining Religion'. *Beckerlegge* obtained funding from the Spalding Trust (2010, £1,116) for a project titled 'A Study of Yoga in a Hindu Nationalist Movement (Vivekananda Kendra)' and Santander Bank has awarded £2,700 for initial development of *Maiden's* project on global Anglican charismatic networks (2013). All of these awards link directly to research-led publications including journal articles and monographs.

Maiden also secured £1000 from the Mercers Company for enhancements to the legacy website for the London religious history knowledge exchange project (2011). *Bowman's* project 'Helping Bridge the Gap' funded by the Higher Education Academy (2008-2009, £1,163) also demonstrates commitment to exploring innovation in pedagogy in Religious Studies.

The faculty supports individuals through an annual research allowance of up to £500, with the opportunity to bid for additional internal funds. The University has provided valuable bridging funds (£26,741.50) for *Maiden's* and *Wolffe's* knowledge exchange work, and financial support for activities such as the May 2013 conference. External bids to bodies such as the British Academy, ESRC and AHRC are supported through the faculty's Research and Enterprise Support Team and the departmental RSG. The wider institution's commitment to enhancing the research culture is evidenced by close management of bidding activity and reflects the importance attached by the University to research as an index of excellence.

Research culture at faculty level is supported by cross-disciplinary research themes which offer platforms for organising research initiatives and venues for the presentation of new research.

Members of the Religious Studies department play active roles in these thematically organised research platforms, notably Cross-Cultural Identities, Material Culture and Digital Humanities. *Tremlett* has led the Cross-Cultural Identities theme from 2010, which has hosted seminars and debates to link the research done by departmental colleagues across disciplines and institutions. *Wolffe* was the founding chair of the Digital Humanities Steering Group from 2009 to 2011 and maintains an active involvement in this theme.

The OU's substantial IT department supports the requisite hardware and software to sustain research. The OU library, in addition to its hard copy book stock, has very extensive digital collections, including 94,000 academic journals, over 300 databases of reference materials and primary source texts, and nearly 550,000 e-books – which provide sector-leading online research resources.

e. Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base

Colleagues play leading roles in learned societies and research advisory bodies, and are sought-after keynote lecturers, nationally and internationally. These wider networks were highlighted in May 2013 when the department hosted its conference, 'Contemporary Religion in Historical Perspective: Engaging Beyond Academia', organised by *Maiden*. The conference brought scholars and practitioners into dialogue, and re-affirmed the departmental and University strategy of linking public engagement with research and teaching. The department's prominence in the discipline is further recognised by the selection of *Bowman* and *Tremlett* to organise the next (2014) annual Sociology of Religion (SOCREL) conference.

E.1 Learned societies and research funding bodies

Bowman was President of the BASR from 2006–09, Vice-President of the Folklore Society from 2005–11 and is Vice-President of the European Association for the Study of Religion (from 2013). She has been a member of the Executive Committee of the Association of University Departments of Theology and Religious Studies since 2009. From 2010, she served on the Executive Board of the Ethnology of Religion Working Group, SIEF (Societe Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore) and has served on the Scientific Advisory Board 'Post-secular culture and a changing religious landscape in Finland' project, Abo Akademi, Finland. She was a reviewer for the Austrian Science Fund in 2012.

Harvey is currently President of the BASR, having previously served as Secretary and also as the coordinating editor for the BASR journal, *DISKUS*. From 2010–14 he is serving as a member of the ESRC Peer Review College and is also an assessor for the Australian Research Council.

Maiden is a member of the Council of the Church of England Record Society.

Wolffe has been a member of the AHRC Peer Review College since 2006, and strategic reviewer from 2011, and joined the ESRC Peer Review College from its creation in 2011. In 2007–08, he was a member of the Commissioning Panel for the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society programme. He was Vice-President of the Ecclesiastical History Society in 2012–13 and its President in 2013–14. He is currently a member of the HEFCE REF sub-panel 33 for Theology and Religious Studies.

E.2 Visiting Professorships

Beckerlegge was Visiting Professor at the Centre for Indian and South Asian Studies at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris in March and April 2010.

Bowman was the William James Visiting Professor, University of Bayreuth, in January 2009.

E.3 Doctoral external examining

Between them, colleagues have externally examined 29 PhD theses for 18 different UK institutions, and internationally for universities in Australia, Canada, Germany, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, Sweden and the USA.

E.4 Invited and keynote lectures

Beckerlegge was an invited presenter at a seminar on humanitarianism arranged by the Leibniz Institute for European History in Mainz, and an invited featured presenter at an international seminar arranged by the Nehru Library and Museum (New Delhi) with the Indian Historical

Research Council.

Bowman gave an invited keynote lecture on 'Religion, Spirituality and Consumer Culture', to an AHRC-funded research seminar in London, in 2009; an invited public lecture in Dublin, in 2011, on 'Contemporary Celticity' to launch a society to study 'new' religions in Ireland; and a keynote lecture at the 'Material Religion' SOCREL conference in Durham, in 2013. She was also international keynote lecturer at a symposium at the University of Turku, Finland, in 2012, and guest lecturer at the University of Lucerne in 2012.

Harvey was keynote speaker at the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, Amsterdam, in 2009, and at the Sixth International Conference on Socio-Religious Studies, Havana, Cuba, in 2009. In 2010, he was keynote speaker at the 'Symmetrical Approach: The Study of Religions After Postmodern and Postcolonial Criticism' conference at Masaryk University, Czech Republic.

Wolffe was keynote speaker at a conference on 'Anti-Catholicism in Comparative and International Perspective' at Farfa, Italy, in 2010, and an invited plenary speaker at the Conference of Irish Historians at the National University of Ireland Maynooth, in 2011. He gave the Hooker Lecture at Exeter Cathedral and the University College of St Mark and St John Plymouth, in 2010, the Wesley Historical Society Annual Lecture at the New Room, Bristol, in 2012, and the Kirkdale Lecture at St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale, in 2013.

E.5 Conference organisation

Bowman co-organised the 'Death in Modern Scotland' conference in Edinburgh, January 2013.

Harvey was a member of the organising committee for the 2013 conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions and a special conference of the International Association for the History of Religions (September 2013).

Maiden co-organised a conference on 'Evangelicals in the Church of England' in Oxford, July 2011.

Tremlett co-organised, with colleagues from the University of Kent and under the SOCREL umbrella, the second annual symposium on Teaching and Studying Religion, held on 13 December 2012 in London, called 'Religion and Citizenship: Re-thinking the Boundaries of Religion and the Secular'.

Wolffe organised a symposium on Protestant–Catholic Conflict in Milton Keynes in May 2011 and a conference on 'Religious Difference and Conflict' in Belfast in September 2012.

E.6 Editorship

Beckerlegge is a member of the editorial board of *The Inclusive*.

Bowman is on the editorial boards of *Fieldwork in Religion* and *Folklore*.

Harvey is on the editorial boards of eight internationally peer-reviewed journals: *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature*, *Diskus: the Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions*, *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, *Moscow Journal of Religion*, *Fieldwork in Religion*, *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, *The Pomegranate: International Journal of Pagan Studies*. He is also co-editor for two monograph series: *Religions in Focus* (Acumen) and *Vitality of Indigenous Religions* (Ashgate); and advisor to a shamanism monograph series for Sapienza University of Rome.

Tremlett is on the editorial boards of two internationally peer-reviewed journals: *Culture and Religion* and *Critical Research on Religion*, and until 2011 was assistant editor of *Culture and Religion*.

Wolffe is an advisory editor for the revision of the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.