

Institution: University of Kent

Unit of Assessment: 33 Theology and Religious Studies

a. Context

The Department of Religious Studies engages with three broad types of non-academic partner and audience to achieve different forms of impact:

- a) **religious institutions and organizations, where our research helps to influence their understanding of their tradition, social context and organizational practices.** This includes Carrette's work with the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva, building on his major research project exploring the work of religious NGOs within the United Nations, Frazier's work with the UK Hindu-Christian forum associated with her on-going work on theological innovation in complex social contexts, Gill's work on bioethics with the Mission and Public Affairs Division of the Church of England and with the European Council of Churches in Brussels, and Deacy's involvement as a key participant in a theology and film workshop held with senior staff at the Vatican and as co-organizer of a conference on film with the World Catholic Association for Communication.
- b) **organizations within the public sector and third sector, where our research helps them to develop a clearer understanding of issues of religion, ethics and the sacred in ways that inform their policies, training and professional practice.** This includes Gill's long-standing work as an adviser to four leading national committees on bioethics (see 'Ethics' case study), Lynch's work (in conjunction with AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award students) with the British Museum on visitor interaction with religious objects and with the National Union of Students on sacralized dimensions of student conflict in relation to Israel-Palestine, and Day's recent AHRC Placement Fellowship with the British Council exploring the significance of belief in the context of cross-cultural communication as well as her role as an advisory panel member for the questions relating to religion and ethnicity for the 2011 UK National Census.
- c) **engagement with wider audiences through public media, blogs and other public events, where our research contributes to deeper public understanding and debate of particular religious issues or traditions or introduces new conceptual frameworks for understanding public life.** This includes Frazier's regular appearances on Radio 4's *In Our Time* and consultancy for other programmes developed by BBC Religion and Ethics, and Lynch's writing for wide circulation blogs (such as the *Guardian's* 'Comment is Free') which interprets current events in terms of a cultural sociological understanding of the sacred (see 'Sacred' case study). Engagement with younger audiences has taken place through Lynch's on-line films on the sacred produced with Truetube and a subsequent project with Truetube to produce a film on women's experiences of the Magdalene Laundries, as well as Day's and Deacy's writing for *Sociology Review* and *Religious Studies Review* magazines (which are read primarily by A and AS level students)

The volume of public engagement and impact activities undertaken by the Department is notable given its relatively small staff group, and reflects a genuine commitment on the part of staff to making use of our research beyond the university sector. The broad types of impact undertaken by the Department are i) communication of theoretical or normative frameworks which may help a wide range of non-academic users to understand their context, ideas or practices in a new way, and ii) insights gained through empirical or other research which provide a new knowledge-base for understanding a specific issue, activity, group or situation. Both of these types of impact are rooted in the Department's core research strengths, and it is this close relationship between the Department's expertise and its impact activities that makes such a high volume and quality of impact work possible.

b. Approach to impact

A number of core principles underpin impact work undertaken by the Department and inform its approach to future strategic planning. Whilst recognizing the value of working with local partners, **the Department has prioritized work with organizations and audiences at a national and international level.** This includes organizations which have an international profile and reach (e.g. the United Nations, the *Guardian*, the British Council and the BBC), are recognized as international centres of excellence (e.g. the British Museum), and have a national-level policy role or represent a national membership (e.g. the British Medical Association and the National Union of Students). It is a mark of the calibre and relevance of staff research that organizations of this level of standing and influence are keen to work with us in ways that they see as beneficial for them.

Recognizing that effective impact activities often require additional resources, **the Department has sought to develop its impact work through a range of externally-funded grants, fellowships and studentships.** Since 2008, staff in the Department have won an AHRC large grant, an AHRC research fellowship, an AHRC public sector placement fellowship, two AHRC CDA studentships, a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship and additional impact funding from the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society programme, all of which have significant impact elements. Staff have worked carefully with external partners to negotiate appropriate activities at the stage of planning these projects. These planning discussions have yielded significant learning in terms of the different time-scales, priorities and organizational structures of partner organizations compared to the university sector, as well as different approaches to communicating academic research to partners with a broad range of professional backgrounds and interests.

Whilst working towards planned impact activities, **staff recognize that sustained contact with partner organizations is extremely valuable in building greater understanding of their aims, structures and culture, as well as creating opportunities for impact that were not originally envisaged.** Carrette's project on the United Nations, for example, led to him being invited by the Bahai International Committee for a consultative discussion with them about how they might develop their work as an NGO at the United Nations in New York. The CDA project with the National Union of Students similarly created an unforeseen opportunity to include two questions of religious identification and attitudes in its major annual Student Experience Survey from 2009 onwards, which involves over 10,000 respondents each year. This made it the largest source of data about student religious identification in UK universities.

Our staff also understand that, to have integrity, **impact activities need to be grounded in sustained areas of research interest and are likely to involve on-going work with a range of partner organizations as these interests (and their implications) develop over time.** Rather than seeing impact as a series of short-term, strategic engagements, undertaken instrumentally to meet external funding requirements, staff have sought to develop extended programmes of impact which relate coherently to their core research interests. For example, Gill's sustained interest in health-care ethics, and experience chairing the Archbishop of Canterbury's Medical Ethics Advisory Committee from 1993-2006, provided the basis for subsequent invitations to join the medical ethics committees of the British Medical Association in 1999, the Royal College of Gynaecologists in 2000, the Medical Research Council in 2001 and the Nuffield Council on Bioethics in 2009. Similarly Day's sustained interest in belief, developed over a range of publications and funded projects, made possible her involvement in the scientific advisory committee for the 2011 National Census. This provided her with a strong basis to continue to develop these interests in work with the British Council. In addition to giving intellectual integrity to these impact activities, this focus on sustained programmes of impact also establishes staff's credibility for particular kinds of work in ways that facilitate future impact relationships with external partners.

We also seek **to integrate our doctoral students into our impact activities and support them in developing impact work in their own right.** Our AHRC CDA studentships have, for example, led to one award-holder running a national study day on religion and museums at the British

Museum, involving over a 100 delegates including representatives from religious organizations and museum professionals. Another award-holder convened a workshop (and related on-line training material) run with the National Union of Students for 60 journalists working with student media at British universities on writing about morally-charged conflicts with particular reference to the Middle East.

c. Strategy and plans

The Faculty of Humanities and School of European Culture and Languages will continue to provide financial support for impact activities in the Department, building on the £14k it awarded to the Department for this in this current REF cycle. After REF2014, the School will prioritize setting up competitive impact bursaries to enable staff to receive buy-out of their teaching (up to the equivalent of a term of teaching relief) to support major impact activities. The Department will also continue to make use of its proximity to London to develop relationships with partner organizations capable of creating impact at a national and international level. More specifically, within this context, the Department will generate future impact work by:

- a) **supporting the development of external grant applications linked to major impact activities** (e.g. Lynch’s AHRC Fellowship application, which would lead to a major exhibition on religious involvement in UK child migration schemes at the V&A Museum of Childhood, and Carrette’s AHRC Follow-On Funding application on the negotiation of women’s rights and religious rights amongst NGOs working within the UN).
- b) **enabling staff with emerging impact plans to refine these and establish links with appropriate non-academic partners with whom members of the Department and University already have a strong track record of collaborative work.** This process will be supported by Lynch in his capacity as Departmental and School Director of Research, informed by his own knowledge of good practice across the Faculty of Humanities. Examples of emerging projects to be developed include Sherwood’s ideas for public exhibitions on the theme of blasphemy and false Scriptures, which will be explored with the British Library and the ICA, King and Frazier’s interest in developing public understanding of Buddhist and Hindu visual culture, to be discussed with the British Museum, and Blanton’s plan for a documentary on the influence of Paul on radical politics, to be discussed with the BBC.
- c) **holding periodic meetings with key stakeholders to explore new opportunities for collaborative impact work.** In 2014, for example, we plan to have staff meetings with Dr J.D. Hill, Director of Research at the British Museum, and Elizabeth Oldfield, Director of the think-tank Theos, to explore future possible collaboration, including projects structured around AHRC CDP/CDA studentships.
- d) using one of its work-in-progress seminars each term **to discuss on-going impact work within the Department, and to share good practice in developing and evaluating impact.**

d. Relationship to case studies

We have selected the two case studies by Gill (‘Ethics’) and Lynch (‘Sacred’) because they represent the type of impact and approach taken to impact by the Department more generally. Both describe activities that involve communicating conceptual and normative frameworks across different non-academic contexts. They also reflect the wide range of non-academic partners with whom the Department engages. Both involve on-going relationships with non-academic partners, with Gill having worked with three of these committees for more than a decade, and Lynch building a portfolio of contacts with different partner organizations for this work since 2008. Lynch’s case demonstrates the University’s financial support for impact activities, with £7k of Faculty funding awarded towards the production and launch of the Truetube films. We regard them as examples of good practice in impact work that exemplify the range of activities we wish to continue in the future.