

Institution: University of Bristol
Unit of Assessment: 33 Theology and Religious Studies
<p>a. Context</p> <p>The department's broad approach to impact is based on the conviction that, given the way in which religion has historically informed and continues to inform the culture, ethics, and values of societies around the world, understanding the world is not possible without some insight into religion. Academic research in the field of religious studies and theology thus has the potential to make a significant contribution to civil society, cultural life, education, public discourse and public services. The department's staff both collectively and individually are committed to disseminating their research to as wide an audience as possible through both proactive public engagement and by responding to invitations to participate in activities and events beyond the immediate confines of academia.</p>
<p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>The department's principal approach to impact in the REF period has been through public engagement, encompassing public services, education, cultural life, public discourse and civil society. Members of the department have sought to engage with the local community and general public, and to have a broader involvement in regional and national bodies. The School of Humanities, in which Religion and Theology sits, operates a workload model which acknowledges and facilitates staff in engaging in activities which take their research to broader publics. The School has an Impact Director who supports and advises research active staff, and works closely with the Deputy Head of School for Research. These initiatives are underpinned by excellent faculty and university support through seed-corn funding and the expert advice from staff in Research and Enterprise Development, the Centre for Public Engagement, the Widening Participation office and the Press Office.</p> <p>Members of the department have drawn on the resources available in the University to assist in the achievement of impact, in particular the expertise of the Knowledge Exchange Development Manager (Wray). Langer was awarded £12,000 by the University's Enterprise and Impact Development Fund to help present findings from the AHRC Buddhist Death Rituals project in a form useful to secondary school teachers and NHS chaplains. She received funding for training in film making (Manchester 2011) which will facilitate the production of such video materials in future projects. With such institutional support members of Religion and Theology have actively tried to carry forward impact through direct public engagement with civil society, cultural life, education, public discourse and public services.</p> <p>Public services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The AHRC funded project <i>Buddhist Death Rituals of Southeast Asia and China</i> (2007–11) had impact informing NHS chaplains on issues relating to death in Buddhism (see REF3b). • Gethin continued to developed his public engagement with the interface between Buddhist psychology and psychotherapy following his invitation to speak on mindfulness at OCD-UK; he addressed an audience including doctors, therapists, and psychologists working on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) on the topic of 'Mindfulness, Meditation and Therapy' at the International Mindfulness Congress in Hamburg (2011). • D'Costa's research on Muslim-Christian dialogue informed policy on Muslim-Christian relations (see REF3b). <p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The AHRC project <i>Buddhist Death Rituals</i> had impact in the field of education, especially in the production of videos and other materials to be used in schools (see REF3b). • Local sixth-formers were invited and attended the department's annual Joint Postgraduate Conferences (2012, 2013). • Members of staff worked on books widely used in the UK and USA in schools, universities, and by the general reader. Williams revised and published 2nd editions of both his <i>Mahayana Buddhism</i> (2008) and <i>Buddhist Thought</i> (2011), informed by his own continuing research and that of staff and students in the department (e.g. Cholvijarn 2007 MPhil). Gethin published <i>Sayings</i>

of the Buddha (2008), and D'Costa *Christianity and the World Religions* (2009), also on the A level syllabus of OCR Exam Board.

- As a result of our research profile three members of staff were invited to feed their expertise into Edexcel's development of a new A-Level Religious Studies specification; this included a 2-hour conference call (2012), and email exchanges with Laura Eason (Pearson UK).
- For more than a decade the Department has participated in the Sutton Trust summer schools and, for the last six years, in partnership with the Sutton Trust has organised six sessions as part of the Access to Bristol scheme, whose aim is to give sixth-formers from local schools (who are often the first generation in their family to go to university, or are those living in low university participation areas) an experience of studying Religion and Theology at university level. Students recruited to the department through this scheme include a sixth-former who graduated last year with a first class degree.
- Staff advise on the vocational education of the laity and clergy. Muessig has advised (2010–11) the Diocese of Bath and Wells on the structure of a new course, *Exploring Christianity*, offering theological training to the laity, and (since 2012) on policy and educational development and planning in the theological training of clergy.

Cultural life

- Langer's research on Buddhist rituals led to an invitation to participate in 'Continental Shifts: Ritual and Memory', one of a series of debates on the themes in the Edinburgh Festival 2011. She joined French Vietnamese choreographer Ea Sola and Indian writer Swati Chopra 'in a wide-ranging conversation exploring the poignancy of lost and living traditions, rituals and cultural memory in Vietnam, India and south east Asia' (<http://edintfest.podbean.com/2011/12/02/continental-shifts-ritual-and-memory/>).
- Gethin has co-supervised (with Drama) a PGR working on a Buddhist-themed production of *Waiting for Godot* for Thai audiences in Bangkok (9 performances at 4 venues seen by over 500 in 2012); the research includes a study of the impact of the production on the audience.
- In 2011, D'Costa and Muessig led two public discussions on *Faith: The Big Debate* at the Bristol Old Vic in a post-performance discussion following Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*, directed by Simon Godwin. Participants included actors, the director and the sell-out audience.
- A PG student working in the department on Sanskrit and Pali has been employed putting her research skills to use advising Welsh National Opera singers on the pronunciation of Pali in connection with their 2013 production of Jonathan Harvey's *Wagner Dream*, which includes text sung in Pali.

Public discourse and civil society

- Members of staff continued to use their research to inform debate on issues of religious diversity and multiculturalism at both a local, national and international level by organising, speaking at and participating in a number of public events and discussions.
- D'Costa, with colleagues from the departments of Law and Sociology, organised two important conferences, attracting very considerable public interest and participation, on multiculturalism and multi-religious identity, one resulting in a jointly edited volume (*Religion in a liberal state*, CUP, 2013). Lyons participated in in two public events on Baptist hermeneutics (Cardiff 2009, Oxford 2011).
- Leech made substantial contributions to the website 'Investigating Atheism' (<http://www.investigatingatheism.info/>). This site was designed to stimulate informed debate on atheism among the public at large; it is cited on hundreds of blogs and currently has 114 backlinks. Leech plans to use his contributions as the basis for a short popular book on atheism.

c. Strategy and plans

The chief aims of the department of Religion and Theology are to build on existing engagement activities, and to adopt a more systematic and reflective approach to following up events and interactions, both maximising and measuring the reach and value of the impact of these activities.

The School of Humanities perceives the enhancement of social and economic life as a major driver of its future research direction, locally, nationally, and internationally. Taking its cue from the

Impact (REF3a)

major funding agencies, the School plans to evaluate likely impact in, for example, applications for study leave, for research funding, and in the recruitment, progression and promotion of staff; in short, to ensure that impact is overtly acknowledged to be one of the measures of success in all its research outputs. To this end, the School is developing a resource of expertise at academic and support staff level, as well as systems and processes that will facilitate the capture of data about impact and build in follow-up activities with external partners across all its constituent subjects. In reviewing its workload modelling systems, the School will also build in a tariff that acknowledges activity leading to the development of impact as part of the allocation of research time. In acknowledgement of the fact that external partners may benefit from the research of more than one of its constituent disciplines, the School is also mindful of its role as a conduit for the communication of the needs of, and opportunities provided by, external partners by its constituent subjects.

Religion and Theology has plans in particular to continue to work with schools and teachers; we are in contact with a number of graduates who are now teaching in schools.

In addition, Langer is now developing a project entitled 'Kitchen cosmology: feeding humans and non-humans in Theravada Buddhism' whose outputs will include videos that will be of interest to schools and also the Sri Lankan diaspora in Europe, the US and Australia.

D'Costa will continue to work to disseminate his research on religious pluralism in the context of inter-faith dialogue, especially with reference to Christianity and Islam, and Christianity and Judaism. This will be complemented by Campbell's interests in contemporary anti-Zionist antisemitism and its (mis)use of sacred texts.

Leech is involved in writing a grant application with colleagues at Cambridge and Aberystwyth for a three-year project intended to further their work on Cambridge Platonism; the project will seek in particular to make the general public more aware of Cambridge Platonist influence on issues of women's equality and religion/secularity through a series of planned impact activities, including radio talks, public talks, and articles in the media and in popular philosophy magazines.

On the basis of contacts made following his participation in the 'Mind and Life XVIII' dialogue with the Dalai Lama (Dharamsala 2009) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-DImXaQNKc>), Gethin is building on his work on mindfulness and Buddhist psychology, having in mind the wider audience of those working in cognitive science and psychology, and MBSR and MBCT. Gethin also plans a 2nd edition, in the light of more recent research (both his own and others'), of his *The Foundations of Buddhism* (OUP 1998), a book widely used in the UK and USA in schools, universities, and by the general reader.

d. Relationship to case studies

The two submitted impact case studies have grown out of the department's research in two distinctive areas, Buddhist studies and Christian theology. The first exemplifies the department's commitment to disseminating more widely the latest approaches in the academic study of Buddhism, where over the last 20 years there has been considerable advances in research focusing on the variety of contemporary and localized practice in different parts of the Buddhist world. While the impact relates to a quite specific project, we were only able to realise such a project in a research environment that has sustained and developed Buddhist studies over some 25 years. The educational potential of the material was clear from the start and planned for primarily in the form of videos and images. The interest the project would have for those working as chaplains in the NHS was not anticipated but was realised following enquiries in the wake of exhibitions and screenings of the videos locally in Bristol and elsewhere in the UK and Europe.

The second case study exemplifies the department's commitment to the study of Christianity and its impact on culture. The researcher is co-director of the department's Centre for Christianity and Culture. The department is committed to disseminating research more widely especially in relation to the 'third sector', in this case the national and international secondary A level curriculum, and to national and international church groups. This case study comes out of the collective research interests of those working within the Christian tradition since the department's foundation. It is also particularly nourished by the unique interfaith context of a department where research and teaching has in addition over the last 15 years encompassed Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism.