

<p>Institution: University of Chester</p> <hr/> <p>Unit of Assessment: 33: Theology and Religious Studies</p> <hr/> <p>a. Context</p> <p>The impact strategy of Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) at the University of Chester seeks to build on the values of the Department and University, which place a high premium on research and teaching focused around vocational education and service to the community. Research and scholarship within TRS has always prided itself on its contextual, public and outward-facing qualities. Much of the department's research emphasis is founded on the theory and method of practice-based research, and analysing bodies of qualitative evidence which privilege the phenomenological, ethical and public dimensions of religious faith. Researchers share broad interests in the way beliefs and values shape practice: either by investigating the interpretation and reception of religious texts and traditions, or by interrogating religious traditions in order to inform practical responses.</p> <p>In thinking about research impact, then, TRS orientates itself within a triangulation of research as 'contribution to knowledge' pertaining to (i) the academy (ii) social, organizational or community benefit (iii) personal and professional development and formation (see Graham, <i>International Journal of Practical Theology</i>, 2013). The Department's impact activities are therefore designed to extend the reach of such research beyond the academy to wider communities, and especially communities of practice. Our main partners and beneficiaries are threefold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) faith-communities and their members - especially, but not exclusively, those responsible for public engagement and adult training - who benefit from our research into the relationship between historic sources of religious traditions and contemporary interpretation, reception and performance; (ii) public and voluntary sector organizations, in areas such as education, health care, disability rights and urban regeneration, who benefit from our research on the reception and influence of religious thought and practice in contemporary culture; (iii) a broad range of 'researching professionals' who benefit from engagement with our research through participating in conferences and networks at the University, or who work in partnership with members of TRS in developing forms of training and continuing professional development. <hr/> <p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>The following examples illustrate many of the broader features of our emerging impact strategy. They highlight the diversity of possible pathways to impact, and illustrate three different models by which departmental scholarly activity is engaging with wider constituencies of policy and practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Scholarship' pathway to impact <p>Whilst this model of research-led impact may involve some empirical or qualitative research, it originates in scholarship that makes an intervention in professional practice or policy via wider dissemination. Prof. David Clough's research on attitudes to non-human animals and their welfare within the Christian tradition represents a radical extension of public understandings of concepts of well-being and human rights by extending them to non-human animals. (See: 'Angels, Beasts, Machines and Men: Configuring the Human and Non-human in Judaeo-Christian Tradition', in Rachel Muers and David Grumett (eds), <i>Eating and Believing</i> (Continuum, 2008), 60–72, and 'All God's Creatures: Reading Genesis on Human and Non-human Animals' in Stephen Barton and David Wilkinson (eds), <i>Reading Genesis after Darwin</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 145-162; Full discussion in 2012 monograph <i>On Animals: Volume 1 – Systematic Theology</i> (London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2012).</p> <p>This research led to animals being identified for the first time as non-human neighbours by the UK Methodist, Baptist and URC churches in the report 'Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change' http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/hope-in-gods-future (§2.5 Attending to other than human neighbours, pp. 18-19). The 'Hope in God's Future' report led to reference to non-human animals as moral subjects of concern in the 2009 Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church position paper on the implications of climate change for investors:</p>
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http://www.cfbmethodistchurch.org.uk/downloads/position_papers/cfb_climate_change_position_paper.pdf, §3.3 pp. 2-3, and its policy paper: http://www.cfbmethodistchurch.org.uk/downloads/policy_statements/cfb_climate_change_policy_statement.pdf.

- **‘Embedded’ pathway to impact**

Robert Evans’ involvement in an action research project to translate Mark’s Gospel into British Sign Language demonstrates TRS’s commitment to ‘embedded’ research into minority languages and cultures that has a direct impact on a particular linguistic community. The outcome of this project will be a visual, signed translation available for use by churches which will enable the greater participation of Deaf people in congregational worship and Bible study and boost the Biblical literacy of an under-represented group in Church and society. As the leading academic consultant in the New Testament and biblical hermeneutics for the British Sign Language Bible Translation Project (Reg. Charity No: 1119990), Dr Evans leads the teams (of Deaf and hearing participants) for the Project’s pilot translation of the Gospel of Mark: the first systematic, scholarly translation of full biblical texts into BSL. He contributes biblical exegesis, translation theory and NT theology within the translation teams, and builds the capacity of Deaf translators and BSL interpreters in historical, linguistic and theological skills. Resources on the Project website (www.bslbible.org.uk) include ‘Aims and principles of translation for the BSL Bible’, a summary by Dr Evans of the approach being developed by the teams under his leadership. To date, the teams have published DVDs of ‘The Gospel of Mark in BSL: 1.1–3.6’, 2010 and ‘3.6-6.6’, 2013. The Project meets the requirements for ‘the public benefit’ as described by the Charity Commission: ‘the longer term aim benefits the UK Deaf community with incremental access to books of the Bible in BSL. In the shorter term the Project is building capacity among BSL users in linguistic, exegetical, translational and presentational skills to make this aim achievable and sustainable’ (BSL Bible Translation Project report and financial statements for year ended 31 July 2012). The immediate impact within the Deaf community, beyond the capacity-building of the teams of translators, reflects a key translation principle of ‘acceptability’ in Deaf Culture and Deaf Church, achieved through the consultative methodology (see ‘Translation process’ <http://www.bslbible.org.uk/page6.html>) with a wide, national, participation of the Deaf community in focus groups and back-translation.

- **‘Dialogical’ pathway to impact**

The Higher Power Project (HPP), which examines the role of spirituality in Twelve-Step programmes of addiction recovery, facilitates greater interaction between researchers and practitioners through conferences, consultations, training provision and joint outputs. This is underpinned by **Wendy Dossett’s** research on approaches to addiction treatment by local government and treatment providers which is alerting many user groups, academics and practitioners to the need to reappraise the language of spirituality within the recovery process. The project process itself provides opportunities for cross-dissemination but also generates original, empirical research that adds value and new evidence to the debate. As explained further in one of the TRS case studies, this is having an impact in terms of a growth in the number of agencies prepared to include Twelve-Step programmes in their recommended treatment pathways, and of the increase in take-up of HPP training. Its impact is also recognised in new patterns of training that raise awareness of needs of minorities or marginalized groups and result in new directions in policy and practice. For example, in July 2013, HPP entered into a “Twelve-Step Facilitation” (TSF) pilot project alongside Wrexham County Borough Council’s Substance Abuse Advisory Team and the Association of Voluntary Organizations in Wrexham, which will deliver support services to twenty local people with histories of substance misuse, using TSF techniques and monitoring procedures co-ordinated by HPP.

Within **Departmental infrastructure**, pathways to impact are currently supported by the provision of dedicated administrative support for conferences and colloquia. TRS staff are also encouraged to use the Chester Repository as an open-access showcase for research outputs. As a Department, we have extensively discussed the merits of social media as a means of greater, more interactive, engagement with public audiences (@TRSChester). Within **University structures**, the development of impact from research undertaken is underpinned by an expectation that a minimum of 20% of the QR income from the RAE2008 exercise is deployed in impact-generating activities. This is an institutional policy that has been of particular benefit to TRS in promoting

Impact template (REF3a)

pathways to impact through support for conferences and colloquia.

For research outcomes that are closer to the marketplace and to commercial exploitation, the University operates a system of **Knowledge Transfer grants**, funded on a competitive basis using HEIF income, to pump prime the commercialisation of research. TRS has received two grants during this period: (i) £10k for a departmental colloquium to showcase the diversity of models of its research engagement with wider society, proceedings published as *Transforming Exclusion* (**Bacon, Knowles, Morris**, 2010). (ii) £8k to develop online learning materials to support a master's programme in Theology, Media and Communication aimed specifically at the continuing development of media professionals (**Graham, Knowles**).

c. Strategy and plans

As the Department forges a long-term impact agenda, its objective will be to consolidate the various different models of engagement with wider communities of practice. Whilst the conventional scholarship model will continue to generate research outputs that have a demonstrable societal impact, our research strategy will also prioritise other strategies that build sustainable relationships with key stake-holders and beneficiaries, in keeping with our commitment to a contextually-driven pathway to impact that follows a model of practice-theory-practice. Whilst many of our opportunities for impact partnerships will be with external bodies in dialogical mode, we also envisage that our growing constituency of PGRs will serve as more 'embedded' ambassadors or bridge-builders between the academy and their own communities of practice. This is due to the high premium given in programmes such as the Doctor of Professional Studies in Practical Theology to the promotion of advanced, practice-based research amongst established professionals and leaders across a range of faith-based, non-governmental, educational and voluntary contexts.

TRS has four objectives for enhancing and promoting research impact over the next five years:

1. Raise the awareness of academic staff of the significance of impact-related activity and monitoring their plans for building impact pathways in research review meetings;
2. Allocate QR income to a fund to which colleagues can bid for support for impact-related activity;
3. Promote PGR pathways to impact and recruit students who wish to locate and disseminate their research within appropriate professional and organizational networks;
4. Seek further collaborative opportunities via joint research, consultancy and action-research projects with potential stake-holders, such as University validation partnerships, service-users and professional or clinical networks.

To these ends, TRS will employ an Impact Research Assistant (0.5 post from January 2014) to support impact-related events (including collaborative projects and events), accelerate placing of research outputs in the University's open-access repository, and map the impact of departmental activity.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our two case studies represent two models of the research process as it relates to external stakeholders, as well as a diversity of beneficiaries of impact. The **Higher Power Project** exemplifies a 'dialogical' process of research to impact, in which initial research is tested and disseminated in conversations between the academy and networks of professionals, service-users and policy-makers. Impact is evident in the extent to which outcomes of the research process inform or redirect the priorities and policies of service providers and users, with the potential for shaping public or voluntary sector organisational cultures and professional practice. **Wayne Morris'** research (2003-2008) on the exclusion of Deaf Christians from formal adult theological education reflects the conventional 'scholarship' pathway, in which qualitative research made the case for an alternative curriculum delivered entirely through the medium of British Sign Language. Aided by the Department's extant links with ministerial training in the Church of England, Morris' research helped to widen participation to theological education for an under-represented constituency, through its Committee for Ministry among Deaf and Disabled People. The research has also had further, global, impact on the policy and practice of the World Council of Churches and continues to raise awareness of the needs of people with disabilities within the churches (<http://www2.wcc-coe.org/ccdocuments2003.nsf/index/plen-1.1-en.html>).