

Institution: GOLDSMITHS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
Unit of Assessment: 22: Social Work and Social Policy
Title of case study: Religious Literacy Programme
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Adam Dinham's work on religious literacy in secular contexts plays a substantial role in challenging and enabling policy makers, educators and publics to engage with religion and belief identity and plurality. He established the Religious Literacy Programme (RLP) to address the poor quality of conversation about religion and belief amongst policy-makers and professionals which his work has observed. It began with substantial funding from HEFCE to research and respond to approaches to religion and belief in universities in the context of extremism. This drew attention to religion and belief as significant but poorly understood and addressed identities. The programme then translated findings into practice-focused training which has been extensively delivered. RLP now also works with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Government Equalities Office (GEO) on religious literacy for employers, trades unions, and service providers, following the same intentional cycle of research translated in to training, and is part of a very senior initiative, led by EHRC, to review law and policy at a strategic level. The RLP entered in to partnership with Cambridge University in 2011 and the Coexist Foundation (based in London and Washington) in 2012 with the goal of founding a permanent public home in a purpose built centre in London. This is being taken forward in ways described below.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Adam Dinham joined Goldsmiths as a Reader in August 2008 and was promoted to a professorship in 2012. Over the last decade he has brought together his training in Theology and Religious Studies (BA Cambridge), Social Studies and Social Work (MA Brunel), and Politics (PhD Goldsmiths) in his inter-disciplinary development of the idea of religious literacy as a method. He has developed the analysis that the 20th Century was largely supposed to be a secular century, during which public spheres paid little or no attention to religion and belief, while at the same time religious forms moved from predominantly Christian and traditional to highly multi-faith and post-traditional. He concludes that this combination of change in a secular context resulted in little attention being paid to religion and belief just as it was needed most, leaving contemporary society largely unable to talk well about religion or belief.⁽¹⁾ He shows that this makes it much more difficult for people to engage in a realistic understanding of the religious landscape now in public and professional settings. In his book *Faiths, Public Policy and Civil Society* (Palgrave, 2009) he shows how this matters as public policy turns to faiths to fill gaps in welfare as states roll back welfare and other forms of provision.⁽²⁾ Likewise in an edited collection, *Faith in the Public Realm* (Policy Press 2009), a series of controversies and dilemmas are set in practical contexts where religion and belief have mattered, but the skills have been absent to address them, for example, in housing, the Third Sector, and schools.⁽³⁾ He proposes a solution in an analysis underpinning the Religious Literacy Programme, rooted in new research specifically undertaken in university settings to understand practical challenges posed by religion and belief identities in pedagogy and in operations.⁽⁴⁾ This informs training for change, and generates impact upon institutions' policy and practice.

This programme emerges from Dinham's innovative shaping of the notion of 'religious literacy' after 2009 when he was approached to direct a proposed HEFCE-funded programme to address campus extremism. HEFCE funded 'Religious Literacy in Higher Education I' between 2010-11 with £250k of resource; a second phase was funded with an additional £81k between 2011-13; and, as discussed below, the EHRC also provided funding of £32k to support the work between 2012-13.

Dinham drew on his earlier research⁽¹⁾ to recast the focus, setting religion and belief in the context of a balanced, informed, high quality of conversation, rooted in evidence and theory, rather than knee-jerk reactions. Drawing on dialogue between his academic disciplines, formed in part through his ESRC seminar series on Faith and Civil Society (2007-08), he urged the consideration of opportunities and dilemmas, as well as risks. The success of his argument for recasting itself

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represents a significant impact and HEFCE has since embedded this approach to religious literacy in its Equal Opportunities Policy.

The project began with an analytical review of existing research relating to religion and belief in HE settings, concluding that HE has been steeped in secular assumptions for much of the last century, in operations, intellectual culture, and curricula, including professional education, and in research preoccupations, which have tended to neglect religion and belief.⁽⁴⁾ This was followed by field research with Vice Chancellors and other senior HE leaders to explore their attitudes to religion and belief.⁽⁵⁾ This found that VCs are preoccupied with how religion and belief impact upon four key areas: student experience; widening participation and internationalisation; equality and diversity; and good campus relations. It also results in a four-part typology of HE stances towards religion and belief in terms of: hard neutrality (with a duty to actively preserve the 'neutrality' of their institution); soft neutrality (where religion and belief are treated as irrelevant to the institution); repositories and resources (where religion and belief are seen as enriching of cultural diversity and potentially adding value through services such as chaplaincy and well-being); and formative-collegial (where religion and belief are seen as potentially central aspects of students' identity and formation within the wider educational journey). This typology is the basis of a '[stance-taking](#)' tool available to institutions which has been extensively used in training.

The programme hypothesised that HE would reflect and reveal religion and belief treatments in wider society, and it was always the intention that the programme would move into other areas, especially welfare and the Third Sector, as faith groups increasingly plug gaps in shrinking welfare states. In 2012, with the support of an Advisory Board of academics, policy makers, Third Sector and public sector leaders, and representatives of religion and belief groups, including non-believers, Dinham sought engagements with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Government Equality Office, which jointly commissioned and funded the programme to research their existing capacities and engagements on religion and belief.⁽⁶⁾ This formed the basis of a series of four roundtable dialogue events with more than 180 participants from employer bodies, trades unions, faith groups, lobby groups, and service provider organisations in Spring 2013. These used participatory research methods to explore perceptions and practices relating to themes emerging from the research. This found that employer groups think that legal cases have muddied rather than clarified the issues; and they perceive law as having encouraged an assertion of rights at the expense of solutions. An extensive suite of reports has been published,⁽⁷⁾ and academic peer-reviewed outputs will follow in 2014.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Evidence of the quality of the research: Reference (1) below is in an international peer-reviewed generalist journal on contemporary religion, published in French and English. Its purpose is to put in to dialogue multidisciplinary approaches to religion and society, recognising that many fields are addressing religion but with limited mutual engagement. It includes anthropological, sociological, psychological, political and philosophical aspects of emerging manifestations of religiosity in any part of the world - whether within innovative movements or mainstream institutions. The term "religion" in the title of this journal is understood to include contributions on spirituality. (3) is a co-edited book published by Policy Press in hard and soft cover. (6) and (7) are policy reports, with plans for translation as peer reviewed journal articles.

The only references here not also entered in this submission as an output are (1), (3), (6) and (7); these are available in hard copy on request from Goldsmiths Research Office.

1. Dinham A (2012) A Public Role for Religion: on needing a discourse of religious literacy *International Journal of Religion and Society* Volume 2 Issue 4 pp. 291-302. ISSN 1935-2409
2. Dinham A (2009) *Faiths, Public Policy & Civil Society: problems, policies, controversies* Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan ISBN-10: 0230573304 [REF Output]
3. Dinham A, Furbey R and Lowndes V (eds) (2009) *Faith in the Public Realm: controversies, policies and practices* Bristol: Policy Press
4. Dinham A & Jones S H (2010) *Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education: an analysis of challenges of religious faith, and resources for meeting them, for university leaders* London: RLLP/HEFCE ISBN 978-0-9565402-2-5 [REF Output]

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5. Dinham A & Jones S H (2012) Religion, Public Policy, and the Academy: Brokering Public Faith in a Context of Ambivalence? *Journal of Contemporary Religion* vol 27 no 2 pp185-201 doi:10.1080/13537903.2012.675687 [REF Output]
6. Dinham A & Shaw M (2013) *Religion or Belief: where research points to next* EHRC/RLLP
7. See www.religiousliteracy.org for 8 reports.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Since 2009 a [comprehensive suite of training](#) has been developed, arising from these research findings, and extensively delivered. These are rooted in an analysis of religion and belief as an issue for public actors⁽⁸⁾ alongside original research-based case studies⁽⁹⁾ and are available as PDFs on the Programme website (above). These have been extensively disseminated in events and training and the programme has worked with 21 Vice Chancellors and Pro-Vice Chancellors plus 180 other senior university staff across 80 HEIs.⁽¹⁰⁾ An average of six events per year has resulted in change in areas including:

- Religiously literate timetabling and exams, for example during Ramadan in 2013-17
- Saturday lectures and attendance
- Public speakers on contentious issues
- Canteens in relation to halal and kosher food
- Alcohol, events and Freshers' week
- Same sex areas and halal/kosher kitchens in halls of residence
- Sports societies and the wearing of the 5 'k's by Sikhs
- Campus banks and appropriate kinds of debt and lending
- Counselling services and psychological and religious/spiritual paradigms of self and society
- The Bible for English Literature students (so as to read Milton and Donne, for example)
- Religion and belief in social work settings
- The place of Theology & Religious Studies in the modern university
- Conflict resolution
- Multi-faith spaces

This work has been extensively evaluated⁽¹¹⁾ and a number of positive impacts noted, including:

- raised awareness of religion and belief as a legitimate and pressing issue for HEIs;
- increased skills and confidence;
- practical initiatives such as the establishment of Religion and Belief Working Groups;
- improved marketing; and
- new admissions and student experience policies.

In addition, four Universities, (Sheffield, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Warwick,) have commissioned and funded bespoke religious literacy programmes to work on their own engagement within their institutions, and specialist events have been held in addition on the themes of law and conflict resolution.⁽¹²⁾

RLP has also increasingly reached beyond HE through its work with government bodies (EHRC and the Government Equality Office) and policy-makers. For example, at a conference on 18 April 2013, the keynote speakers were the Chief Executive of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Department of Communities and Local Government Communities Director, (deputising for the Minister for Faith, Baroness Warsi, who cancelled as a result of Baroness Thatcher's funeral). Delegates included leaders of employer bodies, service providers and trades unions including the CBI, TUC, Chambers of Commerce and Stonewall.⁽¹³⁾ The focus of this event was on equality in employer settings and in service provision, and 100 delegates from a wide range of sectors and settings attended. Many of the participants came from Third Sector and welfare settings, which are prominent as service providers.

This work with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Government Equalities Office gave RLP the opportunity to develop religious literacy research and training in employer and service provider settings, and represents in itself an important impact of the original work in HE

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settings. EHRC's evaluation of this work concluded that it had achieved a much better mood and environment for its engagement with religion or belief issues and groups, and had enabled it to take this area forward more effectively.⁽¹⁴⁾ As a result, the EHRC has since requested a proposal for ongoing packages of work to sustain and develop the network of public actors which has emerged. It is anticipated that this will result in a new commission to undertake a suite of practical religious literacy activities during 2013-14.⁽¹⁵⁾

Likewise, the Department for International Development has drawn on RLPs work in developing and disseminating its Faith Partnerships Principles policy, and Dinham has been involved in six 1-2-1 consultations with DfID's civil service directorate on this, and has joined a high level panel of experts on religion and belief in international development settings, including CEOs of major NGOs, such as CAFOD and OXFAM. DfID's religious literacy work has been taken as a model across Whitehall, and RLP has presented at meetings in the Foreign Office, Communities and Local Government and the Home Office as a result.

In September 2013, RLP, and its partners, was able to draw on its growing credibility to convene a high-level group to establish a pathway for continuing religious literacy impact in policy-making settings. This includes Lord Rowan Williams (as chair), Lord Justice Bernard Rix, Baroness Onora O'Neill, Charles Clarke (former Education Secretary and Home Secretary), Mark Hammond (CEO of the EHRC), Baroness Warsi (Minister for Faith Communities), Professor Linda Woodhead (who directed the AHRC/ESRC £12m Religion & Society Programme), Professor David Ford (Regius Professor of Divinity, Cambridge University), the Chief Rabbi, the Chair of the Muslim Council of Britain, and Professor Dinham. The specific remit of the group is to strategically review the effectiveness of law and policy on religion or belief and to make recommendations for a change in the law.⁽¹⁶⁾

The Religious Literacy Programme entered in to partnership with Cambridge University in 2011 and with the Coexist Foundation, based in Washington DC and London, in 2012. Dinham attended an event at the Harvard Club in New York in 2012 to share UK experiences with US counterparts⁽¹⁷⁾ who have now launched their own Religious Literacy Foundation, acknowledging the influence of the UK programme. This partnership has led to an engagement with senior politicians, religious leaders and business leaders in the City of London via a Mansion House dinner hosted by the Lord Mayor of London, dedicated to 'faith and the city', and an attached roundtable event on religious literacy, at which Professor Dinham keynoted, attended by business and political leaders.⁽¹⁸⁾ The aim of this initiative is to found a long-term purpose-built public home for the Religious Literacy Programme in London, and this is being taken forward in a partnership with the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Inner Temple and the City of London.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

All sources listed below are available in hard copy on request from Goldsmiths Research Office.

8. Dinham A & Jones S H (2010) *Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education: an analysis of challenges of religious faith, and resources for meeting them, for university leaders* London: RLLP/HEFCE ISBN 978-0-9565402-2-5
9. Dinham A & Jones S H (2010) *Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education: leadership challenges in case studies* RLLP/HEFCE
10. Delegates lists for training and events, available on request.
11. Dinham A & Jones S H (2011) *Religious Literacy Leadership Programme Evaluation* London: RLLP/HEFCE
12. Event programmes available on request.
13. Conference programme and details at www.religiousliteracy.org and/or available on request
14. Email correspondence with EHRC responsible officers
15. Proposal for new package of work with EHRC
16. Invitation to meeting of policy group, and correspondence with Chair of EHRC
17. Agenda for Religious Literacy Roundtable in New York
18. Invitation to Mansion House dinner and agenda for roundtable event