

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 21 May 2021

**Periodic Subject Review: Responses to the Recommendations
Arising from the Review of Theology & Religious Studies held on
17 February 2020**

Mr Chris Buckland, Clerk to the Review Panel

The following recommendations have been made to support the Subject in its reflection and to enhance provision in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer and are grouped together by the areas for improvement/enhancement and are ranked in order of priority within each section

Context and Strategy

Recommendation 1

The panel recommends that the Subject consider the academic and financial aspects concomitant with the anticipated tender from the Church of Scotland for Initial Ministerial Education training partners, and that they consult with the School and College where appropriate during the tender process. [Paragraph 4.1.1]

For the attention of: Head of Subject, Head of School, Head of College

Joint Response:

We have been in continued conversations with the Church of Scotland in the wake of their suspension of the tendering process. They expressed their intention to continue with open channels of communication before any significant changes are decided upon. At present there are no new plans for a tendering process. If this changes, we will consult with the Heads of School and College about the tendering terms to determine if a Glasgow bid would be viable.

However, we have enhanced our institutional collaborations with the Presbytery of Glasgow (Church of Scotland) part-funding a post filled by Mark Johnston which intends to develop training outwith traditional degree channels. This has resulted in eight new short courses being designed and delivered and another four in the pipeline. The eight courses are:

Semester 1:

Designing and Leading Christian Worship TRS1030E
Managing Difficult Church Change TRS1031E
Reimagining Christian Practice in an Age of Uncertainty TRS1032E

Semester 2:

Creative Writing as Spiritual Reflection: Models, Methods and Practice TRS1034E
Introduction to Biblical Hebrew TRS1033E
Worship and Contemporary Visual Arts TRS1029E

Additional course approved by the Board of Studies:

Engaging the Bible TRS1036
Listening in Mission TRS1037

These 10 credit courses not only built bridges with the Church of Scotland and have the capacity of serving as Access Courses to widen participation and recruitment, they have also

been revenue generating. The courses are £200 and we've had c.85 students enrol across the six courses delivered so far, thus generating £17,000. There have been significant teething problems around registration and matriculation, but the team in SCS (particularly Helen McLaughlin and Maeve Houston and Mark Johnston (the Short Course convener in TRS)) have worked to address the systemic problems, which should make it easier for other Subjects to develop similar Short Course options, which have proved beneficial to TRS in a number of different ways.

Additionally, Trinity College has planned a number of further activities to enhance outreach. Four online panel discussions have been organised during the Covid lockdown: 1) Theological Reflection in a Time of Covid-19; 2) Pastoral Care in a Time of Covid-19; 3) Reimagining Mission during and after Covid-19; and, 4) Breaking New Ground: Church Planting and New Forms of Church (24 March 2021). The first three events have all taken place and had c.150 participants from across the UK, Europe, North America, South Africa and New Zealand. A six week online community of practices ran in the summer of 2020. The topic was 'Distanced Ministry in Disruptive Times'. The course ran with 24 participants due to pedagogical priorities, although over 60 sought to enroll. Across these activities, Trinity College has demonstrated a greatly enhanced and proactive engagement with extending our external partnerships and strengthening our relationship with both the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church, in particular. This has been significantly supported by the role of Zanne Domoney-Lyttle as Trinity College administrator, jointly funded by Trinity College and TRS endowments.

Strategic planning for future growth

Recommendation 2

The panel recommends that the Subject work with the School and College to ensure that staff workloads are resilient to the planned future growth in Postgraduate Taught provision, and assess whether the number of UG honours courses offered is sustainable or needs further reduction. [Paragraph 6.1.3]

For the attention of: Head of Subject, Head of School

Joint Response:

Out of practical necessity, TRS reduced their offering of Honours courses from c.20 per annum to 12. This has increased the number of students across all of our honours options and reduced workload, while at the same time ensuring a broad range of topics are offered across Theology and Religious Studies. We expect to remain at a similar level of Honours Courses. The School is developing methods for comparing and planning workloads within and across subject areas. In anticipation of this, we have built into the current workload the capacity to deliver the three new PGT programmes that will be coming online: MTh Church History and Theology (Spring 2022),¹ MSc Religion & Global Challenges (Autumn 2023), and MTh Biblical Interpretation (expected Autumn 2023).

Recommendation 3

The Panel notes the strategic outreach plan being developed by the Subject in an attempt to address the lack of growth in undergraduate student numbers. The panel recommends that the Subject consider whether there is a wider market which can be utilised to support Undergraduate recruitment. [Paragraph 5.1.1]

For the attention of: Head of Subject, Head of School

¹ This was due to begin in January 2021, but the College of Arts Graduate School suspended all PGT programmes starting this year in light of the global pandemic.

Joint Response:

In addition to the widening participation Short Courses noted above, TRS at Glasgow has been part of ongoing discussions within TRSUK about addressing issues of diminished recruitment. Two key themes have emerged: 1) the need to foster better links with teachers and schools; 2) making clearer to potential students the natural progress from Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) at secondary school to TRS at university. To directly engage with these issues TRS has used endowments to support a part-time, fixed-term position during the academic year 2021–2 for Dr Jonathan Birch, who is a longtime tutor in TRS and also principal examiner in the philosophy of religion and epistemology for A Levels. Dr Birch has organised a number of outreach activities to support exams revision, develop relationships with teachers and students, and ultimately to increase recruitment. These events align to the exams curriculum. Since beginning these activities in the Spring of 2020, we have seen increases in the number of applications to TRS:

UCAS application figures

	2019	2020	2021
TRS Joint	85	71	93
TRS single honours	64	84	73
Total	149	155	166*

Three more outreach/CPD events are planned for May 2021.

Additionally, we are working with the Recruitment Office to better articulate on our UCAS and internal webpages that the clearest university pathway from an A-Level or Higher in RMPS is a joint MA in TRS and Philosophy. A number of English universities are considering redesigning their incredibly structured degrees to attain this aim, whereas we already have this in place, it just needs to be more clearly articulated. Of the 650 UCAS applications for joint MAs including TRS since 2015, 171 have been joint with Philosophy and 76 with History. Dr Birch is taking the lead on this and is working with the SCS Student Recruitment and Academic Events Administrator (Katie Quinn), the UK Student Recruitment Officer (Rhona Gordon), and colleagues at other TRS departments through the aegis of TRSUK to develop our advertising profile in this respect.

Dr Birch is also taking the lead in developing links with NATRE (National Association of Teacher of Religious Education), which principally comprises RE teachers in England. We have contacted them directly to see if we may be of assistance in setting up a Scottish cluster. We are also in discussions with Education Scotland for developing a CPD course for Scottish RE teachers on world religions in their global context. It is anticipated that this will take the form of a micro credential.

Finally, we have brought online a two-year BD pathway based on the recognition of prior learning. This has already resulted in an increased number of applications from Church of Scotland candidates.

* The figures for 2021 are not yet complete. While they reflect Home applications as of the UCAS deadline, they do not include all International and EU. In addition, we have at least five additional students who are applying after the deadline to complete training for Church of Scotland ministry through the BD, most will be on the new two year version.

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Recommendation 4

The Panel recommend that appropriate quality assurance mechanisms be developed to ensure that the new Postgraduate Taught programmes are included in the Subject's Quality Enhancement review cycle. [7.1.3]

For the attention of: Head of Subject

Response:

This is happening as the programmes come on stream. The MTh in Ministry, Theology & Practice is already included in the Quality Enhancement review cycle and the MTh in Church History & Theology will as well when it begins in January 2022.

Equality and Diversity

Recommendation 5

The panel recommends that the Subject take measures to ensure that they adhere to the University requirement for course material to be populated on Moodle in advance of lectures, in accordance with the Accessible & Inclusive Learning Policy. [Paragraph 5.3.1]

For the attention of: Head of Subject

Response:

The University has instituted new guidelines as we have moved to fully online teaching during the pandemic, particularly in light of the Accessible & Inclusive Learning Policy (AILP). This has included the necessity of uploading material in advance. TRS has complied with these regulations and this in turn has addressed the previous shortcomings. Additionally, the introduction of a traffic light system for monitoring the accessibility of material has ensured that all Moodles are far more compliant with the AILP.

Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching

Recommendation 6

The panel recommends that the Subject work with the School of Critical Studies to ensure that online marking is fully utilised, and that Subject staff receive suitable training on relevant systems. [Paragraph 6.1.6]

For the attention of: Head of Subject, Head of School

Joint Response:

All marking in TRS is now being completed online. Additional training has been made available, motivated principally by the demands of teaching online during the pandemic. TRS now has a clear and functional procedure for online marking and recording of grades, working closely with the Subject Administrator.

Graduate Teaching Assistants

Recommendation 7

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject consider the impact on staff workloads of removing the requirement for GTA seminar teaching at Levels 1 and 2, and that efforts be

made to provide any existing or future GTAs with a level of peer assessment and feedback on their teaching performance [6.4.2]

For the attention of: Head of Subject

Response:

Whereas the subject area had indicated during the PSR that GTA contributions to teaching might be reduced, this will not be the case. TRS is working to normalise GTA work within the subject area. While GTAs previously have not been involved in marking, this is now changing. Training for new markers and direct feedback after moderation processes is now in place. With regards to supporting GTA teaching, course conveners or other permanent staff will sit in on teaching sessions once a semester and provide the GTA with written feedback, both to ensure the quality of teaching but also to support professional development of our GTAs. This will not necessarily happen for those teaching on Tutor contracts, who have greater teaching experience.

Matters for attention – outside of Subject or School (no response required)

The Panel noted the challenges experienced by Subject staff in signposting students to relevant support services and highlighted the Student Support & Wellbeing project of the World-Changing Glasgow Transformation, whose work intends to increase staff and student awareness of appropriate support that is available. [Paragraph 5.2.3]

For the attention of: Executive Director of Student & Academic Services

Additional Subject response:

There has been a university-wide emphasis on signposting students to relevant support during the last year. This has been particularly important in the College of Arts who produced an excellent Induction Moodle that sets out numerous wellbeing issues and provides clear and accessible information. TRS has embedded links to this material in our Handbooks and Moodles, as well as intentionally drawing students' attention to these resources in class.