

<b>Institution: The Open University</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: D31 Religious Studies</b>
<p><b>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</b></p> <p><b>1.1. Unit context</b></p> <p>The UOA's commitment to making a distinctive contribution to academic and public understanding of religion is encapsulated in our strapline "contemporary religion in historical perspective". This phrase expresses both the coherence and the diversity of our research and teaching community. It informs our shared research focus on the experiences of religious communities and individuals in everyday and material contexts – or "lived religion". We are a collegial UOA with an established research culture of teamwork and collaboration consonant with the OU's internationally distinctive teaching and learning profile.</p> <p>Eleven staff (9.1 FTE) are being submitted. Investment in the UOA during the census period has enabled us to increase our staff numbers (despite retirements) and to deploy a wide range of methods in engagement with diverse religious communities and stakeholders. Staff and PGRS have been recruited and supported to contribute their specific interests and skills to a UOA determined to make a distinctive impact on critical religious literacy (the ability to reflect critically on intersections of lived religion and social life) in and beyond academia. Colleagues are provided with time and mentoring to pursue opportunities to use the OU's unique channels for public engagement, such as the free OpenLearn platform, and our distinctive links to the BBC and FutureLearn, to make our research available to large public audiences. We have engaged with schools, media, charities, religious communities and policy makers. We make leading contributions to our discipline internationally.</p> <p>UOA staff are primarily located in the School of Social Sciences and Global Studies (SSGS) in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS). An additional colleague with expertise in Islam joins us from the Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). This intra- and cross-faculty context gives us a breadth of support specific to the sub-fields (e.g., history, social science, information studies) of the discipline, enhancing our engagement with a range of key disciplinary and trans-disciplinary networks, approaches, methods and debates.</p> <p><b>1.2 Unit Structure</b></p> <p>Since REF2014 we have made increasing use of our "contemporary religion in historical perspective" strapline in our conferences, webpages and blog to emphasise the overall coherence of the UOA's varied research interests in rich dialogues between approaches to and analyses of historical and contemporary phenomena. Research by <b>Beattie, Maiden and Wolfe</b> advance academic and public understanding of modern religious history and its contemporary implications for local, national and global affairs. <b>Ali, Bowman, Harvey, Nita, Newcombe, Robertson, Sinclair and Tremlett</b> advance religious literacy in contemporary arenas through engagement with lived religion in relation to historical antecedents. All colleagues are encouraged to develop both individual expertise in specific areas of research and to lead or participate in collaborative research networks. This approach has enabled us to enrich scholarly debate in both historical and contemporary contexts – illustrated by recognition of our contributions to understanding phenomena as diverse as anti-Catholicism, Indigeneity, environmental and social justice activism, pilgrimage and Islamic philosophies. Alongside published outputs, our research feeds into knowledge exchange and our teaching materials. This combination of a research-base focused on historical and contemporary data and debates with the OU's established model of distance learning and teaching drives our contributions to religious literacy in and beyond academia.</p> <p>The UOA's research, knowledge exchange (KE) and impact strategy activities are overseen by a Research Lead (RL), reporting to the Head of Discipline (HoD) to ensure cohesion and to</p>

coordinate staff development and workload management. The RL role includes facilitating the UOA's REF Steering Group (see Section 2.4), drafting REF documentation, and organising residential UOA team days. These have run regularly through the assessment period (8-11 May and 13-16 November 2019); events planned for April and November 2020 were adapted to work online. We use these for strategy planning and development, peer review of draft outputs and funding bids and individualised support: for example, writing breaks to finalise outputs and/or develop bids. The RL (**Harvey**) leads discussion of research matters – e.g., Post-Graduate Research Student (PGRS) supervision and progress, seminar and conference organisation, funding opportunities, and KE activities – at monthly UOA meetings. The RL is also the UOA's PGRS Convener with responsibilities for responding to enquiries, chairing interview processes, and supporting PGRS and supervisors. These functions also involve regular cross-school and cross-faculty collaboration to ensure coherence and best practice. The UOA's Social Media Lead (**Robertson**) coordinates our departmental webpages and open access public engagement through our blog (see below) and social media feeds.

### **1.3 Research and impact strategy**

We have continued to pursue the strategic aims set out in our REF2014 submission. In summary these were:

- a. to make a substantial and distinctive contribution to academic and public understanding of religion through critical analysis of the concept itself and through the promotion of religious literacy for people's personal or professional lives
- b. to sustain and grow PGRS numbers
- c. to maintain and enhance our internal and external collaborations, KE and impact achievements
- d. to maximise the synergies between our research, curriculum and teaching
- e. to raise our profile internationally, including through strategic use of our blog and of unique OU channels for dissemination and KE.

Highlights of our successes for each of the above points include:

- a. 5 monographs, 13 edited books, 4 special issues of peer reviewed journals, 64 book chapters, 48 peer reviewed journal articles, 76 blog posts, 19 encyclopaedia entries, 34 articles for the new edition of the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Our FutureLearn MOOC "Why Religion Matters" (see 1.6) offered Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to police, civil servants, teachers, journalists, council workers and other professionals
- b. 7 PGRS funded and provided with additional training opportunities through the AHRC-funded Consortium for the Humanities and Arts South East England [CHASE] and Open Oxford Cambridge [OOC] DTPs and the ESRC Grand Union DTP; and post-award PGRS mentored to gain positions relevant to their research interests (examples at 2.2)
- c. achieving promotions and permanent contracts related to colleagues' participation in research and KE/impact projects in collaboration with more senior colleagues in and beyond the UOA and with a wide range of religious and other communities, significantly including school students and teachers (see sections 2 and 4)
- d. delivering research-informed module material to enhance undergraduate learning opportunities
- e. hosting a well-received blog (viewed more than 18,400 times in 2020, with 40% of those views within the UK, 25% from the USA and 12% from continental Europe), contributing to leadership in national and international learned societies (see section 4) and adding to our suite of freely accessible educational material through the OU's OpenLearn channel.

### **1.4 Facilitation of impact**

As stated in our REF2014 impact statement, our approach to the study of religion is a non-confessional one – we do not seek directly to influence the specifically religious beliefs and activities of the groups with which we engage. Rather, we aim to have impact through promoting an informed critical awareness among religious practitioners, policymakers and the general public of the cultural and social contexts of historical and contemporary religion(s), and by

helping religious organisations to develop their thinking about key issues such as community engagement, social justice, heritage management and legal recognition. To that end, we have further developed our strong sustainable relationships with the religious groups engaged by our research and KE activities. We have included practitioners, policymakers, teachers, media and other interested people among those presenting and responding in the seminars and conferences we have hosted in Milton Keynes, London, Belfast and Edinburgh. We have encouraged academic–practitioner partnerships through postgraduate research. Through dissemination of accessible outcomes in publications and social media, and good use of the OU’s OpenLearn platform and its relationships with the BBC and FutureLearn, we have enabled students and wider publics to engage with our research and improve religious literacy.

We have selected our two ICSs to demonstrate the success of our engagement with “contemporary religion in historical perspective” and our contribution to public understanding of religion. The ICSs also illustrate our activities in the four UK nations. The first presents **Wolffe’s** and **Maiden’s** impact on the development of religious archives, on community engagement with religious history, and on the promotion of religious literacy. The second presents **Harvey’s** impact among emergent animist ritual groups in the UK (with events in, e.g., Orkney, Anglesey and the New Forest) and in North America, and on the creation of art installations in Germany and Finland, transmitting and brokering new understandings of animism and ontology. Impact has arisen from KE activities built into research design with such groups, e.g., conversations with and presentations to individuals and groups and the sharing of current academic research findings. Section 4 elaborates further impact of the UOA’s research and KE.

Our successes arise from encouraging, supporting, mentoring and (where relevant) funding colleagues and PGRS to build KE and impact activities into their research from the outset. They are underpinned by the UOA’s commitment to making our research accessible, in collaboration with communities, through social media, and through the OU’s OpenLearn platform and its close relationship with the BBC and FutureLearn. Impact training, advice and evidence gathering is supported by faculty research offices. Good practice is shared between UOAs and informs guidance provided to colleagues during UOA meetings and away days.

### **1.5 Interdisciplinary research**

Our contributions to core disciplinary priorities are matched by our commitment to interdisciplinarity which we see as a defining research practice of the study of religions. Our expertise in historical, sociological, ethnographic and folkloric methods aids our engagement with colleagues beyond RS. Within the OU, for example, **Newcombe** joined the steering group responsible for developing the new Global Challenges and Social Justice Research Centre within the School of Social Sciences and Global Studies (SSGS) in 2020, and **Harvey** joined its professorial advisory group. **Beattie**, **Maiden**, **Nita** and **Tremlett** have all contributed to the School’s “Perspectives on the Global” seminar series. Within the faculty, **Bowman** and **Harvey** are members of the steering group of the Baron Thyssen Centre for the Study of Ancient Material Religion, led by Classical Studies, and **Maiden** and several of our PGRS have contributed to its seminars and blogs. **Tremlett** led the “Cultures” stream of the Faculty’s Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance (CCIG), and is a member of the University’s Citizenship and Governance SRA. Since 2008 **Beattie** has been a member of the Ferguson Centre for African and Asian Studies, which is led by History. Since 2016 **Wolffe** has been Associate Dean (Research Enterprise and Scholarship) for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, a further important example of the capacity of RS colleagues to provide strategic interdisciplinary research leadership.

Our interdisciplinarity is also illustrated in national and international research projects. **Ali** was on the committee of “Difference that Makes a Difference (DTMD)” group of the International Society for Information Studies. As Co-I **Bowman** led fieldwork, KE and impact elements of the “Pilgrimage and England’s Cathedrals, Past and Present” project (PEC; York University, 2014-18). She is currently international advisor on the “Re-storied Sites and Routes as Inclusive Spaces and Places: Shared Imaginations and Multi-layered Heritage” (EMP340; 2020-23),

funded by the Baltic Research Program in Estonia. Similarly, **Harvey** and **Tremlett** were involved in developing and conducting the “Reassembling Democracy” (REDO) project combining ethnography, sociology, theology, and ritual and performance studies approaches, funded by the Norwegian Research Council (2013-17). **Wolffe**, **Maiden** and **Sinclair** are Co-Is in the “Religious Toleration and Peace” (RETOPEA) project (EC H2020; 2018-22) which brings historians, educationalists and media studies expertise together and involves school and media KE. **Wolffe** is co-editor of the Wilberforce diaries project, to be published by OUP (led by John Coffey, Leicester). For 2017-18, the anthropologists Irving and Kyriakides joined us as Research Fellows with Templeton funding for their project “Magical thinking in contexts and situations of unbelief”.

### 1.6 Open Research Environment

Our celebration of the OU’s core value of “openness” has established a culture in which engagement and collaboration beyond the UOA, discipline and academia are standard. We work with colleagues in other disciplines (e.g., in networks led by Art History, Classical Studies, Geography, History and Music), with colleagues in learned societies nationally and globally (see section 4), with colleagues in UK and international research teams, and collaboratively supervise a PGRS with Border Crossings Theatre Company. As the RETOPEA project perfectly illustrates, we understand that good research requires collaboration with other knowledge holders whose ideas, practices and lives we seek to engage. As a result, our projects are designed from the outset to result both in scholarly outputs and in outcomes beneficial to communities beyond academia.

Since REF2014 we have increased the amount of research-led learning material that is freely available through the OU’s OpenLearn platform – including short videos on activism and a 12-hour course on religious diversity. We have also produced a CPD training MOOC on religious literacy and diversity for FutureLearn (“Why Religion Matters”) – with 12 hours of active learning spread over 4 weeks. In its first year it attracted 2966 learners. During its first run (November 2019) engagement was high compared to average on FutureLearn courses with 81% “active learners” (compared to 44% overall average). The MOOC is reviewed at an average of 4.5 out of 5. We have contributed to OU/BBC co-productions and other media outputs, e.g., **Newcombe** was academic consultant for “A visual journey through heaven” (2018; for the award-winning BBC Ideas; viewed 106,300 times), and **Harvey** served as academic advisor for *Extraordinary Rituals* (2018), providing freely accessible additional resources for studying rituals and Indigeneity (viewed 5334 times). **Tremlett** is currently making a research-informed film for MASSOLIT (educational media producers) for A-level Sociology students on Marx and religion.

Our outputs are included in the university’s open repository, ORO, either as prepublication final drafts or as links to open access versions on publisher’s websites. Recent examples include an edited book from the REDO project (**Harvey’s** co-edited [Reassembling Democracy: Ritual and Cultural Resource](#), Bloomsbury 2020) and **Bowman’s** [introduction](#) and [article in a special issue of NUMEN: “Reframing Pilgrimage in Northern Europe”](#). Similarly, research material has been presented to the public in accessible form for a broad readership e.g., in the *Pilgrimage and England’s Cathedrals* website.

### 1.7 Research integrity

Research by the UOA is conducted within the university’s ethical and legal frameworks and meets its professional obligations and standards. All members of the UOA participate in training as set out in the Institutional Environment Statement (IES) (Section 2), regarding equality, safeguarding, information security, Prevent and GDPR. Those involved in recruitment of other staff and of PGRS complete a “Recruitment, Selection and Interviewing at The Open University” module. Research proposals by colleagues and PGRS include commitments to work within university and disciplinary guidelines on research integrity and where appropriate are subject to review by the university Human Research Ethics Committee.

Our commitment to ethical research in Religious Studies is also illustrated by contributions by our members to framing discipline-wide and project specific guidelines. These are integral to our focus on lived religion and our ambition to increase religious literacy and therefore encourage critical and respectful engagement with the personal and political expressions of religion.

**Tremlett** and a past PGRS (**Wildcroft, 2015-2019**) were members of the working party which drafted and consulted on new [Ethics Guidelines](#) for the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) in 2019. UOA colleagues and PGRS apply these guidelines in funding bids and in applications to the university Ethics Committee for permission to conduct fieldwork. We have also contributed to research integrity best practice in our interdisciplinary projects. **Wolffe** chairs the research ethics board of the RETOPEA project, and **Sinclair** is a member of that board, which involves inter-institutional and international discussions. As fieldwork lead in the York “Cathedrals” project, **Bowman** had significant input into the project’s ethics guidelines for fieldwork and for the subsequent use and storage of data and outcomes. **Harvey** has proposed a “methodological guesthood” which has influenced collaborative research between social work researchers at the University of Hawai’i Manoa and a Native Hawai’ian food producing project, *Ho’oulu ‘Āina*. UOA outputs exemplify good practice for ethical research by citing as authoritative the words, practices and expertise of our research hosts and partners.

### **1.8 Future strategic aims and goals for research and impact:**

To build on our existing strategy – while enhancing the synergies between our research and teaching activities – the UOA has agreed the following strategic aims under our “contemporary religion in historical context” strapline:

1. We will continue to build strong sustainable relationships with religious groups, educational communities and wider society, locally and nationally (e.g., through links with InterFaith Milton Keynes, schools, NATRE, National Extension College) and globally, emphasising the value of diversity to improve religious literacy;
2. We will continue to engage in collaborative discussion and research within our Faculty and School, e.g., in research forums and networks, especially in light of their developing strategic emphasis on global challenges and social justice;
3. We will seek further funding to enable colleagues to pursue individual and collaborative projects, expand our engagement with historical and contemporary religion, increase the sustainability of our research and discipline, and promote a diverse and decolonising research culture and curriculum. For example, we currently have bids under consideration by the AHRC, British Academy and Culham St Gabriel’s Trust, with further bids in preparation;
4. We will host further conferences, seminars and KE events to highlight the value of exchanges between academics and practitioners, collaborating with networks such as BASR, Inform, the Religious Archives Group and Culham St Gabriel’s Trust;
5. In collaboration with the OOC DTP, funding councils and other networks, we will pursue further opportunities to recruit, fund and train PGRS. We will also pursue opportunities to give our PGRS teaching experience in distance-learning, and will mentor them post-award in seeking post-doctoral, publication and other career-development opportunities;
6. We will further increase and widen public and stakeholder engagement with our research and KE, using our social media presence and blog, the University’s relationships with the BBC and FutureLearn, and its OpenLearn platform. For example, as part of the ongoing RETOPEA project we will develop a Badged Open Course for schoolteachers and other educators on advancing religious literacy and tolerance among young people through making short films.

## **2. People**

### **2. Staffing composition and strategy**

The UOA comprises eleven members (9.1 FTE), ten from Religious Studies and one (with expertise in Islam) from Computing and Communications. This is an increase from 6 FTE at the

last REF census and evidences the OU's investment in the UOA and enables us to sustain and expand our ability to teach and research a wider array of historical and contemporary phenomena through a rich mix of approaches and methods.

Our staffing strategy facilitates the UOA's mission to develop research and curriculum designed to advance critical religious literacy and promote openness, equality and diversity among colleagues, learners and publics. In the assessment period our strategy has been:

- to increase our staff numbers to improve our ability to research and teach about more religions employing more approaches and methods
- to encourage and support career development and promotion and opportunities for training and staff development
- to increase the contractual hours and research time of fixed-term and part-time staff while supporting them to gain permanent contracts
- to enhance staff capabilities for working from home (especially during Covid19 crisis) while maintaining a strongly collegial approach to research and teaching
- to enhance our engagement with students and the public by increasing learning materials, blogs and events relevant in the four UK nations and beyond
- to facilitate participation by all staff in PGRS training and supervision.

The UOA has a good spread from senior and mid-career colleagues to more junior colleagues. There are two Professors (**Harvey** and **Wolffe**), five Senior Lecturers (**Bowman**, **Maiden**, **Newcombe**, **Sinclair** and **Tremlett**), and four Lecturers (**Ali**, **Beattie**, **Nita** and **Robertson**; Nita and Robertson are ECRs). We have an almost even gender balance – six colleagues are male, five female – and our recruitment ambition is to improve our ethnic diversity. During the assessment period **Maiden**, **Newcombe** and **Sinclair** have been promoted from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer, **Harvey** has been promoted to Professor band 1 and **Wolffe** to Professor band 3. **Newcombe** and **Robertson** were recruited during the assessment period on fixed term contracts, but have since been made permanent, with contracts increased to 1 FTE and 0.6 respectively. We also brought in **Nita** at 0.6 on a fixed-term 14-month contract, since extended to March 2021. **Bowman** has been on a 0.2 contract since summer 2019 and also held a 0.2 visiting Professorship at the University of Oslo (2014-18). During the assessment period two colleagues (Beckerlegge and Waterhouse) retired but remain affiliated to the UOA as, respectively, Emeritus Professor and Honorary Associate, while their areas of expertise in Buddhist and Hindu lived religion have been maintained through **Newcombe's** appointment.

### ***2.1. Recruitment, formal and informal staff appraisal and development***

The OU operates in all four nations of the UK, has an online and widening participation mission and is committed to increasing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI: set out in the IES). These characteristics are embedded in the UOA's staff and PGRS recruitment and staff development processes. Relevant training is provided at university and faculty level and mentoring within the UOA, enabling more junior colleagues to gain necessary experience and confidence, enhancing our characteristic collaborative teamwork. This is illustrated by the constitution of research teams (e.g., RETOPEA), co-supervision of PGRS and in shared teaching activities.

The primary opportunity for colleagues to reflect on and seek to develop their careers is provided by annual appraisal process led by the HoD. This is preceded by less formal conversations with the RL focusing on specific research and impact work. Both formal and informal processes include discussion of individuals' research achievements and plans, funding applications and impact activities, ambitions for PGRS supervisory possibilities, networking and external roles. While this advice and guidance is targeted at the research review, colleagues can and do seek advice from colleagues apart from or alongside the HoD and RL when they feel the need throughout the year.

Formal Academic Workload Management (AWM) processes include allocation of time devoted to research, KE, external roles such as external examining and leadership within subject associations or Research Council peer review colleges. Contractually, at least 79 days per

annum are allocated for research and impact activities. Our distance-learning structure enables flexibility about when leave can be taken. Following discussion with the HoD and the arrangement of cover for necessary core roles or events by other colleagues, researchers are able to plan blocks of leave and to respond rapidly to calls and opportunities.

Grant applications and draft outputs are peer-reviewed by the Research Steering Group in regular meetings to oversee research success as well as career development and satisfaction. As discussed above, off-campus “away days” (some residential) expand peer review processes by sharing draft outputs and research plans with the full UOA team for supportive discussion and exploration of potential collaborations. An external reviewer participated in the 2019 mock-REF processes and in UOA away events, reading potential outputs and drafts of this Environment Statement and ICS, and reporting on UOA strengths and preparedness.

Media training enhances the UOA’s ability to meet its ambition to disseminate research and impact diverse publics. Training is carried out in-house using the University’s own specialist staff and consultants – including **Robertson** as FASS Social Media Fellow – and production facilities, or externally if necessary.

Recognition of specific skills and interests enables colleagues to take on particular roles or to train for them. Research is a key element in most promotion cases – e.g., **Wolffe’s** promotion to Professor Band 3 was on the research track. Leadership roles within the UOA provide further opportunities for staff development and promotion. The HoD and RL roles are normally held for three years. Similarly, faculty and university roles are held for defined periods. **Tremlett** is a member of the University’s Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee and was FASS Director of Research Degrees, and HoD for 3 years during the reporting period. **Wolffe** is FASS Associate Dean (Research Enterprise and Scholarship). Currently, **Sinclair** (as Director of the faculty Centre for Scholarship and Innovation) is a member of FASS Research Board.

## **2.2 Postgraduate Research Students**

In the census period eight of our PGRS have been awarded their PhDs. We are currently supervising 13 PGRS. Our focus on contemporary religion in historical perspective has proved fruitful both in recruiting and guiding PGRS to contribute to a range of current debates, deploying a range of methodologies and contributing to the sustainability of the discipline by publications, blogs, conference organisation and KE. We expanded the strapline by adding three further themes – “Global uncertainties and religious change”, “Place, locality, culture and performance” and “The state, citizenships and identities” – to encapsulate our disciplinary and transdisciplinary supervisory expertise. We use our UOA webpages, social media and scholarly networks to link to the OU PGRS prospectus and invite enquiries and proposals. Five of our current 13 PGRS are co-supervised with colleagues from outside the UOA (i.e., Classical Studies; Development; Social Policy and Criminology; and Sociology). One of our part-time self-funded PGRS had an additional co-supervisor from Leo Baeck College, London; while one of our OOC DTP funded PGRS has an additional supervisor from Border Crossings Theatre Company, London.

After interview, successful candidates for supervision may be recommended to apply for full-time funding. Additionally, some self-funded PGRS apply for funding after completing a probationary period. Three of the applicants we have supported have secured full-time funding from the CHASE DTP, three more from the OOC DTP and one from the Grand Union DTP. We have also provided opportunities for self-funded and part-time research, rooted in our commitment to equality of opportunity. This also informs the training offered by the UOA alongside provision by the Graduate School and Faculty. Our networks enable us to provide opportunities for PGRS to present their work in a variety of academic settings. All OU PGRS have access to funds to participate in conferences of subject association (particularly BASR, Socrel, and Ecclesiastical History Society). Supervisors encourage them to publish peer-reviewed journal articles arising from conference presentations or draft thesis chapters if suitable. PGRS contribute to the UOA’s blog and to Religious Studies Project (RSP) podcasts (see Section 4). The nature of OU

undergraduate teaching has enabled two of our PGRS so far to benefit from a FASS teaching scheme (established in 2018). In this, post-upgrade PGRS participate in module presentation teams, shadowing our Associate Lecturers/tutors and participate in distance- and online-learning processes and assessments.

We continue to mentor ex-PhD students post-award. They are typically invited to join our research associate (RA) network (following application and approval by the FASS Associate Dean for Research Enterprise and Scholarship). This provides them with continuing library access, invitations to contribute to seminars, blogs and other UOA activities. Supervisors-turned-mentors encourage publication of revised versions of PGRS theses with leading international presses. Examples during this REF period include

- **Flew's** *Philanthropy and the Funding of the Church of England 1856-1914* (Pickering and Chatto, 2015);
- **Calder's** *The Origins of Primitive Methodism* (Boydell, 2016);
- **Thompson's** *Young People and Church since 1900: Engagement and Exclusion* (Routledge, 2018);
- **Coggins's** *Mysticism, Ritual and Religion in Drone Metal* (Bloomsbury, 2018) – which was awarded the International Association for the Study of Popular Music's 2019 Book Prize; and
- **Wildcroft's** *Post-lineage Yoga: From Guru to #MeToo* (Equinox 2020).

Among forthcoming books are

- **Wanless'** *Individualized Religion* (Bloomsbury 2021);
- **Robertson's** *Play, Pain and Religion* (Equinox 2021); and
- **Thomas's** *Free Zone Scientology: Contesting the Boundaries of a New Religion* (Bloomsbury 2021).

We have supported ex-PGRS in their career progression (in and beyond academia): e.g., **Thompson** is Senior Lecturer in Youth and Community Work at Goldsmiths; **Thomas** is Lecturer in Religious Studies at Wolverhampton; **Wanless** has a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at Edinburgh and **Coggins** at Brunel, **Flew** is Deputy Director of Development at Imperial College; **Wildcroft** is project coordinator, Centre of Yoga studies at SOAS; **Corio** is vicar of St Mary the Virgin, East Barnet. Our PGRS (before and after award) contribute to subject associations, e.g., **Wanless** as BASR Web Officer, **Wildcroft** as BASR Bulletin editor. Adding to these contributions to religious studies, **Thomas** and **Wildcroft** were the driving force in the founding and development of the alt-ac.uk (“alternative academia”) network, providing support to ECRs and independent researchers within the sector in the current job market, including organising the highly successful on-line one-day international “Conference at the end of the world” (July 2020).

### 2.3 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The University's commitment to EDI and to openness and equity in research assessment, as described in REF5a, is implemented at faculty level through the FASS strategic plan 2019-2023, which includes targets to further increase diversity in our staff. Its PGRS management group has recently established a group with PGRS members to engage with Black Lives Matters (BLM) calls for change. The SSGS School facilitates engagement by all its disciplines with social justice by emphasising it in the title of its nascent research centre and by transdisciplinary debate about decolonising research and curriculum. The diversity of our PGRS community and of our contributions to OU, faculty and school networks illustrate the UOA's commitment to and promotion of the policies, practices and ambitions of these forums.

All members of the UOA have contributed to EDI debates and processes. This can be illustrated by **Harvey's** membership of the university Race Equality Charter steering group (2017-19), the FASS BLM group, and the SSGS research centre planning group. Our “contemporary religion in historical perspective” strapline is evoked in **Newcombe's** “Institutional Racism, Religious

Studies and #BlackLivesMatter” blog and in **Beattie, Maiden, Newcombe** and **Tremlett’s** pilot project on “Decolonising Religious Studies” (funded by FASS’s Centre for Scholarship and Innovation). UOA members’ 3 blog posts for FASS’s series for Black History Month (October 2020) and MOOC illustrate our efforts to widen participation with our collaborative research among diverse and often marginalised communities (e.g., Indigenous religionists, Muslims, African diaspora pentecostalist Christians, democracy and climate activists) and, therefore, our commitment to social justice.

Females and males from the UOA have been appointed to leadership roles in university, faculty and school, and have achieved promotion (as noted at 2.1 above). The dispersed nature of our staff and research student community underlines the importance of the range of University measures for facilitating remote working which are environmentally friendly, promote well-being and have been of great benefit during the Covid19 crisis. UOA meetings can be attended remotely using University-approved software; those with caring responsibilities regularly use these facilities, as do those with temporary workload pressures. Our meetings are scheduled where possible to avoid frequent travel during rush hours and care is taken to ensure that adequate breaks are taken while staff are meeting on campus. More frequent but shorter online meetings have been held during the Covid19 pandemic to support colleagues and maintain necessary processes. Working patterns within the UOA are routinely adjusted to accommodate research leave, attendance at conferences and other events, to enable child and parental care, and to facilitate any matters related to protected characteristics. Fixed-term staff and our staff tutor (see IES 1.2) (**Beattie**) receive the same (pro rata) research privileges as other staff members and care has been taken to ensure that their research is treated in the same way as that of other colleagues. Similarly, our part-time and full-time, funded and self-funded PGRS receive equivalent support and access to facilities.

#### **2.4 REF2021 Preparations**

The UOA’s submission has been prepared by a steering group, led by the RL, consisting of five members of the RS discipline whose appointment has been ratified by both the Faculty and the University. They were selected for their leadership, research experience and understanding of the diverse approaches applied by colleagues. All members of the panel have completed the Equality and Diversity training required by the OU’s REF2021 Code of Practice. The whole UOA has been consulted about drafts of the submission in residential away days in 2019 and dedicated online meetings in 2020. Discussion and feedback have enabled the steering group to improve drafts while contributing to the collaborative environment and cohesion of the UOA and to all colleagues’ sense of ownership of the submission.

During the mock-REF (2019) all members of the UOA were invited to propose up to 6 outputs for submission and to propose further recent outputs in 2020. The steering group selected outputs in consultation with an external adviser who was a former REF subpanel member. The selection process attended to the diversity of our staff, research approaches and outputs, and to the value of our strapline as a generator of cohesion between diverse interests.

### **3. Income, infrastructure and facilities**

#### **3.1 Research income**

Income from external and internal sources underpins the vitality and sustainability of the UOA. In the census period we have gained £589,858 of external grant income. This reflects a diversification of bidding over the assessment period – with more colleagues involved in seeking external funding, more sources approached, and more research approaches engaged in.

Funding from the AHRC, Norwegian Research Council and the EU has enabled the UOA to be PIs or Co-Is in the PEC, REDO and RETOPEA projects noted above (e.g., at 1.5). In addition, **Maiden** furthered the “Building on History” project with Mercer’s Company funding, while funding from the Historical Society of the Episcopal Church (USA) and Santander Universities facilitated

his research on charismatic Christianity. While HoD, **Tremlett** was able to use Templeton funding to bring Irving and Kyriakides into our team as Research Fellows. Several bids are currently under consideration or in preparation (supported by the Faculty Research Office) which will further increase the number of colleagues submitting proposals to AHRC, ESRC, Leverhulme and other funders.

In addition to the external funding which has enabled these larger, more ambitious activities, UOA research is also supported by internal funding. This begins with an annual baseline personal allocation (PSA) of £500 which has enabled colleagues to conduct some fieldwork or archive visits, participate in national or international conferences or gain some research assistance. The UOA was allocated internal funding from university strategic investment; from School research budgets; and from the Faculty's Strategic Research Investment Fund (SRIF) – which provides seed-corn funding of up to £5000 per application for individuals and teams to meet strategic ambitions of various kinds. This funding (£75,996) has enhanced the UOA's ability to meet its aims and support key activities. We have organised, hosted or supported two conferences under our “contemporary religion in historical perspective” strapline: a “Festival Cultures” conference (2020), and the 2020 conference of the British Association for the Study of Religions. We have piloted research with international collaborators (f2f and/or online), enabled KE events in the UK and Ireland, organised author-workshops to increase the coherence, significance and potential reach of edited volumes, had 3 books professionally indexed, employed consultants to gather evidence of our impact, and purchased equipment such as recording devices. Strategically, this expenditure has freed up time for further research, KE and impact activities.

### **3.2 Research infrastructure and facilities**

The Faculty is led by an Executive Dean supported by Associate Deans. The Associate Dean for Research Enterprise and Scholarship chairs the Faculty Research Board which takes a strategic overview of research activity (including PGRS). The Faculty Research Office provides administrative expertise and works with the University central Research and Enterprise team and the Graduate School to support bid development, the management of awards, research student administration, knowledge exchange, impact, the distribution of internal funds for research and REF management. Internal funding processes are noted in Section 2.

UOA processes are supported at Faculty level, where a team of expert administrative staff performs several essential functions, including:

- a continuing advice, guidance and alert service designed to provide information on the types and grants available and their bidder success rates
- a regular quarterly call to researchers to gain information about bidding intentions, to ensure coordination and capacity planning within the Faculty
- advice and guidance to ensure that the financial elements of grant applications are suitably prepared
- advice on ethical and contractual matters
- oversight of all larger bids, including coordinating internal peer review to ensure the quality of the bid
- management, advice and guidance for grants in progress, to ensure proper financial planning and probity
- training, monitoring and evidence gathering for impact.

Facilities within the UOA include audio and video equipment for making field recordings and/or interviews. These are looked after by the UOA's discipline coordinator and can be booked out on request.

### **3.3 Impact Infrastructure**

We benefit from guidance and support from the Faculty Head of External Engagement and the Impact, Enterprise and Knowledge Exchange Manager who lead on relationships with a range of

non-academic bodies. The UOA's RL collaborates with other school and faculty RLs, attends external, university and faculty impact briefings, advises colleagues about impact relating to their research as part of research reviews, organises impact sessions at departmental away days, and liaises with the UOA's social media lead and other colleagues to consider and develop pathways to impact. We pursue opportunities to disseminate research-based and open access material to reach large and diverse audiences. In addition to our blog, we have re-versioned some of our research-led learning materials for open access dissemination via OpenLearn, produced a FutureLearn MOOC and contributed to BBC productions (examples above at 1.6). The university has funded consultancies to enable us to gather evidence of impact and enabled us to target promising current and future areas of impact.

#### 4. Collaboration and contribution to the research base, economy and society

The OU's "openness" ethos permeates the UOA's activities, inspires our varied collaborations and is expressed in our contributions to the research base, economy and society. Our focus on contemporary religion in historical perspective informs our engagement both with academic colleagues and with diverse publics in wider society.

##### 4.1 Collaborations, networks and partnerships

The University Research Office ensures that appropriate formal collaborative agreements with other institutions and with other units within the OU are made, liaising with other OU offices as necessary. Agreements cover finances, intellectual property, data protection, reporting and any other issues required to establish secure working arrangements. Support at faculty level ensures appropriate actions are taken.

In addition to OU interdisciplinary networks noted in Section 1.5, we are leading and active members of national and international research collaborations and networks. We have already noted collaborations (sometimes as PIs or Co-Is) in the international "Reassembling Democracy" (REDO), "Religious Toleration and Peace" (RETOPEA) and "Re-storied Sites and Routes" projects and the national Pilgrimage and England's Cathedrals (PEC) project. In addition, **Bowman** was scientific advisor to the Finnish *Post-secular culture and a changing religious landscape in Finland* project (2010- 2015) and **Newcombe** is a researcher in the ERC-funded "Entangled Histories of Yoga, Ayurveda and Alchemy in South Asia" (AYURYOG) project, working with colleagues in Austria and Canada to examine the histories of yoga, ayurveda and rasanāstra from the tenth century to the present (2015-20). **Maiden** participated in the AHRC funded 'Faith and Place' network (2014-15) and presented his research in an international research symposium funded by the Luce Foundation and hosted by the Roosevelt Study Centre, Netherlands (2015). This resulted in a special issue of *Journal of American Studies* 'Towards a global history of American evangelicalism'. **Wolffe** participated in the 'Anti-Popery in British History' AHRC funded network (2018-19).

We have convened seminar series or events beyond the OU. For example, **Ali** is co-organiser of the Mellon Sawyer Seminar on "Histories of AI: A Genealogy of Power" (2020-21; Cambridge), and **Maiden** and **Wolffe** co-convene the Modern Religious History Seminar, Institute of Historical Research, University of London.

In addition to holding leadership positions in subject associations and learned societies focused on both historical and contemporary religion (see below) we are directors and trustees of centres that develop, coordinate and/or disseminate research. **Newcombe** is Honorary Director of INFORM, a scholarly charity collecting and providing evidence-based information about minority religions to policy makers, educators and enquirers. **Robertson** is the co-founding Editor of the Religious Studies Project (RSP), an international collaborative enterprise (and registered Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation) producing weekly podcasts with leading scholars on the social-scientific study of religion which are widely used in schools and universities in Europe, the US and Australia, expected to reach 1 million downloads in January 2021.

#### 4.2 Engagement with key users, beneficiaries or audiences

As noted above in outlining KE and impact pathways, we seek to benefit and collaborate with the communities among which we research. We have enabled or enhanced archive related activities, cathedral visitors' experiences, applications for charitable status, and developments in religious literacy among school students, media and other communities. This has resulted from our participation in funded projects, and our offering of open access resources, talks to groups in person and online within religious, cultural and political groups and events. For example, **Bowman** is academic advisor for the development of the Glastonbury Way Path, a new pilgrimage; **Nita** has given talks to Christian climate change groups, **Harvey** has recorded talks for Druid and other Pagan movements, and **Sinclair** has been advisor for the Church of England's Networked Learning Advisory Group. We are finalising our engagement with the 2021 Census through an AHRC-funded project about religious and ethnic change in Milton Keynes in the last 50 years. This will involve a cross-generational digital workshop and result in open access resources on OpenLearn.

In this census period we have strategically encouraged work with schools. Prior to disruption consequent on the pandemic the RETOPEA project commenced work in schools (and has plans to work in museums and youth clubs) in eight countries across Europe. **Tremlett** and **Nita** lead a school engagement initiative, working with Denbigh (Secondary) School in Milton Keynes and the Local Education Authority's Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) to learn from pupils and teachers and to share our expertise around critical religious literacy. We have made teaching materials for schools freely available within the outreach and schools' section of our website. The UOA is a group affiliate of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education, offering encouragement and resources for teaching about lived religion.

#### 4.3 Wider contributions to economy and society and engagements with diverse communities and the public

In addition to the open resources we have made available through our social media, OpenLearn, FutureLearn and the OU's Open Research Repository, we have contributed to The Conversation (e.g., **Newcombe's** "How yoga conquered Britain", June 2019, and "From Ayurveda to biomedicine", Nov 2017, with over 12,000 and 21,000 readers respectively by April 2020), the Religion Media Centre (e.g., **Robertson's** "Understanding conspiracy theories", April 2020); Counterpoint (e.g., **Harvey's** "Predators, prey and snowdrops", Feb 2019), Oxford University's blog (**Tremlett's** "Energy and contagion in Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*", October 2017), and the Religious Studies Project (around 40 contributions by UOA members).

Led respectively by **Wolffe** and **Tremlett** and building on the strength of our focus on religious literacy, the UOA made submissions to the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Religious Education (2016) and Religion in the Media (2020). **Wolffe** was subsequently an invited speaker at two meetings of the APPG on Religious Education.

We have given invited presentations to industry groups (e.g., **Ali** to AI scientists), talks at galleries and museums, e.g., most staff have been involved in public events at the British Museum, **Tremlett** and **Harvey** presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art (2018) and at Tate Exchange (2019), **Bowman** appeared on the BBC R4 programme *Making History* (2018).

#### 4.4 Sustaining the discipline and interdisciplinarity

We play or have played leadership roles in key subject associations and learned societies. The majority of the UOA are long-term members of BASR, the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) and the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR). In the census period, **Harvey**, **Robertson** and **Sinclair** have been members of the BASR Executive Committee. **Bowman** was vice-President of EASR from 2013 to 2019. **Bowman**, **Harvey** and **Tremlett** have represented the UOA and BASR in TRS-UK and the Arts and Humanities

Alliance (AHA) throughout the census period, and **Bowman** is vice-president of TRS-UK (2019-21). We have organised panels for EASR, IAHR, AAR and AAA conferences. **Wolffe** is President and **Maiden** is a committee member of the Religious Archives Group. In his founding and continuing roles in the Religious Studies Project (noted above) **Robertson** makes major contributions to dissemination and debate about research in the discipline globally.

We shape intellectual thought through editing and peer review. We are editors of four book series: *Religion and the Senses* (Equinox), *Vitality of Indigenous Religions* (Routledge), *Religion, Space and Place* (Bloomsbury), and *Religion, Culture and Society* (Routledge). We are founding editors, editors, scientific/advisory board members and/or book reviews editors of 14 peer reviewed journals; and have guest edited issues of these and other journals (e.g., *Religion*). **Wolffe** is an editorial advisor and contributor to the new edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.

We contribute significantly to peer review bodies. **Bowman**, **Harvey** and **Wolffe** are or have been members of the AHRC peer review college. **Bowman** and **Sinclair** have peer reviewed for the Swiss National Science Foundation. **Bowman** has peer reviewed for the British Academy, the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office, the Estonian Research Council, the Austrian Science Fund, Singapore's Academic Research Council; and the Norwegian Research Council. **Bowman** and **Newcombe** have peer reviewed for the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. **Harvey** is a member of the ESRC peer review college and an assessor for the Australian Research Council. **Newcombe** has peer reviewed for the Wellcome Trust. **Sinclair** has peer reviewed for the ESRC and for the Netherlands Initiative for Education Research; and **Wolffe** for the European Science Foundation and the Polish Research Council.

We have peer reviewed articles submitted to 38 journals focused on a wide range of disciplinary and trans-disciplinary topics and approaches as well as those engaging with specific religions or regions.

We have reviewed book manuscripts for Berghan, Bloomsbury, Boydell Press, Brill, Cambridge University Press, Columbia University Press, Continuum, Counterpoint Books, Equinox, Manchester University Press, New York University Press, Oxford University Press, Peter Lang, Policy Press, Routledge, Springer, University of California Press, University of Hawaii Press, and Zed Books.

We have served on panels validating and/or reviewing programmes at All Nation's Christian College, Cambridge Muslim College, Maryvale, Union School of Theology, Union Theological Seminary, the Universities of Durham and Kent, SOAS, University College Cork. We have served as external examiners for undergraduate and taught Masters programmes at the universities of Aberdeen, Chester, Durham, Lancaster, Wolverhampton, and Queen's Belfast.

In addition to sustaining future research through PGR supervision, we have also examined PhDs at the UK universities of Aberdeen, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Kent, Kings College London, Leeds, Sussex, SOAS, Wales Trinity St David, and Winchester. Internationally, we have examined PhDs at the Université de Fribourg, Switzerland; the University of New South Wales, Australia; and the following Dutch HEIs: the International Baptist Seminary, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and Tilburg University .

#### **4.5 Responsiveness to national and international disciplinary priorities and initiatives**

Through participation in national and international disciplinary and trans-disciplinary associations, networks, peer review forums and research projects we have contributed to the shaping of research priorities and initiatives. Synergistically, our research interests have evolved to embrace such national and international concerns as migration, environment, activism, conspiracism, heritage, individualism, identities and religious change. We contribute to debates that engage classic disciplinary issues (such as ritual, pilgrimage, charisma, socialisation, secularisation,

animism and discourse) with transdisciplinary concerns under headings such as “global challenges”, “social justice” and “decolonising”. We have broadened the array of religious phenomena researched and debated in and beyond the discipline (e.g., by promoting the study of Indigenous religions) and have informed the application of approaches and methods appropriate to historical and contemporary lived religion. Our research is at the cutting edge of the multidisciplinary “turns” to embodiment, gender, location, ontology and material religion. From research planning and bidding to impact assessment we have aimed to improve literacy about religion and its varied contributions to society. Our future strategy aims to sustain and develop these contributions.