

Institution: Newman University Birmingham		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 31 Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: Reforming the School Religious Education (RE) Curriculum in England and Wales		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Susan Docherty	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of New Testament and Early Judaism; Head of Theology	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 01/09/2000 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: March 2015 – July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Professor Docherty has engaged purposefully with school teachers, Religious Education professionals, policy makers, and relevant national bodies (e.g. GCSE Examination Boards and the Catholic Education Service) to influence the development of Religious Education curricula and teaching methods in secondary schools in England and Wales. The dissemination of her research into early Christian and early Jewish biblical interpretation has (a) promoted a greater appreciation of the Jewish roots of Christianity within RE syllabi and (b) introduced teachers to new ways of using scriptural texts within classes which are based on sound modern biblical scholarship. This impact has been exerted on Catholic schools in particular.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Docherty has undertaken extensive research into the interpretation, reception and re-use of Israel's scriptures among both Jews and Christians in the early centuries BCE and CE. She has published widely in this area, drawing attention especially to the overlap in exegetical methods employed by the New Testament authors with those characteristic of early Jewish sources such as the Qumran scrolls, rewritten scriptures and rabbinic midrashim (e.g. 2015, 2018a, 2020a). Her findings serve to underscore the close connections between the religions of Judaism and Christianity and the importance of early Jewish thought for the development of Christian theology.</p> <p>Since 2012 Docherty has developed a particular expertise in the interpretation of the Jewish scriptures in two collections of ancient religious texts, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (e.g. 2014, 2019). These writings are not well-known or widely-studied within faith communities today, although they were very popular and influential for many centuries. She has sought, therefore, to promote a fuller understanding of their content and significance for contemporary Christian and Jewish theology and practice through dissemination of her work (e.g. 2020b).</p> <p>During this REF cycle, she has engaged in substantial dialogue with Religious Education professionals, with a view not merely to further disseminating her research, but to applying it directly to the development of new school curricula and fresh ways of learning and teaching in RE. Several studies conducted during the last decade have concluded on the basis of evidence such as inspections and pupil performance in public examinations that the teaching of Christianity in UK schools is generally weak, and specifically that pupils are not enabled to interpret the sacred texts of world's religions with sufficient competence or nuance (e.g. AQA, <i>Religious Studies 40553: Report on the Examination</i>. 2014, Manchester, AQA.; Bowie, R., "Interpreting Texts More Wisely:</p>		

A Review of Research and the Case for Change in English Religious Education.” In *Christian Faith, Formation and Education*, edited by John Shortt and Ros Stuart-Buttle. 2018, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 211-228; Horrell, D. and Davis, A. “Engaging the Bible in GCSE and A Level Religious Studies: Environmental Stewardship as a Test Case.” *British Journal of Religious Education*, 36/ (2014): 72-87). In a number of papers and talks, therefore, Docherty has proposed a rewriting of school RE curricula to allow for a greater recognition of the Jewish context within which Christianity was formed and a method of teaching biblical texts which involves drawing intentionally on a wider and more diverse range of interpretational perspectives, both ancient and modern (e.g. 2018b, 2018c).

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

Docherty, Susan E., *The Jewish Pseudepigrapha: An Introduction to the Literature of the Second Temple Period*. 2014, London: SPCK/Minneapolis: Fortress

Docherty, Susan, E., “New Testament Scriptural Interpretation in its Early Jewish Context: Reflections on the *Status Quaestionis* and Future Directions.” *Novum Testamentum* 57 (2015): 1-19

Docherty, Susan E., “Exegetical Techniques in the New Testament and ‘Rewritten Bible’: A Comparative Analysis.” In Allen, G.V. and Dunne, J.A. (eds.), *Ancient Readers and Their Scriptures: Engaging the Hebrew Bible in Early Judaism and Christianity*. 2018a, Leiden: Brill, pp. 77 - 97

Docherty, Susan E., “A New Dialogue Between Biblical Scholarship and Religious Education.” *British Journal of Religious Education* 40/2 (2018b); DOI: 10.1080/01416200.2018.1493272

Docherty, Susan E., “Scripture and Religious Education: Jesus as ‘Messiah’ and ‘Divine Son’ - Insights from Recent New Testament Scholarship.” In Whittle, S. (ed.) *Religious Education in Catholic Schools: Perspectives from Ireland and the UK*. 2018c: Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 193-207

Docherty, Susan E., “Abraham in Rewritten Bible.” In Adams, S.A. and Domoney-Lyttle, Z. (eds.), *Abraham in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*. (Library of Second Temple Studies Series 93.) 2019, London: Bloomsbury (T&T Clark), pp. 59-74

Docherty, Susan E., “The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews Chapter 13.” In Mason, E. and Moffitt, D. (eds.), *Son, Sacrifice, and Great Shepherd: Studies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. (WUNT II Series) 2020a, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 207 - 218

Docherty, Susan E., “Between the Testaments: Early Exemplars of Scriptural Formation.” *Pastoral Review* 16/2 (2020b): 48-51

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

1. GCSE RS Syllabus Content

Faith sector stakeholders were specifically invited by the Department for Education to contribute to the shape of new GCSE RS programmes to be developed as part of a wide-ranging revision of GCSE structure and content in spring 2012. A working group known as Credo (Catholic Religious Education Development Opportunities) was formed by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales in spring 2015 to respond to these reforms. As a member of this group, Docherty exerted considerable impact on curriculum development, as detailed below:

(a) The Credo group influenced the response of the Catholic Education Service (CES) to these reforms, through their regular meetings with representatives of the CES, the National

Board of RE Inspectors and Advisors (NBRIA) and the Bishops Conference. The Catholic Church in England and Wales accepted the reforms and committed its schools to continuing participation in GCSE RS, expressing publically its support for the aims of increasing both the academic rigour of the new syllabus and the amount of theological content to be studied within it (corroborating sources R1 and R3).

- (b) The Credo group helped to shape the national requirements for GCSE Religious Studies in dialogue with the Department for Education and representatives of the Examination Boards, making particular recommendations around the need for students to engage with the bible and other primary sources in order to gain a full understanding of religious belief and practice (corroborating sources R2 and R3).
- (c) Members of the Credo group engaged with representatives of the 3 major national examination boards (AQA, Edexcel and Eduqas) which offer a paper specifically in Catholic Christianity to help them devise their syllabus and ensure its accuracy and currency in respect of contemporary Catholic theology. This led to the creation of a list of topics to be studied within this paper, also known as the Catholic Annex (corroborating source R2, pp. 13-15). This particular route through GCSE is taken annually by almost 50,000 students from over 300 Catholic secondary schools across England and Wales, representing approximately 22% of all GCSE RS entrants (corroborating sources R4 and R5).

2. Teaching Methods and Approaches

Docherty exercised a further impact on the teaching of these revised syllabi through her engagement with CPD and other kinds of formal training for the teachers of Religious Education in secondary schools in England and Wales. The Credo group planned and delivered a summer training day in four different locations across England for three years (2016, 2017 and 2018), in tandem with NBRIA and local Dioceses (corroborating source R3). One of these was led annually by Docherty at Newman. Attendance figures each year ranged between 140 and 300, with the usual pattern being that a school sent one member of the RE Department who would then cascade the material to colleagues more widely. Separately Docherty was involved in:

- (i) training secondary RE teachers in 9 Catholic schools within the Diocese of Nottingham in Judaism (a new component of the GCSE RS paper taken by the majority of RC schools across the country) in spring 2017; and
- (ii) offering webinars (replacing in-person sessions due to the covid-19 pandemic) in July 2020 to pupils and RE teachers from a wider range of secondary schools on aspects of biblical interpretation; attendees were drawn from across England and represented state as well as faith schools.

These sessions impacted directly on the classroom practice of teachers, leading them to, for example, include a wider range of scriptural and non-canonical texts in lessons, and prompting greater engagement with current scholarly ideas and thinkers. This was acknowledged in social media fora and via feedback from organisations such as the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) (corroborating source R6).

3. RE Curriculum in Catholic Schools

Partly in response to the GCSE reforms, a wider review of the content and approach to Religious Education for pupils in all key stages in Catholic Schools in England and Wales was launched by the Bishops and Catholic Education Service in spring 2018. This will result in the publication of a new National Directory for RE in autumn 2021. Docherty has served as Theological and Scriptural Advisor to the national working group which was called together to undertake these revisions from April 2018 to the present. Her expertise is informing the following sections of the framework in particular:

- Judaism – the inclusion of opportunities to study more non-canonical texts; greater emphasis on the commonalities between Judaism and Christianity;
- the use of biblical texts to support theological content – the introduction of a diversity of interpretational perspectives, both ancient and modern.

This Directory shapes the RE curricula and assessment for pupils aged 3-19 in the 2122 RC schools across the country so her research will impact on the learning of these pupils

(numbering 823,572 in total at the 2018 census point) for at least the next decade (corroborating source R5).

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

R1

Department for Education (DfE), "New academically rigorous RS GCSE backed by faith groups." Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-academically-rigorous-rs-gcse-backed-by-faith-groups> (2014)

R2

Department for Education (DfE), "GCSE religious studies: Subject content, aims and learning objectives for GCSE in religious studies for teaching from 2016." Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-religious-studies> (2015)

R3

McGrail, Peter and Towey, Anthony, "Partners in Progress? An Impact Study of the 2016 Religious Education Reforms in England." *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 23/3 (2019): 278–298

R4

Towey, Anthony and Robinson, Philip, "Religious Education Reform in the Catholic Schools of England and Wales." In *Contemporary Perspectives on Catholic Education*, edited by John Lydon (2018, Leominster: Gracewing), pp. 43-57

R5

Catholic Education Service, "Religious Education Curriculum Directory." Available at <https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/schools/religious-education/item/1000034-religious-education-curriculum-directory> (2012)

R6

Selected Tweets during webinars:

Just updating my lesson on emotivism for this afternoon and making lots of references to the session from [Newman] on religious and ethical language from last week. That is a sign of a successful CPD session. (17/6/20).

Useful to see how both the Bible and enlightenment thought support the dominion model. This would make a great evaluation point for a GCSE student... One of the things I have gained from the lectures from [Newman] is being introduced to a new and diverse range of thinkers to enhance my teaching. (24/6/20)

Fantastic talk by [Newman] on theology and the environmental crisis. I have learnt so much that is highly relevant for the AQA GCSE and links to the A level... (24/6/20)

Very timely lecture from [Newman] on non canonical writings. In 40 minutes I start teaching a lesson on J D Crossan and the use of apocryphal texts! (1/7/20).

National Association of RE (NATRE)

Email from a NATRE committee member and teacher in a Birmingham secondary school on 24/10/10:

"I have been meaning to contact you all as so many teachers have said to us at NATRE how useful these sessions have been...please don't underestimate how useful they have been for both teachers and students. I really hope that you are able to do this in the future again."

In the minutes of the NATRE AGM on 6/11/20 and of the TRS-UK AGM 4/12/20 the CPD support provided for schools by the Theology Department at Newman University is specifically singled out for commendation.