

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> Goldsmiths, University of London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 20, Social Work and Social Policy		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Religion and Belief Policy Network: enabling policy bodies to meet legal requirements prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014 - 2016		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Adam Dinham	Professor of Faith & Public Policy	2008-
Chris Baker	Professor of Religion & Public Life	2016-
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 - 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Responding to the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief in services and employment (Equality Act 2010), Dinham and Baker created a Religion and Belief Policy Network, with the capacity to reach 25,000 professionals working in health and social care practices. Working with a core group of network participants, Dinham and Baker have co-produced seven open-access resources to support policy development and published new guidance with the Health Care Professions Council (the regulator for nineteen health and social care professions), who have a collective reach to every service provider in the UK. The education policy strand of the Network advised the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) in 2018, leading to policy reform as regards the teaching of RE in schools in the United Kingdom (UK).</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<b>Building on Earlier Foundations</b>		
<p>This programme of research emerges from Dinham's earlier shaping of the notion of 'religion and belief literacy'. In 2009 he was approached to direct a proposed HEFCE-funded programme to address campus extremism, but recast the project to examine religion and belief in universities and the public sphere – an innovative turn which challenged the Islamo-centrism of much of the public debate. HEFCE subsequently funded the 'Religious Literacy in Higher Education' programme, directed by Dinham, between 2010-11 with £250k of resource (G1). A second phase was funded with an additional £81k between 2011-13 and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) provided further funding of £32k to support the work in other public institutions between 2012-13 (G2). The goal was to take the debate beyond binaries of 'secular' and 'sacred' to recognise that societies are complexly both (R6). Drawing on dialogue between his academic disciplines, formed in part through his earlier ESRC seminar series on Faith and</p>		

Civil Society (2007-08), the research led to an innovative academic connection between religion and belief and public policy.

### **Challenging ‘Unconscious Secularity’**

Dinham and Baker’s more recent research responds to the hitherto largely unmet challenge that the Equality Act 2010 prohibits service providers and employers from discriminating on the grounds of religion and belief, to which organisations are largely un-resourced to respond. Their research shows that the great majority of organisations have done little or nothing to operationalise this (R2). At the same time, their analysis shows how much of this is rooted in unconscious bias which sees religion and belief as problematic and risky, associated primarily with social conservatism and extremism (R3). The research also shows how secularity forms another important context, though this is an idea which is not well understood in public spaces and is often wrongly equated with some sort of neutrality, and with the decline of religion (R4). This makes it very difficult to convince policy and practice settings to engage in the first place and therefore it is a significant achievement in itself that the research opened up concrete pathways for the conversation, and developed work on this area with national policy bodies whose own policy-making structures and timetables are large and unwieldy. The processes described here have demanded sustained engagement and a persuasive evidence base.

### **Establishing an Evidence Base**

The research is rooted in three projects. The first project (led by Dinham and Baker) is funded by AHRC and revolves around the researchers’ observation that religion and belief are appearing in academic disciplines and professions which have never before, or not recently, been interested in them. The researchers asked ‘How are academic disciplines conceiving of religion and belief in contemporary scholarship and with what practice implications?’ They analysed treatments of religion and belief across nine Arts, Humanities and Social Science disciplines, undertook nineteen ‘landmark’ interviews with world-leading scholars, and held a three-day international interdisciplinary colloquia with a further twenty leading thinkers. They also took findings on an international ‘roadshow’ to Ottawa, Canada; Melbourne, Australia and Oslo, Norway, to test out their international transferability. Their analysis found a cross-disciplinary preoccupation with: security, extremism and cohesion; equality and diversity; and the role of faiths in welfare service provision, especially health, social care, welfare and education (R3, R4). In a concluding workshop at the House of Lords, participants were facilitated to devise an agenda for action which identified the need for a network and policy tools.

### **An Emerging Focus on Health and Social Care**

This paved the way for the second project, which received AHRC follow-on funding, in which the researchers convened four events with senior policy-makers (London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast) in the public professions, especially welfare and health and social care to identify biting points, concrete needs and inhibiting and enabling factors for policy change. The research in this phase was focused on leaders’ experiences of policy-making processes in their organisations in terms of service user experience, service provider confidence and changes in policy-makers’ attitudes and understandings of religion and belief. This resulted in four journal articles focusing on the gap between professional requirements to address religion and belief and training to do so in social work and other health and social care professions (for example, (R2)).

### **Focusing in on Education Policy**

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The third project (led by Dinham) focused specifically on education policy, seeking reform of school RE as a sustainable way of ensuring future generations are better able to engage with the contemporary religion and belief landscape. This was identified as a policy priority because of significant criticism of how existing RE largely fails to equip young people as future citizens and workforces in relation to religion and belief. Interviews were held with pupils, parents, teachers and employers (n=319) to ask about their understanding and hopes for the purpose, content and structure of learning about religion, not only within RE but across the whole school environment. Key findings were that 1) there is a confusion of the educational, formational and confessional in relation to religion and belief in schools which muddles rather than clarifies thinking; 2) that learning about religion and belief should take an elastic definition to include traditional (world religions), non-traditional (spiritual, informal), revival (wicca, pagan etc), non-religious beliefs (like humanism, secularism and atheism) and spiritual but not religious beliefs; and 3) that learning should focus on religion and belief as the impact upon politics, media, social policy and sociology as well as theology and religious studies. The project resulted in three peer-reviewed journal articles (for example, R5), one PhD thesis, a policy report, an executive summary report, and a monograph (R1).

### 3. References to the research

**R1.** Dinham A (2020) *Religion and Belief Literacy: Reconnecting a Chain of Learning*, Bristol: Policy Press. [MONOGRAPH]

**R2.** Crisp B and Dinham A (2019) 'Do the Regulatory Standards Require Religious Literacy of Health and Social Care Professionals?' *Social Policy and Administration*, vol 53 no 7. [ARTICLE] [Submitted to REF2]

**R3.** Baker C, Crisp B and Dinham A (eds) (2018) *Re-imagining Religion and Belief for 21st Century Policy and Practice*, Bristol: Policy Press. [EDITED BOOK] [Submitted to REF2]

**R4.** Dinham A and Baker C (2017) New Interdisciplinary Spaces of Religions and Beliefs in Contemporary Thought and Practice: an analysis Religions, vol 8 no 1, Basel MDPI. [PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLE]

**R5.** Dinham A and Shaw M (2017) Religious Literacy through Religious Education: the future of teaching and learning about religion and belief, in Religions Basel: MDPI. [PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLE]

**R6.** Dinham A & Francis M (eds) (2015) *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice*, Bristol: Policy Press. [EDITED BOOK]

\*All outputs available on request

#### Selected research grants:

**G1.** Dinham, A. Religious Literacy in Higher Education programme, Phase 1: HEFCE, 2010-2011 £250K and 2011-2013, £81K

**G2.** Dinham, A. Religious Literacy in Higher Education programme, Phase 2: EHRC, 2012-2013, £32K

**G3.** Dinham, A [PI], Baker, C [Co-I] 'Re-imagining Religion and Belief for Public Policy and Practice' AHRC, 2019-2021, £81K

**G4.** Dinham, A. RE for REAL, Culham St Gabriels Trust, 2014-2016, £41K

### 4. Details of the impact

From the outset the research was intended to lead to change by going beyond action research into intentional co-production. This process began with Dinham and Baker's observation from

within existing practice networks that religion and belief was coming up more and more in places which had previously never thought about it. This was made visible through the Faiths and Civil Society Unit's rolling programme of six annual public seminars on issues of practice and policy topicality and was mirrored in academic networks where religion and belief started to crop up in disciplines which had never, or not recently, engaged with it at all.

### **Introducing a new Religion and Belief Policy Network**

Between 2014-16, Dinham and Baker identified an agenda for change that would remedy the; 1) dearth of resources and thinking spaces; 2) desire for help with understanding the real religion and belief landscape; 3) a call for help with framing policies that can best support religion and belief actors; and 4) a call for provision of a regular, safe space to share new ideas and challenges in this sensitive area. Their work in the field led to a longer process of co-production between 2018-20 starting with an in-principle commitment from project participants to create at least one policy change process in their organisation during the course of a year. **[text removed for publication]**. During 2019 the researchers conducted a series of co-production events with a sample of participants from across the initial network, including police chief constables, MSPs, senior civil servants, and diversity and equality leads in approximately 100 public bodies. A core group was drawn from this who worked together to produce policies, resources and tools that met the pre-identified needs **(S1)**. As a result of these events, participants across the programme, and beyond committed to the formation of a new Religion and Belief Policy Network, which was delayed by COVID but is currently under design using AHRC COVID extension funding. This takes the form of an online platform containing the new coproduced policy tools, case studies, vox pops, a searchable database of resources, a full project report and will also be the space for regular network online events.

### **Reforming the RE curriculum in UK schools**

In 2015 Dinham co-authored a policy report based on his research which included key policy recommendations outlining the need for a national commission on the future of teaching and learning about religion and belief in schools **(S2)**. This was framed as part of a wider public policy issue that advocated that school leavers carry their understandings of religion and belief into their citizenship and workplaces. This recommendation informed the introduction of a national commission, **[text removed for publication]**;

“In all, your work has significantly enabled the RE community in the UK – both educators and policy makers – not only to rethink what happens in schools but also how this impacts upon the rest of society as young people leave schools and go into workplaces and communities.” **(S3)**.

The Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) sat from 2016-17, during which time they reached the conclusion that there should be a new subject called Religion and Worldviews. This reflects all of the key findings in Dinham's earlier work and is currently undergoing political consultation. This process is being facilitated by former Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon Charles Clarke, who is now Professor of Religion and Politics at Lancaster University and has worked closely with Dinham **(S4)**. The Welsh Senedd have since formally changed the name of RE to Religion and Worldviews. This was announced in January 2021 with the update having been agreed in the period leading up to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020.

Dinham's research has also been the subject of three APPG discussions (December 2013; May 2016; April 2018) **(S5)** with the result that, whether or not RE policy is reformed, the process has

already informed the thinking of the RE community in Britain and Europe and instigated 'buy in' to a 'religion and belief literacy' approach which is becoming embedded in new classroom practices. **[text removed for publication] (S6)**. A follow-up project to identify and model innovative learning about religion and belief, led by Dinham, reflects CoRE's recommendations and shares them across the UK and Europe. This has resulted in a series of online case studies which have been made available to the public **(S7)**. Indicative of the growing interest in these initiatives, Dinham has participated in new 'religion and belief literacy and RE' networks that have arisen as a result in Finland, Norway and Sweden **(S8)**.

Direct beneficiaries of the research include sector policy-makers and their teams **[text removed for publication] (S9)**. Educators in these professions benefit from the requirement to include aspects of religion and belief in their training curricula, and this in turn benefits newly qualifying professionals and their service users. Thus, wider beneficiaries are assumed to be health and social care service users, sector policy-makers, and teachers and pupils in schools. This is predicated on a theory of change which sees policy change as the most effective and wide-reaching place to start because it shapes training and therefore practice.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

**S1.** Sample of online resources and pages included on the Religion, Belief and Policy Network website (2020).

**S2.** Report, Dinham A and Shaw M (2015) [RE for Real: the future of teaching and learning of religion and belief](#).

**S3.** Testimony, **[text removed for publication]**.

**S4.** News item/Link to video of public lecture in which Rt Hon Charles Clarke responds to the Inaugural Lecture of Professor Dinham, 11 October 2016: Westminster Faith Debates, '[Adam Dinham Inaugural Lecture](#)'.

**S5.** Testimony, **[text removed for publication]**.

**S6.** Testimony, **[text removed for publication]**.

**S7.** Sample case studies from Jack Hunt School, Bickleigh Down School Holy Trinity, Pewley Down School, Aylesford School and St Andrew's C-of-E Primary School, published on line, [Innovative RE: Case Studies](#) (2019).

**S8.** Testimony, **[text removed for publication]**.

**S9.** Testimony, **[text removed for publication]**.

**S10.** Testimony, **[text removed for publication]**.