

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> Liverpool Hope University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D31 Theology and Religious Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Repositioning Adult Theological Literacy with Roman Catholic Stakeholders		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> January 2015 - July 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Dr Ros Stuart-Buttle	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Senior Lecturer Theology and Education	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> September 2011 – September 2020
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> May 2015 - July 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>The Centre for Christian Education undertook research with key stakeholders in the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales to evaluate the nature and assess the provision of adult theological literacy through the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS). This fed directly into the formation of teachers for Catholic schools and those taking up lay ministries in local contexts. Concrete changes in policy, administration, curriculum and delivery at national, regional and local levels resulted, specifically across Catholic dioceses, schools and universities. Internationally, the research supported a major review of adult religious education in Ireland in addition to wider knowledge exchange.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The Catholic Bishops Conference of England &amp; Wales (2000), <i>The Priority of Adult Formation</i>, called for national and local initiatives for theological formation for catechists, teachers, parish ministers, parents and lay leaders, highlighting a lack of existing research. The need for adult theological literacy has since been emphasised by church leaders and practitioners but received limited research attention.</p> <p>In this context, a project proposal was by drawn up Dr Ros Stuart-Buttle through the Centre for Christian Education at Liverpool Hope University. The aim was to stimulate national conversation and theological reflection among the Catholic community about the nature, purpose and provision of adult theological literacy in light of changing contemporary religious, socio-cultural and educational contexts.</p> <p>The project was submitted to the Catholic Board of Religious Studies, and approved by that body in May 2015. The Board subsequently agreed to fund the project at its October 2015 meeting. From the outset, the project was a response to established practical concerns, and it was welcomed and practically supported by Catholic agencies at a national level. This involved significant partnerships with churches and wider communities, resulting in interdisciplinary and impact-oriented engagement with academic and non-academic audiences across ecclesial and educational sectors.</p> <p>The research employed stakeholder theory (<b>see R1</b>) to identify key stakeholders across England and Wales and gain collaboration from the Catholic Bishops Conference of England &amp; Wales</p>		

Dept of Education and Formation, Catholic Education Service, National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers, Diocesan Schools Commissioners, and Catholic dioceses and universities. Briefing papers, international/national conference presentations, and published outputs resulted in knowledge exchange and wide debate about the priority and practice of adult theological literacy for today's contexts (**R3, R4**).

The research specifically examined the role and impact of CCRS, a leading national resource for adult theological literacy. In existence from 1991 and since accessed by over 30,000 adults in the UK and overseas, CCRS contributes to the formation of teachers for Catholic schools and lay ministries in local contexts. Phased research undertook systematic analysis with multiple CCRS stakeholders concerning the nature and provision of adult theological learning, the implications for theological literacy, and where future directions might be sought. Between March 2016 and March 2018, quantitative and qualitative data was gathered as first-hand evidence from 1,474 participants via online survey, alongside 12 structured interviews with Catholic bishops, diocesan leaders, and school primary and secondary head teachers, between March 2016 and March 2018.

The publication of the research report *CCRS Twenty Five Years On* in March 2019 (**R2 and S3**) strongly affirmed the value of CCRS among stakeholder constituencies and gave clear evidence of the continuing need and priority for supporting adult theological literacy today, especially for teachers in Catholic schools and those involved in local lay ministries. In offering a rigorous critical lens to assess the status and delivery of CCRS, the research enabled Catholic education stakeholders to evaluate their own provision and approaches to adult learning.

The research recommendations were taken up by the Catholic Bishops Board of Religious Studies and leading church education agencies. They have led to concrete changes in CCRS policy, administration, curriculum and delivery at national, regional and local levels, specifically across Catholic dioceses and universities. Wider impact through dissemination of the research to academic and researcher-practitioner audiences has directly stimulated new thinking about adult theological literacy and influenced new research in Ireland on adult religious education through knowledge exchange with international colleagues in Catholic education research networks (**R3, R5**).

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

**R1** Stuart-Buttle, R. (2019) 'Higher Education, Stakeholder Interface and Teacher Formation for Church Schools', *International Journal of Christianity and Education* Vol.23 (2) pp. 299–311.

*NB: R1 also submitted as REF output.*

**R2** Stuart-Buttle, R. (2019) *CCRS Twenty Five Years On: One Size Fits All?* Research final report produced for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Board of Religious Studies, Matthew James Publishing.

**R3** Stuart-Buttle, R. (2019) 'Catholic Teachers, Theological Literacy and Engagement with Biblical Texts' in Buchanan, M. & Gellel, A. (eds) *Global Perspectives on Catholic Religious Education*, Springer.

**R4** Stuart-Buttle, R. (2018) 'Theological Education and Professional Practice' in Stuart-Buttle, R. & Shortt, J. (eds) *Christian Faith, Formation and Education*, Palgrave Macmillan.

**R5** Stuart-Buttle, R. (2016) 'Vatican II and new thinking on Catholic education: An English Perspective' in Whittle, S. (ed.) *Vatican II and New Thinking about Catholic Education*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis.

**Quality indicators:** Journal article **R1** peer-reviewed. Book chapters **R3, R4, R5** in books with globally established academic presses and subjected to editorial review. Research grant by Catholic Board of Religious Studies awarded for **R2**.

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

The impact can be divided into three areas: firstly, its role in shaping Catholic education policy at a national level; secondly, the application of the research findings by local CCRS providers; and, thirdly, wider impacts established via communication of the research findings to audiences of school heads and to the Irish Catholic church. These aspects of impact show the research was effective, not just in renewed interest and take-up of the CCRS, but in key aspects of its promotion, pedagogy, student experience and extension to new audiences.

##### *Impact on Catholic education policy*

The Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales Board of Religious Studies utilised the research on adult theological literacy to inform and implement national policy for CCRS. Specific measures included new publicity (national rebranding completed March 2020), curriculum revision (specialist modules review undertaken during 2019-20), recommendations for enhanced standards for assessment and course resources, and improved regional moderation/quality assurance. The Board, in representing Catholic Education Service, Diocesan Religious Directors/Schools Commissioners, National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers, and 27 Catholic dioceses, universities, and distance providers of CCRS, holds considerable influence on Catholic education policy. Their engagement with the research was maintained from the outset, alongside a Steering Group drawn from across the sector. Evidence is demonstrated in minutes from ten Board meetings between May 2015 and March 2020, including an Extraordinary Board (January 2019) to begin implementation of the research recommendations (**S1**).

Significant policy influence resulting from the research is evidenced through the commendation of the Bishops Department for Education and Formation (**S6**), who stated formal thanks for 'this valuable survey of the impact that CCRS has had over the last twenty-five years, and could have in the future', adding that the Department Chairman 'welcomed the research recommendations which have been made as a result of this research, fully affirming the Church's commitment to the role and contribution of CCRS to adult theological formation across England and Wales'.

The National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers noted the 'first-class input and sharing of CCRS Twenty-Five Years On: One Size Fits All' received at their 2019 conference. The Board pledged their 'continued engagement with and support for CCRS' and their 'formal endorsement of our support for CCRS and the endorsement of [the report's] research findings' (**S7**). The Catholic Education Service, likewise, endorsed the research findings in their communications to Diocesan Schools Commissioners/ Directors of Religious Education (**S8**). They used the research as a catalyst to directly promote CCRS to teachers in Catholic schools across England and Wales (**S8**), a policy move made in direct response to the research findings. As Fr Des Seddon, Chairman of the Board of Religious Studies of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, stated "The recommendations will provide the Board of Studies with a way forward for the next Phase of developments for the CCRS" (**S9 and R2**).

##### *Impact on CCRS providers*

Extensive, localized application of research findings was adopted by diocesan, university and distance-learning CCRS providers; a sample is included below. Purposefully-designed impact collection measures included questionnaires sent to all 27 CCRS centres during 2019 and formalised impact sessions at National CCRS Review Conferences in 2016, 2018 and 2020. Evidence is taken from questionnaire responses and National Review formal transcripts (**S2 and S4**).

- *Evaluation of current practice, workforce training and future planning.* Hexham and Newcastle Diocese used the research for their 2019 annual moderation to affirm current practice and implement curriculum changes. Shrewsbury Diocese held staff discussions on the research during 2019-20, prompting an overall review of local curriculum and pedagogy, with encouragement to diversify their teaching methods for fostering greater student participation. Westminster Diocese made changes to their assessment practice, adopting new assessment styles in a move away from the traditional essay.
- *Use of the research for enhanced/focused advertising for example in Brentwood and Hexham and Newcastle Dioceses;* the latter abandoned their traditional course information evening and created a social media clip highlighting the benefits of CCRS from the research, now used successfully for recruitment purposes.
- *Changed practices to enhance student experience.* Newman University acted on a specific challenge identified in the research for young teachers (workload, lack of theological capacity, professional pressures etc.) and subsequently introduced 2 mentors to support their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students.
- *Supporting theological literacy for teachers in Catholic schools.* Liverpool Archdiocese, as a direct consequence of the research, contacted teachers across all Catholic schools in the archdiocese, resulting in 65+ new teachers starting CCRS in 2019-20. Other dioceses, such as Clifton, were prompted to develop professional ITE partnerships.
- *Supporting theological literacy for lay ministers through enhanced adult formation opportunities.* Wrexham Diocese identified a new target local audience for CCRS to include non-teachers. Northampton Diocese developed a new module on Catechesis and incorporated this into diocesan-wide catechist training. Brentwood Diocese prepared a new module on Evangelisation for parish participants.
- *New financial and administrative arrangements to support adult learning.* Liverpool Archdiocese created a new paid administrator role and made financial grants available to course participants. Other centres reported new financial arrangements with local schools to support teachers taking CCRS.
- *More flexible adult learning provision.* Westminster Diocese introduced twilight and weekend sessions in direct response to research recommendations calling for flexible delivery. Plymouth entered discussion with local headteacher and Diocesan advisers to reintroduce CCRS into the diocese.

#### *Impacts on wider understanding and learning*

The research impact on furthering knowledge exchange between academia and the public sphere is confirmed through these examples:

Dissemination of the research through published articles for professional (*Networking: Catholic Education Today* vol 21, issue 1, pp.28-30) and pastoral audiences (*The Pastoral Review* vol 15,

issue 5, pp.24-28) prompted an upsurge of responses from Catholic schools/headteachers requesting CCRS for their staff as well as personal testimony from individuals affirming the need/importance of adult theological literacy for professional-vocational contexts (private documentation).

The Network for Researchers in Catholic Education invitation to Dr Stuart-Buttle for a keynote presentation at their international conference in October 2019 influenced colleagues from the Irish Episcopal Conference to investigate how their initial teacher education programmes could be made available to adult parishioners seeking to develop their own theological literacy. This had not been the case in Ireland before. This led to a new research project in Ireland on Adult Religious Education and Faith Development at Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education, Dublin City University. As Dr Gareth Byrne states, 'All in all the review of the CCRS twenty-five years on has created a new conversation between providers of CRS in Ireland and those overseeing CCRS in England and Wales.' **(S5)**.

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

**S1** CCRS Board of Religious Studies minutes 2015 – 2019 (PDF)

**S2** National Review Conferences transcripts 2016 – 2020 (PDF)

**S3** CCRS national website <http://www.brs-ccrs.org.uk/index.php/downloads>

**S4** Summary of Impact Questionnaires from CCRS Centres (PDF)

**S5** Letter from Dr Gareth Byrne, Director of Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education Dublin City University March 2020 (PDF)

**S6** Letter from Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales Dept for Education and Formation April 2019 (PDF)

**S7** National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers Conference statement from Items of Business 2019 (PDF)

**S8** Letter from Paul Barber, Director of Catholic Education Service to Diocesan Schools Commissioners and Directors of Religious Education (22<sup>nd</sup> March 2019) and Catholic Education Schools Newsletter May 2019 [press@catholiceducation.org.uk](mailto:press@catholiceducation.org.uk) (Catholic Education Service research impact evidence PDF)

**S9** Press Statement: CCRS Twenty-Five Years On: New Research Report published this week January 2019 (PDF)