

Institution: Coventry University		
Unit of Assessment: 19		
Title of case study: Improving policy and practice in Religion and Education		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: October 2014 – July 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Kristin Aune	Professor in Sociology of Religion	October 2014 to present
Paul Weller	Professor	September 2018 to present
Chris Shannahan	Associate Professor in Political Theology	September 2015 to present
Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor	Assistant Professor	August 2015 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: March 2017 to 31st July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Societal challenges and their interplay with policy and practice are a strong focus within CTPSR, with a wide body of research concerned with religion-based discrimination and harassment, Islamophobia, domestic abuse, and the influence of wider family circumstances. Research in this area has driven significant change in informing and enhancing **policy, guidance and practice** in the **UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand**. Within the **UK**, research findings have informed **policy within the Department for Education and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government**, as well as influenced decision-making, guidance and training in religious institutions, including the **Church of England (CofE) and the British Board of Imams and Scholars**. At the **international level**, findings have underpinned the operations and strategy of the **Anglican diocese of Melbourne** in **Australia**, as well as religious leaders across **Canada**.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Coventry were commissioned to develop new evidence and insights across a number of key challenge areas including, religion-based discrimination and harassment, Islamophobia, domestic abuse, and the influence of wider family circumstances on resilience. The research underpinning the impact of this work was undertaken by Professors Aune and Weller and Drs Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shannahan between October 2014 and July 2020 and centres on three inter-linked strands including, Religion in Higher Education, Building Interfaith Understanding, and Faith-based Interventions in Family Life. A number of projects within the portfolio have been led by Coventry in collaboration with other UK universities (Durham, SOAS, Lancaster, Leicester, Canterbury Christ Church) and third sector organisations (CofE, The Linking Network, CoramBAAF, Penny Appeal and Restored).

The **first strand, Religion in Higher Education**, commenced in 2016 and was funded by the CofE to develop an evidence base and recommendations for enhancing the provision and effectiveness of chaplains across the higher education sector. The research, which is the most comprehensive and significant to date, revealed that chaplaincy today, while still dominated by Christian chaplains, is becoming more diverse and multi-faith. The research demonstrated an urgent need to enhance training and funding and develop wider understanding of the unique pastoral role chaplains from all religious groups play in universities. As students' pastoral needs have increased, chaplains have become a vital part of student welfare and support services [R1, G1].

The **second strand, Building Interfaith Understanding**, focuses on three inter-linked areas of work funded by the Linking Network and the AHRC. The first is the Schools Linking: Building Bridges of Understanding amongst Schoolchildren project, led by Shannahan, to develop intercultural and interfaith understanding of 30,000 pupils in 450+ schools across England and

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Wales. The project developed a ten-step path to sustainable schools linking which has been adopted by The Linking Network to guide its future development and the organisation of linking in 28 Local Authority areas across England [R2, G2]. The research results demonstrated the benefits of establishing and harnessing links between majority White community schools and minority-faith schools, the importance of creative match-funding to sustaining schools linking, and of active local government support in enhancing societal resilience. The second area, led by Weller, focused on the relationship between education and social and legal change relating to religion, discrimination and human rights [R3, G3]. This found informal or adult education was important in achieving social change, especially in sensitive areas where religion or belief intersect with other ‘protected characteristics’. The third is an AHRC funded project on Re/presenting Islam on Campus [R4, G4], conducted by Cheruvallil-Contractor, explored how people of all faiths and none understand, perceive and experience Islam on UK higher education campuses. The findings identified a mixed picture of campus life characterised on the one hand by harmony between different religion or belief groups, sincere interfaith initiatives and Islamic Studies teaching. On the other hand, it uncovered evidence of misinformation around Islam and illuminated patterns of prejudice.

The **final strand, *Faith-based Interventions in Family Life***, centres on two significant research projects funded by numerous faith-based charitable organisations, Penny Appeal and the Department for Education. The first of these projects, Church Responses to Domestic Abuse, led by Aune, identified the nature and extent of domestic abuse amongst churchgoers in Cumbria and how churches were responding to domestic abuse [R5, G5]. The findings uncovered that 1 in 4 churchgoers had experienced at least one abusive behaviour in their current intimate relationship, that only 2 in 7 churchgoers considered their church equipped to respond to a disclosure of domestic abuse, and that where a church had a congregation member who had undertaken domestic abuse awareness training, the church was able to respond to a disclosure of abuse more effectively. The second, Amongst the Last to Leave: Muslim Children in the Care System, led by Cheruvallil-Contractor, investigated challenges facing the care system in finding fostering and adoption placements for children from Muslim backgrounds – specifically, challenges recruiting Muslim adopters and fosterers and low levels of education amongst social workers about children’s religious needs. It found that reasons for the poor recruitment of Muslim carers included a perception among some Muslims that adoption and fostering were not religiously permissible and a lack of awareness that there were Muslim children in the care system [R6, G6].

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

The quality of the underpinning research is evidenced by publications in peer-reviewed journals, prestigious university press, and reports authored by the researchers and published by major third sector organisations (Penny Appeal; Church of England; Restored; and The Linking Network)

[R1] Aune, K., Guest, M. and Law, J. (2019), Chaplains on Campus: Understanding Chaplaincy in UK Universities, May <http://www.churchofengland.org/chaplainsoncampus>

[R2] Shannahan, C. (2018), Schools Linking – Building Bridges of Understanding Amongst School Children, <https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Schools-Linking-and-Social-Cohesion-An-Evaluation-of-TLNs-National-Programme-July-2018.pdf>

[R3] Weller, P. (2017), “Learning from Experience, Leading to Engagement: Lessons from Belieforama for a Europe of Religion and Belief Diversity”, Studies in Interreligious Dialogue, Vol 27, 2, pp. 27-51 DOI: 10.2143/SID.27.2.3269034

[R4] Scott-Baumann, A. Guest, M., Naguib, S., Cheruvallil-Contractor, S. and Phoenix, A. (2020) *Islam on Campus: Contested Identities and the Cultures of Higher Education*, London: Oxford University Press.

[R5] Aune, K. and Barnes, R. (2018), In Churches Too: Church Responses to Domestic Abuse – a case study of Cumbria, March <https://www.restoredrelationships.org/cumbriaresearch>

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[R6] Cheruvallil-Contractor, S., Dsouza, S., Boti Phiri, M. & Halford, A. (2018), Among the last ones to leave? Understanding the Journeys of Muslim Children in the Care System in England, <http://pennyappeal.org/muslim-children-in-care>

The quality of the underpinning research is also evidenced by significant funding, including:

[G1] Chaplains on Campus – funded by Church of England - £89,835

[G2] Evaluation of Linking Network Programme – funded by MCHLG and DfE - £25,000

[G3] Tackling religion-based hate crime – funded by Office for Students - £49,681

[G4] Re/presenting Islam on Campus – funded by AHRC - £568,727

[G5] Church Responses to Domestic Abuse – Multiple co-funders - £38,963

[G6] Journeys of Muslim Children in the Care System– funded by DfE/Penny Appeal - £31,850

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

In a policy field characterised by limited empirical evidence and often subject to significant policy debate, CU research has provided novel insights that have informed and influenced the policies and practices of those addressing religion-based discrimination and harassment, Islamophobia, domestic abuse, and the influence of wider family circumstances on resilience. As a result, the research has had significant and wide-reaching impact on education and faith-based institutions, at both policy and operational levels, in the UK and internationally. This impact breaks down into two core areas, policy and guidance, and practice.

1. Informing and enhancing policy and guidance

CU research has informed and significantly enhanced policy and guidance in the UK, with its reach demonstrated across multiple beneficiaries and sectors. In the context of *Religion and Higher Education*, the team's research underpinned Advance HE's 2018 policy guidance on Religion and Belief: Supporting Inclusion of Staff and Students in Higher Education providing 'early research insights' that helped influence the development of the guidance. Indeed, the guidance also referenced the research in its recommendation that universities collect Religion Monitoring Data in a sensitive manner in order to ensure that staff and students feel safe and able to provide that information [S1]. Findings from Aune's Chaplains on Campus research have provided significant underpinning for the CofE planning of the national Education Office, and in the production of their next Strategic Plan. The National FE and HE Policy Adviser at CofE corroborates that the research "**was a core source of data**" and that it "**will be the core material for chaplaincy planning within the Church of England over the next 5-10 years**". Additionally, the research has been "**influential in shaping the agenda for our FE and HE Development Group**" and that the "**recommendations and our response to them will occupy a major part of the Development group's work in 2020. It is unusual for a single piece of research to have that degree of influence on our workplan**" [S2]. Further demonstration of reach and significance of this research is evident outside the CofE. The Chair of the Free Churches Group, Higher Education Working Group, corroborates that the team's research informed the development of The Free Churches Group in England's policy 'Towards a Free Church Vision for the Place of Religion in Universities' [S3].

Cheruvallil-Contractor's research on Re/presenting Islam in Higher Education informed the APPG on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia, subsequently adopted by the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats. Anna Soubry ex-MP and Wes Streeting MP, APPG Co-chairs, thanked Cheruvallil-Contractor, writing, "The final report of the APPG has cited your submission, and the primary research on which it is based, in numerous places throughout the report. We hope you will appreciate this as indicative of the high regard in which your contribution was held and demonstrative of its impact on the APPG on British Muslims' inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia" [S4a and S4b].

In the context of *Building Interfaith Understanding*, Shannahan's *Schools Linking and Social Cohesion* report was cited by The Linking Network Briefing Papers presented to MHCLG and DfE government Ministers in November 2019 and January 2020 [S5] **and provided the theoretical**

underpinning for the ‘**Social Cohesion and Education**’ training webinar that TLN provided for the nationwide **Cohesion and Integration practitioner network** [S5]. The Chair of TLN’s Board of Trustees, the Bishop of Bradford, wrote, “*The report has been used in briefing papers to government, local authorities, in cases of support to funders, in facilitator and teacher resourcing, in academic circles and in board level discussions. The report has given confidence to partners about the impact and value of TLN’s work and contributed to securing funding.*” [S5]. Indeed, the *Schools Linking* research is being utilised by the DfE to measure the sustainability and scalability of schools linking throughout England and Wales. The research recommendation to continue MHCLG and DfE funding, was incorporated in the *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper* with TLN corroborating that *since the report was published schools linking has been written into the MHCLG’s Integration Action Plan*” [S5]. The national Directors of The Linking Network suggested that, “The report has given ‘added value’ to our work and [given] confidence to potential partners, from the national to the local. The report has made a positive contribution to TLN’s profile and has been used in briefing papers to government, local authorities, in cases of support to funders, in facilitator and teacher resourcing, in academic circles and in board level discussions.” [S5]. Additionally, the research “contributed to confidence in TLN” and persuaded the MHCLG and DfE to extend their funding in 2019 for 3 years, enabling the expansion of schools linking into five new local authority areas, increasing the number of children involved across England and Wales to 30,000 in 28 Local Authority areas.

In relation to **Faith-Based Interventions in Family Life**, the Muslim children in the care system research was presented to 60 senior scholars from the British Board of Scholars and Imams at their annual Multaqa (meeting) in 2017. Adoption and fostering are contentious issues for Muslims, with some Islamic scholars considering it haram or forbidden. The presentation increased their understanding of the lived experiences of children in care and the Board unanimously voted to declare adoption and fostering as a communal obligation of the highest degree on Muslim communities. This led to them developing the first-ever Islamic Guidance on Fostering and Adoption in the western context [S6a]. Penny Appeal’s Chief Executive testified about Cheruvallil-Contractor’s research on Muslim Children in the Care System that: “**Many of the scholars came to the multaqa with an opinion that adoption and fostering was impermissible or indeed forbidden... However thanks to your contributions scholars unanimously voted to state that it was a Fard e Qifaya or an obligation on the Muslim community to adopt or foster if they had the resources to do so**” [S6b]. Over 150 social workers engaged with the research findings through 10 workshops and a practitioner conference across England.

The Domestic Abuse Project findings shaped Anglican policy in the Diocese of Carlisle in the UK and in the Anglican Church of Australia. The Diocese of Carlisle committed to including domestic abuse in its safeguarding policies [S7a] and on the back of these findings, Aune was then invited to advise the Anglican Church of Australia’s Family Violence Working Group, presenting to c. 25 diocesan leads on domestic abuse. Consequently, the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne in Australia utilised the research findings to establish a Family Safety Champion to support clergy in embedding action to address family violence in the church. The role description has been signed off by the Archbishop in Council and the Melbourne policy recommended for adoption by all 23 Anglican dioceses in Australia [S7b].

2. Informing and enhancing practice

In the UK, the Church Responses to Domestic Abuse research enhanced Christian organisations’ training on domestic abuse. The findings were integrated into training delivered by Restored to around 30 churches and Christian conferences each year. Requests received by Restored for training increased by 50% as a direct result [S8]. In addition, the research influenced Christian charity Press Red to start the GRID network of domestic-abuse aware churches in northern England and to produce a play about domestic abuse which has been shown widely, including at the Home Office and the Metropolitan Police Domestic Abuse Conference [S8]. The research also led Churches Together in Cumbria to reaffirm that it would provide domestic abuse training to churches [S8]. Moreover, the Anglican diocese of Carlisle committed to ensuring domestic abuse is “included in the safeguarding training that we offer”. The Bishop of Carlisle corroborated that

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“The report gives church leaders a strong mandate to address this issue more proactively” [S7a]. In Canada, a new training segment on why churches need to train a domestic abuse ‘champion’ in each congregation alongside a leader was added to the RAVE Project’s online training module (which reaches around 500 church leaders each week) based on Aune’s research on domestic abuse [S9].

A 2018 presentation of *Weller’s* body of research on the *Relationship Between Education and Social and Legal Change Relating to Religion or Belief, Discrimination and Human Rights*, coupled with the provision of the taster sessions taken from the Belieforama religious diversity and anti-discrimination training programme originally developed in Europe, informed the Religious Diversity Centre of New Zealand/Aotearoa decision to adopt and adapt Belieforama as their framework for adult education across New Zealand. The training was rolled out across New Zealand [S10].

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

[S1] Advance HE guidance to higher education institutions across the UK, and Colleges in Scotland, on how to support the inclusion of staff and students of different faiths and beliefs including those with no religious beliefs <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religion-and-belief/> (see Acknowledgements, pp.13, 57-58)

[S2] Corroborating Statement: National FE and HE Policy Adviser, Church of England

[S3] Corroborating Statement: Chair, Free Churches Group Higher Education Working Group

[S4] (4a) Corroborating Statement: Co-chairs of the APPG on British Muslims, All Parliamentary Group on British Muslims and (4b) APPG Inquiry Report in to working definition of Islamophobia <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170cee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>

[S5] Corroborating Statement: Chair of Trustees, The Linking Network and Directors, The Linking Network

[S6] Penny Appeal Report on Islamic Guidance on the Contemporary Practice of Adoption and Fostering in the UK <https://pennyappeal.org/storage/app/media/appeals/Adoption%20and%20Fostering/Adoption%20and%20Fostering/Islamic%20Guide/Final%20Islamic%20Adoption%20and%20Fostering%20-%20print%20pdf.pdf> and Corroborating Statement: Chief Executive, Penny Appeal

[S7] Corroborating Statements from Bishop of Carlisle and Chair, General Synod Family Violence Working Group, Anglican Church of Australia

[S8] Corroborating Statement: Director of Restored, Director of Press Red and President of Churches Together in Cumbria

[S9] Corroborating Statement: Director of Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research, Canada

[S10] Corroborating Statement: Co-chair, Religious Diversity Centre, New Zealand
