Discourse

Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies

The Higher Education Academy

Discourse:

Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies

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Editorial board:

Discourse:

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Editorial—Disciplines and Progression

Welcome to the eighteenth edition of Discourse. You will no doubt have noticed that this is a bumper edition; we have included the normal range of papers and reports together with presentations from our successful summer conference, —A-Level Above? Progression to Undergraduate Studies in Philosophy (St Anne's College, Oxford, 2-3 July 2009).

We are entering a period of uncertainty and change: the full fall-out from the banking crisis and recession will be felt across the public sector very soon; there is much discussion about how the REF will capture and measure 'impact' in research, particularly in the humanities; and the publication of *Higher Ambitions and Skills for Growth* by BIS gives an indication of how teaching in the UK HE sector will be expected to address expectations in a globalised market producing graduates of the future. But we do not know in any detailed way how diversity and disciplinarity fare in this future. Will we be asked to promote and enhance the distinctiveness of the disciplines that provide our current academic identities, or are we to embrace an increasingly inter- and trans-disciplinary world where differences are eroded? A rain forest contains more diversity and supports a greater number of individuals than a monoculture, and once it is destroyed it cannot be regenerated; so defending and promoting our distinct contributions to the UK's HE landscape may be more pressing now than ever before.

Here at the Subject Centre we hope the range of pedagogical research and evidence informed practice that we have funded, encouraged, initiated and published over the last nine years and continue to develop will provide a significant grounding for your own demonstrations that learning and teaching in our disciplines is unique and worthy of future development and enhancement.

This issue of *Discourse* opens with an interview with George MacDonald Ross who retired as Director of the Subject Centre this summer. George's vision and insights have guided the Subject Centre from its inception and his own commitment to subject-specific teaching practices has long been recognised and widely appreciated. There are three pieces on Subject Centre related projects including a report on our Student Focus Group work.

The conference papers begin 'Wot u @ uni 4?' which also explores student expectations of philosophy. Many of the papers highlight difficulties and challenges faced by the diverse range of students now coming to study philosophy at university, and how their experiences in a changing school and FE context affect their studies. We hope that the outcomes of this conference, although specifically for philosophy, will be of value to others.

We hope 2010 is a fruitful year for you.

Best wishes

David

Dr David Mossley
Editor of *Discourse* and
Manager of the Subject Centre

News and Information

The Higher Education Academy

The Higher Education Academy's mission is to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students.

Its aims and objectives are:

1. To be an authoritative and independent voice on policies that influence student learning experiences;
2. To support institutions in their strategies for improving the student learning experience;
3. To lead, support and inform the professional development and recognition of staff in higher education;
4. To promote good practice in all aspects of support for the student learning experience;
5. To lead the development of research and evaluation to improve the quality of the student learning experience;
6. To be a responsive, efficient and accountable organisation.

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk

The Subject Network

The Subject Network is a network of 24 subject centres based in higher education institutions throughout the UK. It is funded by the four HE funding bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It aims to promote high quality learning and teaching through development and transfer of successful practice in all subject disciplines.

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is based at the University of Leeds and at a partner site at the University of Wales, Lampeter and covers the disciplines of Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, History of Science (including the History of Medicine and Technology), Theology, and Religious Studies.

Mission statement

Supporting teachers and learners in Philosophical and Religious Studies in higher education in the UK.

Strategic Aims

- To work in collaboration with PRS colleagues and students in order to be effective advocates for our disciplines in the development of national and regional policies.
- To fund and take part in projects and events that support the development and recognition of good teaching practice in PRS.
- To participate in relevant research developments.
- To provide a repository of relevant knowledge and expertise within our subject communities.
- To maintain a well managed, flexible and properly structured subject centre staffed by appropriately qualified people with academic and creative strengths.

Visit our website at **http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk**
or contact us directly:

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Departmental Visits and Workshops

Departmental visits and requests

We have visited almost all of the departments in our subject communities—however, we are always happy to come and see you to gather information about existing effective practice and to discover the most pressing issues for your department and for individual lecturers and tutors. Regular contact with the academic communities we serve is a vital part of our mission, as it enables us to ensure that we meet your needs in the best ways possible. If you would like a subject expert in your discipline to come to your department, then please get in touch, or feel free to contact us at any time to discuss matters to do with learning and teaching.

Departmental workshops

With learning and teaching issues of central importance to the future of higher education in university strategies and government policies, it is essential for individual departments and academics to be able to articulate the values that underpin their teaching methods, and to show how these are developed reflectively. Students are taking an ever growing interest in the ways they are taught and the benefits they gain from education at university. Furthermore, the scholarship of teaching attracts more research funding than ever before into departments.

The Subject Centre for PRS runs workshops to facilitate reflection on these issues. These are offered free of charge, and can be tailored to the specific needs of your department.

The Subject Centre has recently published a booklet detailing the workshops we run for TRS departments, as a companion to the booklet *Thinking About Teaching Philosophy* which details our workshops for philsophers. If you would like a copy of either of these, or have any other ideas of work we could do with your department, please get in touch. The list of workshops is also available online at:
http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/events/workshops.html

HumBox Open Educational Resources Project

HumBox is a new way of storing, publishing and sharing your Humanities teaching resources on the web.

You can upload things like seminar activities, lecture slides, podcasts and assignments and download and adapt resources others have deposited. It's all about sharing ideas, approaches and resources and saving you time.

The HumBox project focuses on the Humanities and is a collaboration between four Humanities Subject Centres (LLAS, English, History and Philosophical and Religious Studies), and at least twelve different institutions across the country. It is part of a wider Open Educational Resources initiative funded by the JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) and the HEA, to showcase UK Higher Education by encouraging teachers within HE institutions to publish excellent teaching and learning resources openly on the web.

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You can find HumBox at:

http://humbox.eprints.org/

What kinds of resources can I find in HumBox?

The HumBox contains a wide variety of learning and teaching resources for use in the Humanities. The resources consist of all media types, including videos, audios, images, text files and online activities. All resources have been uploaded by teachers and lecturers from UK Higher Education institutions, and all resources have been used for teaching and learning. There is a broad range of subject matter, activity-type, technical format, pedagogic method, all of which highlight the innovative nature of humanities teaching in the UK.

Who regulates the content on HumBox?

You, the HumBox community of registered users, regulate HumBox by adding useful comments to resources and adding extra files or information to resources to enhance their teaching/learning potential. All of the material on HumBox has educational value, but you should be warned that some of the content on HumBox may deal with potentially shocking topics. If you have any issues with any of the content on HumBox then tell us by clicking the 'report a problem' button at the bottom of the page.

Official Launch Event

The Humbox has been in development in 2009. There will be an official launch on 26th February, 2010, at the University of Sheffield. Visit the HumBox website and blog in the new year to find out more.

http://humbox.eprints.org/

Watch the Subject Centre website for further PRS specific news in relation to this exciting development in learning and teaching resources for our disciplines.

Publication of Report – *Finding Your Own Way: The Role of Inquiry-Based Learning in Theology, Religious Studies and Biblical Studies*

This project was run by Rebecca O'Loughlin, Academic Co-ordinator for Theology at the Subject Centre, and a full report is now available on our website:
http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/PrsDocuments/398

The report includes an overview of the uses of Inquiry Based Learning in TRS disciplines in the UK, detailed case studies of two UK departments and an analysis section on the actual and potential usefulness of IBL in TRS.

Courting Controversy? Teaching Theology and Religious Studies in the 21st Century

University of Leeds, 8-9 July 2010

Keynote speakers: Anthony Reddie (The Queen's Foundation) and Dan Cohn-Sherbok (St Mary's University College, Twickenham).

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is organising a two-day conference to explore issues around the policy and practice of teaching Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) in higher education (HE) in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society. The conference is aimed at TRS academics, diversity officers, staff developers and students.

The conference will have two key strands, which aim to provide space for discussion and reflection on:
Policy – The profile of religion in UK society is higher than it has been for many years. How can we, as TRS practitioners and Cultural and Religious Diversity (CRD) experts, feed into current debate and interest in such issues as CRD, public and corporate discourse on identity, citizenship and community, and the interrelation of religion,

society, politics, law and the media?
Practice – How can we best approach the practicalities of teaching TRS in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society, including managing the sensitivities of teaching controversial topics such as gender and sexuality, moral decision-making and the relationship between religion and terrorism? How ought we to teach the questioning and critical analysis of issues of belief that go to the heart of personal, political and religious identity? Are there ways we can manage the emotive discussions, and the fall-out from them, which can ensue?

Proposals are invited for papers/workshops/presentations/discussion groups related to one or more of the following:

- The contribution of TRS to debates about: cultural and religious diversity; identity; citizenship; community cohesion; religion, violence and conflict resolution; media portrayals of religion; the interrelation of religion, society, politics and law);
- Learning and teaching TRS in the 21st century:
  - Cultural and religious diversity in the classroom;
  - Teaching controversial subjects; methods, successes, challenges;
  - Managing emotion and destabilisation in the classroom;
  - Student experiences: how do students respond to opportunities to explore controversial subjects and/or their own faith stances?

This list is not exhaustive and contributions on other relevant topics related to the theme of the conference are invited. Presentations should be 45 minutes in length (including 10-15 minutes for questions).

For more information, or to submit your proposal – including your name, email address, institutional/organisational affiliation, a 150-200 word description of your proposal and your preferred session format (e.g. paper presentation, workshop) – please email Dr. Rebecca O'Loughlin at **rebecca@prs.heacademy.ac.uk**.

Teaching Spirituality in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges

Old School Board, Leeds, January 14th 2010

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is organising an interdisciplinary workshop to explore issues around teaching spirituality in higher education in the UK. The workshop is aimed at academics, chaplaincy workers, equality/diversity officers, staff developers, and students. It will provide an opportunity for participants to discuss the approaches, issues and challenges involved in teaching spirituality, to showcase and share examples of good practice, and to network with colleagues teaching spirituality in different institutions, both within and outside of Theology and Religious Studies departments.

Keynote speaker: Marion Bowman (The Open University)

Other speakers include:

- Kate Adams
- MaryCatherine Burgess
- Dominic Corrywright and Nick Swarbrick
- Douglas Davies
- Paul Dearey
- Ian Delinger
- Christian Kaestner
- Ursula King
- Bernard Moss
- Aru Narayanasamy
- Mark Plater
- Simon Robinson

The event is now fully subscribed. To be added to the waiting list, or for more details, please visit:
http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/449

The Discourse Interview

The *Discourse* Interview

George MacDonald Ross

University of Leeds

Interviewed by: David Mossley

Centre Manager
Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies

Continuing our series of interviews with academics with a special interest in teaching issues, David Mossley talked to George MacDonald Ross, retiring Director of the Subject Centre for PRS, about his lengthy philosophical career, the establishment of the Subject Centre network, and his many successes in the teaching of philosophy. The interview was conducted in Leeds on October 29th, 2009.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed by Discourse this morning George. You've recently retired as director of the Subject Centre, and your work has had a great influence on us, and impact on learning and teaching across our disciplines. I'd like to begin by asking you first about your background in philosophy, how you came into philosophy and your early career.

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I think I was brought up to think philosophically, because my father was an amateur theologian and very interested in philosophy. We often had philosophical discussions at home, and I got used to thinking philosophically. In fact I did Classics at school, for A-level, and got a place to study Classics at St. Catharine's College, Cambridge. During the long vacation before going to Cambridge, I thought I had better brush up on my Ancient Greek, and started looking at a Greek text and trying to understand it, and thought really Greek is not for me. As it happened, I picked up a second hand copy of Mill's *Logic*, and thought that sounded really interesting, so I decided to change my subject to Philosophy.

Induction by elimination?

Yes. Not knowing about academic procedures at the time, I didn't bother to tell the college that this was my intention until I arrived and had an interview with the senior tutor. He got very angry when I said I wanted to change my subject, because there wasn't actually a philosophy don in the college at the time, so I'd have to be farmed out for supervision purposes. However, they did let me change, and I have had no regrets. Nor for that matter do I regret having studied Classics, because one of the things that I've done quite a lot of, in my career, is translating historical texts from languages such as Latin into English in a way that is intelligible to undergraduates.

Thanks. Could you tell us a little about your early career?

The first job I had after I graduated was that I spent a year in Crete teaching English as a foreign language. I had no formal tuition in how to teach so I was just learning on the job, but it did teach me a number of things. One in particular was the importance of speaking very intelligibly and distinctly to people and I think I've carried that on as a lifetime habit. There is one particular incident that stuck in my mind that had considerable influence on me. I had painstakingly written comments on a piece of work that one of the students had done, and then allocated the mark for the piece of work, which was not a very high one. When I returned the work to him he turned the paper over to look at the mark, scrumpled the paper up and threw it into the waste

paper basket! The lesson I learnt from that was never, ever to return a piece of work with comments and a mark, because students will read the mark and not the comments. It's a complete waste of time, so one of the things I've done as a teacher is to make sure that I return essays with useful and helpful comments which explain why I have given the mark I have, without telling them what the mark is. The students then have to read the comments in order to guess what the mark is, and come and tell me what mark they think I've given them and why. As a result, my students became very adept at assessing their own work and coming to almost exactly the same mark as I actually gave.

So after Greece, how did your career progress?

The first job in teaching philosophy I got was in Birmingham, as a temporary assistant lecturer. I had that job for three years. When I was appointed the appointing committee were a bit iffy about my research credentials, but said, we'll give you the temporary post, because we think you'll be a very good teacher, and I hope they were correct in that prophecy.

Then after those three years, I got another temporary job, very briefly, in Leeds, in the Division of History and Philosophy of Science, as a Research Fellow, and then that got converted into a straight lectureship in philosophy, so I've spent the last 37 years as a lecturer in philosophy at Leeds.

And during that period, how would you describe your research interests?

My research has mainly been in the history of philosophy, which I find particularly interesting, though in those days it was a bit of an uphill struggle being a historian of philosophy, because history of philosophy was very much out of fashion. I remember when I first came to Leeds, somebody took me aside and told me that the only reason why we teach the history of philosophy at Leeds is so that undergraduates will learn the dreadful mistakes that people make through not having read Frege, so I felt that I was teaching philosophy very much on sufferance. It was a long time before I acquired other colleagues who were also interested in the history of philosophy.

That situation has changed somewhat, hasn't it?

It has. I was one of the founding members of the British Society of the History of Philosophy, in fact I was its first secretary, and I think that the organisation has done a lot to raise the status of history within the discipline. Things are very much different now from how they were when I started out.

Could you say a little bit about the development of your subject-specific learning and teaching interests?

Well, I've always been a great believer in killing two birds with one stone, and one thing that I've tried to do is to relate the teaching of philosophy to my interests in the history of philosophy. I have written a lot about this, particularly about Kant's views on the teaching of philosophy, which I find extremely modern and up to date. I think that many people would improve as philosophy teachers if they followed the advice that Kant gave about teaching philosophy.

Ok, and how did the SC come about?

During the 1990s, I moved very much into administration. I was head of department, and I was chair of what was known as the taught courses committee of the faculties of Arts, Social Sciences and Law, at a time when the university went over to modularisation, so I had a lot of controversial work to do in order to bring about the modularisation of something like half the programmes of study in the university. After that came to an end, I went off to what was then University College Scarborough, as academic dean and deputy principal, with a brief to turn it round from being an ex primary teacher education college to being a bonsai university with university values. That was a very interesting and enjoyable experience, so when I came back to leeds in the later 1990s, I suppose I was suffering a bit from the very common syndrome of people not wanting to go back to doing exactly what they were doing before. I was looking for a more responsible role. So when, in 1999, I read the advertisements for people to set up the Subject Centres I thought this would be an ideal opportunity to continue a leadership role, while at the same time fulfilling my own overriding interests in high quality teaching.

The SCs were, in many respects, a response to some of the recommendations of the Dearing report. How effective do you think the SCs were as a response?

I think the SCs were mainly set up under the influence of the treasury, who thought it was outrageous that about the only profession which didn't involve professional training was university teaching. Just about every other profession did, being a doctor or a lawyer for example, and they didn't see why there should be this exception for university teachers, particularly because there was a lot of anecdotal evidence of not very competent teaching going on in universities. A lot of money was spent during the 1980s and 1990s on setting up educational development units in universities, employing a lot of members of staff who had the brief to improve the quality of learning and teaching in universities, and they hadn't been terribly effective. The main reason that they were not effective is because busy members of staff were very reluctant to go on courses and be trained by people who did not know anything about their own discipline. This meant that the training tended to be heavily theoretical, or on highly practical issues like how to use an OHP which people didn't find very edifying.

Also philosophers in particular, I think, have been very sceptical about what is done in educational theory because they object to the language, and also the research methods which are used in education. In particular the idea that anything has to be supported by endless references to the literature looks to philosophers, and I have sympathy with this, rather like the fallacy of the argument from authority. Philosophers are much more interested in rational arguments for doing things this way rather than that, or straight empirical evidence on the basis of what has worked in practice. The trouble is, educational specialists tend not to be teachers in higher education and don't actually have the practical experience which philosophy lecturers would respect. So I think that the SCs were set up in a way to call the bluff of academics who said we're not interested in what we get as training, because it's not relevant to our particular discipline. Ok, here's some money to set up these subject centres which are discipline specific.

Ok, so would you like to expand a little bit further on your philosophy of education, and your views on education more generally,

not just in regards to the philosophy of higher education, but education as an overall activity or process?

I am a great believer in the traditional distinction between education and training, and I believe that I'm in the business of education. I don't want to disparage training, and even within the sorts of things we teach in university, there is a role for developing physical skills and rote learning. For example, if you want to learn a language, there's the hard slog of memorising vocabulary and grammar which you have to go through, and which is in a sense a part of education, even though it looks more like training. But what distinguishes a university language degree from a crash course at a language school are higher-order activities such as placing the language in a social and historical context, very delicate issues of how you translate from one language to another, literary criticism, and so on. Or again, mathematics won't get you very far unless you've learnt your times tables, even though there's far more to mathematics than that. I think philosophy is rather different from other disciplines, in that the amount of rote learning that is appropriate is at a minimum compared to other disciplines. The higher order skills are of much greater importance.

One of my corollaries of believing that it is education rather than training that is of importance is that it puts the emphasis not on what the teacher tells the student (so it's not a question of the passive absorption of knowledge that the teacher has, or practising the simple skills the teacher has) but on developing the autonomy of the learner. I'm unashamedly student-centred, to use the jargon, in my approach to education. This has certain consequences. For example, I tend to disparage lecturing as a form of teaching. It had its place in its time—in a medieval university the lecture consisted in the reading out of a book, and this was an essential function, because students couldn't afford books themselves. They were very valuable objects, and even paper was expensive, so they couldn't take copious notes, and they were expected to memorise the text, which they could then discuss. So the twin source and methods of education available in universities were the lecture, where you got the text inside your head, and then discussion, which was very good. They had debates and disputations in which students would be allocated quite paradoxical positions, and had to use imaginative reason in order to defend them, arguing against each other,

using lots of independent thinking, which was an excellent method of teaching. I think one of the tragedies of more recent university education is that the lecture became redundant after the invention of printing, and it has taken over half a millennium for us to catch up with the importance of the Gutenberg revolution. People talk about a post-Gutenberg university, in which we recognise that lecturing is no longer the most appropriate method of teaching. But we have preserved the lecture and unfortunately dropped the disputation, which is actually the most interesting and important part of the university education. So I'd like to restore the balance, and I've avoided lecturing myself. The last time I gave a lecture was in 1993. I keep to small group teaching in which I encourage the students to contribute, to think, to debate, to argue, discuss and to be autonomous, independent learners.

Do you think that that position is sustainable given the very large numbers of students there are now, compared to when you first started teaching?

It is more difficult, and certainly in my own institution when I arrived for many years the staff student ratio was stable at about 8.6, whereas now it's in the upper 20s, so we've got many more students to teach. Nevertheless, I do think that we are teaching students much more efficiently than we were when I first came. It's much more of a professional operation and there are ways of organising things so that you can minimise the large lecture and spend more time on one-to-one work or small group work. A lot depends on how things are arranged.

One thing that has not changed, though, is that I remember doing a survey when I was head of department trying to calculate the amount of attention students got in different years. I used a very simple, crude measure, which was to take the hours that students had of contact with teachers and divide it by the number of fellow students who were present at the same time, so one hour one-to-one counts as one hour, and one hour in a lecture theatre with 60 students counts as one minute. On the basis of that measure, it turned out that final year students had around 10 times as much attention as first year students. Now I think most academics would agree that one of the things that happens during a student's time at university is that they become more autonomous, less dependent on their teachers, than when they arrived. Sometimes a

crude dichotomy is drawn between school teaching where it's all didactic, teaching to the text, and students are quite passive, then suddenly you come to university where you've got much more freedom, you're expected to spend much more time working independently out of formal hours, you should be handling your own reading, and things like that. The focus is on a much greater autonomy. I think it's a paradox that although we all believe this, the way we teach is exactly the opposite, from what we believe about what will happen, so we give students less help and attention when they arrive, and much more at the very point when they will be leaving university as autonomous learners. So I think a lot could be done to rebalance the way that we teach so that we teach more heavily in the first year, and then gradually leave the students more to their own resources as they approach graduation.

So ideally, what sort of skills or abilities do you think a student needs to be successful in a philosophy programme when they're starting out? And how effective is the current education system in delivering those skills to students?

I would say independent thinking, being able to see alternatives, and not thinking of learning as going along a predetermined path where there's only one way you can go. The openness about philosophy is more distinctive than it is in other disciplines. Of course you also get it in other disciplines, for example in literature where you interpret a text differently, in history where there are different theories about what happened or even what history is about, and so on. Sociology and politics are also disciplines where there are different possibilities of interpretation, and approach, but it's particularly marked in philosophy, and I think it's particularly difficult to come from being taught at school, at A-level, to what we expect of them in the first year. I think we need to pay more attention than we do to this transition from school to university. I'm sorry to say that even in the case of the people who've done philosophy at A-level, the way that A-level is taught in order to bring it into line with other A-level syllabuses means that there is far too much teaching to the test, assessment all the time, and not enough freedom for students to think for themselves. So it is possibly more difficult to bring people round to the way we teach at university

if they've done philosophy A-level than if they haven't, because they think they've done it already. You tend to teach much the same material, like Descartes, for instance, is taught in the first year and also at A-level, and often the students say, well I've done Descartes already. They get rather bored and don't appreciate the different expectations of university.

So how do you think philosophy changes people?

I think it makes them much more self-aware and self-reflective, in a way, sometimes, they don't always like. This is why I'm very much against talking in terms of student satisfaction, as if it's our task to satisfy desires or expectations that the students have when they arrive. I think it's very important that they've probably wasted their time at university if they haven't got a wholly changed expectation about what education's about, so often the process of becoming more philosophically sophisticated makes students less satisfied than they were before, because they see the complexity of things, issues are not as simple as they thought they were, they're seeing other dimensions, they might find it more difficult to decide about things and so on. It's not necessarily a bad thing, but it can be disturbing.

Better to be an unhappy man than a happy pig. So do you think that there are any key threshold concepts in philosophy that bring about this change?

I find it very difficult to isolate any particular threshold concepts, because you might say that what makes a concept a philosophical concept is precisely that it is a threshold concept, that is to say, that once you've grasped the concept then there's no going back, you can't sort of ungrasp it again and you see things through different eyes.

You've won a number of awards and fellowships. Would you like to say a little bit about what was involved in those?

Well there are actually three if you include that I was given an award of merit by the American Association of Philosophy Teachers. I suspect that I got that one because they were rather jealous of the fact that there was public money going into the teaching of philosophy through my

directorship of the Subject Centre. That was certainly part of it, but it was very nice to have that recognition. Also I must say I do very much value attending regular conferences of the AAPT, which is trying to do the same thing as us, but hasn't got the same sort of resources or support.

The second award I got was the University of Leeds University Teaching Fellowship, and the policy of the University of Leeds was to offer these fellowships as a sort of dry run for the National Teaching Fellowships, so the criteria for awarding them were quite similar. The most distinctive features of the Leeds one and also the National Teaching Fellowship is that they're not really interested in a teacher as a performer, so there's no inspection of what you do. They don't sit in your classes and see if you're a brilliant, charismatic lecturer, and I think this is wholly beneficial, because teaching involves all the things that you set up in order to encourage students to learn, and to help them to learn. Probably about the least helpful thing you can do is to give them charismatic lectures, because then students go away with the impression that they've got all they need. They then think that all they have to do is go away and repeat the sort of stuff that they've absorbed from the lectures, when they're assessed, and that's all, so I like to say that there's only one thing that's worse than a bad lecture and that's a good one, because it leaves the student satisfied. I think that what we need to do is to show that we structure the students' learning experience in such a way that they are under pressure to work hard, to think hard, to work independently, and to produce really good work.

What role do you think inspiration plays, which a charismatic lecturer could inspire?

Yes, well there are many ways that one can inspire, and it doesn't have to be in the context of a formal lecture. Certainly I think demonstrating that you are interested in what you are doing, and above all demonstrating that you are interested in each student as an individual, is of crucial importance in inspiring them. Of course it helps if you are witty or you have a good fund of funny stories and things like that, but it is by no means essential, in being a good teacher. There is too much emphasis on assessing teachers on things like wit and liveliness and so on, and though they do help, they're not what education is about.

So can we say a little bit more about the National Teaching Fellowship, and also the NTF scheme?

The scheme has altered over the years. When it was originally set up it was intended as a way of rewarding people who were outstanding teachers and also who were showing leadership. Part of the criteria was to demonstrate that you have influenced other people for the good, so obviously being director of the Subject Centre was an advantage, in that it was evidence of influencing other people. Nowadays, there are more fellowships. Part of the earlier system was that you had to put forward a project, you were given £40,000 to implement it, and you were partly judged on the nature of the project. The way that is has changed recently is that there are more fellows. There are now 50 a year appointed with lower funding, it's now only £10,000, and the £10,000 is not for a project, it is as a reward, so you can use it how you like, in order to make your life as a teacher, or as a leader in teaching, easier. So for example you can buy computers, use it for foreign travel to conferences, and things like that, so how it's spent is much more open. In addition to that, there's an additional pot of money which national teaching fellows can bid for, for much larger sums, for projects designed to improve the student learning experience in universities.

Thanks. Looking at your work with the SC, what would you pick out as highlights of the 9 years you've spent as director?

For myself, I think what I felt best about was when we had an international conference at Leeds, which was well-attended, and in particular attracted roughly equal numbers of people from the UK, the US and the rest of the world. It was a truly international event, which led to some very interesting papers in the journal *Discourse*, and I feel that events of this nature are really what it's about. I just regret the difficulty of getting people from the UK to attend such events. I know it's a problem that many institutions are strapped for resources and find it difficult to support people going to conferences on learning and teaching issues. Such funding as there is tends to be reserved for research events rather than teaching events, which is something I regret.

So what would you say is the good of the SC?

The good of the SC is that in many ways it provides an opportunity of support for people who are genuinely interested in improving the quality of the student learning experience at a departmental level. We've given a lot of grants for people to be able to work at this and money speaks, so if somebody has got, say, £3,000 to do something, this weighs well in the balance against research activities. The SC also gives an opportunity for people to get together with likeminded people in different departments. I think it's interesting that some of our most successful events have been with people like formal logicians, who feel rather beleaguered because logic doesn't have the same place in the syllabus as it used to 40 years ago, for example, and I think people teaching formal logic feel rather lonely, and are conscious of the difficulty of teaching it and its unpopularity among students, so it gives an opportunity for logicians to get together with a sense of solidarity and mutual support from different departments. The same is true of various other minority groups within our disciplines, such as our successful work with Black theologians.

Generally when philosophers get together at conferences, particularly at research conferences, the attitude tends to be oppositional. You're trying to pick holes in papers that have just been delivered. I think one of the really rewarding things to do with holding events to do with learning and teaching is that when philosophers get together to discuss learning and teaching, there's a much greater spirit of co-operation, of recognition that we all have the same problems and we can learn from each other. I do find this a really rewarding part of the job.

Although you've officially retired, there is still work continuing with your teaching fellowship, and you are also still working as a senior adviser for the SC. Would you like to say a little bit about what you're working on at the moment, and how you see your projects moving into the future?

Well, when people retire they always say that they're busier than ever. I still have a lot of writing projects. I haven't forgotten my research interests in the history of philosophy, and I recently published a book on Hobbes. I also intend to put together my thoughts on teaching into a book which I will call 'How I teach philosophy', which will be mainly a reflection on how I teach philosophy and the way I do things,

but there's quite a lot of unfinished business. I haven't yet completed the project that was funded by my UTF, which is a new idea for using multiple choice questions on a computer as a way of getting people to think about issues where there are no right or wrong answers. What I'm doing is to add it as a bolt on to a translation I've already produced of a large part of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. I use multiple choice questions in order to encourage students to think about different ways of interpreting crucial parts of the text, and considering arguments, considering reasons for interpreting one way rather than another, and then considering reasons for regarding the text as so interpreted as being a good or bad piece of philosophy. The idea is that the students would spend some time going through these different possibilities, so I'm not saying this is the right answer to it, but these are the sorts of possibilities and how one could rationally support them. The aim is that students acquire the practice of thinking as an experienced historian of philosophy while they are reading the text, rather than the approach which most students have, which is either to say, I can't understand this, or trying to read it as if it were a newspaper article or a novel or something like that, which of course won't work. It forces them to think about things in an appropriate way.

Ok, so looking more broadly now, what do you think are the most pressing factors driving change in our disciplines in the UK, and internationally? Are they the same in teaching and research, or are they different?

Obviously, I think one of the most pressing issues at the present moment is the question of financing, and there's going to be a lot of pressure on people to teach more economically, which goes against all that I hold dear, that is, trying to establish a personal relationship with each student. Also, I worry that the outcome of recent high profile debates about standards at universities may result in much greater standardisation of what is done, and the more you standardise, the more you get teaching to the test, and you lose what is essential to a liberal education in the university. We've got to find ways of teaching professionally and efficiently but without losing the essential point, that we are educating the students as individuals and not merely passing on factual content and basic skills.

Do you think there are any international pressures, more broadly?

Yes, I think there are international pressures which we have largely ignored in the UK, and I have to say the QAA has been doing some sterling work trying to defend the way we do things in the UK against different approaches that are common in the continent. In particular I think they have been successful in fending off attempts to measure student learning in terms of the hours they spend sitting in seats, rather than in terms of the outcomes of what they've actually learnt. The UK approach has actually been victorious there, and that's a very good thing.

And again, on most of the continent there's much more central control. In countries such as France, there's even a centralised national syllabus, and I think this is incompatible with developing students as autonomous individuals.

Which teacher has had the most influence on you, and why?

I find that a very difficult question to answer. I have to admit that I don't think the teaching I had at Cambridge for example was very good, I always resolved that anyone who went through my hands as a student would have a better education than I got at Cambridge, but I don't want to disparage my own education too much. There were certainly object lessons I learnt from the way people taught so that I learnt a lot about what to avoid in teaching.

Finally, what would you say was your greatest achievement as a philosophy educator?

That again is a very difficult question. It tends to be a lot of different things. I feel I've achieved something worthwhile when I read the comments in the course evaluation questionnaires, where students say nice things about how they've been transformed by doing my course. I get comments such as, it's the most difficult module they've had to do, but the most rewarding. It's not a question of one off big achievements—it's lots of little things.

Thank you, George.

Thank you.

Reports on Subject Centre Projects into Learning and Teaching issues in PRS disciplines

Student Focus Group Report

Rebecca O'Loughlin
Subject Centre for PRS

Enhancing the learning experience of students in Philosophy, Theology, Religious Studies, Philosophy of Science, and History of Science, Technology and Medicine (PRS) is at the core of the Subject Centre's (SC) mission. In order to help us fulfil this mission, we organise student focus groups each year. The groups generate feedback on the student learning experience in PRS which we use to guide our work with academics and students.

In 2008, we invited all level two and three single- and joint-honours students in PRS departments in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to apply to take part in the focus groups. 41 students applied. Of these, we invited 12 to join us. The groups took place over two days (27-28 November 2008). Nine students attended.

The student group was constituted as follows:

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- Gender: five males and four females;
- Level of study: undergraduate levels two and three;
- Type of study: single and joint honours;
- Subject(s) of study: Philosophy; Theology and Religious Studies; Philosophy, Religion and Ethics; Theology for Education; Philosophy and Politics; History and Religious Studies;
- Institutions: students represented a broad range of institutions from older universities to newer HE colleges.

  The group also included part-time and mature students.

Over the course of two days, students participated in several interactive workshop- and discussion-style sessions, designed to generate feedback on their:

- Motivations for studying PRS subjects;
- Expectations of PRS degrees prior to coming to university;
- Approaches to learning, especially reading and writing for their degrees;
- Views on module design;
- Views on assessment;
- Best and worst learning experiences;
- Career aspirations.

The sessions allowed the students to reflect on how they are learning; to gain a deeper understanding of the pedagogies of their disciplines; and to express their views on learning and teaching in a neutral and supportive environment. They also enabled the students to make comparisons between their experiences and those of students from other institutions studying their own or cognate subjects, and to draw insights from these. Feedback from the groups, collected via evaluation forms, was excellent, with students saying that they had valued the opportunity to discuss their views on learning and teaching.

The report which follows is a thematic analysis of the feedback generated at the focus groups.

Issues Affecting Students Before and During the Transition to Higher Education

Progression

Progression from secondary to higher education (HE) was discussed at several points during the focus groups. Most of the students said that their degree choices had been influenced by their enjoyment of PRS and related subjects at school. Most had studied PRS and cognate Arts and Humanities subjects, including Sociology, History and English, at secondary level.

We wanted to find out about students' expectations of a degree in PRS before they arrived at university, to see if they matched with their subsequent experiences. We ran an activity designed to identify the topics which students in PRS expect to study before coming to university, the topics they want to study, and the topics they actually study, in order to facilitate a comparison between their expectations and desires, and the reality. The data generated could be helpful in making an informed judgement about whether any of the students primarily studying Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) would have chosen to do Philosophy at university, and whether any of the students primarily studying Philosophy would have chosen to do TRS, if the content of the degree had been different (but such that it remained definable as a Philosophy/TRS degree), or if the degree had been marketed differently, without its content being changed. The results also indicate discrepancies between what TRS students think Philosophy degrees consist of in terms of subject content, and the reality; and between what Philosophy students think TRS degrees consist of and, again, the reality.

Three out of four TRS students would have been even more likely to have applied to study TRS at university if they thought that 'Religion and liberalism' was going to be covered in the curriculum, but three out of four would have also been surprised to learn, prior to coming to university, that this topic was going to be covered. All of the TRS students said it had been possible to study it at some level during their degrees. Three out of four TRS students said they would have

been even more likely to have applied to study TRS at university if they knew that 'Creation, evolution and religion' was going to be covered in the curriculum, but three out of four would have also been surprised to learn, prior to coming to university, that this topic was going to be covered. In reality, most of the TRS students had had the opportunity to study this topic. All four TRS students would have been even more likely to have applied to study TRS if they knew that 'Religion and politics' was going to be covered in the curriculum. Two out of four students had expected it to be covered, and one did not have any expectations either way (one student did not respond to this part of the question). Three of the students reported that it had been possible to study this subject at some level during their degree. These observations, particularly with regards to 'Creation, evolution and religion', correlate with the results of a different session in which the students were asked to design their own modules. In this session, the TRS group[1] proposed a module on 'Science and Religion', designed to address the 'history of [the] relationship between science and religion; critical examination of theories in [the] module area; analysis of contemporary relationship, including structure and nature of universe; examination of the conflict and resolutions between science and religion'. The theories to be studied were: 'Darwinism, evolution, big bang theory, creationism, plate techtonics [sic]'.

All four TRS students said that a Philosophy degree would have been more attractive if they knew that 'The meaning of life' was going to be covered in the curriculum; two of the four expected this topic to be part of a Philosophy degree. However, the Philosophy questionnaire for Philosophy students revealed that three of the four students had only had the opportunity to study this topic to a small extent, or not at all.

Four out of five Philosophy students would have been even more likely to apply to do a Philosophy degree if they knew that 'Aesthetics' was going to be covered in the curriculum. Four reported that it had been possible to study this topic at some level during their degree, but only one had expected to be able to study it (with three having no

[1] For most exercises, the students were divided into subject groups (broadly, Philosophy and TRS), in order to facilitate the straightforward extraction of subject-specific feedback when it came to analysing the data.

expectations either way). Three of the four students who answered this question would have been even more likely to apply to do a Philosophy degree if they knew that the 'The meaning of life' was going to be covered in the curriculum, but all three also said that this topic could only be studied to a small extent, or not at all, in their degrees. However, two of the three students who answered this part of the question had expected to be able to study it, saying that they would have been 'very surprised' if it had not been included in a Philosophy degree. Three out of five students reported that 'Sexual ethics' had not been available to study in their degrees; but four out of the five students had no interest in studying this topic in any case. In different session, Philosophy students made a related point that their degrees had had more of a theoretical and historical focus, and less of an applied one, than they had expected. In the session where students were asked to design their own modules, it is notable that the Philosophy group designed a module on 'Contemporary Applied Ethics', which covered 'environmental holism; business ethics; medical dilemmas/bioethics; animal/primate testing & treatment; war'.

Four out of five Philosophy students said that a TRS degree would have been more attractive if they knew that 'Creation, evolution and religion' and 'Religion and politics' were going to be covered in the curriculum. In both cases, three out of the five either did not expect these topics to be a part of a TRS degree or had no expectations either way. Four out of five Philosophy students said that a TRS degree would have been more attractive if they knew that 'Philosophy of religion' was going to be covered in the curriculum (three said it would have been 'much more'; attractive, and one 'a little more' attractive); but equally, three would have been very surprised if this had not been covered in a TRS degree.

To summarise these findings:

- Both Philosophy and TRS students are interested in studying 'The meaning of life'. The majority of Philosophy students, and half of the TRS students, expected this topic to be covered in a Philosophy degree. However, the majority experience among the Philosophy group was that this topic had only been available for study to a small extent, or not at all. If the study was repeated on a larger scale, and if, this time, TRS students were asked about

whether this topic was covered in their degrees, and if the topic was found to be covered in a significant number of TRS degrees but not in as many Philosophy degrees, then this would suggest that students interested in this topic may have at least one reason to opt for a TRS degree over a Philosophy one.

- Philosophy students are attracted to Philosophy degrees that include 'Aesthetics', but most do not expect this topic to be covered in a Philosophy degree. In reality, however, most Philosophy students are able to study it to some extent.
- TRS students are attracted to TRS degrees that include 'Creation, evolution and religion', but most do not expect this topic to be covered in a TRS degree. In reality, most TRS students have an opportunity to study this topic.
- TRS students are attracted to TRS degrees that include 'Religion and liberalism', but most do not expect this topic to be covered in a TRS degree. In reality, however, most TRS students are able to study it to some extent.

Barriers to problem-free progression

The Philosophy students reported experiencing some difficulties adjusting to independent learning in higher education. Whilst they emphasised that they did not expect to be spoon-fed by tutors, they felt that more contact time with tutors would have smoothed their transition. What was interesting was their attempt to express this view whilst simultaneously dissociating themselves from it, as if they were speaking on behalf of other students not present at the focus group: 'There is a lot more independent learning than in school, which it seems some people struggle to cope with'. The possibility emerges that some students are embarrassed to seek help from tutors because they worry that this will make them appear dependent.

A couple of the students felt that their progression to undergraduate study would have been easier had they not been taught by postgraduate teaching assistants, and they were surprised that this was common practice. A comment was made that 'post-grad teachers lack confidence and breadth of knowledge'.

Despite these barriers, all the students agreed that they would opt for the same degree subjects if given the choice again.

Issues Affecting Students During Higher Education

Ambivalence about module choice

The students were divided over the question of whether it is helpful to have an extensive choice of modules. With one exception, the Philosophy students reported having had a wide range of module choice at their institutions; some of the TRS students reported likewise, but several in the TRS group had had only a limited selection. Some of the Philosophy students' best learning experiences had included being able to choose from a wide range of modules, but others in the Philosophy group had felt overwhelmed by the choice, and this had contributed to their worst learning experiences. One student complained that he had had to choose three modules from a list of 30. The students said that the extensive choice of modules was particularly problematic at level one because they did not have the background knowledge to understand what the module titles and descriptions meant. One commented:

> I think that was a problem, because I didn't know enough about it, so I chose modules in the first year just based on what would be easiest rather than what would actually help me later on in the course…even though there were course descriptions, reading it didn't actually help, I could read 'you will have a deep understanding of the philosophy of religion', but it didn't mean anything to me at the time…I think if I knew then, before I started, what it would be like, then I probably would have not done it…I was going to leave after the first year.

Another student agreed that module descriptions in departmental handbooks were not particularly useful in helping students to choose their modules. One of the students suggested that a remedy to this would be to set up a system whereby, during the first two weeks of the semester, students should be allowed to attend as many different classes as they

liked without formally registering for any, in order to get a flavour of what was on offer. Only at the end of this period should they be required to register for modules.

The impact of teaching delivery on the student learning experience

When the students were asked about their best learning experiences, their discussions centred on the importance of good tutors. They related stories of inspirational, enthusiastic tutors, and agreed that a sense of humour was a key characteristic of a good tutor. They felt that younger teachers who are less advanced in their careers may have more enthusiasm and be more open to new ideas (which they regarded as a positive thing), but they did not acknowledge any conflict between this and their scepticism about the academic capabilities of postgraduate teaching assistants.

The students also discussed the value of (well-facilitated) small group discussions. One of the Philosophy students said: 'The discussion sessions that we have, in philosophy, I think it's very useful, people arguing their case…seminar groups of around 10 people, we get to listen to the views of others…'. The TRS students also said that they value freedom of expression in classes, and that they enjoy contributing to discussions and having their own views challenged, whilst challenging those of their peers and their tutors.

Both Philosophy and TRS students spent some time discussing how emotive, sensitive, and potentially controversial topics should be approached in small group discussions. They agreed that as long as all members of the group showed respect for each other's views, no topic should be excluded. They also felt that if 'difficult' topics were included in the course description, then students could not have legitimate objections to them being discussed in class. It was surprising, therefore, to learn that one of the institutions represented by the students allowed Muslim students to be excused from seminars discussing homosexuality in a course addressing religion in society.

There was a consensus among the students that small group discussions need to be chaired well in order to be effective means of deepening student engagement with learning. The students expressed frustration with facilitators who allow people to deviate from the main

point of the session.

The students' discussions of their worst learning experiences centred on teaching delivery. Complex and rushed lectures; dull presentations and 'boring delivery', including the reading aloud of PowerPoint slides in lectures; monotonous and unfocused teaching; tutors who distribute unstructured lecture notes to the class; tutors who fail to provide handouts altogether; and tutors who are unable to control or engage with the class, were all listed as contributing to the students' worst learning experiences; note that the detrimental effects of poor classroom management on learning was emerging as a theme in the students' discussions. One student said the following of one of their tutors:

> He's an amazingly knowledgeable man, but his delivery, it's really hard to follow his lectures, he stutters and goes off on his own thoughts, and his lecture notes are really unstructured as well, just like a block, not even bullet points, almost like his own shorthand and [it is] really difficult to use them either to follow the lecture or to look at afterwards.

Students also said that it had been obvious when they were being taught by tutors who had been forced to teach subjects in which they had no interest, and that this had also contributed to their worst learning experiences. Finally, TRS students expressed scepticism about what they termed 'creative, unacademic' teaching methods, giving the showing of 'biased, inaccurate documentaries' as an example.

Students' limited exposure to e-learning

When students were asked, in their discipline groups, to design a module, both the Philosophy and the TRS groups suggested multiple media content for the seminar and lecture materials—'film, music, literature, art …' were recommended by one group—but neither group recommended any form of technologically-enhanced learning. Their notes also revealed that their experience of e-learning had been thin and unfruitful.

However, discussions did reveal some examples of the students supplementing their teaching with online resources. One student claimed: 'there's a lot of philosophy on youtube, some of it's crap, but

the BBC's made quite a lot of philosophy programmes, Brian McGhee did lots of interviews...Peter Singer'. 'Philosophy Bites'[2] was also recommended by one of the students, who said:

> If you ever read something and you can't understand it, go to 'Philosophy Bites' have a look there, and then when you hear somebody talking about it, it's so much easier than reading all that dense prose, and that's a great way to untangle…

Notwithstanding these examples, it was not evident that the students had experienced sustained and substantive engagement with e-learning. This is somewhat surprising, given the range of different institutions they represented.

Students' understandings of the processes of learning and teaching

We devoted a session to exploring the extent to which the students understood the nature of the processes that are embedded in programmes of study, the application of assessment criteria to course outcomes, and the overall shape of the education they are receiving in higher education.

The students were asked to design a module on a topic of interest to their subject-specific groups, paying special attention to the processes that underpin the module and how students studying it are expected to learn. This is based on a technique used by the session facilitator to encourage new staff to focus on the philosophical content of educational processes. Many of the students appreciated the insight into how modules are designed and structured.

In terms of outcomes both groups stressed the development of analytical and evaluative skills. Interestingly the Philosophy group stressed the need to be able to apply the learning from the course and to develop the ability to 'identify issues and ethical dilemmas in the world today' while the TRS group's module focused on skills used in an 'academic setting'.

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[2] 'Philosophy Bites' (**http://www.nigelwarburton.typepad.com/philosophy_bites/**) bills itself as follows: 'podcasts of top philosophers interviewed on bite-sized topics'.

It could be concluded that while the students sought 'relevant' and engaged material in courses they preferred those materials that were concrete over the abstract, and that they were not exploratory in the delivery and assessment of modules. This suggests that their own experiences of teaching that has moved beyond the lecture and seminar format is very limited, so that it is regarded as 'out of the ordinary' when encountered. From this one could infer that tutors themselves are unclear on the pedagogical advantages that can be gained from other teaching techniques. And while it is tempting to think that simply making examples and content 'concrete' will address recruitment and retention issues, this would be to do the students a disservice since they themselves recognise the importance of abstract analytical skills as the outcomes of learning.

Both groups did, however, set out intended outcomes, means of delivery and assessment criteria for their courses, although these tended to be of a traditional form 'lecture and seminars … optional one-to-one tutor support … reading lists' with '50% split between exams and end of module assessment; with presentations in seminars' for example. Discussion revealed that in some cases their experiences had been more diverse than the resulting design, suggesting that more innovative forms of delivery and assessment are seen as divergent from an accepted core model.

The students' scepticism of non-traditional learning and teaching methods was emphatically expressed during their discussions of group work (in a different session). The students had had very unsatisfactory experiences of group working and generally found group work, especially group presentations, problematic. One said:

> In presentations, you're too reliant on the other members of the group, so if people don't pull their weight, in a group presentation…you can slave away.

Suggestions from the facilitator that this situation reflects that which they will face as employees, and therefore that group work helps prepare them for life after graduation, drew mixed responses.

Students' active approach to reading academic texts

When questioned about their approaches to reading texts, both the Philosophy and TRS students appreciated that texts opened other conceptual doors and that reading could be a core activity in the development of analytical and critical skills. The Philosophy students noted that one of the purposes of academic reading is to 'stimulate [your] own critical thought—critical thought is useful at [an] academic level to establish [the] process of arguments'. The TRS students related this to other factors in learning, saying that reading 'enable[d] continual motivation...throughout reading, [you should] ask questions of the text so you are able to challenge ideas and arguments'.

The development of an active engagement with texts and the acquisition of critical skills were addressed directly by all the students. This suggests that some aspects of active learning are embedded, at least in theory, in academic practice for Philosophy and TRS. This is supported by analysis of individuals' notes from this session. There was little indication that students regarded texts simply as authoritative repositories of knowledge when encountered in their learning.

On the other hand, neither discipline group raised questions about the reliability of texts, either electronic or in hard copy, and neither discussed how judgements about the quality of texts should be made. This suggests that critical and analytic skills are being encouraged but that there is space to look again at this critical judgement aspect of the learning experience. A social constructivist reading of pedagogy may downplay this kind of concern as tending to encourage 'elitism', but without a sense of quality in reading students will be unable to successfully navigate through ongoing debates in contemporary research and reach higher levels of engagement within the humanities.

Students' engagement with their own learning processes

When students were asked to take part in activities designed to tease out their understandings of the link between their disciplines and education, the differences between the two disciplines, Philosophy and TRS, were more marked than in other sessions. The Philosophy group focused on the role that philosophy can play in conceptually unpacking

education, voicing a series of questions: 'What is the purpose of education? Empowering? Controlling? Both? Neither? … What are we learning? Different types of knowledge? What is knowledge? … Who teaches? Who learns? Who benefits? … What ought to be taught?' The notes from the session support the view that it was not difficult for the Philosophy group to associate education with their subject in terms of the epistemological, ethical and political issues it raises. They also asked about the methods of teaching, suggesting a 'holistic' approach as the best strategy. The question of whether any forms of assessment could ever be appropriate in 'quantifying "learning"' was a radical point reached at the end of their reflections. However, there was no attempt to read back from educational practice into the nature of philosophy. This indicated that the next step in developing good judgement and insight about the nature of learning itself had not been reached by the group; and that there is room for further development in this area in making the curriculum transparent in its pedagogic operation.

The TRS group presented wider person- and society-oriented issues that connected their educational experience to their subject. They specifically raised the prospect that 'theology as a degree influences its cultural environment' in a multi-faith society, and that study of religion could lead to 'an increased understanding of other cultures/faiths—develops and fosters tolerance'. It should be noted that no-one suggested the opposite (possible) effect where knowledge leads to greater intolerance through the highlighting of unacceptable beliefs and practices. The TRS group also stated that 'one's own spirituality' increases in contact with other faiths through the study of religion, but they noted that TRS could be used to 'back up atheism' as part of a critical evaluation of religion. The connections to education per se seemed harder to make for the TRS group. However, it could be suggested that they only lacked the same application of their own learning experience back to their discipline that the Philosophy students missed.

On the whole the students accepted in principle the need for critical engagement with their own learning processes and activity. They saw the need to move beyond passive acceptance of ideas and texts and to challenge their milieu if they are to advance in understanding and skills. However, in drilling down to their chosen disciplines, there were obvious critical gaps in the connections to be made from the

specific encounter with the subject to their learning experience. It was not through lack of appreciation of conceptually nuanced questions about the place of the subjects in relation to education, but, it could be suggested, through a failure of curricula to make explicit what is gained by the courses undertaken and, crucially, how this is a product of both the discipline, the nature of education and the wider context of both in the education system of higher education in the UK.

Concerns about workload

Students reported that unbalanced and excessive workloads had contributed to their worst learning experiences. They tended to have one heavy semester and one light semester each year, but would prefer work to be spread more evenly. The students were also concerned about their tutors'—as they saw it, unreasonable—expectations of what they could achieve within particular timeframes, and a number felt stressed as a result of their studies. One of the Philosophy students said:

> it does feel like we're cramming a massive amount of content into a relatively short time…So much reading, and I haven't got the time or the brain space to deal with it all.

Diversity in assessment methods

Students were given an opportunity during the focus groups to reflect on their experiences of assessment. They welcomed the opportunity to do so, and to hear about assessment methods used in other institutions.

The results of the assessment session provide further evidence that students are traditional in their learning, teaching and assessment preferences. Their opinions are, however, noticeably less traditional when they are asked to express them individually rather than in groups.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most common methods of assessment the students had experienced were essays and examinations, but at least some of them had experienced assessment by presentation (individual and group); on the basis of attendance and participation in classes; via other forms of written coursework (dissertations, reading or text summaries) or exams (logic tests); and, in one case, by means of dramatic

performance.

The group also discussed which of these assessment methods were summative (counted towards their final degree classification). In this context students found a much greater reliance on traditional methods of assessment, namely essays and exams; and, in the majority of cases, 50-100% of summative assessment was conducted via examination, with the remainder being undertaken via coursework essays. A notable exception was presented by one joint honours student, whose degree programme was assessed entirely via coursework, comprising 95% essays and 5% dramatic performance.

It was interesting to note that, whilst several students expressed individual preferences for more diverse and innovative assessment methods—for example, favouring less emphasis on exams in favour of more oral assessment such as presentations and performances, and/or a greater variety of written coursework assignments—when asked to negotiate their 'ideal' assessment schemes in discipline groups, what they produced was, by their own admission, more traditional:

- Philosophy students voted for 50% examination and 50% coursework essays, with the caveat that this should be complemented by increased opportunities to practise writing skills and gain feedback (i.e. additional coursework essays for formative assessment only).
- TRS students opted for 45% examination, 45% coursework essays (two), and 10% individual presentation. (Group presentation assignments were widely unpopular, due to perceived risks that not all group members contribute equally.)[3]

It could be useful to explore further whether the move witnessed here, towards a more conservative approach when negotiating a group decision on assessment methods, is an inevitable or desirable outcome. Given the students' individual preferences for innovative assessment, it may be that they perceive it to be easier to do well in traditional forms of assessment than in more innovative forms, and thus regard the former as the 'safe option', although the latter may in the end provide

[3] There is a growing literature on assessing student group-work effectively and fairly—see for example:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment/Group.

them with skills which better prepare them for life outside academia. There is a wider question at the root of this, that of what the students think a degree, and education in general, is for.

Diversity in feedback

The group briefly discussed their experiences of receiving feedback on their work. These varied from 'just a grade' with no qualitative feedback on an assignment, to up to two pages of written comments or one-to-one feedback sessions with their tutor. Some students had the opportunity to obtain formative feedback on essay drafts.

Students expressed dissatisfaction with the level of guidance available regarding assessment criteria—not all students had received information about the criteria against which their work was assessed; and in some cases, it was felt that the criteria available were not sufficiently discipline-specific to be of genuine use. There was also a degree of scepticism about marking practice, insofar as students felt that many staff did not make use of the full spectrum of marks available.

Issues Affecting Students After Higher Education

The relationship between degree choice and employment prospects

Students appreciated the opportunity to think about what they would do after their degree. In many cases, they did not have a specific career path in mind, although some were working towards particular goals (teaching; further studies); and it should also be noted that some were clear about directions they did not want to take; for example, one of the TRS students declared that s/he would not seek to work in 'something holy'. After some discussion, other possible career paths suggested by students included law; the armed forces; the national health service (perhaps working in policy); and self-employment—setting up your own business.[4]

[4] For more information on self-employability in TRS see the report from a project

When asked how their choice of degree subject related to their career ambitions, members of both the TRS and Philosophy groups identified a tension. They said that part of the reason they had chosen their degree subjects had been simply that they enjoyed studying them, but that they were aware that their choices would not lead them to a particular job. The Philosophy group identified the following reasons for their choice of degree: love of ideas and intellectual challenges, also referred to as 'a romantic attraction to intellectual pursuits'; a desire to avoid over-prescriptive degree courses; a desire to do a degree which gives them the freedom not to have to give the 'right answer'; and a desire to improve their analytical and problem-solving skills. Both the Philosophy and the TRS students felt that their prioritisation of interest in their subject over pragmatic considerations had impelled them towards non-vocational degrees. Some commented that there is 'not much you can do with these degrees' (TRS group) and that 'few of us are going to end up as professional philosophers, are we?' (Philosophy group)

Not all of the students regarded non-vocational degrees as problematic, however. Most of the Philosophy students had no clear idea what sort of work they wanted to do after university, but they said that one of the reasons they had chosen a degree in Philosophy, beyond having an interest in the subject, was because it would help them to develop a range of transferable skills, which would give them the freedom to choose from a range of careers: 'The great thing about philosophy…it's like any arts subject, you can do anything with it...'.

A minority of the students had not experienced any such tensions between degree choice and employment prospects. A couple from the TRS group said that they had specifically chosen to do TRS with a view becoming qualified to do a particular job, including teaching.

Difficulty in articulating subject-specific skills

When asked to think about the skills they were acquiring as a result of their degree studies, the students compiled the following list:

conducted by Jan Sumner for the Subject Centre:
http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsdocuments/421

- Clarity of thought
- Logical approach
- Problem solving
- 'Thinking outside the box'
- Critical thinking
- Articulate arguing
- Written and verbal communication skills
- Coherent public speaking
- Persuasive speech
- Negotiating
- Tolerance—degree specific: understanding of cultural diversity
- Team work skills
- Research skills
- Organisational skills
- Planning skills
- Ability to work to deadlines
- Ability to work objectively
- Persistence in achieving goals

The students took part in mock interviews designed to tease out their understanding of the skills they are acquiring. They gave the following responses:

What benefits do you feel your degree has left you with? What skills have you gained from it?

> (Phil student): in the course of the research as a student I developed clear thinking, critical thinking skills, problem solving, being applied to a target, training in logical thinking…I think that my work experience and my degree has trained me to pick out relevant information, assess a problem or a question and pick out the information that's actually relevant to that, and working with people, developing respect and tolerance for other people, with working, that would help in this job.

What sort of skills do you think you've brought, uniquely, from your degree, that you could use in a job?

> [TRS student] … the ability to be able to read through information at vast speeds and actually comprehend the information, because we get an awful lot of information when we're studying for religious studies, we're able to actually comprehend what we're actually reading, and that's one enormously effective skill to bring to the work. Apart from that, generally, the ability to get along with other people and work professionally and to deadlines.

… is there anything that you think is distinctive about what you've learned from studying theology and religious studies that graduates from other disciplines wouldn't bring to the job, that you could offer that would be unique?

> [TRS student] Because we do tend to talk to a lot of different people of various religions and cultures, that actually does help us to become tolerant to everyone (words inaudible) and I think that those that unfortunately are not studying those kinds of subjects, such as those Jewish, Islamic, unfortunately they don't bring those things because they're not used to being together with other people from other faiths.

Evidently, the students tended to focus on generic transferable skills, finding it more difficult to identify and articulate relevant capabilities and experience that were specific to their subject of study. They were very enthusiastic about the Subject Centre's student employability guides: *Where Next? Unlocking the Potential of your [Philosophy / Theology and Religious Studies] Degree*,[5] which were distributed after the interviews. The students felt that these were a valuable resource which would assist them in articulating the distinctive benefits of their disciplinary studies. They were very keen to have help with their career planning, with most seeming to have done very little work on this prior to our session.

[5] **http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/emp_guides.html**.

Concluding Reflections

To conclude this report, it will be useful to focus on one key point which emerges from these findings: that PRS undergraduates are, in many ways, more traditional in their educational outlook than we might think. In their attitudes to module choice (both in terms of range of choice and the content of modules on offer), and to teaching and assessment methods, they show a marked preference for the tried and tested over the innovative.

It is sometimes assumed that students clamour to study 'hot topics'—provocative and controversial subjects which are guaranteed to polarise opinion and ignite lively debates in the classroom—when they come to university to do PRS degrees. Our findings urge caution when approaching such a conclusion; that studying sexual ethics, for instance, is of little interest to our students may provide food for thought for those in the business of curriculum design.

It is also simplistic to assume that giving students a wide range of modules from which to choose empowers them. Students can feel overwhelmed by the extensive choice of modules on offer; sometimes, too much choice can be a bad thing. The effect of presenting students who have come straight from school, and who have no real experience of independent learning, with a baffling number of modules to choose from, is likely to have a negative effect on progression and retention.

In terms of teaching, students are sceptical about creative methods and are particularly wary of group work. Those we interviewed had had relatively limited engagement with e-learning, given advances in this field in PRS. Students feel more comfortable with lectures and seminars. Their traditionalism is even more manifest when it comes to assessment, with students preferring essays and exams to more experimental forms (although this tendency was less marked when the students we spoke to were questioned individually rather than in groups).

There are many reasons why students are suspicious of innovative forms of learning, teaching and assessment. It may simply be that they have had little experience of them. But it may be that where they have experienced innovation, their experience has led them to question its value and to crave the security of more traditional pedagogical

approaches. In this case, it is possible that the innovation in question was inappropriate for the context in which it was applied, or that it was set up and/or facilitated poorly. It is also conceivable that sceptical attitudes towards divergence from the conventional model of lectures and seminars, essays and exams, on the part of tutors could filter through to students, who are greatly influenced by their tutors' dispositions regarding such things.

The intensification of students' traditionalism when assessment is the topic of discussion suggests that students are preoccupied with doing whatever they need to do in order to pass. They seem to feel that experimental and exploratory learning and assessment are luxuries they cannot afford, risks they do not want to take; they are perceived as something 'wacky' which will distract them from their path to academic success. Traditional forms of assessment are a 'safe' option because they are thought to be easier to do well in. Students do not seem to have considered the possibility that there is a relationship between their preference for traditional methods of learning and assessment and their inability to articulate the subject-specific skills they are acquiring as PRS students.

The picture which emerged from the focus groups was that of an enthusiastic cohort of students, who are keen to succeed academically and professionally, but who are not at all confident that creative forms of learning and assessment can help them towards these goals. These students are under pressure to conform to a particular definition of academic success, and this limits the extent to which they are willing to engage with newer pedagogies.

It is little surprise, then, that these students look for stability and hope to find it in adequate module descriptions, well-structured modules with clear goals, and in well-managed classrooms. The detrimental effects of poor classroom management on their learning was a recurring theme in the focus group discussions. Students also lack confidence when it comes to career planning, and they are very keen to have help with this. The students we interviewed seemed to have had very little guidance from tutors in this regard. However, they admitted that they are reluctant to ask their tutors for assistance—with career planning and with study in general—for fear that they may be perceived to be struggling to get to grips with independent learning. Better student-tutor communication could go some way towards resolving

this problem. If tutors make it known that they are available to assist students and that they are sensitive to problems related to progression and transition, students are more likely to feel comfortable asking for help.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to emerge from these groups is that it is time for a period of sustained, critical reflection on what creativity and innovation means in our disciplines. What does creativity/innovation look like in the classroom? Why are creative/innovative approaches to learning and teaching worthwhile? How does creativity/innovation help students learn? What are the challenges of creative/innovative learning and teaching, and how can we confront them? How does creativity/innovation enhance student employability? And, perhaps most crucially, how can we ensure that creative/innovative methods of learning are assessed appropriately, with fairness and with rigour? It strikes us that encouraging such a discussion may go some way to addressing the suspicions of both students and staff in our disciplines that 'creative' is a euphemism for 'wacky'.

Tandem Learning and Interfaith Dialogue

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Context

In November 2006, the University of Sheffield launched the Sheffield Graduate Award, first as a pilot for final year students and as of October 2007 for all students, undergraduate and postgraduate. The purpose of the Award is 'to recognize and reward the variety and experience of students' extra curricula activities and to enable students to monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development' (Lamb 2007, 2). The award thus seeks to bring an extra dimension to the qualifications of students by encouraging activities that take place outside their actual degree courses, which can provide valuable skills and experience and

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enrich personal development.[1]

The award covers six broad areas, which are as follows: Enterprise, Student Jobs and Work Experience, Volunteering, Cultural and Social Awareness, Extending International Horizons, and Activities Supporting the Institution. The Interfaith Tandem Learning Project, IDENTITY, was conceived of as part of the Cultural and Social Awareness area. It is funded by the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies of the Higher Education Academy and executed through the Multifaith Chaplaincy Service at the University of Sheffield.

The project began late in 2007 and set out six key objectives (Lamb 2007, 2-3): (1) to research current trends in Tandem Learning, and current good practice in interfaith dialogue, with a view to reviewing potential options for development; (2) to develop appropriate learning resources in the light of the review (including appropriate guidelines for interfaith engagement); (3) to develop an appropriate method of assessment as part of the Sheffield Graduate Award, as well as an appropriate form of feedback for the purposes of the project; (4) to carry out a trial of the learning resources; (5) to review feedback from the trial and (6) to disseminate the learning resources to the wider Philosophy and Religious Studies community, as well as HE Chaplaincy.

A project board was established in October 2007 consisting of Christian, Jewish and Muslim chaplaincy advisors/chaplains, the President of the Students Union, and the Head of the Biblical Studies department to act as a consultant. In December 2007 two postgraduate research assistants were contracted to work on the project.

What follows is a report of the research and development of the interfaith tandem learning project at the University of Sheffield. We first discuss tandem learning and interfaith dialogue in general terms, followed by an exegesis of our appropriation of the two. We then comment on the theoretical underpinnings of the project we have been developing and its curriculum. The paper then relays the findings of a trial of the course curriculum and a consultation with staff from the University of Sheffield Modern Languages Teaching Centre. In the

[1] **http://www.shef.ac.uk/thesheffieldgraduateaward/**, retrieved 05 May 2008, 12.21pm.

final section we present a revised up-to-date version of the programme curriculum.

Language Learning in Tandem

Language learning in tandem as a pedagogical approach within Universities has been developing over the last fifteen years or so, the stimulus for which was 'the awareness that the internet had demolished the barriers constituted by geographical distance and was making possible forms of partnership-based learning hitherto only feasible when one set of learners was able—or obliged—to travel to the homeland of the other.' (Lewis 2003, 13) Since its conception, tandem language learning has gained substantial popularity and is now practiced within several universities in Britain and around the world.

Brammerts suggests that learning a language is in tandem when 'two people with different mother tongues work together in order to learn from each other.' (Brammerts 2003, 28) In doing so he claims 'both set out: to improve their communicative ability in their partner's mother tongue; to get to know their partner better and learn about his or her cultural background, and to benefit from their partner's knowledge and experience, e.g. in the areas of work, education and leisure.' (Ibid., 28-29)

Tandem learning activities, therefore, comprise dialogue between native speakers of different languages either in person, via email, over the internet, on the phone and so on. As a result, partners develop 'their linguistic skills not only by making both languages the *medium* of their communication (learning from models supplied by their partner, practising what has been learnt, etc.), but also the *topic* of their communication (in the form of corrections, explanations of linguistic features, etc.).' [emphasis original] (Ibid., 29)

In creating an environment whereby partners learn, support and seek guidance and help from one another, tandem learning functions according to two basic principles, namely reciprocity and autonomy. Partners in a tandem partnership act on the one hand as teacher, offering guidance on their own language and culture, and on the other as pupil, seeking to improve their foreign-language linguistic ability through communication with their native-speaking partner. This

'mutual interdependence between two partners demands equal commitment in such a way that both benefit as much as possible from their working together,' (Ibid., 29); hence the reciprocity inherent in tandem learning. Meanwhile, autonomy exists as '[E]ach of the two partners is responsible for their own learning. Each decides what they want to learn how and when, and what sort of help is required from their partner.' [emphasis original] (Ibid., 29)

Project Development

In the initial stages of our project development, we looked at different forms of interfaith dialogue current in the UK. Our research showed that dialogue activities are concentrated around three main modes:

1) people of different faiths taking action for common causes, like world peace or the environment[2]
2) forms which are more theological or explicitly religious in orientation[3]
3) and most recently, activities funded by the UK government,[4] which have enabled many communal and regional interfaith bodies to carry out interfaith dialogue projects that centre on capacity building for communities with a view to promote social cohesion.[5]

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[2] An example is the World Conference on Religion and Peace. (Weller 2001:82) Cf. also **http://www.wcrp.org/** (Accessed November 17, 2008). There are many such initiatives. For a more comprehensive list of those who are active in the UK, refer to Weller (2001:79-109).

[3] A good example of a more theologically oriented project is the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths in Cambridge (**www.woolfinstitute.cam.ac.uk**). See also Kessler (2006).

[4] This funding for interfaith dialogue initiatives is part of a funding scheme generally concerned with community development. See Ladds (2006) and Munn (2006). See also **http://www.gos.gov.uk/gose/news/newsarchive/397781/** and **http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/news/news_releases/071212_community.aspx**.

[5] 'Capacity' refers to faith communities' ability to participate in civic and public life; 'Capacity building' thus aims to provide them with resources and skills that are needed for such participation. It is also concerned with 'trust and understanding between different faith groups'. (Munn 2006:37) See also Ladd (2006:29).

There are many local interfaith initiatives that leave little trace in writing and are thus not easily researchable. However, much of the interfaith dialogue activity that we were able to research is not directly about religion, but about people of faith working together, or those which address communities or representatives of communities rather than individuals as religious believers.

The potential of tandem learning, we felt, lies in its potential to facilitate a personal interfaith dialogue that addresses the individual, as a member of a religious community, but not as a representative of that community. A careful appropriation of the tandem learning principles to the situation of interfaith dialogue could provide a semi-structured framework that would guide participants to engage in conversation about religious topics, and at the same time leave them enough space to bring their own interests and their own personal faith as a lived day-to-day experience to the table. The appropriation of tandem learning to interfaith activity is thus centred around the two basic principles of tandem language learning: autonomy and reciprocity. Meanwhile we draw explicitly on the element of cultural insight through personal contact which is inherent in tandem exchanges.

Autonomy in interfaith tandem learning

Autonomy is an essential element of tandem language learning. It ensures that tandem exchanges are authentic and relevant to each partner. It also allows each learner to manage their own learning goals and outcomes, ensuring that they benefit from the experience as much as possible.

Autonomy is also an essential aspect of an interfaith tandem experience. Providing tandem partners with freedom to discuss their beliefs and practices openly allows for authentic and meaningful conversation. This genuineness and relevance makes for a deep, personal and challenging interfaith experience. It promotes a real appreciation of the other's faith, whilst allowing partners to express themselves and their own experiences in a way which is truly significant.

Autonomous learning in interfaith dialogue, which encourages each learner to establish and assess their own learning goals and outcomes, moreover, guarantees that they discuss topics of interest and importance to them, again making the experience more consequential.

Reciprocity in interfaith tandem learning

Reciprocity in tandem language learning is the principle that each partner benefits from the experience equally. In tandem language learning, this is realised by each partner being given equal time to talk in their own language and the language of their partner, and to attend to their individual learning goals.

This principle is of course also essential in interfaith dialogue. Partners sharing their knowledge and experiences equally promotes tolerance, respect and empathy and ensures each achieves their learning goals.

In interfaith dialogue, the idea of reciprocity also has two more significant dimensions. First, by encouraging each learner to discuss their faith, not only do they acquire knowledge of their partner's religion but they are also forced to express their own faith in terms which their partner can understand. In other words, the tandem process promotes the formulation of religious identity through introspection and the negotiation of faith through conversation with the religious-other. Secondly, facilitating reciprocity and the equal share of 'talk-time' decreases the likelihood of unhelpful dominance by one partner, counteracting the chance of proselytising or verbal bullying.

Cultural insight and living experience in interfaith tandem learning

One of the major benefits of face-to-face or virtual interactions with speakers of a foreign language as part of a tandem language learning scheme is the opportunity this provides for learners to not only acquire knowledge of a language, such as vocabulary and grammar, but an appreciation of how that language is used in real-life by a native speaker. This is often enhanced in tandem learning programmes by encouraging partners to discuss aspects of each other's culture, background and so on.[6]

In a similar vain, the potential for tandem learning in interfaith dialogue is for each partner to learn about each other's religion, not as

[6] The Tandem Learning modules offered by the Modern Languages Teaching Centre at the University of Sheffield are a good example of this. For more information see **http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/mltc/courses**.

a set of abstract propositions, as in a textbook, but as a lived experience. Partners are able to acquire knowledge of each other's religion, such as tenets, beliefs and practices, and they are able to understand how these are put into practice and expressed by a real-life adherent. We envisage that the chance to meet and converse with someone of another faith face-to-face in private will add to the appeal for potential participants to take part in the programme.

Following this appropriation of tandem learning to interfaith dialogue, we conceive that, in theory, a tandem interfaith programme will follow a three-fold framework, promoting a) the acquisition of knowledge, while offering b) the opportunity for authentic understanding and c) personal self-reflection. We believe that it is this move from knowledge to understanding to self-reflection, which sets interfaith tandem learning apart from other forms of interfaith activity described above:

Knowledge

Participants will gain a knowledge of the practices, beliefs and tenets of their partner's religion as a result of dialogue. This is on the level of interfaith activities which seek to provide participants with knowledge in the hope that this will encourage respect and tolerance.

Understanding

Participants will gain an appreciation and understanding of the religious-other through the authentic interaction with their tandem partner's faith as a real-life lived authentic experience. At this stage, knowledge becomes operational; can be applied to predict, forsee and gauge the consequences of circumstances and actions. This is on the level of interfaith activities which encourage social cohesion and conflict resolution.

Self-reflection

Participants will engage in a process of self-reflection and identity construction through the formulation of their faith for the purpose of conversation, and through negotiating their identity through communication with the religious-other. It is the potential for this process of self-reflection which distinguishes tandem learning from many interfaith activities which lack the personal and challenging nature of a tandem

experience. It is because of the potential for tandem learning to challenge the individual's understanding of their own religious identity, that the tandem interfaith programme at the Multifaith Chaplaincy Service of the University of Sheffield is entitled 'Identity'.

The Original Curriculum

After several months of initial groundwork and preliminary research, the authors of this paper set out to develop a curriculum for a programme of interfaith tandem learning which could be employed by the Multifaith Chaplaincy Service at the University of Sheffield.

The curriculum was set out over five sessions with each session encouraging tandem pairings to discuss increasingly abstract and difficult topics, moving from the more general to the more personal, for which task sheets and some learning resources were to be provided. Moreover each session was to consist of three parts: a group meeting, a tandem task and journal questions. The curriculum was designed in this way so as to, as far as possible, promote the progression for participants from knowledge, to understanding, to a negotiation of identity, as described above.

The group meetings would serve to bring the group together and thus keep everybody 'on track'. However, more significantly, they would provide students with knowledge which would then, in the tandem tasks, go on to apply to a specific topic. Group meetings could make knowledge available through group discussions, presentations, lectures, reading texts, watching videos and so on.

After the group meetings, students meet with their tandem partner at their leisure within a set time frame and in a place they choose to do a tandem task. In the tandem meetings students are to find out how issues introduced in the group meetings play out in their tandem partner's religious life. Along the way they are free to explore any of the specificities of the general topic and beyond and they may take the discussion in whatever direction they are interested in. The intention is that participants will experience, as far as possible, the real-life manifestation of religion in the other. This encourages an authentic and meaningful understanding of another's religion in a way that engaging with a textbook or abstract propositions could not provide.

As a guideline for the tandem discussion, students are provided with a task sheet. These include suggestions of aims, objectives, questions to consider and a task which would act as a trigger for discussion between partners. These task sheets are designed to serve as guidelines only and students are encouraged to pursue their own interests in conjunction with their tandem partner, and as such may choose to follow the task sheets completely, or indeed not at all.

After the tandem task has been completed, the journal questions are answered. This will take place individually by each student. The first question of each session is designed such that it leads the students to reflect on what they have learned from the tandem discussion with their partner. This is to ensure that participants do the tandem tasks, while encouraging them to situate themselves in relation to their tandem experience. The second question does not relate directly to the tandem task and is meant to encourage further self-reflection.

Just as the structure of each session promotes the move from knowledge, to understanding, to self-reflection, so too does the progression from session to session, by encouraging tandem partners to discuss increasingly difficult and personal topics. The idea is that as partners become more and more comfortable sharing their thoughts and beliefs with each other as time goes on, they will be able to discuss ever more testing subjects, which would lead individuals to reflect upon, challenge, understand and express their faith more explicitly.

Apart from session 1 and session 5, which are reserved for an introductory exercise and a concluding exercise, respectively, the other three sessions provide participants with three topics from which they, in collaboration with their tandem partners, are required to address one. The topics for each session are deemed to present an equal challenge to participants. Learning resources and task sheets are to be provided for all topics. This freedom of choice granted to the students ensures that the autonomy aspect of tandem learning is preserved. Tandem partners are able to deal with topics which are of interest to them, thus allowing for a more meaningful and authentic experience.

The Trial

In April 2008, following the construction of an initial programme cur-

riculum, the authors of this paper ran a trial of *the methodology of tandem learning in interfaith dialogue*.[7] We have added italics here to stress that while the trial sought to gauge student response to the programme curriculum as a whole, its primary purpose was to test whether or not tandem learning worked as a pedagogical tool in student interfaith dialogue.

Consequently the trial consisted of an introductory session to introduce the programme to potential trialists, followed by the exercise designed to take place as the tandem task in session 1 of the curriculum and finally focus group sessions and questionnaires to attain feedback.

The introductory session involved a short presentation about tandem learning and the interfaith programme. Attendants were told that their participation in the trial was part of its research and development process and all were asked to sign a declaration of participation. Following a brief exercise designed to facilitate introductions between participants, they were asked to partner-up according to the religions they were interested in learning about. They were then told to carry out the tandem task in the subsequent two weeks, after which they would be invited to give feedback on their experience.

Participants were also asked to give feedback after the introductory session. 74% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they were enthused by the concept of tandem learning, with one respondent suggesting 'I think tandem learning will be interesting, as it will allow us to explore interfaith issues at a personal level, whereas such discussions I have been involved in in the past have been far more formal and group-structured.' This feedback reflected our theory that participants would be excited by the idea of tandem learning in interfaith dialogue as it provides them with the opportunity to discuss faith in a unique way, particularly as a lived experience rather than a set of

[7] Respondents for the trial included 30 attendant at the introductory session and representatives from 33% of the tandem pairings attendant at the follow-up focus groups. The relatively small sample was a result of the unfavourable period within which we had to carry out the trial, with it being around exam time. While the evidence drawn from this sample cannot be viewed as conclusive, the data does strongly suggest trends highlighted within this article. All respondents were full-time undergraduate students at the University of Sheffield. The following faith communities were represented in the trial: Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Pagan.

abstract propositions.

After two weeks, participants were asked to attend focus group sessions at the University of Sheffield Multifaith Chaplaincy Service. As mentioned above, the aim of the focus groups was mainly to find out from the students whether or not the methodology of tandem learning in interfaith dialogue worked. Our expectation was that tandem learning in interfaith dialogue would function to:

- Facilitate a move from knowledge to understanding to self-reflection.
- Result in cohesion, empathy and respect, in line with the majority of interfaith activities, whilst also allowing for the added dimension of real, authentic introspection and identity construction.
- Provide partners with the chance to experience religion as a lived reality, not just as a set of statements.
- Enable participants to learn about their partners, but also to learn about themselves.
- Enable participants to achieve learning goals which they have set for themselves.
- Be fun, unique, interesting and different.
- Develop meaningful relationships with the religious-other.

The feedback we received from questionnaires and focus groups resoundingly vindicated our theoretical underpinnings for appropriating tandem learning to interfaith dialogue.

As highlighted above, our primary concern was that tandem learning should provide students with the opportunity to gain knowledge (by learning from their partners about the tenets and practices of their religion), understanding (by experiencing what being an adherent of that religion is like through personal contact and conversation) and initiate a process of self-reflection (by reflecting upon their faith in relation to their tandem experience). The consensus among our respondents indeed suggested that tandem learning not only allowed them to gain a basic knowledge of their partner's religion, it allowed them to understand how their partner saw the world and practiced their religion. Significantly, feedback also showed that participants began to think about their own religion and beliefs as a result of their conversation with the religious-other.

When asked if they had gained a better understanding of a) their

partner's religious doctrines and teachings and b) their partner's faith as a lived experience, 50% responded positively to a) while 75% responded positively to b). Respondents suggested that they already knew most of the information their partner's provided about their religion's doctrines and tenets, though they claimed with more time and other topics to discuss they would learn a lot more. Trialists did advocate strongly, however, that one of the significant benefits of tandem learning was that they gained an understanding of their partner's religion as a lived experience. One participant suggested:

> It does feel like I learned more from a couple of hours with a Buddhist than I would have learned from two RE lessons at school on Buddhism. It's a lot less dry, there is a lot more reality to it when you are sat opposite someone, to whom this is their life and it is them we are talking about. It's not just some hypothetical person of that faith.

Although time restricted our ability to extend the trial to more than one session or to have the participants answer journal questions, the process of self-reflection, which we highlighted as one of the unique consequences of tandem learning, was nevertheless raised in the feedback:

> The fact that you are articulating your faith into words you are forced to have something to put in there. There was an element while I was talking of putting words to stuff that I perhaps wouldn't normally put words to, because someone has asked about it and you have to explain it.

Another major advantage with tandem learning, as became apparent from the feedback, was its novelty, informality and enjoyability in comparison to other forms of interfaith dialogue. 100% of respondents said they had enjoyed the experience. Meanwhile one trialist said:

> To be honest when I first heard about it I was sceptical...and [thought] it's never going to work like these things never do. But I really enjoyed it. I thought it was completely different to any interfaith thing I have experienced before, it was good.

Others suggested:

> I can ask the kind of questions I wouldn't be able to ask a priest or someone, because I would expect them to give me a textbook answer, but because it was a person and their experience of it, it was interesting to see how they actually put it into practice rather than what I'm almost expecting to hear, and I don't think I would have got that other than by talking to someone about it, because you wouldn't get that from talking to a priest I don't think.

> It is informal, and you can generally have a conversation, and you can get genuine answers. You don't feel like you have to say the right thing.

Finally, the response to the trial showed that the autonomy of tandem learning, namely allowing partners to explore aspects of their religions as they wish, was of real benefit to a genuine and authentic interfaith experience. 50% suggested they were able to discuss things of interest, while 50% were indifferent, though the general consensus amongst the latter was that more tandem sessions would be necessary to achieve more meaningful discussion. Nevertheless, 75% reported they were successful in achieving their learning goals. Significantly, the freedom to discuss on their own terms allowed participants to learn, share and teach, and begin to generate authentic and meaningful relationships. One respondent suggested:

> It potentially builds you a friend in another faith, which is one of the most important things you can get out of it, that it can actually create links between faith communities so they don't become little isolated things. Even if someone knew about all the other faiths, but they didn't actually talk to each other then it doesn't mean a lot.

Issues Raised

While the trial tested the effectiveness of the tandem learning methodology in interfaith dialogue, Lesley Walker and Jane Woodin from the Modern Languages Teaching Centre (MLTC) at the University of Sheffield were invited to assess our curriculum and suggest improvements to our programme. The MLTC has played a significant role in

developing tandem language learning and as such we were extremely grateful for their input. Their involvement highlighted two major issues, namely a lack of autonomy in our programme vis-à-vis the problem of expertise in religion. In this section, we will relay their criticisms and suggestions, and in the next section we will describe how we have revised our curriculum in response.

It was always the intention that our tandem learning programme would have no explicit aims, such as promoting social cohesion or tolerance to others, but rather that by encouraging a move from knowledge to understanding to self-reflection, these ends may be achieved in turn. However, by designing the curriculum in such a way so as to facilitate this move as far as possible, the staff from the MLTC pointed out that we were restricting the extent to which learners were able to define and fulfil their own learning goals. In this regard they also expressed concerns about the group meetings, which we had envisioned to provide knowledge that participants might need for discussing the subject, thus ensuring some degree of objective quality of the discussion. The MLTC staff felt that by making these provisions we were again neglecting the autonomy in tandem learning, and not allowing our learners to achieve the learning outcomes they would hope for from their tandem experience.

In tandem language learning, partners are required to jointly define and deal with their own learning goals. As such, for instance, if an English speaking partner wished to improve their ability to use the past tense in French, then the French-speaking partner would spend time helping him/her to do so. This is the principle of autonomy which, as was cited above, is one of the necessary features of tandem learning.

Following on from this issue of autonomy, questions arose concerning the place of 'expertise' within the interfaith programme. Unlike in tandem language learning, where each native-speaker is naturally an expert in their own language, in tandem interfaith dialogue being an adherent of a particular religion does not necessarily guarantee one's expertise in regard to one's religion in the same way. Believers may indeed have significant gaps in their religious knowledge. Furthermore, religion and religious belief is inevitably to some degree subjective with individuals interpreting and committing to religious doctrine and tenets differently.

So, if we take the same example given above, the French-speaking partner will be able to expertly instruct and assess their partner's use of the past tense. However, correspondingly, if a Jewish student wished to learn more about the role of Mary in the Catholic faith, the opinion of their Catholic partner may be an interpretation which differs significantly to other Catholics, or they may not possess knowledge about Mary at all.

This problem raises questions such as what kind of knowledge, if any, partners are to expect to gain from each other? What is the value of tandem learning when neither partner is an expert? Couldn't some ideas be misleading? Of course, in tandem language learning, these issues, to a large extent, do not exist.

The issues of expertise lead on to a further concern, raised not only by staff from the MLTC but also by members of the project board, regarding the content and the practicality of the group sessions. Project board members suggested that apart from the problematic workload this would involve for students, providing 'knowledge' on various aspects of religion would be extremely difficult. Questions were posed regarding who would be qualified to provide this knowledge, how this knowledge would be relayed and what should be classed as 'knowledge' rather than personal interpretation.

Revised Curriculum

Having collected feedback and suggestions, the authors of this paper revised the original curriculum in order to respond to three main, and interrelated, difficulties, namely a lack of autonomy, the issue of expertise and problems with the group sessions.

In order to correct the perceived lack of autonomy three adjustments to the original curriculum were made. Firstly an initial introductory group session entitled 'setting objectives' was added at the start of the course to ensure participants, along with their tandem partner, are free to decide upon their own learning goals and objectives. This is more in-line with tandem language learning programmes, such as those at Sheffield MLTC, and ensures that the autonomy principle inherent in tandem learning is maintained.

Following on from this, rather than prescribe which tandem topics learners could cover each session, as was part of the original curriculum, the revised version invites participants to select five topics from an extensive list of options which they are requested to explore at their own discretion within a given time frame. They are advised that tandem partners should decide which topics they cover together, so as to fulfil their learning objectives. Task sheets and resources are provided for each topic. Participants are also free to cover topics not included in the list.

Finally, the journal aspect of the programme is expanded to include not only questions which are aimed to facilitate the process of self-reflection, but also questions designed to act as self-assessment to ensure that participants are fulfilling their learning goals. This allows them to keep track of what they have learnt and what they wish to cover in future tandem sessions. It also acts as a significant element of course assessment which is one of the requirements for it to be included in the Sheffield Graduate Award Scheme.

As suggested above, the issue of expertise in interfaith tandem learning, led to some discussion among those working on the project. The project board, along with the authors of this paper, have wrestled with this issue throughout the development of the tandem interfaith programme. We concluded, however, that the term 'expert' must have a different meaning in interfaith tandem learning than it does in tandem language learning.

The benefit of expertise in language learning is that it ensures both partners improve their linguistic aptitude, which is the major goal of the programme. However, in interfaith tandem learning, while the acquisition of knowledge about another's religion is important, the benefits of authentic, face-to-face communication with the religious-other, and the relationships which can develop as a result, are equally, if not more, important. As such, we would suggest that the term 'expert' in interfaith tandem learning refers to the expert knowledge which each individual learner has about their own individual religious life, beliefs and practices. It is this 'expertise' which ensures authentic and meaningful tandem experiences, which lead to understanding and self-reflection which, together with the acquisition of knowledge, represent the true benefit of tandem interfaith activities.

In the revised curriculum, all participants in the programme are

reminded from the outset that their partner is an expert only in their own religious beliefs, and that their interpretation of faith and the practices they follow may differ from those which are more commonly held within their religion. It is stressed that while their partner is of course a source of a great deal of knowledge, they are not qualified teachers, and if points need clarifying following a tandem session they should seek the advice of the Multifaith Chaplaincy Service Chaplains.

In turn, participants are also required to attend a group listening session, designed to help them develop the necessary listening skills to make the most of their interaction and conversation with their tandem partners. This involves acknowledging the value of encountering another religion as a lived experience, as relayed by their tandem partner, whilst respecting that their beliefs may differ from those more commonly held by members of their faith community.

Apart from the two group sessions cited above, plus another group session at the end of the programme entitled 'Final Session: feedback and reflection', which invites participants to share their views and experiences together, the group session element from the original curriculum has been disregarded in the revised version. We felt that because of the practical difficulties, alongside the potential ambiguity in content of the group sessions, it was prudent to remove them.

This will ensure that autonomy and the value of personal communication and interaction between tandem partners are stressed and allow participants to get the most out of the programme by defining and fulfilling their own learning outcomes.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

'Identity' as it stands is closely modelled after the language tandem learning programme of the MLTC at the University of Sheffield. This provides a well-tested way of ensuring autonomy for the participating students in regard to the content and strategies of their learning, while at the same time incorporating a process of accountability that is needed if some form of formal recognition is to be awarded upon the completion of the programme. For the participants in the 'Identity' programme, this recognition will be given within the framework of the Sheffield Graduate Award.

Given the emphasis on the learner's autonomy in tandem learning, it has been necessary to state the envisioned learning outcomes that a participation in 'Identity' is to yield in rather general terms. Still, the set-up of the interfaith situation as a personal encounter reasonably justifies the assumption that participants will be able to gain not just knowledge in the sense of factual information, but more significantly an understanding of what it means practically to be an adherent of their tandem partner's faith. In the same way it can be expected that self-reflection is to result from the attempt to explain one's religious identity and practices to another. It is the goal of both the devised curriculum and the learning materials to facilitate this progression in learning outcomes while also offering suggestions in regard to possible topics.

In our deliberations between the project board and the research assistants, authenticity emerged as a primary value we attributed to the tandem interfaith encounter. This authenticity has shown itself to be attractive to potential participants. The focus on individual practice and belief meant we had to wrestle with the issue of expertise, as not every practitioner of a faith is automatically an expert in its teachings. Yet, as we were primarily aiming for students to gain an understanding of how religious beliefs play out in the embodied experience of everyday life, we decided that accurate knowledge of doctrines was of secondary importance and could be obtained by students, where needed, by consulting encyclopaedic resources readily available to them through the university library and the Internet.

It is our hope that the Multifaith Chaplaincy Service at the University of Sheffield will employ the tandem learning curriculum developed over the last ten months and run the 'Identity' project in full in the current academic year.

This report acts as part of the dissemination which was stipulated as an objective at the outset of the research for 'Identity'. It is our intention that other information will become available in due course at **www.shef.ac.uk/ssd/chaplains/identity.html**, such as learning materials and resources, which can be used by the wider HE Chaplaincy community to engage students in their own interfaith tandem learning projects.

We believe that the potential for tandem learning in interfaith dialogue to promote a progression from knowledge to understanding to

self-reflection offers students a challenging, intellectually stimulating, fun and unique brand of interfaith activity, which lends itself to develop meaningful relationships with members of other faith communities and encourages a deep, personal and authentic interfaith experience.

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Appendix 1

An example Task Sheet: CHA 100.2. Feasting and Fasting

As a tandem pair discuss between you the significance of food within your respective traditions.

After this discussion, plan an 'interfaith' dinner between a number of people from each of your traditions.

Be sure to take into account seating arrangements, food, prayers, dietary requirements, etc.

Of course, if you would actually like to put this dinner plan into practice, by all means do so!

Aim

To discover the significance of food, including rituals associated with food, sharing meals and providing food for others.

Objectives

On your own and with your partner define your objectives for this tandem exercise. What do you want to learn?

Consider asking yourself:

- What is the significance of food within my religion?
- What does food symbolise?
- What rituals are associated with eating and meals?
- Is food sacred in my religion?
- Are there special occasions or festivals where food plays a particularly significant role?

Consider asking your tandem partner:

You may ask all or none of the suggestions above plus:

- What special dietary requirements exist within your religion? Why?
- When planning a meal, what requirements should be taken into account?
- Do you follow all of the rules and requirements regarding food within your religion?
- What difficulties do you encounter in day-to-day life (e.g. at uni) concerning food?

Things to reflect on together:

- What are our similarities? Why?
- Where do we differ? Why?

PRS 'Beyond Boundaries':
Exploring Philosophical and Religious Studies Learning and Teaching in Non-PRS Departments

Andy Cochrane and Clare Saunders

Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies

Introduction

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that a great deal of the learning and teaching of philosophical and religious studies (henceforth 'PRS'—an umbrella term for the cluster of disciplines supported by the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, including philosophy; theology; religious studies; history and philosophy of science, technology and medicine) in higher education takes place outside of 'core' PRS departments—for instance, by means of specialist PRS courses which are an element of other degree programmes (e.g. ethics for medical students) or PRS components in interdisciplinary programmes (e.g. area studies). However, it

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is often difficult to find out more about such provision—for example, to what extent do such courses draw upon the resources of 'core' departments and programmes (and vice versa)? What (if any) are the distinctive challenges and opportunities of teaching 'PRS beyond boundaries', and how might these be addressed most effectively?

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies thus decided to undertake an exploratory survey of 'PRS beyond boundaries' in order to discover more about such provision, and to gain a more complete picture of the true size, nature and diversity of PRS learning and teaching in higher education.

The 'Beyond Boundaries' Project: Design and Methods

The following aims and objectives were established for this project:

- To produce a map of PRS teaching outside core PRS departments;
- To identify key learning and teaching issues for this constituency;
- To explore what support would be useful to this constituency, and how the work of the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies might address these needs and interests.

It was hoped that the project would thereby contribute towards an improved understanding of the extent and nature of PRS learning and teaching in UK higher education; and thus assist the Subject Centre for PRS in developing provision that is tailored to meet the needs of our diverse academic community, including those working 'beyond boundaries' of philosophical and religious studies departments. (See section 5 of this report for further details of the Subject Centre's response to the project findings.)

In order to achieve these objectives, the project began by conducting a survey of the PRS academic community. It was acknowledged that this was unlikely to be a comprehensive study—of its nature, 'PRS beyond boundaries' teaching may often be found in unexpected areas of the academy, may not be well connected with the 'core'

PRS community and, thus, may be difficult to reach. However, it was hoped that this preliminary scoping study would give at least a flavour of 'PRS beyond boundaries' provision that could form the basis for further investigation or development if appropriate.

An informal survey was designed, which asked the following questions:

- Do you teach philosophical, theological or religious studies in UK HE, but are not based in a PRS department?
- What are you teaching and in which department are you teaching it?
- Which academic subject(s) do you identify with?

The survey was circulated in October 2008 via discipline-specific email discussion lists, subject association newsletters, the Subject Centre for PRS's own website and journal, and the other Subject Centres in the Higher Education Academy. (See Appendix 1 for further details of the survey design and distribution.) In each case, recipients were encouraged to assist with 'viral marketing' of the survey by circulating further to colleagues to whom it might be of interest—in this way, it was hoped to address the challenge of reaching PRS lecturers based in 'unlikely' departments.

Survey responses were supplemented by the following means:

- Searches of university websites to identify PRS-related teaching provision in non-PRS departments—to provide a rough-and-ready baseline against which to assess the representativeness of survey responses;
- Follow-up telephone interviews with a sample of survey respondents—to obtain more in-depth information about a range of 'PRS beyond boundaries' provision (captured via a series of case studies—see section 5 and Appendix 2 of this report for further details);
- Additional background information provided by colleagues in other Subject Centres about the role of PRS teaching in their disciplines.

The information collated via these methods was used to produce the desired map of PRS provision outside core PRS departments (see section 3 of this report), and as data for analysing any distinctive features and challenges of 'PRS beyond boundaries' (section 4).

Project Findings I: a (Partial) Map of 'Philosophical and Religious Studies Beyond Boundaries'

Survey responses

A total of 27 survey responses were received by the end of January 2009.[1] Responses have come from academics teaching in the following departments:

- Nursing, Midwifery & Physiotherapy (3)
- Psychology (3)
- Lifelong Learning (2)
- Politics & International Relations (2)
- Sport, Health and Social Sciences (2)
- Biology (1)
- Chemistry (1)
- Cognitive Science (1)
- Computer Sciences (1)
- French (1)
- Geography and Anthropology (1)
- Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute [HATII] (1)
- Law (1)
- Life Science (1)
- Sociology, Politics and Policy (1)

Of these twenty-two respondents (the remaining five respondents either did not have, or did not specify, a non-PRS department in which they were based), seventeen are involved in teaching philosophy modules (or modules in which philosophical topics are central), and at least eight are involved in the teaching of theology or religious studies (TRS) modules (or modules in which TRS topics are central). At least three respondents were involved in teaching both philosophy and TRS topics.

[1] The survey 'deadline' of end January 2009 was a notional cut-off point for the purposes of compiling this project report. Further responses have been received since this date, and it is hoped to provide ongoing updates to the map of 'PRS beyond boundaries' provision via the project website: **http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/beyond_boundaries/**.

Out of the full twenty-seven respondents, fifteen also replied to the question 'which academic subject(s) do you identify with?'. Out of these fifteen replies, seven reported that they identified, inter alia, with PRS academic subjects; one identified with no academic subjects (asserting that they were 'optimistic about being trans-disciplinary'); and seven did not report that they primarily identified with PRS academic subjects.

Two respondents reported certain PRS topics and issues are quite commonplace in (a) the teaching of research methodology, and (b) the teaching of biology.

Supplementary desk research

Following up on the survey responses, it was initially intended that a random sample of university websites would be searched, in order to identify how widespread PRS-relevant teaching is in non-PRS departments, in the areas identified by survey respondents. However, this attempt to get a snapshot of the breadth of teaching by taking a sample of universities was abandoned due to the fact that different departments within different universities often provide very different degrees of information regarding their modules, and some universities offer much clearer module lists and information than others. It was therefore decided that a simple accumulative acquisition of data on PRS teaching in non-PRS departments would be preferable.

The web-searches did not try to locate ethics teaching in non-PRS departments, since this is already well-documented, and would have needlessly swamped the mapping of non-ethics PRS teaching provision.[2]

The early results of these searches indicate that there is widespread teaching of PRS in the following non-PRS departments:

- French—French philosophical thought (e.g. London, Leeds, Exeter, Sheffield, Bristol)
- Classics—ancient philosophy (e.g. Leeds, Exeter, Durham, Newcastle)
- Psychology—psychology of religion (Newcastle, Ulster,

[2] For further details of ethics teaching, see for example the outcomes of the ETHICS project: **http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/ethics/index.html**.

Cambridge, Heythrop); transpersonal psychology (e.g. Northampton, Liverpool John Moore's, University of Wales); and experiential modules in religion (Northampton)

- Nursing and Midwifery—spirituality and health (e.g. Nottingham, Aberdeen, Staffordshire)

Also, and less surprisingly, modules engaging with PRS issues/topics are commonly taught in Law, History and Politics departments.

This additional research has thus identified some disparities with the results of the survey—viz., no survey responses came from staff in Classics departments, and only one response came from staff in French departments. Follow-up work may therefore be useful to explore further the nature of PRS provision in these fields.

Web-based searches have also found PRS teaching within the following additional departments:

- Russian (Philosophy and Religious Studies: Literature, Religion and Value)
- German (Philosophy and Religious Studies)
- History of Art (Philosophy: Aesthetics)
- School of the Built Environment (Philosophy: Philosophy of Design)
- Archaeology (Religious Studies: Ancient Religion)
- Business School (Philosophy)
- Computer Sciences/Cognitive Science (Philosophy: Philosophy of Cognitive Science, Philosophy of Mind, Logic)
- English (Philosophy and Religious Studies: e.g., 'Metaphysics and Melancholy', 'The Bible and Literature')
- Sociology (Religion: e.g. Religion and Social Thought)

Additionally, colleagues in other Subject Centres provided further general information about the role of PRS in the teaching of their disciplines:

- Architecture—philosophy is often taught, but generally not by philosophers;
- Geography—most undergraduates do some philosophy when they study the history of their discipline.

Summary of findings

As anticipated, the project findings do not yet constitute a comprehensive map of the field, but rather a sample of PRS provision outside core PRS departments. However, although a project of this small scale is not alone sufficient to furnish definitive data on the extent of PRS 'beyond boundaries' in a quantitative sense (how many courses, students etc.), it does perhaps already suffice to illustrate its scope in a qualitative sense—that is, the range and diversity of such provision. Even this brief informal survey has identified examples of PRS teaching in all major 'faculty level' subject groups—physical and life sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities, as well as vocational degree programmes.[3]

It should be noted that the current survey has identified more 'philosophical' provision than that relating to theology and religious studies, or to history and philosophy of science, technology and medicine. Without further research it is difficult to be clear whether this is a true reflection of the state of 'PRS beyond boundaries', or merely an artefact of the current project's methods—given our reliance on 'viral' distribution, this result may simply be a product of the fact that there exists a well-established email discussion list for philosophy, with well over 4,000 subscribers.[4]

Project Findings II: Key Features and Challenges of 'Beyond Boundaries' Provision

The range of PRS provision identified by this survey does, however, present a challenge when it comes to answering our additional research

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[3] It also seems likely that PRS provision is an element of many (if not all) degree programmes not identified via this project—e.g. medicine (ethics and/or history of medicine), literature (philosophy and religion), engineering (ethics). The project focused on PRS-specific courses within degree programmes, and thus is likely to have overlooked any provision which is embedded within other modules but not explicitly characterised as PRS in module descriptions, for instance.

[4] The discussion list in question is Philosophy in Europe (Philos-L): **http://listserv.liv.ac.uk/archives/philos-l.html**—4,269 subscribers as at 8 April 2009.

questions—namely: what are the key learning and teaching issues for this constituency, and what support would be useful?—insofar as the diversity of the field makes it difficult to furnish any meaningful generalisations about distinctive features, needs and interests of 'the PRS beyond boundaries constituency'.

One common theme, explicitly identified by three survey respondents (and perhaps tacit in others), is the challenge of developing PRS provision beyond 'core' departments—particularly if there is no such core PRS department at the higher education institution in question. Comments included 'it can be a lonely task', and 'so I'm very keen to… find how best to support [philosophy] in this kind of way'.

Beyond this, it is difficult to discern many distinct patterns or commonalities across PRS 'beyond boundaries' provision—excepting, perhaps, the widespread practice of teaching applied ethics (which is already relatively well established),[5] PRS teaching outside core departments is fairly eclectic. Other trends in curriculum content arguably include the teaching of spirituality and faith; and PRS dimensions of 'cultural studies' (broadly construed to encompass literature, language and area studies, history and classics)—but such analysis is at best provisional on the evidence of this project alone.

Of course, such diversity also problematises the task of providing appropriately tailored support to the academic community/ies in question—for example, how might one best support the sharing of teaching practices in this field (and hence address the challenge of developing PRS teaching in relative isolation from 'core' provision, as identified above), when the field itself is so varied and, as a result of this, it is often unclear how much such teachers will have in common? It is thus likely that this survey will provide just the first step in an ongoing programme of enhancing our understanding of, and support for, 'PRS beyond boundaries'.

What next?

[5] See note 3 above for details of previous Subject Centre research and resources in this field.

Limitations of the current study and scope for further research

The current project methods—informal survey plus web-based research—clearly fall short of a robust and comprehensive study of the field. It is likely that the 'map' of PRS provision thereby obtained is at best partial, for a number of reasons, including the following:

- There may be significant PRS teaching embedded in a range of modules taught by members of staff in non-PRS departments that is not specifically mentioned in module descriptions (and thus not readily identified by means of web-based research).
- Relatedly, some of those teaching PRS topics/issues in non-PRS departments may not see themselves as teaching PRS (and thus may not easily be reached by the 'viral marketing' survey approach adopted for this project).[6]

As indicated in section 3 above, there are also some surprising gaps in the findings—not least the absence of any significant history and philosophy of science provision—which further suggests that this map of 'PRS beyond boundaries' is not yet complete.

It is possible that a more complete picture could be obtained by further extending the survey, for instance by designing and circulating a number of more discipline-specific versions which include tailored examples to encourage respondents to identify relevant PRS provision (e.g. 'do you teach science students ethics, philosophy of science…?'). It is far from guaranteed, though, that this would generate significant further responses, let alone a comprehensive set of data. However, it is proposed to continue the survey via the project website (**http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/beyond_boundaries/**), and to update periodically the findings of this study in light of further responses.

An alternative approach might be instead to supplement the existing survey by targeting students as well as academic staff—e.g. 'are you studying for a non-PRS degree, but have studied PRS-related topics?'—but this raises further challenges of how to distribute such a survey effectively.[7] It is thus likely that any such study would merely

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[6] Indeed, one of the survey respondents raises precisely this point: 'However, possibly many [biologists] would not regard themselves as teaching philosophy'.

[7] As many academic colleagues will be aware, existing student surveys such as in-

provide further samples of such provision, rather than furnishing a definitive picture. (It may, however, prove fruitful to explore whether students' perspectives of key learning and teaching issues, and what support would be useful, are the same as those of their teachers.)

In light of these considerations, it was decided instead to supplement the 'broad brush' survey findings with a set of in-depth case studies which would provide more detailed snapshots of 'PRS beyond boundaries' provision in a range of contexts.

Further activity to support Philosophical and Religious Studies 'beyond boundaries'

In order to capture the diversity of 'PRS beyond boundaries' provision, and to explore in more depth the learning and teaching issues raised thereby, a representative sample of survey respondents were invited to contribute case studies of their teaching. It is hoped that these will provide both a 'showcase' of the range of philosophical and religious studies teaching in UK higher education, and also a resource which can be used and adapted by other teachers of these subjects. The following case studies are currently available from the project website (**http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/beyond_boundaries/**):

- History of Art
- History and Philosophy of Science
- French
- Cognitive Science
- Psychology of Religion
- Spirituality and Responsibility

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies will continue to encourage PRS teachers to contribute further case studies to be added to this database.

The Subject Centre for PRS will also seek to develop networks or 'special interest groups' in order to assist 'PRS beyond boundaries' teachers in countering the sense of isolation commonly expressed (see section 4 of this report) and in establishing contacts with colleagues in

house course evaluation questionnaires or the National Student Survey present significant logistical challenges. It would be still more challenging to conduct an effective national survey without recourse to such institutional mechanisms.

similar fields to facilitate the sharing of teaching practices. In the first instance, these will focus on areas which currently lack tailored support (and thus will not include applied ethics, for which several such special interest groups already exist), where the 'beyond boundaries' study has identified a significant amount of PRS learning and teaching, such as:

- Teaching spirituality and faith—e.g. psychology of religion, medicine, health sciences and practices, applied social sciences
- Teaching PRS in cultural and area studies—e.g. philosophy and religion in modern languages; ancient philosophy and religion

The survey findings indicate that, in many cases, teachers of such PRS topics do not identify themselves primarily (if at all) as PRS academics; therefore such networks will be developed in collaboration with other Subject Centres and subject associations as appropriate.

Interested parties are invited to contact the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies with suggestions for networks or for further details (see below for contact information). The Subject Centre will provide support and assistance in setting up such networks, although it is anticipated that these will become self-sustaining. Subject Centre support may also be available for the development of any network resources (e.g. learning and teaching materials).

Sources of further information

Full details of the 'Philosophical and Religious Studies Beyond Boundaries' project—including a list of PRS-related courses identified by the survey, and the case studies developed—are available from the project website:
http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/beyond_boundaries/.

Additional information about the project, including the proposed 'special interest groups', is also available by contacting Clare Saunders (Senior Academic Co-ordinator, Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies): clare@prs.heacademy.ac.uk.

The project website also provides a number of links to other relevant resources on PRS-related topics such as:

- Ethics—including an online guide (Approaches to Ethics in Higher Education: Teaching Ethics Across the Curriculum); a database of case studies; and details of resources available from the Inter-Disciplinary Ethics. Applied Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
- Cultural and religious diversity and 'faith literacy'—including case studies and an annotated bibliography of relevant web resources.
- Education for sustainable development—including annotated bibliographies and details of PRS-related courses in a range of UK higher education institutions.

Appendix 1: 'Philosophical and Religious Studies Beyond Boundaries' Survey

The survey below was circulated as follows:

- Discipline-specific email announcements and discussion lists, e.g. Philos-L, Dolmen.[8]
- Subject association newsletters, e.g. the British Association for the Study of Religions bulletin.
- Publicity on the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies website, and in *Discourse: Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies.*
- Colleagues in other Subject Centres of the Higher Education Academy, for distribution to their own discipline-specific networks.[9]

In each case, colleagues were encouraged to tailor the content to their discipline context, for example by using specific relevant examples.

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[8] See note 5 above for details of Philos-L. Dolmen is an English-language electronic discussion list sponsored by the European Association for the Study of Religions (**http://easr.eu/dolmen.html**).

[9] The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is part of a network of 24 Subject Centres, who collectively provide discipline-specific support for all subjects in UK higher education:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/networks/subjectcentres.

Scoping Study of Provision of PRS Subjects Outside Core Departments

Do you teach philosophical, theological or religious studies in UK HE, but are not based in a PRS department?

We at the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (PRS) are beginning a scoping study of PRS provision in non-PRS departments. ('PRS' subjects include philosophy; theology; religious studies; history and philosophy of science, technology and medicine.)

Just as there are learning and teaching issues that are specific to philosophical and religious studies, and which the Subject Centre for PRS aims to support, we feel there are similar specific issues involved in teaching courses with a PRS element to non-specialists, such as natural and social scientists, literature students, artists or historians. We would like to hear from you if you are teaching PRS subjects outside a philosophy or theology and religious studies department, to find out more about the courses you are teaching or contributing to, and how we might best support you in this.

We aim to produce a map of current provision, an analysis of key learning and teaching issues for this constituency, and, depending on responses received, to initiate special interest groups for PRS academics working outside PRS departments, to facilitate practice-sharing and networking.

If you are involved in the teaching of philosophical or religious studies in a non-PRS department, and would like to share your experiences and/or to suggest ways in which the Subject Centre for PRS could support you, please email clare@prs.heacademy.ac.uk. For the initial mapping exercise, we are particularly interested in the following:

- What are you teaching and in which department are you teaching it?
- Which academic subject(s) do you identify with?

We would be grateful if you could assist us by disseminating this call as widely as possible to your colleagues working outside core philosophy, theology or religious studies departments.

Appendix 2: 'Philosophical and Religious Studies Beyond Boundaries' Case Study Template

The following template was used for capturing case studies of 'PRS beyond boundaries' provision, by means of telephone interviews with a sample of survey respondents. The case studies are available from the Subject Centre for PRS's website:
http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/beyond_boundaries/.

1. Curriculum and intended learning outcomes
   - Department / subject / discipline area
   - Topic
   - Number of times you have taught this topic (or courses with similar topics involved)
   - Mode of delivery
   - Intended learning outcome(s) - have these changed / been made easier / more detailed
   - Student resources
   - Level of study
   - Pre-requisites

2. Activity
   - General approach
   - Learning task(s) / how the learners carried out the tasks

3. People involved
   - Number of learners
   - Learner characteristics

4. Assessment
   - Method of assessment

5. Outcomes for learners
   - Learner feedback or formal / informal observations from learners during course

6. Reflections
   - Benefits and opportunities from taking the approach you did (what worked well / benefits to approach taken?)
   - Problems and risks (what worked less well / risks taking this approach / teaching these topics)
   - Advice you would give to another practitioner planning to deliver a similar activity or use a similar approach
   - Other reflections - (a) on the process of planning / delivering the teaching; (b) on further developments that you may undertake; (c) on anything you have learned as a result of this teaching

A level Above?

The following six papers were developed from conference presentations originally given at the Subject Centre for PRS conference, ‘A level above? Progression to Undergraduate Studies in Philosophy’, held on July 2-3 2009 in Oxford.

Wot u @ uni 4?:
Expectations and Actuality of Studying Philosophy at University

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Abstract

In a project funded by the Subject Centre,[1] we used focus groups to explore students' answers to six questions, including their reasons for going to university and their views of the purpose of higher education. Particular surprises were the invisibility of research to students and the depth of disagreement about the value of seminars. But most significant was the consequence of the dramatic decline in contact hours on arrival at university. Students found it difficult to form supportive study relationships. They also seem unclear about the distinc-

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tion between collaboration and collusion. We end, therefore, by suggesting that learning and teaching practice needs to be illuminated by reflections on critical friendship.

Background and Rationale

> 'My dear Agathon … I only wish that wisdom were the kind of thing that flowed … from the vessel that was full to the one that was empty.' – Plato, Symposium

Staffroom anecdote suggests a mismatch between university staff and students about the purpose and value of higher education. Such a mismatch, if it exists, will hamper teaching, learning and assessment. Activities and criteria that are intelligible given the background assumptions of staff may make no sense to students, if students have a different conception of the whole purpose of going to university. For example: do students who think of learning as fact-gathering understand the point of seminars or workshops that are aimed at developing skills and intellectual virtues? Does anyone explain this to them? It is difficult to engage wholeheartedly with an activity that seems arbitrary or ungrounded. A misunderstanding about the purpose of higher education could account for the behaviour of students who seem to despise or abandon their academic work (even if they do not formally withdraw from university).

This mini-project investigated the understanding of the purpose and practice of higher education among undergraduate students in philosophy.

Method

We put six questions to focus groups made up of philosophy

[1] We would like to thank the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies for its interest in and financial support for this project. Thanks also to the students who participated in the focus groups and the staff at each institution who helped to put these groups together.

undergraduate students:

1. Why did you come to university?
2. What do you think is the purpose of a university?
3. What do you think is the purpose of seminars?[2]
4. Is your answer to either of these questions (purpose of a university; purpose of seminars) different now from the answer you would have given before you applied to university?
5. Is there anything that nobody told you before you came to university that you wish they had? If so, what?
6. How do university essays differ from any essays you have written previously?

Each focus group lasted approximately one hour. The focus groups took place at four universities. Two of these are in the Russell Group and two are post-1992 universities (one former polytechnic and one former college of higher education). Each group of eight students included representatives of all three undergraduate years, and divided (so far as possible) evenly between students with and without graduate kin. We did not inform participants of the purpose of the research before the session; we answered their questions at the end. We made audio recordings of the focus groups but not the subsequent question-periods. Before we conducted the four focus groups, we ran a pilot using a different group of students at the first of the four institutions, to order trial the questions. Using two groups at one institution helped us to allow for the effects of particular personalities and biographies within groups, as we were able to compare the replies of two groups drawn from the same student body. Nevertheless, we are conscious that four groups of eight students constitute a narrow empirical base. Moreover, there is likely to be a significant selection effect, because the participants responded to our advertisement, and are thus untypical of their cohorts. However, our principal results emerged from clear consensus, were present in all four groups, and conform to the results of large-scale statistical studies such as Longden and Yorke (2007).

[2] By 'seminars' we meant group discussion-based classes; what in some of our institutions were labelled 'tutorials'.

Results

The students at all four institutions gave similarly intelligent, thoughtful and articulate answers. The only remarkable difference in the content of their answers was that the students at the former college of HE were more aware of universities as instruments of social and economic policy. They observed that a university can animate the economy and gentrify the culture of an otherwise quiet small town.

From the answers to each of the six questions, we have extracted themes or features that either emerged as common trends or seemed noteworthy on other grounds.

1. Why did you come to university?

It was widely observed that for many students, university is simply the default next stop after secondary school or sixth-form college. For some it is an attractive—if expensive—alternative to work, and allows them to defer life-decisions.[3]

However, more detailed answers to this question articulated an even mix of vocational and educational goals. On the vocational side, the chief aim was a higher salary, though some students had particular professions in view, such as school-teaching, apparently without regard to income. The educational goals included specialising in a chosen subject; meeting a diverse population; the development of social skills, especially tolerance; the development of new tastes; progression to independent life ('flying the nest'); gaining self-confidence and self-understanding; and finding like-minded souls.

There was also a fairly even split between expressions of gratitude for the opportunity to attend university and expressions of entitlement to services paid for in fees. (The fact that higher education is still massively subsidised by the tax-payer does not seem to loom large in the undergraduate mind: some students seemed to believe that their tuition fees covered the entire cost of their education.) We note for future studies the question of whether a grid made up from these two axes (vocational/educational, gratitude/entitlement) would show a

[3] Other responses were more idiosyncratic, our favourite being 'I was a terrible electrician.'

pattern.

2. What do you think is the purpose of a university?

The students' answers to this question were overwhelmingly repeats of their answers to question one. That is to say, they almost unanimously answered the question in terms of their own interests and goals. The thought that universities have purposes other than undergraduate education, when it did arise, almost invariably came from mature students or students who had taken non-traditional routes into university. By asking about the purpose of a university, the wording of the question may have obscured the possibility that universities have multiple purposes.

One student said that university was for education in those matters where this cannot easily be done independently. This suggested to us—especially in the light of some of the responses to questions three and five—that Newman's focus on a university as a physical community of learners ('the assemblage of strangers from all parts in one spot'[4]) still has contemporary relevance, notwithstanding developments in distance-learning and e-learning.

Students took a long time to remember that universities do research. Interestingly, this effect was equally marked at all four institutions. It would seem that the research activity of universities does not make much impression on the undergraduates, even at Russell Group institutions. However, once research came up, some students spoke feelingly about classes left in the hands of post-graduate students or taught in a perfunctory fashion by tutors who clearly regard teaching as something they have to do in order to do research. On the whole, students did not regard the research activity of their tutors as a benefit to themselves, except for some recognition that that teaching is livelier when tutors teach their research-topics. The students at the former HE college knew that they were at a 'teaching-focused' institution. However, their understanding of the relation between teaching and research was indistinguishable from that of the students at Russell Group institutions.

Students reported that our question two is not much asked either

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[4] Newman, John Henry, *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated* (1854).

at home, school or college. Such discussion as they could recall was entirely in terms of their own decisions to attend university. In other words, their previous discussions of question one did not lead to any debate about question two.

3.What do you think is the purpose of seminars?

Students tended to focus first on the role of seminars in mastering course content: seminars are an opportunity to check for gaps and misunderstandings, to develop an independent view of the material and for students with more discursive learning styles to engage with the material. Subsequently, they identified seminars as the occasion to develop team-working, social skills, self-awareness and self-confidence.

Students divided more sharply over the value of seminars than over any other issue. Some students were unwilling to see any value in listening to other non-experts, and regarded time spent in discussion with their peers as time wasted. Others regarded seminars as more important than lectures. Indeed, some students identified seminars as the reason for attending a campus university rather than distance-learning or e-learning.

At one institution, the final year teaching is entirely by seminars, with no lectures. While the students recognised the value of seminars, one remarked that, 'The odd lecture wouldn't go amiss. They could throw us a bone every once in a while.'

4. Is your answer to either of these questions (purpose of a university; purpose of seminars) different now from the answer you would have given before you applied to university?

Students' experience of higher education had little effect on their understanding of the purpose of a university. As we saw under question two, they had not reflected much beyond their personal reasons for going to university.

However, students expressed some dissatisfaction with universities' focus on employability. The concern here seemed to be that such a focus, while understandable, was excessively instrumental. (As one student put it, 'I just want to learn.') Surprisingly, in two groups,

students seemed to have the impression that their university was unusual in focusing on employability, unaware that most if not all institutions have embraced this agenda. Further dissatisfaction targeted the idea of universities as businesses: some students insisted that universities should be more concerned with social goods than they are.

Students' positive answers all focussed on seminars. Many of them had come to value seminars increasingly over the course of their studies, while the perceived value of lectures had declined. Some students reported that before they attended university, they found the prospect of contributing to seminars daunting. In the event, the experience of seminars was much less stressful than they expected and they were surprised how easy it is to contribute. (Here, the selection effect may have played a role. By participating in our focus groups, these students had in effect volunteered for an extra seminar, unconnected to their formal assessments.)

5. Is there anything that nobody told you before you came to university that you wish they had? If so, what?

All four groups reported that the lack of contact time comes as a shock. Full-time undergraduate philosophy students typically have about eight hours of classroom time per week, sometimes less. This requires an abrupt change in study habits from school or college, and makes strenuous demands on the time-management capacities of students who had previously relied heavily upon teachers to programme their activities. This is particularly true on modules where all the assessment comes at the end. Most of the students had been warned about this in advance but had not developed the habits and discipline necessary to heed such warnings.

The lack of contact time had a less obvious consequence. Because they spend so little time together in the classroom, humanities students find it difficult to bond and form supportive study relationships (most of the students in these groups were taking philosophy with other humanities subjects). Some students were surprised by the lack of mutual support and had arrived at university expecting to participate in student reading-groups. Some students were lonely, but even those who formed social networks were often isolated in their studies, because they lived with or socialised with students on other courses. Students

reported that Virtual Learning Environments help, but not decisively. It seems that VLEs can facilitate existing supportive study relationships, but not engender them.

Some students were disappointed by the low levels of commitment to study among other students. The committed students felt (sometimes resentfully) that the uncommitted mass of students come to university because it is 'what you do next' and because they do not know what else to do. This feature was common to all four institutions.

Assessment did not come up under this heading, except that some students observed that they could drastically cut down the work necessary to pass a module by picking essay-titles early on and directing their learning solely to those topics. At one institution, students also commented on the enormous additional effort it takes to get a high rather than a low upper second class mark.

6. How do university essays differ from any essays you have written previously?

School experience varied. Many students described pre-university essay-writing as a mechanical exercise in the arrangement of required points into model answers, with no room for the student to develop an independent view. Others reported that their A-level teachers demanded much the same intellectual independence as at university (but such teachers often had some connection with or experience of university-level teaching). Some students suggested that unlike school, university assessment offers no rewards for using pompous vocabulary. One student said that at school, you answer the question, while at university you go beyond the question. She had some difficulty then explaining what 'beyond' means, as she recognised that there is no space for irrelevant digressions in a philosophy essay. Nevertheless, she was sure that at university, in philosophy, you have to do something with the question in addition to answering it directly.

The overwhelming consensus was that philosophy essays are different from essays in other disciplines. One student spoke of 'getting your history brain off and your philosophy brain on'. Philosophy essays, the students claimed, require more self-reliance because there is no required correct answer; rote-learning will not suffice. Students have to do their own research and create their own arguments.

Expressing your own view is experienced as a risk—but also as an opportunity that is often not available at school or college. It was claimed that undergraduate philosophy essays offer greater freedom, but also greater rigour. 'Philosophy,' observed one mature student, 'is the only subject where you are allowed to say 'I think''.

Some of these differences sound like distinctions of level (between school or college and university). However, when asked, the students were emphatic that the deep differences are specific to the discipline rather than the level. This view was particularly strong among students who had studied philosophy at A-level.

Students in two groups observed some variety in the methodological advice coming from university tutors. Specifically, some tutors like to see ideas embedded in some historical context, while others regard historical detail as irrelevant. The students were bemused by this, but they noticed that tutors who differ in this respect do not seem to disagree when moderating marks. Moreover, students recognised that tutors reward essays that offer good arguments for conclusions with which the tutors disagree. They were aware of differences in doctrine between their tutors but less aware of differences in philosophical method and approach.

Discussion

Students in these groups had no difficulty explaining why they came to university. This may be a selection effect, because the participating students were all volunteers. Perhaps a more randomly selected sample would have shown less evidence of prior reflection. We noted the splits between job-related and educational motives, and between attitudes of gratitude and entitlement. The design of this exercise did not allow us to consider statistical relations (if any) between these divisions. Students were well aware of (and, as noted, in some cases critical of) the employability agenda, but they did not spontaneously produce the argument that philosophy provides skills transferable to employment. If our sample is at all typical, it would seem that local and national efforts to embed this idea in the student culture have met with limited success.

The fact that students' answers to question two were almost all in

terms of their own interests and goals suggests that universities do not communicate their whole missions to their undergraduates (though it may also indicate some self-absorption among the students). Most universities recognise stakeholders other than their undergraduates, and have multiple strategic aims in addition to excellence in undergraduate education. Almost all of the students in these groups were oblivious to the wider aims and constituencies that universities serve. However, students are aware of their universities' public relations and marketing efforts. For example, the students at the former HE college knew that they were at a 'teaching-focused' university and it seems that this was presented to them as a benefit. Moreover, students' answers on the nature of philosophy essays were suspiciously similar to the standard messages in philosophy subject guides, and in general, the students in these groups seemed to have absorbed the discipline's own idealised self-description as free, rigorous, critical thought. So, students are aware of what their discipline says about itself, and of what their university tells them about itself, but are not aware of the university's broader mission. As universities do not communicate their strategic goals to their students, it is no surprise to hear students asking questions of the form: *why are they spending our fees on X, which has nothing to do with teaching?* It may be that X has third-stream funding and serves one of the strategic aims that the students have not been told about.

Students' indifference to and ignorance of their universities' research activities surprised us, especially in the Russell Group institutions. There was one significant exception. A final-year student (not in a Russell Group institution) observed that university is a safe place to articulate your own thoughts because in their research, lecturers also hazard their opinions, that is, they run the same emotional risk as students. For this reason, she associated the open discussion at university (in contrast to the closed curriculum of school) with the fact that lecturers are researchers who positively welcome new thoughts and points of view. This thought, about parity of emotional risk between lecturer-researchers and intellectually autonomous students, is largely absent from the existing literature on the teaching research nexus (see Jenkins *et al*. for a summary discussion).

The students' indifference to the research activities of their universities connects with the most striking result of this exercise: the con-

sequences of the low contact times for humanities students. Students arrive at university knowing that they will have to work more independently. However, they typically imagine that this means working in isolation, and the sparse timetable of classes we offer them confirms this misapprehension.[5] Many do not realise that 'independent study' means intellectual autonomy rather than physical isolation. They have to learn for themselves (as it is rarely explained) that a group of students can work autonomously (in the sense that they devise their own question and do their own research), and conversely you can work alone on a pre structured (and therefore tutor-dependent) task.

The connection between low contact time and research culture is this: researchers collaborate. We form reading groups, listen to each other's papers in research seminars, read each other's drafts, give each other ad hoc tutorials and suggest sources. Students often do not know that collaboration is normal in academia. In the humanities in particular, most research is the work of a single academic and most research-products are single-author documents. We acknowledge help from others in small-print, in a preface or at the foot of a page, where few first-year students are likely to notice it. Jenkins *et al* argue that the teaching research nexus does not come about automatically. It has to be forged. Discussing the practicalities, they observe that:

> …in many of the sciences, much research is team and project based; and this creates opportunities for involving undergraduate and postgraduate students in (staff-led) research. This is possible in the Humanities… but this involves a very conscious going against the disciplinary grain of individualistic research in the humanities. (pp. 35-36).

It may be possible to involve undergraduates in historical research (by having them trawl archives or transcribe interviews), but it is less clear how this might be done in philosophy. Further, the challenge is to change the perceptions of the mass of undergraduates early in their first

[5] One of the student voices in Longden & Yorke regretted not having made 'sure I was really organised and prepared as it is mainly singular study. Having come straight from achieving higher A levels in sixth form, this has been a shock. Sometimes brutal.' (p. 42) Another complained of 'Lots of time between sessions wasted' (ibid.), apparently unaware that such time could be spent in discussion with other students.

years. Finding research assistants among the final year students will not achieve this. In any case, such tasks will not teach the vital lesson, namely that philosophers are invariably *in dialogue* with others, and almost invariably enjoy collaborative relationships of one kind or another. Intellectual independence does not mean intellectual autarky. On the contrary, becoming intellectually independent involves developing a network of supportive intellectual relationships—and gaining the skills and virtues necessary to sustain such relationships.

The individualistic culture of humanities research shows itself in typical 'how to study' guides, in that they tend to focus on solitary activities. Even the otherwise excellent *Doing Philosophy* mentions interaction with other students just twice (pp. 93-4 and 159-60). Both these brief discussions suppose that 'study-buddy' relationships are already in place, and offer no advice on how to initiate or sustain them. Being a critical friend requires qualities more like those of a teacher than of a student. That may be why Briggs' *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* offers a very short note on student learning partners (p. 112), but a longer discussion of critical friendship (pp. 154-5) in the chapter on 'The Reflective Teacher'. Again, these discussions assume that such relationships require no special virtues or nurturing beyond those found in any other kind of friendship.

Undergraduates are unlikely to realise quite how much help professional philosophers get from each other unless we make a point of showing them. School is for the most part an individual effort aimed at individual goals (though some schools do employ assessed group work). On arrival at university, students receive terrifying warnings about plagiarism and collusion, without quite grasping how collusion differs from collaboration. This, together with the misunderstood instruction to 'work independently', confirms to them that university must be a solitary struggle.

There are easy things we can do to change this. First, we can explain to students the difference between independence and isolation, and encourage collaboration by building peer-support activities into programmes.[6] Such activities might include criticising each other's

[6] 'The qualitative data point to the importance of the making of friendships in the higher education experience. Institutions can assist in this process through the pedagogic approaches they adopt – for example, by engaging students early on in activities that involve collaboration.' (Longden & Yorke p. 43)

essay plans or proofreading each other's essays, but not, for this purpose, group work, because the point is to learn how to get help with your individual work without cheating. Second, we can offer our own research culture as a model of academic mutual support. The student responses in this study suggest that the staff research effort and culture is scarcely visible to all but a small minority of students. Those students who were aware of staff research rarely regarded it as a benefit or a model—perhaps because their view of it is partial, and chiefly experienced as detrimental to teaching. We can change that simply by talking about it, with a particular emphasis on *how* we write rather than *what* we write, and the help we get from peers.

Schools and colleges can play their part too, first by giving students opportunities to develop the habits and capacities necessary for effective time-management,[7] and second, by encouraging students to come to university with the intention of forming supportive, study-buddy relationships with others on their courses. In general, we would urge schools and colleges to work on preparing students for university in addition to getting them into university. Responses in this study to questions about essay-writing and about supportive intellectual relationships ('study-buddies') suggest that these two tasks do not coincide. Existing research supports this point. Cook and Lowe found that 'Student study habits formed in secondary school persist to the end of the first semester of university life.' (2003, 53). This would not be a problem if the study-habits formed in secondary school were appropriate to university. Rectifying this may require an effort from academics to engage with schools and colleges to explain what qualities they hope to find in incoming students. A study by the Sutton Trust (Tough *et al*.) found links between schools and universities to be ad hoc and fragile, and that 'Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the sector is too often narrow and outdated' (2008, 11). The converse may also be true. School and college teachers regularly complain of the lack of time for detailed in-class discussion, but the time-pressures under which AS and A2 teachers labour is perhaps less well known than it ought to be in the university sector.[8] Booth, in his 2009 essay on the transition of history

[7] Longden and Yorke report that in their study, more students identified 'workload and time management' as the worst aspect of their first-year experience than any other (p. 37).

students from school to university, observes that 'Unfortunately, in recent years the gap between school and university teachers appears to have widened, not least due to the pressures of the Research Assessment Exercise in universities and time pressures in schools'. In Booth's view, this gap explains why, 'Whilst learning activities are broadly similar at school and university, tutor and student constructions of what these activities signify can diverge. For example, critical reading often holds different meanings for students and history tutors. Even the meaning and purpose of seminars, essay writing, assessment and feedback are not uncommonly construed differently.'[9] Booth is surely correct that schools do not wilfully fail to prepare their students for university.

Regarding essay-writing, the tendency of GCSE and AS/A2-level assessment to discourage risk-taking and intellectual autonomy is not news. Forward-looking schools are increasingly abandoning GCSEs and A-levels in favour of the International Baccalaureate (James & Seldon 2009), because the IB offers students greater scope for intellectual independence and initiative. The fact that only one exam board (AQA) currently offers A-level Philosophy does not help matters. A few of the students we spoke to explained that their schools encouraged curiosity and intellectual autonomy in spite of the tendency of the examination system to drive out these virtues. Those schools, we imagine, are not under pressure to raise their performance in formal assessments and can afford to pursue education and examination-success in tandem. Other students reported that their A-level experience was entirely tuned to assessment and concentrated on rote-learning of required content. These students were not well prepared for

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[8] This was a major theme that came up in discussion at 'A Level Above? Progression to Undergraduate Studies in Philosophy', the Subject Centre conference at St Anne's College, Oxford, on 2-3 July 2009.

[9] Like the present study, Booth starts with the 'disjunction between tutor and student perceptions of the motivation, skills and abilities that students bring to university.' He notes that, 'Whilst history students at both school and university see the teacher as their most important resource, new undergraduates often see the tutor as the 'expert' who can (and perhaps should) give them 'the information'. By contrast university history teachers emphasise the need for student autonomy and independent judgement.' However, he does not suggest, as we do, that students achieve autonomy by getting help from their peers as well as their teachers.

university in general and undergraduate philosophy in particular. For them, the leap from reproducing required material to doing their own research and making their own arguments is strenuous, and in some cases painful. Universities already offer support and training to help students to adjust to university-style writing, and no doubt we could do more. However, time pressures notwithstanding, we would urge schools and colleges to consider the consequences for the students of focussing exclusively on formal outcomes at the expense of developing intellectual autonomy.

Within university, we should ask what we can do (in addition to the measures suggested here) to encourage those students most in need of good study-buddies to seek them out (rather than finding comfort with other students with similar school experiences).

As noted above, the peer-support aspect of student life receives little attention from writers on philosophical teaching and learning. In the sixteen issues of *Discourse* (formerly The PRS-LTSN Journal) there is just one article on the topic (Hawley 2002). In the same issue, John Sellars' comprehensive review of six volumes of the American journal *Teaching Philosophy* shows that this is not a uniquely British lacuna. Yet beginning students in philosophy, no less than academic philosophers, require critical friends among their peers. And philosophy and religious studies teachers in schools, colleges and universities need a better understanding of how to encourage and sustain such friendships. Fortunately, in the educational literature, there is a burgeoning body of work on learning communities, communities of practice, communities of inquiry, etc. A further study, which we shall pursue during the academic year 2009/10, will first survey and report on this research insofar as it bears on the typical assessment instruments and aims of undergraduate philosophy education. Its second phase will seek to apply selected themes from the philosophy of friendship (such as the importance of the difference between friendship and flattery, and the relationship between friendship and justice) to encouraging new undergraduates to think about how best to form beneficial intellectual friendships. Its third phase will explore the present perceptions of the target population, current year 12 and 13 school students, on co-operation and collusion in essay-writing.

Combining the three phases will enable us to make practical recommendations for the encouragement and legitimisation of peer intel-

lectual friendships among philosophy students, uniting both philosophical reflection and proposals for action, both for staff and students.

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What is Autonomous Learning?

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Introduction

This article has its origin in a project sponsored by the Subject Centre for Philosophy and Religious Studies (PRS) in 2008 that set out to examine the experience of tutors and first year undergraduate students at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) with regard to autonomous learning.[1] As a result of our initial background research, and the research for the project itself, which consisted of a series of questionnaires and interviews with philosophy students and staff at MMU, we came to think of autonomous learning—by which we mean the capacity to think for oneself—as an acquired habit. Since habitual activities are often regarded as thoughtless and unintelligent—

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activities that are mindlessly repeated—such a definition might seem, at best, paradoxical. However, once it is accepted that habits are not necessarily unintelligent, we feel that there are good grounds to understand autonomous learning as an acquired habit. In what follows we develop that understanding and its implications in the hope that further reflection and discussion about this issue will be stimulated. We believe the issue to be of some significance firstly because of the role of autonomous learning in Higher Education (HE), and also because of several factors related to the transformation of HE itself, and we intend to begin by making some remarks about both.

The Role of Autonomous Learning in Higher Education

The authors of one paper on the issue of autonomous learning have it that 'the capacity to think, learn and behave autonomously is often claimed as an outcome for students in higher education'.[2] However, we suppose that there is good reason to put this claim in stronger terms. The capacity to think, learn and behave autonomously is not simply one outcome among others. It is central to all forms of university education: witness the important claim that any university worth its name is, and should always be, a place of freedom of thought and speech. If that is the case, it is *a fortiori* true of philosophy, a discipline which is inconceivable in the absence of such a capacity. As it has been expressed in the PRS publication, *Doing Philosophy: A Practical Guide for Students*, the most distinctive feature of philosophy is not so

[1] We should like to acknowledge the assistance of the Subject Centre for Philosophy and Religious Studies, which provided a grant for the project from which this article derives. Thanks are due to the philosophy staff and students at MMU who participated in this project. In particular we should like to thank Clare Saunders of the Subject Centre for Philosophy and Religious Studies, who oversaw the project and who has provided invaluable help and advice. We must also thank Mike Garfield. He responded generously to our inquiries and many of his ideas inform our thinking and recommendations.

[2] Fazey, D. & Fazey, J, 'The Potential for Autonomy in Learning: Perception of Competence, Motivation and Locus of Control in 1st Year Undergraduate Students', *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2001, p. 345.

much what is studied, but how it engages with those things it studies. Doing philosophy, the authors argue, entails taking 'a step back from our everyday thinking', exploring 'the deeper, bigger questions which underpin our thought', identifying 'hidden connections and flawed reasoning' and developing 'our thinking and theories so that they are less prone to such errors, gaps and inconsistencies'.[3] Any university programme of philosophy must, therefore, be dedicated to engendering or reinforcing the capacity for autonomous learning in its students. If it fails to do this it will merely serve to inform its students about philosophy, without engaging them in philosophising.

Autonomous Learning and the Transformation of Higher Education

The report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Report) of 1997 has been central in shaping policy and thinking about the aims and objectives of HE. According to the report, one of the principal aims of university education is to promote autonomy among learners. Among the imperatives it lists, it states that HE must 'sustain a culture which demands disciplined thinking, encourages curiosity, challenges existing ideas and generates new ones.'[4] These are skills and attributes that both suppose and contribute to the process of independent, or autonomous, learning.

As has been noted, part of the motivation for Dearing's emphasis on autonomy is instrumental and economic.[5] One of the purposes of what Dearing calls 'a learning society' is to inspire individuals to

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[3] Saunders, C. *et al*., *Doing Philosophy: A Practical Guide for Students* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 9.

[4] National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1.4

[5] See, for example, Hanscomb, S., 'Philosophy, Interdisciplinarity, and 'Critical Being': The Contribution of the Crichton Campus' Philosophy-based Core Courses to Personal Development and Authenticity', *Discourse*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 2007, pp. 159-184. In particular, Hanscomb notes that 'The [Dearing] committee was asked to take account of the 'principle' that 'learning should be increasingly responsive to employment needs', and indeed many of the items expressed by the Department of Education as 'principles' and 'context that constrain the report concern economics'. (p. 163).

develop their capabilities so that they are 'well-equipped for work'. Here, being well-equipped for work means developing essentially transferable skills and abilities, since:

> The pace of change in the work-place will require people to re-equip themselves, as new knowledge and new skills are needed for economies to compete, survive and prosper. A lifelong career in one organisation will become increasingly the exception.[6]

It is no surprise, then, that autonomous learning should figure so highly among the aims of HE in the Dearing Report. For what we are here calling 'autonomy of learning'—the ability to think and act critically and independently, to self-manage study and learning, and realistically to appraise one's strengths and weaknesses as a learner—is not simply one transferable skill among others; rather, it is a disposition towards learning that is integral to the acquisition of all other skills and knowledge.

The overarching emphasis on autonomy of learning in HE is reflected at a subject specific level. On the one hand, this reflects the fact that enabling students to think in independent and critical terms is integral to the discipline of philosophy. 'Philosophy', The Subject Benchmark Statement for Philosophy Benchmark Statement notes, 'seeks to understand, and critically to question, ideas concerning the nature of reality, value and experience that play a pervasive role in understanding the world and ourselves'.[7] Elsewhere, the Statement has it that philosophy lays a distinctive 'stress on independent thought' and that it is not 'simply a body of knowledge to be taught'. Furthermore, it is its distinctive stress on independent thought that places philosophy at the heart of 'any university worthy of its name',[8] since it provides 'a reflective understanding of the underlying presuppositions of any subject'.[9] On the other hand, however, and informed by the Dearing Report, the Benchmark Statement argues that the study of philosophy promotes the development of a range of personal attributes 'that are important in the world of work' and 'that will strengthen the graduate's

6 National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1.12.

7 Ibid, p. 1.

8 Ibid, p. 2.

9 Ibid, p. 1.

ability to engage in lifelong learning'.[10] These include attributes which are integral aspects of autonomous learning:

- The ability to motivate oneself
- The ability to work autonomously
- The general management of one's own work to time limits
- A flexible and adaptable mind able to face new situations,
- The ability to think creatively, self-critically and independently.[11]

Alongside the emphasis on lifelong learning, employability and economic prosperity, we have seen the massification of HE,[12] greater managerialism in the governance of universities, increased funding from the Government, the introduction of student fees, and the increased use of IT in learning and teaching. As a result, both lecturers and students are faced with a transformation of the context and nature of teaching in HE, and if standards have not necessarily dropped as is sometimes alleged, they have certainly changed, with more students from a wider diversity of class, racial, cultural and educational backgrounds now attending university, being taught in bigger classes with less opportunity for small group or individual tuition. Students are required to master a range of new skills—often related to the use of IT—for different purposes than hitherto. Consequently, lecturers are increasingly required to teach such skills, irrespective of their original disciplinary expertise. Without wishing to make any polemical points about this transformation, it is nonetheless imperative to recognise that

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[10] Subject Benchmark Statement: Philosophy 2007, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, p. 5.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Laurie Lomas points out that: 'In 1962, there were 125,000 students at 25 universities whereas in 1996 there were more than a million students at just over 100 universities. In the early 1970s, 14% of eighteen year olds attended university yet in 1996 the figure was 30% and participation in higher education is now over 32% of those in the 18-21 age group. Not only has the increase in numbers diminished the élitist nature of HEIs, but also this trend has been assisted by an increase in the proportion of non-standard entry students. These are students who do not have the usual minimum requirement of 2 'A' levels for undergraduate courses. At Liverpool John Moores University, the proportion of nonstandard entrants was nearly 75%'. See 'Does the Development of Mass Education Necessarily Mean the End of Quality':
http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/papers/lomas.pdf

this kind of tectonic shift compels a reconsideration of the challenges of fostering autonomous learning at university, and in particular within the discipline of philosophy.[13]

The Problem of Autonomous Learning

In the preceding section we argued that systemic changes within HE make it necessary to look at the issue of autonomous learning. However, there is a further reason that necessitates doing so; that is, the perception of a significant number of academics that students coming to university are less capable of autonomous learning than hitherto. Admittedly, there is no objectively verifiable evidence that this is the case, and since it is difficult to see what might constitute such evidence, it is an assertion that will probably always be contested. But, if such a view is difficult to corroborate objectively, it is nevertheless difficult to dismiss, since the academics that hold it are the ones that evaluate students' work, and are deemed competent by their institutions to do so.

One commonly offered reason for the perceived decline in students' intellectual standards is the sweeping changes that have permeated the HE sector over the last forty years.[14] Another is the nature of A level tuition. For example, George MacDonald Ross has argued that students:

> have mostly been restricted to a narrow range of teaching methods at school, in which they absorb what their teachers tell them in class, and what they read in their textbooks, and then they regurgitate what they have learned in traditional essays. The ones who are most successful at this are the ones who are admitted to universi-

[13] Stemming from a recommendation in the Dearing Report, personal development planning (PDP) is an initiative based on the recognition that the changing context of HE necessitates the reconsideration of autonomous learning. What we are concerned with in this report can be understood as complementing that process; our concern is specifically with how the experience of teaching and learning in philosophy contributes to autonomous learning.

[14] See, for example, Hillary Swain, 'Intellectuals Fight "Dumbing Down"', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 12th March 1999, p. 3. **http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=145416** , referred to in Lomas, op. cit.

> ty, and they have problems adjusting to the UK ideal (enshrined in the QAA's qualifications frameworks) that university graduates have been educated to become autonomous, critical thinkers.[15]

MacDonald Ross is not necessarily accusing A level teachers of teaching badly. On the contrary, if we accept that the aim of an A level teacher is to teach students what they need to know in order to get the best A level grade possible, in order that the majority can obtain a place at university, then his argument can be construed as implying that they are fulfilling their function, and are in that sense teaching well. As we understand it, MacDonald Ross is simply pointing out that there is an incompatibility between teaching students to pass their A Levels and training them to meet the ideals of HE, to which such students who succeed in their A Levels are admitted.

Perhaps school teachers might consider MacDonald Ross' perceived criticism of the narrowness of teaching methods, and the effectiveness of the teaching methods they use to school their pupils in autonomous critical thinking, to be unjust. Indeed, it would perhaps seem unwise to trust entirely to such claims if they are not reflected by a decrease in marks at least in the first year of an undergraduate degree, if not throughout. However, it would be unwise to dismiss them even if degree students continue to perform as well, if not better, in terms of grades than in the past, for there is persistent talk of grade inflation, a perception reflected by the increasing demand for finer discrimination of results than that provided by the traditional classification of degrees (for example, the issuing of full transcripts of student performance, and the identification of percentage placing within cohorts). In this sense, the problem might be not that students are performing less well in terms of grades and final degree classifications, but that lecturers are unsure how to discriminate between accomplished but essentially unengaged and passive work, and work which manifests a genuine engagement with and understanding of the texts and issues studied. To put it simply, any decline in autonomous critical skills might be masked by the ability of those students who enter university to absorb informa-

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[15] MacDonald Ross, G., 'Electronic MCQs with no Right-or-Wrong Answers as a Means for Developing Dialogic Thinking' in *Discourse special edition–e-learning*, Vol. 8, No 3.
http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/PrsDiscourseArticles/68

tion from their teachers or other sources and regurgitate it relatively thoughtlessly, a skill acquired at school, and honed in HE.

Finally, it is important to note that whilst they are not in a position to make comparisons, current philosophy students have acknowledged that secondary education has not adequately prepared them for the challenge of autonomous leaning at university.[16] For two reasons, then, autonomous learning at university presents a problem. On the one hand, university students are less equipped with the ability when they come to university; on the other hand, given the changed context within which HE operates, there are numerous new challenges for lecturers to confront in order to nurture this essential skill. In both instances, it is necessary that university lecturers address themselves to the problem, because otherwise they are failing the ideal of HE itself; this is particularly the case in relation to philosophy, the doing of which is impossible without such a habit of mind.

Two Views of Autonomous Learning

Our concern with autonomous learning and the question of how to engender it in undergraduate students emerges from significant current developments in the HE sector, and from the perception of lecturers that students are increasingly lacking in this skill. Both the Dearing Report and the *Subject Benchmark Statement for Philosophy* assert the importance of engendering autonomy of learning, but understandably both stop short of a clear definition of precisely what this entails.

In one respect at least, the definition of autonomous learning is uncontroversial: it is the exercise of the capacity to think for oneself. Just as there is little contention over the minimal definition of what autonomous learning is, there is little dispute over how it is recognised. It is generally accepted that the capacity for autonomous learning is recognised by its expression in a number of different forms, such as the ability to understand an argument and set it in context; to search for,

[16] 'It is also clear from these reflections that students acknowledge—indeed, often welcome—responsibility for their own learning; however, they often feel that their experience of secondary education leaves them ill-equipped to respond adequately to this challenge.' Lamb, D. & Saunders, C., "What do our Students Really Think?", *Discourse*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 2007, p. 43.

read, and understand relevant primary and secondary material; to explain and articulate an issue in oral and written form to others; and to demonstrate an awareness of the consequences of what has been learned.

However, the minimal definition of autonomous learning can support two different views about the issue. One view is that autonomous learning simply and solely constitutes learning that students do for themselves. For those that hold such a view, an autonomous learner is someone who, given minimal information, would, for example, go away to the library, find sources for themselves and work by themselves. In the discipline of philosophy such work would amount to the student sitting down with a text and trying to come to an understanding of it on their own. Another view, however, and one that we believe significantly contradicts the first, has it that autonomous learning involves showing the student how to do something in such a way that they are then capable of undertaking a comparable activity by themselves (for example, having been shown how to analyse Descartes, they can then go off to analyse Hume). From this perspective, autonomous learning becomes the habitual exercise of skills, developed and perfected through continuous practice, which come to be second nature.

Significantly, these different views about what autonomous learning is are related to differences in the way in which the practice of autonomous learning is seen to be developed or reinforced. Where it is held that autonomous learning essentially amounts to working on one's own, it follows that fostering autonomous learning simply involves telling students to go away and read secondary texts, in order to find out what other people have found problematic about a particular issue or argument. Lectures, and thus the lecturer, fulfil an obvious function in such a model: they provide the student with minimal introductory information, then send them away to exercise those skills that are the mark of the autonomous learner. Seminars are no less an important aspect of higher education on such a view, but the role of the seminar tutor becomes merely to provoke debate by asking students, 'why do you think that?' On the other hand, where autonomous learning is understood to be an acquired habit or disposition, it follows that it is instilled through practice and exemplification—giving the students a model to copy, showing them how to break down and analyse an

argument, how to structure an essay, and seeking to inspire them as a role model. On this view, autonomous learning is a habit that is inculcated.

At the beginning of this article we said that that we think there is good reason to hold to this latter view of autonomous learning. Accepting that autonomous learning is a habit of mind is important in one respect because certain prejudices and assumptions condition us to think of it as an innate ability, which some students have already realised, that others need only to be told about in order to exercise at will, and which still others have only a limited capacity to grasp.

However, it could be objected that what we have said thus far amounts simply to applying a well established distinction between what we might call 'telling that' and 'showing how' methods of teaching to autonomous learning, according to which mere 'telling that' without 'showing how' is nothing more than issuing instructions without instructing, ordering rather than educating. It might also be objected that not only is not much gained by conceiving autonomous learning as an acquired habit, but there is a fundamental incoherence involved in doing so that obscures and confuses things, it being impossible to explain how repetition could instil in a student so vital a capacity as autonomous learning. At the very least, it might be said, the inculcation of the habit of autonomous learning cannot be achieved simply by repetition through practice. Rather, the repetition must itself be undertaken because the student desires to learn independently. In that case, does not conceiving autonomous learning as a habitually acquired disposition at best simply push the problem one stage back, since the student either has the desire to learn independently or does not? In answer to this, it is necessary to recognise that desires and habits are one in the sense that although they are conceptually distinguishable, they are existentially reciprocally dependent: desires inform and motivate habits, whilst habits generate, form, and deform desires. In other words, repetition becomes a habit in the sense that it shapes desire, whilst without the desire the habit will not stick, a point made by Aristotle.

Beyond this, however, it is important to acknowledge that how to stimulate this desire in students is a question to which there are no easy or absolute answers, for the capacity of a teacher to stimulate the desire to learn independently is not itself something that can be taught

abstractly. Teaching is a *practical art* acting upon the moment, and not a *theoretical science* concerned with the universal, and it requires that the teacher applies his or her particular skills to specific circumstances. Consequently, the principles of teaching are only general truths, and this is something that shapes the points that we will go on to make. For the moment though, we want only to say that engendering autonomous learning is not a matter of producing the desire to learn independently *ex nihilo*. Although it might be the case that students are increasingly less equipped to learn autonomously when they first enrol at university, and whilst not all students who undertake a degree necessarily do so out of a desire to exercise independence of thought, the majority do. Certainly, this is not an original point[17]—and in any case, it is a point that is scarcely worth contesting, since to do so would imply that there was no good reason to teach at university, or to be concerned with how we teach what we teach. If, as one of the lecturers we interviewed for our project put it, students are nowadays prone to treat their tutors as repositories of information, whose job is to tell them what they need to know, that is perhaps because they have been habituated to treat teachers in such a way by their prior experience, and is not in itself an indication that they lack the desire to learn independently. Indeed, when interviewed, those students who came directly from A levels recognised that they had not been sufficiently accustomed to autonomous learning—a recognition that presupposes the desire to develop this disposition.[18]

Conclusion

In this article we have sought to advance a definite conception of what autonomous learning is: a habit of mind, expressed through a range of activities and skills, acquired and developed through practice. We

[17] This is a point that has been made elsewhere—see, for example, Lamb and Saunders 'What do our Students Really Think?', op. cit.; it is also implicit in the willingness of students to participate in this type of project.

[18] In comparison to the direct A level entrants, those classified as mature students felt much better prepared by their previous life-experiences with respect to the demands of autonomous learning. However, they often felt less confident with regard to formal academic skills—such as writing essays.

believe this definition to be the most significant outcome of the project we undertook for the Subject Centre, for it provides a basis for understanding and responding to the challenge of instilling independence of learning in students in the current context of HE. In our opinion what is most important about seeing autonomous learning as a habit of mind is that it overcomes the view that promoting autonomous learning entails leaving students to work by themselves. Defined as a habit of mind, autonomous learning is a virtue, but it cannot be classified as what Aristotle terms an intellectual virtue; that is, an excellence of intellection owing its inception and growth to instruction.[19] Instead, it is closer in nature to what Aristotle calls a moral virtue; one that is neither engendered by nature nor contrary to nature, but which we are constituted by nature to receive, and which owes its full development to habituation.[20]

Understood in this sense, the paradox of autonomous learning is the paradox of habit. A habit is not necessarily unintelligent—indeed it can be an expression of the highest intelligence—and yet for all that it is not exercised self-consciously or voluntarily. Autonomous learning—independent thinking—is the highest virtue of the mind, an expression of its freedom, and the necessary condition of all other intellectual virtues, and yet itself is an acquired *disposition*, a second nature, and therefore is neither voluntary nor involuntary.

It follows then that autonomy of learning is not 'teacherless learning'. Teachers have a decisive role to play in inculcating this habit of mind. Certainly it is correct to claim that autonomous learning is 'thinking for oneself', but to reduce the definition solely to this claim risks obscuring the problem it involves, since it is precisely that expression that promotes the idea that all one has to do is encourage the isolation and separation of students as if that were equivalent to pedagogical self-reliance.

The crucial question remains as to how best to inculcate the disposition of autonomous learning. As Aristotle observes, we acquire a virtue by exercising it—builders learn to build by building, swimmers learn to swim by swimming; similarly, students become autonomous

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[19] Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, trans. J. A. K. Thomson, rev. H. Tredennick (London: Penguin, 2004), 1103a 15.

[20] Ibid, 1103a 25.

learners through the activity of autonomous learning, and they perfect the exercise of this disposition through repetition and practice. In this way, autonomous learning becomes second nature. It follows from this that best practice, underpinned by a coherent encouragement of autonomous learning, is achieved by fostering good habits. In other words, if 'like activities produce like dispositions',[21] then the virtue of autonomous learning is fostered by activities that have the requisite qualities.

As we envisage it, this would entail moving from a *knowing that* to a *knowing how* based programme of learning; that is, a programme of learning founded on, or foregrounding, a set of practically based competencies, and at the same time moving away from thinking about and planning learning in terms of what the educationalist Elliott Eisner called 'instructional objectives', and instead recognising the need to think about curriculum activities in terms of 'expressive objectives'.[22] For Eisner, instructional objectives are those which are arrived at by breaking down learning into specifiable elements that can then, theoretically, be delivered in a systematic way with the aim that the student would come out of the course of study in a state of knowing; that is to say, they are should 'specify unambiguously the particular behaviour (skill or item of knowledge) the student is to acquire after having completed one or more learning activities'.[23] In our experience, it is in these terms that most academics are required to think about and plan their courses. By contrast, what Eisner called 'expressive objectives' are not specifiable in advance.

> An expressive objective does not specify the behaviour the student is to acquire after having engaged in one or more learning activities. An expressive objective describes an educational encounter: it identifies a situation in which [students] are to work, a problem with which they are to cope, a task they are to engage in—but it does not specify what from that encounter, situation, problem, or

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[21] Ibid, 1103b 20.

[22] See Eisner, E., 'Instructional and Expressive Educational Objectives: Their Formulation and Use in Curriculum',
http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/37/e2/25.pdf.

[23] Ibid, p. 16.

> task they are to learn. An expressive objective provides both the teacher and the student with an invitation to explore, defer or focus on issues that are of peculiar interest or import to the enquirer. An expressive objective is evocative rather than prescriptive. [24]

In short, expressive objectives are descriptions of situations in which students explore, try to understand, grasp the point of, feel the enthusiasm of other students in the group about what is going on. The point for Eisner is that the expressive objective cannot have its point or value expressed in advance; its value emerges from the encounter with it. For Eisner, expressive objectives have the distinct advantages of being close to the practice of teachers, and of being specific to the situation and to the learner, thereby promoting an active engagement in learning. Such objectives would thus, we think, best serve to inculcate the habit of autonomous learning.

The final question we should like to address is that of how such a process of teaching might best be facilitated. One way of doing so would be to develop a *Handbook of Practices*. Such a handbook would identify, develop and detail a series of practices appropriate to each stage of a degree programme, building specific competencies through regular practising. Since the development of the skills we have concerned ourselves with is long-term, the handbook would have to reflect the need to integrate these practices developmentally into the gradual span of a student's career.

[24] Ibid, p.1-18.

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The 14-19 Diploma in Humanities and Social Sciences

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Introduction

I have been involved in the development of the humanities diploma, and this paper is a personal reflection on my perceptions of the development process and its likely outcomes. As such, I do not wish to put forward a view that is taken to be the official standpoint of the Subject Centre or Network—rather, I draw on my years of experience as a philosophy educator in order to provide some ruminations on the possible strengths and weaknesses of the diploma, in the hope that these will prove useful and/or interesting to those with a vested interest in the proposed qualification.

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The 14–19 diplomas in general

Scope

The 14–19 diplomas apply only to England. Parallel innovations are being developed in Scotland (the Curriculum for Excellence) and Wales (the Welsh Baccalaureate).

To those outside the school system, the age range of 14 to 19 may seem rather strange, since in England it is normal to enter secondary education at the age of 11 or 13, and to complete it by the age of 18. As we shall see, the diplomas are offered at three levels, and it is tempting to assume that each level is intended to cover two years of study. But in fact some levels could be completed more quickly, and the norm would be to qualify for the highest level at the age of 18, at the same time as completing one or more A-levels.

In the short term, the diplomas are only one strand in a wider reform of 14–19 education, and they will exist alongside (and in competition with) more traditional qualifications such as GCSEs and A-levels. Policy makers hope that the diplomas will become so popular that they will gradually supplant other qualifications; but the initial low level of take up suggests that this is unlikely, at least within the near future.

Rationale

A long-standing criticism of post-14 education in the UK has been that it is divided between the academic and the vocational. The vocational strand has always been treated as inferior, with the consequence that students avoid training for careers which would be rewarding for themselves, as well as contributing to the UK economy, in favour of academic study for which they may not be suited, and which may not lead directly to employment. The 14–19 diplomas are intended to overcome the crude dichotomy between the academic and the vocational, thus circumventing the disparity in esteem. Indeed, transcending the vocational/academic dichotomy is so central to the ideology of the diploma that the very terms ‘vocational’ and ‘academic’ are studiously

avoided in the official literature. They are intended to be neither the one nor the other, and to lead either directly to employment, or to higher education.

A good philosophical case can be made for avoiding the academic/vocational polarisation. The higher status given to the academic over the vocational goes at least as far back as Plato's Academy itself. It arose from the dualism of mind and body, according to which the possession of a body is common to all animals, and what distinguishes humans from the rest of the animal kingdom, and sets them above it, is the possession of a mind or soul. Consequently, professions that involve the exercise of the mind, such as philosophy, mathematics, the law, politics, and medicine, are inherently superior to those that involve the exercise of the body, such as tilling the soil, bricklaying, carpentry, and road-sweeping. This maps neatly onto the equally old distinction between education and training. Education is a cultivation of the mind leading to independence of thought and judgment, and is practised in academically oriented schools and in universities. Training, on the other hand, involves the rote learning of facts and the development of physical skills, and is acquired through apprenticeships or training colleges. Indeed, so deep-rooted is the contrast between education and skills training, that some academics are utterly hostile to the idea that it is their job to develop their students' skills at all, however intellectual and sophisticated those skills may be.

Although it is increasingly rare for philosophers and educationalists to believe that mind and body are utterly different kinds of substance, it doesn't follow from the abandonment of this belief that there is no radical distinction between the mental and the physical, and by extension, between academic education and physical training. Indeed, at the extremes it is obvious that there is an immense gulf between developing the ability to reason elegantly and inventively in philosophy or science, and acquiring pre-determined motor skills, such touch-typing or driving a car. Nor would anyone in their right mind wish to deny that the skills involved in being a ground-breaking scientist or engineer are rarer and more difficult to acquire than those of typing fast and accurately, or driving without having an accident.

Nevertheless, if we consider the large majority of human activities that involve education or training, they invariably involve both. Nearly everything we do as humans we do differently from animals

because we use our intelligence while doing it (even if we don't always use our intelligence well). Right in the middle come skills which involve muscular control and intellectual imagination in roughly equal proportions, such as playing a musical instrument, painting a picture, constructing an engineering model, or captaining a football team. It would be absurd to devalue these skills simply on the grounds that they can be manifested only through bodily activity, and it is difficult to think of any human skill so humble that it is appropriate to teach it in the way we train animals.

Even the most abstract of disciplines, such as philosophy and pure mathematics, cannot be conducted in a wholly disembodied way. Philosophers and mathematicians need to interact with others through reading, writing, listening, and talking; and these are quite basic physical functions we learn to do well through training. Moreover, many of the necessary intellectual skills are themselves quite mechanical, and need to be acquired by rote learning: the times tables in arithmetic, grammar and spelling, the vocabulary of foreign languages, technical terms and formulae in science, and so on.

In short, there is a smooth continuum between skills and knowledge that are acquired primarily through training, and those that are acquired primarily through a liberal education. Neither is entirely separate from the other, and the large majority of disciplines involve a significant measure of both. It is the purpose of the 14–19 diplomas to recognise this continuity, and to avoid both the anti-practical bias of much academic education, and the anti-academic bias of much practical training.

Levels

The diplomas have three levels:

- Foundation (level 1)
- Higher (level 2)
- Advanced (level 3).

The Advanced Diploma is equivalent to 3.5 A-levels; the Higher Diploma is equivalent to seven GCSE passes at grades C–A*; and the Foundation Diploma is equivalent to five GCSE passes at grades below C. This last is unfortunate, because the designers wish the diploma to be a positive qualification, whereas GCSE passes at below grade C are

generally considered to be failures (when they were initially established, grades below C were defined as equivalent to fail grades in the old O-levels).

Since we are concerned here only with qualifications for entry to university, for the rest of this paper I shall confine myself to the Advanced Diploma.

The Structure of the Advanced Diploma

The relative weights of each component of the diploma are expressed in terms of Guided Learning Hours (GLH), of which the total for the whole diploma is 1,080 GLH. This measure (which of course can only be an approximation) is intended to include assigned independent study time as well as hours in direct contact with a teacher. It is one of the merits of the diploma that work outside the classroom is integral to the design of the syllabus, and it corresponds very closely to the university convention of specifying modular credits in terms of study hours rather than of contact hours.

There are three main blocks of learning. The first is called Principal Learning, counting 540 GLH, or exactly half the total. This consists of an interdisciplinary study of the broad subject area covered by the diploma in question. Unlike traditional theoretical study, 50% of the learning must be applied. In other words, students must be set tasks which have many of the characteristics of real work, and are relevant to the workplace.

The second main block is Generic Learning, counting 180 GLH. This in turn is divided into three sub-components. The first is Work Experience lasting a minimum of 10 days, but not counting towards the GLH. The second sub-component is an Extended Project of 120 GLH, in which the student is expected to demonstrate a high level of independent thinking and research under the overall guidance of the teacher. The third sub-component is Personal, Learning, and Thinking Skills of 60 GLH, in which students learn to become independent enquirers, creative thinkers, reflective learners, team workers, self-managers, and effective participators.

The third block is Additional and Specialist Learning, counting 360 GLH. This will be any formal qualification of the appropriate level

and weight. It need not be within the subject area of the diploma, but it must not reduplicate the Generic Learning to any significant extent. In the case of the Advanced Diploma, it is most likely to be an A-level.

The Humanities Diploma

Relation to other diplomas

In diploma-speak, the employment sector or subject area covered by a diploma is called a Line of Learning, or LOL. Altogether there are 17 LOLs, introduced in four phases. The diplomas in the first three phases are more directly vocational than those in the fourth phase, which have a more academic character:

1. First taught in September 2008
- Information technology
- Society, health and development
- Engineering
- Creative and media
- Construction and the built environment

2. First taught in September 2009
- Environmental and land-based studies
- Manufacturing and product design
- Hair and beauty studies
- Business, administration and finance
- Hospitality

3. First taught in September 2010
- Public services
- Sport and leisure
- Retail
- Travel and tourism

4. First taught in September 2011
- Science (later postponed to 2012)
- Humanities
- Languages

Title of the Diploma

What was originally known as the Humanities Diploma is now known as the Diploma in Humanities and Social Sciences. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that, as we shall see below, many of the disciplines it covers are in fact social sciences and not humanities. The second reason is that the word 'humanities' has different meanings in schools and universities, and the longer title helps to avoid ambiguity. In schools, the term 'humanities' means the particular disciplines of history and geography; whereas in universities, it is usually equivalent to what was traditionally taught in faculties of arts (excluding geography), and is used in order to avoid confusion with the performing and creative arts. In this document, I shall refer to the Humanities Diploma for short.

Coverage

In diploma-speak, the range of particular disciplines covered by a diploma are known as its 'disciplinary footprint'. The disciplinary footprint of the Humanities Diploma is as follows:

- Archaeology
- Citizenship
- Classics
- Classical Civilisation
- Economics
- English Language
- English Literature
- Geography
- History
- Law
- Philosophy
- Politics
- Psychology
- Religious Education
- Sociology
- World Development

Timetable

It is important to understand that the general specification of the

diploma is the responsibility of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (now turning into the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency), subject to the overarching approval of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It is the task of individual examining boards to design detailed syllabuses that fill out the details of the general specification.

The timetable is as follows:

- 2008–9: Consultation about the design of the diploma, carried out by Creative and Cultural Skills (the Sector Skills Council for the Creative and Cultural Industries).
- Summer 2009: QCA publishes the criteria for the Principal Learning, and awarding bodies begin to develop detailed specifications.
- March 2010: QCA publishes curriculum guidance.
- Summer 2010: Ofqual accredits the Principal Learning qualifications.
- Autumn 2010: The full qualifications are made available.
- Autumn 2011: Teaching begins.
- Autumn 2013: The first diplomates enter university.

Progress so far

As of summer 2009, the consultation phase has been completed, and the criteria for the Principal Learning are ready for publication. However, the criteria are quite general, and it is almost impossible to evaluate the educational worth of the Principal Learning until the awarding bodies produce their detailed specifications. Moreover, the Principal Learning is only half the qualification, and virtually nothing has yet been decided about the Extended Project, the Work Experience, or the Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills. By the time these details are published in 2010, there will be no opportunity for consultation, and we shall have to live with whatever the examining boards have produced.

Principal learning

In the Advanced Diploma, the topics to be covered are as follows:

- Challenging knowledge, argument and evidence

- Understanding oneself and others
- Exploring diversity
- Sustaining environments
- Expressing culture
- Living with rules and governance
- Linking local and global economies

It is left open how these topics are to be mapped onto the 16 disciplines. Some topics are obviously more closely the concern of particular disciplines than others—for example, 'challenging knowledge, argument and evidence' is largely philosophical (and corresponds closely to the Theory of Knowledge component of the International Baccalaureate), and 'living with rules and governance' is largely political and legal. But some disciplines have no obvious home in the above list (e.g. classics, English language, and history), and the intention is that the topics should be treated as cross-disciplinary themes, to be discussed through particular disciplines as appropriate to individual schools and colleges.

However, the QCA's Criteria for Principal Learning does break down each topic into more specific sub-themes, with stronger clues as to which disciplines might be relevant. To give a flavour of what is involved, I reproduce the list of what students should know and understand under the first topic, of 'challenging knowledge, argument and evidence:

1. That there are different types of knowledge, including scientific, historical, religious, ethical, organisational, philosophical and revelatory.
2. The historical origins of religious/ideological, political and scientific arguments.
3. Why knowledge claims are challenged.
4. The nature of primary and secondary evidence.
5. Why different evidence is used or presented in different circumstances.
6. How evidence is identified, collected, processed and presented.
7. The strengths and weaknesses of different forms of evidence, including the concepts of authenticity, objectivity, reliability, validity, representativeness and currency.
8. The relationship between evidence and argument.
9. How valid arguments and proposals are constructed and

used, including the use of logic.
10. How to present persuasive arguments for particular audiences.
11. The use of different media to present an argument or evidence.
12. That evidence should be examined from different perspectives.
13. How to make a reasoned argument for and against a case.

There are similar lists for all the other topics, together with the abilities students will develop, and the personal, learning and thinking skills they will need in order to engage effectively with the topic.

Strengths

The Humanities Diploma has a number of great strengths:

First, as mentioned at the beginning, it stresses the application of theoretical knowledge and understanding to practical situations, and, if successful, should help to overcome the largely artificial divide between the academic and the vocational, or between theory and practice. It would put into effect Leibniz's motto *theoria cum praxi*, or 'theory combined with practice'.

Second, A-levels have long been criticised for encouraging rote learning and teaching to the test. In the diploma, the Principal Learning must be taught in a way that develops personal, learning, and thinking skills, and these cannot be developed if students merely memorise and regurgitate what they have been told in class or read in textbooks. Moreover, these skills are not merely introduced implicitly through the Principal Learning, but are addressed explicitly in the Generic Learning, so that diplomates will be active and reflective learners.

Third, the extended project requires a level of independent thinking and research that is quite foreign to traditional A-levels.

The consequences for universities are highly significant. Although there are some notable exceptions, it is generally the case that first-year teaching at university consists mainly of large lectures, supplemented to a greater or lesser extent by smaller seminar or tutorial groups. The main differences from A-level teaching are that student numbers are much greater; class contact time is much less, and with relatively little direction as to how time out of class should be spent; much

of the teaching is done by untrained graduate students; feedback on written work is relatively infrequent; and there is little personal contact between staff and students. It is only later that students embark on dissertations or projects, and have more personalised contact with members of academic staff.

The transition from A-levels to university is already a problem because of the differences in environment and expectations; but at least the didactic mode of lecturing and pre-digested course handouts will be familiar to first-year students. However, if we try to imagine what the experience will be like for humanities diplomates, it is certainly possible that they will find these teaching methods less than inspiring. After years of active learning, applying theory to practice, researching projects, and independent writing, the largely passive environment of a first-year lecture theatre may fail to engage their interest. If diplomates start arriving in significant numbers, universities may have to re-think their first-year offering. I describe this as a strength of the diploma, because the teaching prevalent in the first year of university tends to be quite traditional, and could perhaps benefit from a stimulus that encourages a reflective examination of the methods employed.

There is a widespread consensus that, even if students arrive at university as passive learners, wholly dependent on instructors for their learning, by the time they graduate, they ought to emerge as autonomous practitioners of their discipline, capable of improving their skills and knowledge without further help. So it is paradoxical that in most departments, students have far less individual attention from expert teachers in their first year than they have in their final year. Many years ago, I did a calculation in my own department. I used the rough and ready measure of dividing the hours students spent in class each week by the number of fellow-students in each class, so that, for example, an hour's one-to-one tutorial counted 60 minutes, and a one-hour lecture with 60 students present counted one minute. The outcome was that final-year students received about ten times as much individual attention as first-year students, with second-year students somewhere between the two. I know there were valid administrative and financial reasons for this discrepancy, but there is a serious tension between these, and the academic judgment that students need more individual attention when they arrive at university than by the time they are about to leave it. Any development that encourages universities into

teaching first-year students in ways which involve active research, personalised feedback, and small group interaction, instead of leaving these as a special treat for finalists, will have a dramatic and positive effect on the student learning experience for all.

Weaknesses

Unfortunately, the above strengths of the diploma are matched by a greater number of weaknesses.

First, humanities disciplines such as English and History which presuppose a significant amount of prior subject-specific learning at school are unlikely to accept the Humanities Diploma as an entry qualification to university. They might accept it if candidates have at least one other relevant A-level; but this would raise the entry requirement to the equivalent of 4.5 A-levels or more, which is likely to deter candidates from most state schools. This is less of a problem with subjects like philosophy, which do not presuppose any particular prior knowledge; but admissions tutors are still likely to be disturbed by the lack of depth to the diploma.

Second, the major component of the diploma is the Principal Learning. Spread as it is over 16 disparate disciplines, it is difficult to see how it can be taught with coherence and rigour. The range of subthemes in each topic is so wide, that it is unrealistic to expect the students' experience to be any more than a superficial survey of each. Besides, there are serious practical problems over ensuring that every component is taught by teachers with the required expertise. To give just one example, there are very few secondary teachers with the necessary background in philosophy and scientific method to be qualified to teach the first topic, 'Challenging knowledge, argument and evidence'. The designers of the 14–19 diploma are well aware of this difficulty, and it is a requirement for any school wishing to offer it to be a member of a consortium through which expertise can be shared. But even if the consortium does have all the necessary staff resources (which is unlikely), the logistics of moving students or staff from one institution to another are very complex. Moreover, such consortia are totally impracticable in isolated rural areas, thus confining the diploma to larger conurbations.

Third, one of the defining characteristics of a humanities disci-

pline is the close reading of texts. But this a skill which is totally absent from the Humanities Diploma as currently specified. It may be that the detailed syllabuses to be produced by exam boards will remedy this deficiency to a certain extent. However, there is a serious danger that diplomates will enter humanities departments at university with no previous experience of interpreting difficult texts, unless they encounter them through A-levels studied within or alongside the diploma.

Fourth, there is a great stress on applied learning and work experience; but so far no thought seems to have been put into what this might mean in the case of the topics and sub-themes constituting the diploma. Again, the exam boards may come up with something more specific, but I suspect that it will be left to hard-pressed teachers to devise case studies and negotiate with reluctant employers for remotely relevant work placements.

Fifth, there will be only one year between the publication of the qualifications and the beginning of teaching. It is difficult to see how there is anything like enough time to write and publish textbooks supporting the diploma; to train teachers in teaching methods that are radically different from those at A-level; to prepare lesson plans; and to organise the distribution of teaching responsibilities and timetables within consortia.

Conclusion

In discussion at the conference, there was widespread sympathy for the aim of the Humanities Diploma to overcome the artificial divide between academic theory and vocational practice; to encourage active learning and independent research; and to ensure that students were equipped with basic intellectual skills. However, there was very little sympathy for the breadth and superficiality of the Principal Learning, and considerable disquiet about the practicality of introducing the qualification within such a short timescale. There was also concern at the proliferation of qualifications for university entry (A-levels, International Baccalaureate, Cambridge Pre-U and so on), which would cause confusion for applicants and admissions tutors alike.

Given that A-levels are the most familiar and widely understood

qualification, the simplest way forward would be to reform the A-level system so as to incorporate the strengths of the diploma, while retaining the depth and subject specificity of A-levels. It is generally agreed that A-levels in their present form are structured and assessed in a way that encourages narrow academicism, passive learning, and teaching to the test. Most of the distinctive features of the diploma could be added to existing A-levels, and it should be noted that the latest A-level reform includes an optional Extended Project worth half an A-level—which is certainly an improvement. There is also scope for explicit teaching of general skills corresponding to the Functional Skills in English, ICT, and mathematics taught in the Foundation and Higher Diplomas, and the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills taught in all the Diplomas.

The main difficulty is the reform of A-level teaching so as to encourage independent thinking. The reduction in assessment from once a term to twice a year will be of some help; but much more radical reform is needed to match the underlying educational philosophy of the diploma. The slogan for the diploma is 'Bringing learning to life'—and an excellent slogan it is too, since the diploma not only applies theoretical knowledge to real-life situations, but also enlivens the whole process of learning. We need to bring A-levels to life. But one golden opportunity was missed when Tomlinson's recommendations were rejected; and another with the half-hearted reforms just coming into effect. Unfortunately, there is a rule that, apart from minor tinkering, there must be a six-year period before any further reform. Consequently, it is most unlikely that there will be any significant improvement in the skills and attitudes of those entering university by the A-level route until 2017 at the earliest.

If everything goes to plan, students will begin entering university with the Humanities Diploma in 2013. But even that is in doubt, because the Conservative Party has undertaken to abolish it. It may change its mind if it comes to power; but it is difficult to predict what will happen. The one thing that can be predicted with certainty is that it will be many years before universities are overwhelmed with entrants who have benefited from such an active, rigorous and exciting learning experience in their last two years at school or college that they will be entirely alienated by the traditional lectures and seminars of most first-year courses at university. Until that is the case, the challenge for us as

humanities educators remains to ensure that first-year teaching is fit for purpose to smooth the transition from passive learning at school to active learning at university.

Resources

Department for Children, Schools and Families:
http://yp.direct.gov.uk/diplomas/
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority:
http://qcda.gov.uk/5396.aspx
Creative and Cultural Skills:
http://www.humanitiesdiploma.co.uk

The Virtues of Thinking:

an Aristotelian Approach to Teaching Thinking

Pete Worley

The Philosophy Shop

> Philosophy is like having a conversation with a voice in my head.
> Year 2 child (age 7)

In a recent article published in the TES Professor Tim Birkhead said the following:

> The most striking thing about some undergraduates is their dependence, their lack of initiative and their reluctance to think for themselves… New undergraduates seem to expect to be told what to do at every stage. It is almost as though the spoon-feeding-and-teaching-to-the-test-culture at school has drained them of independent thought.[1]

Discourse: Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies,
Vol. 9, No. 1, Autumn 2009, pp. 143 - 150

In this paper I would like to say something about the phase of education that precedes the undergraduate phase, drawing on Aristotle to outline a solution to the 'spoon-feeding-and-teaching-to-the-test-culture' that Professor Birkhead speaks of. I would also like to say something about how philosophy, when included in this earlier phase of education, can address these problems.

Why Teach Philosophy?

Philosophy is a neutral forum in that it does not contain the biases of the various subjects that may be taught and it seeks to challenge any assumptions—including its own—that may be held by a subject. Other subjects don't on the whole do this.

With regard to teaching thinking, philosophy is in the unique position of having thinking and reasoning as its subject matter and is not limited by needing reference to a body of knowledge in order to pursue discussions. One does not need to know lots about philosophy to be able to do philosophy in the same way that one needs to know facts about maths to be able to discuss maths fruitfully.[2]

Philosophy is also not an 'anything goes' subject where all contributions are considered equally valid by virtue of having been contributed and are admitted unchecked, though I think sometimes it is treated in this way. Done properly, I argue that philosophy has the capacity to offer evaluation and assessment methods to those taking part, so that the interlocutors acquire the attributes to be able to challenge the others in the group in a constructive and respectful way, helping the dialectic process to progress. To avoid problems with terms like truth that were certainly used by Plato and Socrates when speaking of the aims of dialectic, I will simply say that the participants learn ways to discern better answers from less good ones using the criteria of reasonableness as a standard. Also, importantly, these tools can be learned without being explicitly taught if the facilitator is skilled in the

[1] 'We've bred a generation unable to think' by Professor Tim Birkhead, *TES* comment, Feb. 16th 2009.

[2] These points are made in 'Philosophy and the Development of Critical Thinking' by Carrie Winstanley in *Philosophy in Schools* edited by Michael Hand and Carrie Winstanley, (London: Continuum, 2008).

right ways: first of all skilled in philosophy and secondly in the transmission of philosophical ideas and methods.

Can children do philosophy?

Philosophy is notoriously difficult to define, but I will provide a list of salient features that I think will be adequate for the present purposes of talking about philosophy with children. I have identified the following key features that I think constitute doing philosophy - I realise that there are difficulties with providing exhaustive necessary and sufficient conditions for doing philosophy, but if we don a Wittgensteinian hat we can see how it may work as a 'family resemblance':

- Conceptual analysis
- Abstract thinking
- Meta-level / second order thinking
- Generality
- Complex reasoning
- Non-empirical
- Special topics (metaphysics, epistemology, ethics)
- History of ideas
- Revaluation

Can it be demonstrated that children are capable of this sort of thinking? The following examples have been taken from some footage of children ranging from Years 4 to 6 (ages 9 to 11) who attend an after-school philosophy club.

Cieron's mono-universe

> I've got an argument to prove there's only one universe and nothing doesn't exist:
>
> I know the universe is infinite, but say half of this room is the universe and the other half of the room another universe.
>
> When they meet together, they must have a point where they meet.

> And what is to define that the two universes are different? I mean they all have the same description; they cover everything.

> And if the universe was here (points) and nothing was there (points elsewhere) the universe must be touching the nothing, and if it is touching it it must physically exist, therefore…

Felix's Monadology

> They (atoms) might be the smallest physical thing, but surely energy must be made of something.

> There might be, like, matter that (because even gas and things are made of atoms, which is physical) makes something which you can pass your hand through.

> Maybe there's, like, something smaller than the atom which can't be divided because it's actually not really physical…

Felix's later reflection on this:

> … How [can] something that doesn't officially exist make something that does exist?

> You could say when two monads collide they get much bigger and make an atom, but how can things that don't have any stuff hit anything?

Nadia's valid point

> If time is a thing, then, if there's no thing *[Ed: as is implied in the word 'nothing']* then time wouldn't exist because it's a thing.

Noah's 'anti-things'

> We've made up a classification for things that have no properties but do have consequences. We call them 'anti-things'.
>
> So 'time': if you left a cloth in a drawer it would get dusty. That is a consequence of time. A consequence of nothing is that nothing solid exists. A consequence of existence is the exact opposite: solids appear. The consequence of gravity is that you go down if you go up. The consequence of motion is if you are going downhill you speed up.
>
> So that is 'anti-things': no properties but they do have consequences.

Alice's argument against anti-things

> It is a thing though: it's something that exists and everything that exists has a property. Like, things that exist might have a property that they don't have a property, but that's a property. An anti-thing couldn't be an anti-THING because it's a thing and it's impossible.

I am not suggesting that all these arguments are sound and valid, but then there are plenty of examples of 'real' philosophers getting it wrong, so it doesn't have to be a good argument to be philosophy, or even good philosophy. I do think that there are plenty of examples of features that constitute philosophy however. For example, complex arguments (Cieron) and in some cases expressed in standard form (see Nadia); all of the examples are abstract, meta-level discussions and some display a clear grasp of the language of philosophy with words such as 'argument', 'therefore', 'property', 'consequence', 'description', 'classification'—and that perennial favourite of philosophy—the neologism with the word 'anti-things'. There is reference to the history of ideas with Leibniz's monads and Felix not only comes up with a suitable Leibnizian insight about the basic stuff being non-physical but he also later demonstrates some very sophisticated revaluation when he

finds a worrying objection to this idea (*how can something that doesn't exist make something that does? Or, how can something that doesn't have any stuff hit something?)* All the ideas expressed by the children have a logical, *a priori* tendency and none, I think, rely on empirical data (children in philosophy sessions do have empirical discussions of course, but, at their best and with the right facilitation, it can be seen here that they are capable of fruitful, non-empirical discussions).[3]

Techne and Hexis

I shall borrow some terminology from ancient Greece to return to the question of thinking skills and I shall use the words *techne* and *hexis* to refer to what some educationalists[4] have distinguished between *skills* and *dispositions*. Many students of philosophy will be familiar with techne as the word used by Plato to describe skills, crafts and art. Readers of Aristotle will be familiar with the word *hexis* as meaning 'having or possessing something', or 'tending towards a disposition'. Aristotle argued for the need to acquire *hexis* with regard to both moral and intellectual development. In other words one needs to cultivate good habits with regard to one's moral and intellectual life so that these good habits become second nature.

I shall argue, following from Winstanley and others,[5] that the thinking skills approach to teaching thinking, such as can be seen in something like the critical thinking A level, is too much like *techne*. The problem with this approach is that skills may or may not be utilised, and very often are unlikely to be used until they have been internalised and naturalised, in other words, so that a hexis-like process has occurred.

One may think of it like this: imagine a bookshelf with many

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[3] These are, of course, end points in the discussions that they were taken from and in many ways the most interesting part of children doing philosophy like this is how they got there, but unfortunately there is not space to transcribe the entire session but if you would like to see more context to these insights then edited versions of these sessions are available to be viewed at:
http://www.youtube.com/user/ThePhilosophyShop

[4] See Winstanley, ibid.

[5] See Winstanley, ibid.

very useful books that you have read and underlined at some point in your past but the books remain on the shelf gathering dust and are not available to you when you need them. Compare this to a book that you have studied in great detail and know exceptionally well: it will often inform many of your thoughts and actions to some extent. Many people learn the bible in this way, or, a student of philosophy may have read a book like *The Critique of Pure Reason* in this way in preparation for a final exam or a set of essays. Good thinking is better learnt in this latter way (*hexis*) than in the former way (*techne*) and this is best done by 'doing' and 'modelling' rather than by 'learning about', or, in other words, when the knowledge has been learned by acquaintance rather than propositionally. (This is not to say that it can't also be learned propositionally, but just that to be able to think well, as opposed to knowing how to think well, one needs to be well acquainted with the methods of good thinking: one needs to practise them).

Dialogue: Inside and Out

I shall now offer a method for developing the *hexis* approach to teaching thinking using a famous and illustrious method: the method of silent dialogue.

If we can enter into the world of Plato's dialogues for a moment we can identify two kinds of dialogue: external and internal dialogue. The external dialogue is the dialogue had between the characters, in other words, a social kind of dialogue where two or more people work through an issue or problem together. In the *Theateatus* Socrates speaks of another kind of dialogue where the aim is to learn to be able to do what one does in the external dialogue but on ones own:

> SOCRATES: And do you accept my description of the process of thinking?
>
> THEATETUS: How do you describe it?
>
> SOCRATES: As a discourse that the mind carries on with itself

> about any subject it is considering. You must take this explanation as coming from an ignoramus, but I have a notion that, when the mind is thinking, it is simply talking to itself, asking questions and answering them, and saying yes or no. When it reaches a decision—which may come slowly or in a sudden rush—when doubt is over and the two voices affirm the same thing, then we call this its 'judgement'. So I should describe thinking as discourse, and judgement as a statement pronounced, not aloud to someone else, but silently to oneself. (Plato: Theatetus 189e-190a6)[6]

This has become known as the 'silent dialogue'. Here, one learns to challenge and reconsider and re-evaluate on one's own as one might in a discussion with others. This has become a standard method in philosophy and Descartes' *Meditations* is a good example of this being done, where the sentences and paragraphs constitute a series of objections and replies as if there were more than one voice even though there is only one writer. Of course, if we step outside of the world of Plato's dialogues this is also what is happening in his dialogues as Plato is the true single voice. If one is including a thinking program in a school curriculum then an overall aim for the entire program (ideally over at least a six year period through primary school and beyond) would be to move from external dialogues such as those had with a group of children—or indeed a whole class—towards an internalisation of this process so that what the child starts by learning to do with their classmates they end by having learned to follow a similar process in their own head. Learning the method of silent dialogue at an early stage of their education would leave them with a life-long skill and would seem to me to meet the concerns raised by Prof. Tim Birkhead.

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[6] Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, Eds. Hamilton, Edith and Cairns, Huntington, (Princeton University Press, 1961).

Young Dogs, New Tricks

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We all know that some students leave school with good A-levels, but ill-equipped to work well at university. In some disciplines—including my own, philosophy—they often have very little prior experience of the subject. True, this means that they have not had the chance to develop any bad habits, but the downside is that they can find the subject very different from their expectations.

There may also be very limited understanding of what sort of academic work is expected of them. Our students have done well at school, and it can be a shock to find that techniques that worked at A-level are not what are required at university. Staff see a succession of worried or resentful students wondering just what has gone wrong, and have to repeat very similar advice on referencing, on essay content or writing style, even sometimes on basic grammar or word use.

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What seems to be needed, alongside academic teaching, is training in basic academic skills—an induction into a way of doing things. In philosophy, at least, those specialised skills might include:

- Writing argumentative, rather than descriptive essays
- Developing and defending your own response to material, rather than relying on authorities (easing students away from what the Guardian called a 'sat-nav' mentality)
- Using specialised technical vocabulary correctly
- Learning effectively in lectures, seminars, problem classes
- Referencing and avoiding plagiarism
- Managing time; studying effectively on one's own, and making the most of contact time.

Developing these abilities is a daunting task, and can seem far removed from the business of subject teaching. The temptation must be to hope that undergraduates somehow absorb them along the way. Furthermore this is a disparate bunch of skills, and there may be no single best way to develop them all. What should we do?

Distributing handouts or posting online material only works if students are already self-starters, and diligent in following up the advice. Most departments probably have sections of their websites called something like 'information and advice for undergraduates', but the repeated experience of having students ask questions that are addressed on these sites suggests that they are not well used. We could offer special introductory skills classes, but these eat into teaching timetables and require considerable staff input if every student is to be supported. And not every skill is suited to classroom teaching; polishing up your writing, for instance, is best tackled on your own, and time management can only be learned by doing it.

At York we are trying a different approach; last year we introduced a compulsory online module for our incoming single honours students, called *Academic Skills for Philosophers* and available through the University's Virtual learning Environment, on the Blackboard platform.

Running throughout the first year, the module consists of four 'chapters', covering pretty well all the skills we want these students to grasp:

- *Writing Skills* explains what is required in writing philosophy and properly referencing sources, introduces technical

vocabulary, and explains the marking system.

- *Studying and Learning* encourages students to recognise their individual learning style, to work well in lectures, seminars and private study, to manage their time, and to approach exams effectively.
- *Understanding* develops their grasp of philosophical analysis and technical vocabulary, and provides a refresher course in basic logic.
- *Critical Thinking* seeks to develop a philosophically robust approach to understanding and challenging arguments

Our own material is linked to the University-wide *Academic Integrity* unit, to ensure that students understand how to avoid plagiarism, collusion and so on, and to set that important topic in the context of our wider advice on academic practice.

How does this differ from just posting advice on the web? Well, completing the module is compulsory for single honours students; it forms an integral part of the first year of their degree. Completing the module counts for 10 credits in the first-year programme, and is a requirement for progression to the second year.

We try to present the material in a chatty, engaging way, and to structure it so that students are encouraged to move through the module, from relatively straightforward advice to more demanding material. Participants are offered exercises and 'think boxes' linked to their current academic work.

First year tutors are encouraged to point students to module material in essay feedback, and regular e-mails prompt students to progress through the chapters. Exercises and tests encourage engagement rather than just clicking through the pages, and the Blackboard platform gives easy access to the module, allowing students to study at their own pace, pausing to complete exercises or re-read material as they wish.

We need to keep an eye on how they are doing, however, and we are already aware that for some students, ensuring steady progress will be a challenge. There is a delicate balance to strike between emphasising the *value* of these skills for learning, and enforcing *sanctions* for non-completion. In the last session several students had to retake the module in order to progress to the second year, and this year we have changed the structure of the module a little to encourage regular work.

We have also introduced an induction element, enabling students to make a start on the material even before they arrive at university. At the time of writing, a week before term starts, over half the new intake has done so.

Writing and uploading this much online material (around 80-90,000 words) is also very time consuming, but we expect it to provide a resource for several years to come. Certainly, revising the material for the coming year took very much less time than the initial set up.

Student feedback, as one might expect, is mixed; many appreciate the clear advice and relevant support, although some of the more able or more conscientious can't always see what the fuss is about.

So, is this the right approach? We think it is the right solution for us, but for both staff and students, only time—and exam results—will tell.

Inclusion of Ethnic Minorities in Philosophy A-Level at a Further Education College

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Objectives

The Foster Report (2005) published for the DfES stated that Further Education colleges of the future should deliver its core purpose in an inclusive way which improves diversity and equality of opportunity. This report will focus whether the delivery of the AQA A-level Philosophy syllabus at Sutton Coldfield College, a very large, multicultural college, offers equality of opportunity and inclusion in a specific area of student diversity—ethnicity.

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The report will take the following structure:

1. A broad overview of government policy regarding inclusive provision, through, for example, LSC and DfES documentation, and linking this to the statistics for the ethnic background of students in the college Sixth Form, and for Philosophy A-level. The specific anomaly regarding the number of Black males taking the subject will be highlighted.
2. A closer look at the AQA Philosophy curriculum and policy on inclusion and diversity, in an attempt to explain and assess some of the findings in the previous section. The issue of lack of Black role models and philosophical tradition will be considered, along with the much wider issue of perceived lack of relevance of the subject, which may be magnified in this demographic.

Government Policy on Inclusion and Diversity

The LSC Equality and Diversity Strategy (2004/7) includes two points that are particularly pertinent:

- Ensuring personalised and inclusive learning for all
- Measuring outcomes with a focus on results rather than the processes used to achieve them.

It seems then, applying this to the case in hand, that the college should be delivering the Philosophy curriculum in such a way that each learner, regardless of ethnic background, is included, and that the curriculum is tailored to individual needs, which indicates that the curriculum should be regarded as a praxis, where learner needs should be addressed in ensuring that they can relate to syllabus content and see the relevance of the subject (Smith 1996, 2000). But then the Strategy goes on to say that the success of such an approach will only be measured in terms of results, taking a much more product based approach to curriculum. It seems that the LSC will be assessing results, and the personalised learning process will be down to the different institutions to deliver. Presumably, should the statistics not indicate that ethnic minorities are achieving measurable results, then the person-

alised and inclusive learning will not be judged to be taking place.

This can be considered alongside the DfES Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners (2004) which states that the proposed transformed 14-19 phase should offer a:

> …wide choice of high quality programmes for every young person, with challenge at all levels, and support to overcome barriers to progress.

Although not stated explicitly in the document, I am taking barriers to progress for ethnic minority groups to include issues such as the language spoken at home, different religious and cultural backgrounds and beliefs, and perhaps also parental expectations of education and subjects to be studied (this obviously, is an issue for research in itself). In this document, it is not stated how this will be measured.

The next consideration would be the statistics for ethnic diversity in the college during 2004/5 when this research began, and compare this to the intake of Philosophy students.

- As a college, based on students who started the college, in 2004/5 52% were from an ethnic minority background
- This is comparable with the start rate in AS Philosophy, where 56% for the same year were of an ethnic minority background
- Of the high achievers that year (measured on A and B grades) 50% were of an ethnic minority background.

If we follow LSC guidelines, and focus on measurable results, then it seems the college provision of the Philosophy curriculum has successfully implemented LSC and DfES guidelines on inclusion and equality of opportunity. But there is a glaring anomaly. Despite Black males comprising 7.7% of the college starting students, not one Black male joined the AS Philosophy class that year. This trend continued, with no Black males enrolling in 2005 or 2006, and one Black male enrolling in both 2007 and 2008. This makes the issue of curriculum delivery, retention and achievement for this particular minority group redundant, as they are not even taking the course in the first place.

Research produced for the DfES by the University of Birmingham (2003) showed that young Black men in post-16 education often view college as a chance to re-enter education and main-

stream opportunities for young people who have been alienated by previous experiences of schooling.

> In particular, college can provide a space where young Black men are supported by a community of Black students, and an opportunity to study a curriculum that celebrates Black cultures and histories.

Why, then, in a college with such ethnic diversity of learners, has A-level Philosophy failed to engage Black male learners? If FE colleges are the opportunity to engage previously disengaged learners, why is Philosophy failing to extend inclusivity to Black males? To some extent, we can look to the specification content, although scope for change here might be limited. On the other hand, the problem may be to do with perception of the subject in general.

Possible Reasons for the Under-representation of Black Males

The first issue considered was the specification content itself. The AQA Philosophy A-Level curriculum has clear aims and objectives—that learners have clear knowledge and understanding of themes and texts, and can take a 'rigorous approach, both critical and constructive, to the study of philosophy'. The aims stated in the syllabus list a range of transferable skills such as comprehension, interpretation, evaluation and analysis, and it is recognised that there will be an increase in maturity from AS to A2.

The specifications also state that it provides 'a worthwhile course for candidates of various ages and from diverse backgrounds'. The specifications also include a section on 'Spiritual, Moral, Ethical, Social, Cultural and Other Issues' in which it is stated that candidates should be aware that 'society is made up of individuals with a variety of opinions'. They are also careful to state that AQA 'has taken great care in the preparation of this specification … to avoid bias of any kind'. (2006)

With such seemingly good intentions and claims to inclusivity, what, then, is the barrier to inclusion?

Without going into great detail into the old specification, there were options over the two years between certain themes, set texts, and a synoptic study based on the philosophers covered in the set texts. All of these philosophers are male, and all are European. This obvious bias contradicts the inclusivity claims made by AQA, but is seemingly acknowledged and accepted, as the syllabus states that it covers 'philosophy of a Western tradition, not Eastern cultures, which is covered in the Religious Studies syllabus.' Thus although it would seem on the face of it that the individual centres can tailor the curriculum from a number of syllabus options—texts and themes—there is obviously limited flexibility when there is no Eastern or Afro-Caribbean philosophy to choose from (although from experience it is possible to make some references in certain areas of the specification). Having said this, the number of ethnic minority learners from Asian backgrounds studying philosophy at the college is proportionally high. Perhaps this is due to a stronger philosophical tradition in Asian and Western European cultures than in Afro-Caribbean. But this would not explain the gender differences, as Black females are fairly well represented.

This lack of non-Western themes and texts makes the retention and achievement of ethnic minorities (not to mention females) surprising, even more so when the advanced level of English required to study these texts is taken into account. However once again the issue at hand here is not the success of the college in attracting and retaining ethnic minorities and females, but why Black males are not taking the subject, let alone being retained or achieving on the course. As stated above, these points do not explain why Black males are less represented in the subject than females, so other issues need to be considered. The LSC guidelines suggest that how inclusivity is achieved will be measured on results. But if Black males are not even taking the subject in the first place, retention and achievement are not even an issue.

It should be noted, though, that there is little opportunity for change in specification in this regard, as the scope for any Afro-Caribbean philosophy that would be applicable is very limited, and the prominence of Black philosophers both historically and in contemporary academia is very low. Although not a particularly thorough piece of research, one can simply type 'Black philosophers' into Google, and the first hit (at time of writing) is a site asking 'why are there no Black philosophers?'

This leads to the second consideration, regarding the lack of role models both historically and in teaching for Black males.

Research by the Commission for Black Staff in Further Education (2003) advises that 'Black learners should be taught and motivated by both Black and white staff…[to] experience positive Black role models.' This seems impossible when there are not even any positive role models for male Black students in the syllabus. The obvious implication of the lack of Black male students in Philosophy is the lack of Black male teachers. This again, does not necessarily explain gender differences, unless one assumes that positive role models are even more important to young Black males than Black females.

But the lack of role models in academia will not be solved until Black male students actually begin to take philosophy in the first place. It seems that we need to consider other issues, perhaps the generic character of philosophy itself. Traditionally a rather elitist subject, it may be hard to engage learners into the relevance of such an abstract topic, and despite earnest talk of 'transferable skills', the use of philosophy for future employment is not obvious.

It is necessary to consider the current situation at HE, and the employment market. Research presented in 2008 and quoted by government minister David Lammy (the first Black Briton to study for a Masters in Law at Harvard) shows that the proportion of university students who are Black Caribbean males has remained at just above one percent for the past three years. Obviously, here is a group who is vastly under-represented in HE. Those who do go to university rarely study Philosophy.

Mark Steel, in his 2006 article for the *Independent*, suggested that philosophers need to promote philosophy as something integral to life, rather than a stand-alone subject. He mentions New Labour's 'dislike' for philosophy, as it is not 'useful'. ('Playing Philosophical With The Truth', 22nd February 2006). Although New Labour's perception that 'use' equates to how easy it is to make money is probably overly cynical, it may be the case that study for study's sake, sadly, is seen as a luxury, and that Philosophy is perceived as a little self-indulgent in today's climate.

One main reason for this is the high level of graduate unemployment in today's competitive market, and a possible preference for more

career-oriented subjects. When a student does not have a cultural or family tradition of HE, they may choose to study a subject that will guarantee employment, as sadly study for study's sake is a luxury few can afford. With the news full of unemployment and job cuts, studying Philosophy may simply not be a practical or viable option for many. This issue is obviously one that applies across all ethnicities and genders, but the point is that it will be magnified in a demographic without a strong culture of HE.

The Future

Lesley Dee, in the report *Inclusive Learning—From Rhetoric to Reality*, suggests that as it stands, the FE curriculum is not based on inclusive principles which seek to match the provision to the requirements of the learners, but on determining the curriculum, and then selecting students to fit the courses. (Dee, 1999 in Green & Lucas 1999).

This claim seems to be supported if one considers the non-selection, however inadvertent, of black male students at the college, and I would imagine, if there had been opportunity to research it, nationwide. But this is not something that can be easily changed without a more prominent history of Black philosophy to draw upon, whereas subjects such as History have been more easily able to adapt to cross-cultural needs, and incorporate Black history modules.

The change in specification may allow some room for flexibility in making more cross-cultural references (for example linguistic determinism and conceptual schemes on the compulsory Reason and Experience module). But this is unlikely to have any major impact, and perhaps the more pertinent issue, and one which deliverers of Philosophy and A-Level and HE can have some control over, is the perceived relevance of the subject. Philosophy needs to be presented as a skill that can lead to success in a range of areas such as Law and Media, rather than an isolated and abstract body of knowledge. Success stories of Philosophy graduates need to be publicised, and the subject needs to be marketed as relevant to students without a family background in HE. How this can be successfully achieved is still to be developed. But what is clear, is that simply looking at the specification content is only

a very small part of the picture when it comes to inclusivity in Philosophy.

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Papers and Articles on Learning and Teaching Issues in Philosophical and Religious Studies

Weaving Philosophy into the Fabric of Cultural Life

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The present paper is an abridged summary of the report entitled *Philosophical Theory and Contemporary Relevance: Personalised, Object-based Learning in Philosophical Studies and the Methods and Practices of Acquiring and Developing Core Critical Skills* produced with the support of The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies of the Higher Education Academy.[1]

Introduction: Bedding philosophy in reality

Among ethicists and teachers of ethical theory it is implicitly acknowledged, to be overtly rhetorical and a little bit disingenuous, that the role of applied ethics and bioethics is of more use in teaching the central doctrines of moral thought than in the actual res-

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olution of issues in contemporary culture, at least as it is practised in most cases.[2] The reasons why discussions of euthanasia, abortion and war, for example, serve this purpose are obvious: the learner feels that there is something at stake, that there is something worth arguing about in a way that they do not when engaging with, say, the veridical versus dispositional theories of pleasure. Central to the degree programme in Philosophical Studies at Newcastle University is an object-centred research programme (hereafter referred to as 'the Project'), personally directed and partly self-assessed by the student which seeks to bed metaphysical, ethical and epistemological concepts into real debates and the actual world. The research is 'object-based' or 'centred' because the student's thesis grows out of and concerns itself with a personal engagement with a non-philosophical and (broadly conceived) empirical object found with the world. So, for example, students begin their investigations from an interest in a particular song, a building, football, a film, a new scientific discovery or a recent political speech.

Over and above the traditional content and substance of a philosophy degree, learners who engage in an object-centred research project will acquire knowledge that crosses disciplines and takes them beyond their standard, narrow curriculum. To continue with the examples above, learners may have to acquire the vocabulary of musicology, architecture, sports science, literary criticism or political science in order to be properly articulate about their chosen object. Reciprocally, it brings philosophical concepts and skills closer to the non-academic world in much the same way that bioethics has centred many ethical debates through their application of philosophical concepts to real, scientific facts, such as the sentience of animals, the development of embryos or the welfare of peoples.

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[1] I should also like to express my gratitude to Miriam Baldwin, Milan Jaros, Lars Iyer, Chris Lindsay, Roger Pearce and George MacDonald Ross for many useful discussions, comments and contributions. The full report is available at: **http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsfundedprojects/22**.

[2] I repeat that this opening salvo is merely rhetorical. As a statement it ought to be made conditional to the teaching of applied ethics as a module part of a programme in philosophy and not as embedded in more vocational or professionally accredited degrees (engineering, biology, medicine) where it serves quite a different purpose. See Myser (2001) for a more rounded discussion.

Beyond the demonstration to students of the relevance of philosophical theory to the real world, there are two other main advantages in the learning approach of the Project. First, the students' motivation to engage in learning is interest rather than punitively driven. The student has a stake in the outcome and conclusions of his or her thesis because it is grounded in an object that is of interest to that student and they are therefore more likely to be motivated to carry out the personal and isolated research necessary for such an endeavour. To be conjectural, one could assume that the reason why is not dissimilar to Aristotle's critique of Plato's argument for common property. If one owns something or sees it as one's own, one is more likely to look after it and care for it. And remember that the thinkers' point of disagreement specifically centred on the ownership and education of children. (Plato, 1955: 462b-c; Aristotle, 1996: 1263a) Second, the Project commits students to a very real engagement between disciplines and hence meets the desirable goal of interdisciplinary education. (UNESCO, 2007: 114) The object of a student's investigation takes him or her outside the comfort of the subject matter of philosophy and requires proper and rigorous research in a separate domain of knowledge (be it archaeology, history, musicology and so on) before reconciling the two in an interesting philosophical manner.

For example, engaging in a research project centred on the object of the 'home' within the territory of 'architecture as a cultural phenomenon' would not only furnish deeper understanding of the specific philosophical concepts brought to bear (possibly, 'space', 'family' and 'tradition') and the conceptual exposition in appropriate thinkers (Kant, Hegel and MacIntyre for example), but also lead to an acquisition of knowledge about architecture and cultural practices. Such knowledge outcomes will be set by the learner himself or herself in collaboration with the supervisor and stated in a continuously amended personal development plan and then repeated in the project dissertation itself. The learning objectives, knowledge outcomes and educational rationale of the project module are that students be reflectively aware of and able to apply the core critical skills of philosophy to an empirical, non-philosophical object as well as preparing students to have the confidence to use relevant philosophical concepts and knowledge beyond the academic confines of a degree programme.

There is ample, colloquial evidence to suggest that Philosophical

Studies' students are more than satisfied with their degree programme and believe that the Project is a worthwhile endeavour, but the purpose of the research programme supported by the Subject Centre for PRS was to explore whether the actual experience of undertaking the Project is fulfilling its goals and whether its delivery could be improved. The changing nature of the job market entails that the vast majority of graduates are no longer either specialist possessors of knowledge or skilled craftsmen, rather most employers require graduates with core critical skills and also the ability to bring knowledge from their degree programme to bear upon seemingly alien domains of knowledge. The Project is a methodology aimed at developing the core critical skills demanded by such roles: independence, autonomy, critical thinking, reflective understanding, evaluative interpretative skills, ability to understand, organise, order and disseminate specialist knowledge (oral, verbal and new media communication skills). These core skills are all traditional academic skills, but students have often been only latently aware of their talents. The reflective nature of the learning process of the Project is aimed at increasing awareness of these skills through the application of philosophical theory to empirical objects.

Skills, Skills, Skills

There is implicit in the forgoing discussion an assumption that ought to be challenged. The overarching aim of this research is seemingly to show that a philosophy degree, its content and its methods are useful or have utility outside the academic environment and, hence, reading for a degree in philosophy is worthwhile. Such an assumption, if true, reduces the value of education to a means-end one and makes it a purely functional practice. Its sole function is seemingly to develop those skills and knowledge useful in one's future life. This is, of course, consistent with the aims and purposes of a learning society as set out by the Dearing report and it would idealistic to suggest that this is not at least part of the aims of education, but it ought however to be countenanced that it is not the be all and end all of education. Perhaps more obliquely, the investigation sought also to justify the putative assumption that the Project methodology captures the Humboldtian ideal of a tertiary educational system capable of producing independent

researchers rather than mere archival units of information. The Project methodology attempts to meet the dual requirements as set out by the Dearing Report to learn knowledge both for its own sake and for its value in other contexts. (NCIHE, 1987: ¶23) Central to one aspect of the Project methodology is the claim that the learning approach emphasises the discipline of philosophy itself and not just the skills that a study of such a discipline will foster.

The Project Teaching and Learning Methodology

Undergraduates are introduced to the Project approach via a mini-project in semester 2 of year 1 (4000 words), but the full module is taught in years 2 and 3 and students are required to produce a thesis of 8000 words for each of those years. It begins and ends with the academic year and the thesis is produced in the June diet of examinations. The teaching of the object-based research module takes place in weekly meetings in groups of maximum ten students, reinforced by one-to-one sessions and substantial supervisor and peer feedback. As part of the object-centred research module, students will be required to produce: a written progress report; a personal development plan in which the student reflects on what they have learnt, develops a specific methodology for his or her research and becomes aware of the skills required to successfully carry out his or her intended study; two oral presentations in which learners present a summary form of their research to others in such a way that it is explicable to non-philosophers and gain immediate feedback from peers and tutors in terms of question and answer sessions; a small webpage summarising their project; and, finally, the actual 8000 word thesis itself to be assessed by project supervisors, second markers and with samples sent to the External Examiner. The complete assessment of the project is a mixture of self-assessment and continuous assessment, involving both indicative (progress report, first presentation), formative (second presentation, entry for the book of change, personal development plan) and summative (Project thesis) elements.

The learning process is a collaboration between project supervisor and learner through a phased development leading from dependence to independence. The timing of the phases is driven by student

need and progress, but a very usual pattern is that by the January presentation, phases 1 and 2 have been completed and the second semester is concerned with the production and discussion of the philosophical research which will form the backbone of the thesis as well as self-reflection on the purposes and aims of the research itself (phases 3 and 4).

Phase 1 is the identification and investigation of the object of research. Some students arrive at the first meeting with very clear cut ideas about what exactly they want to pursue, some arrive with a vague, nebulous set of interests and some with no ideas whatsoever. The role of the supervisor is to offer encouragement and to use his or her experience to direct the learner away from objects that are inappropriate, either because they will not yield any substantial discussion of worth or because they are too ambitious in their scope. Once the object has been identified and provisionally approved, learners must actively, independently and creatively identify possible sources of information and data beyond the normal comfort zone of the library and the Internet (although these will, more than probably, be the starting point). The learner must be encouraged to engage with the 'real' world with the supervisor reminding them that one of the objectives of the project is to demonstrate to the learner—and to give them in turn the ability to demonstrate to others—the relevance and utility of philosophical methods and knowledge outside the degree. Through this process, the way in which the object is to be understood—its 'context', 'place' and 'territory'—are to be decided.

Phase 2 is the identification of appropriate philosophical concepts and methodology drawn from the traditional lecture and seminar syllabus. The supervisor may wish to direct the learner to see how an immediate understanding of the object may well be problematic and urge him or her to contrast two different understandings of the same object. These contrasts should bring into sharp relief the immediate nature of our everyday statements and judgements and also the supposed rational basis for them. Through the narrowing of one's object to a discussion within a specific territory or context (ethical, epistemological, cultural, scientific, metaphysical and so on), and by empirically researching the 'place' of the object within this context, the appropriate philosophical concepts ought to suggest themselves. Bibliographies and notes should be assembled in the personal develop-

ment plan and the understanding of the concepts will be developed and revised in conversation with the supervisor and project group.

Phase 3 is a reflective self-assessment and self-development on the part of the learner. He or she will need to explicitly state how they are going to both investigate his or her project and also state why the philosophical concepts are appropriate and how they are to be applied. In short, he or she will need to, at least in a rudimentary fashion, state the methodological approach taken towards his or her object of research. Given the technical nature of this phase, the supervisor's role is most intensive here and the student is most dependent.

When the discussion of the object, context and concepts have reached a high level of theoretical worth, the supervisor will begin prompting members of the project group to begin asking themselves whether it was worth undertaking the research they have done, whether they have developed skills or acquired knowledge that will be of use in the future or with relation to their degree as a whole. Learners are encouraged to reflect on their own development by looking back through their personal development plans. Finally, phase 4, is the production of the thesis itself. The learner should be independent and active by the stage of thesis writing and group meetings should be wholly led and determined by learner aims and objectives.

An Illustrative Example

A learner has an interest in looking more closely at illegal drugs sparked by a variety of circumstances: why certain substances are illegal and others are not, why there is such a difference in attitudes to different substances (nicotine, alcohol, cannabis) between generations, why contemporary society is seemingly equivocal in its own attitude to illegal substances, and so on. The supervisor sees possibilities in such an exploration and prompts the learner to ask herself whether experiences of drug taking and religious experiences are similar, why people take drugs, why society may want people to use or not use certain substances, why the individual may want to use them, when the substances were made illegal, why we distinguish in kind between substances, and so on.

The learner seeks information from a variety of sources (the

library, government, friends' anecdotes, fictional narratives and so on) until she hits upon a little known fact that there was an attempt to prohibit certain substances to specific social classes, especially factory workers. The idea of certain substances being prohibited for the immediate reason of protecting the individual from harm, can be theoretically contrasted to other paternalistic laws (seatbelts) and also to other substances which may cause harm (alcohol, nicotine); or, an historical contrast can be developed between the pre and post legislation periods and to see what time-line the legislation coincided with (the industrial revolution, the era of mass and cheap production of these substances); or a cultural contrast between societies with stricter and those with weaker laws. The supervisor asks her about the sources for her information and whether it can be trusted. (Is it from a decriminalization lobby group, for example?) She then makes a connection between economic productivity and drug use and becomes aware that the paternalist justification for the prohibition of certain substances may well be disingenuous. She decides (with the help of her supervisor) that what interests her most is the object drugs within the context of legislation and law (ethics broadly construed).

The project supervisor suggests that the concepts of consent and liberty are most appropriate and the learner develops research questions: whether legislation exists to protect the individual or to protect the interests of someone else. These concepts form part of the syllabus of the core ethics module. The agreed method is a rational, empirical enquiry using reflective equilibrium into the justification of law and its foundations. She compiles a relevant bibliography drawn from the core module lectures and begins writing her thesis. The learner notes in her personal development plan that she has developed an interest in law and legislation and may proceed to a law conversion course after graduation.

The Research Aims and Methodology

The pedagogical research into the Project learning methodology sought to realise three specific objectives:

1. To discover whether the object-based, personalised approach to learning better develops the core critical skills

as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies;
2. To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the acquisition of the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies;
3. To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy.

The objectives arose in response to an intuitive understanding of object-based personalised learning as a method more appropriate to the development of core critical skills, more reflective and more relevant than traditional pedagogical approaches. It is seemingly more reflective in that students are at least minimally involved in setting the agenda of what they learn and, more importantly, why they are learning it, and more relevant in that the methodology ought to demonstrate how critical thinking and the concepts of philosophy can fruitfully be brought to bear on objects outwith the confines of the academy.

Evaluation of the objectives was effected by the use of Likert scale questionnaires (with a few additional discursive questions), by the content of students' self-development plans and also through informal discussions. The questionnaires were distributed to a variety of groups in a process of measuring students' *expectations* and *evaluations* and also to garner their mature *reflections*.[3] Comments, appraisals and informal feedback were extracted from discussions with project groups (both this year and the last) reflecting on their learning experience and through self-appraisal present in the personal development plans.

The first two objectives required asking current students a series of questions concerning the skills, knowledge and relevance of the programme at two points in the year: expectations were measured in October at the beginning of the module and evaluations, especially concerning any change in attitude towards the module, were garnered in March. These questionnaires were distributed to Philosophical Studies' students at Newcastle University divided by year as well as

[3] Examples of these questionnaires are contained in the appendix.

students enrolled on a more traditional philosophy course (University of Glasgow) and on the various biology degree programmes at Newcastle University. Although not exhaustive, the data supplied the basis for comparative analysis along differing axes: expectations against evaluations, year on year progressive changes within Newcastle Philosophical Studies students, students at Newcastle compared with a traditional philosophy degree programme and finally the two humanities degrees compared to the natural science degree.

The questionnaires were split into two sections and answers to the questionnaires were to be divided into three broad areas of interest: students' implicit skill awareness (their answers to the Likert scale questions), students' explicit skill awareness (their answers in the free text box) and the evaluation of the relevance of the discipline outside the academy (answers to the second set of questions in the Likert scale). The first section avoided the temptation to simply ask whether a student agrees that he or she has acquired the skill of, say, analytical skills. Such an approach would be worthless because if you were to ask a philosophy graduate whether they have improved their analytical skills, it would be rather odd to receive a negative answer. They are well prepared to express such sentiments in job interviews without being able to give substantial examples of how exactly they developed these skills. The relevant skills were embedded in indirect questions and a free text box was present for participants to name the three most significant skills, thus splitting their answers into implicit awareness of skills and explicit awareness of skills acquired. The core critical skills being sought were reduced to the following set for the purpose of quantitative simplicity: articulacy, rationality, rigorousness, critical reflectivity, flexibility, creativity and independence. The purpose of the second section was to evaluate the third objective of the research: the Project module is discipline-affirming in that students are more aware of the value of philosophical knowledge beyond the academy than traditional students.

Finally, in order to satisfy the need for mature reflection to see whether the object-based learning approach does in fact fulfil its purported aims and purposes, a separate questionnaire was distributed to graduates of the Philosophical Studies programme at Newcastle University. In June, 2008, a virtual, social network was created in order to gauge the attitudes and experiences of students after they have

entered the workplace and to reflect on the merits of the programme. This questionnaire was distributed to graduates of 2008 who joined the social network group in October 2008, three months after they had graduated.

Analysis of the Empirical Data

We were fortunate enough to receive comparator data from the natural sciences (biology students at Newcastle University) and from a traditional philosophy degree programme (University of Glasgow), but the overall numbers were such that any conclusions reached based on the figures must never be anything more than an observation of a possible trend. However, empirical data were, it is true, always going to play the role of reinforcing *a priori* considerations and would never have constituted proof unless the data samples were larger and carried out over a period of years using a control group.[4] Informally this process will continue. No concrete conclusions can be drawn from such a small and unconditional sample of data, but certain intuitions concerning the nature of object-based learning can be supported by both the statistics and the personal testimonies.[5]

It is clear that the non-traditional approach at Newcastle is not producing a different set of skills or harming those traditional set of philosophical skills acquired through reading for a philosophy degree. However, the aim was to substantiate the claims that one, personalised learning is more appropriate to the development of core, critical skills than traditional programmes; and, two, students on the Philosophical Studies programme are more aware of their personal development of these skills. There is unfortunately no statistical evidence to support the former of these claims, but one should not underestimate the significance of difference in the explicit awareness of skill acquisition. The core set of skills are more fairly distributed amongst the Philosophical Studies students than their traditional counterparts and also the indication that independence, obviously a consequence of the research intensive and personal aspect of the object-based learning, is an ability that

[4] The full data sets and graphical interpretation can be found in the full report.

[5] Extracts and examples are available in the full report.

Newcastle students are aware, both implicitly and explicitly, of possessing to a seemingly greater extent than their counterparts. There was also a distinct difference in the changing expectations and progression of self-understanding: the implicit awareness of skill acquisition of the Philosophical Studies students increases and shifts towards a stronger agreement with those statements that indicate an ability to exercise such skills from the beginning to the end of the year and progressively through the three years whereas, for philosophy students at Glasgow University and biology students at Newcastle University, there is very little change from the beginning of the year to the end of the year and between years in the acquisition of skills. What these traditional students expected is what they believe they received, perhaps revealing not so much the non-acquisition of other skills but an unreflective engagement with their own learning. It could be that Philosophical Studies students at Newcastle, through object-based learning, are more involved with and thus reflect more on their actual development as learners and persons. A direct comparison between Philosophical Studies students at Newcastle and Glasgow reveals that the former are implicitly aware of acquiring creativity and independence over and above the more traditional philosophical skills of articulacy, rationality and critical reflectivity.

Newcastle Philosophical Studies students do seem more inclined to view philosophical knowledge as relevant beyond their degree and appropriate for the workplace, as substantiated in the personal testimonies and personal development plans. Perhaps the most interesting result of the whole questionnaire in that Philosophical Studies' students at Newcastle University seemed to reflect the reorientation of this research project concerning the discipline affirming nature of the personalised, object-based Project. Looking at the statement 'I consider my degree to be appropriate for a specific employment niche', Newcastle students responded in a way more akin to the biology students than the traditional philosophy students. With reference to the statement 'potential employers will be interested in what I have learnt in the degree programme's modules'. 21% of Philosophical Studies' students 'strongly agreed' and 43% 'agreed' with the statement, compared with 4% 'strongly agreed' and 35% 'agreed' of traditional philosophy students. (The results for biology were 13% 'strongly agreed' and 54% 'agreed'.) Again, the agreement to this statement

increases through the progressive years of the degree and so may be due to the impact of the Project learning approach. Couple this with the willingness and ability to relate philosophical knowledge to both skill acquisition (as demonstrated by their wide distribution of explicit awareness) and external territories (possibly workplaces or at least objects in the cultural world in a broad sense), then object-based learning allows students to answer the perennial interview question 'How do you see your degree as relevant to the current vacancy in our company?' with more than the 'It has taught me to be analytic and rigorous, formulate rational arguments…' as all students would answer. Rather our students are able to answer in relation to their Projects, be they about education, the workplace, architecture, music , et cetera. Through such answers, they are able to demonstrate the worth of philosophical knowledge to the employer and not just as means to acquiring skills desired by the would-be employer.

Conclusions

Research question 1: Is personalised learning more appropriate to the development of core critical skills than traditional programmes?

There was no evidence to support the claim that students on the Philosophical Studies degree programme at Newcastle University possessed any advantage over traditional programmes (in this case, the Philosophy degree programmes at the University of Glasgow). The degree programme at Newcastle, based as it is in personalised, object-based learning, does not produce a different set of skills nor does it do so better than a traditional programme. There is, perhaps, more evidence of independence and creativity due to the heavy autonomous and personal nature of the undergraduate research, as would be expected. So, the answer to the first research question would seem to be no, that personalised learning approach is not more appropriate to the development of core critical skills, neither is it more inappropriate, it is just a different learning methodology that is perhaps more appropriate or less appropriate with reference to the particular student and his

or her own learning preferences.

Research question 2: are students actually aware of the benefits of personalised learning?

The second research question arises from the second aim of the current research, that is 'To determine to what extent the object-based, personalised approach to learning makes students aware of the acquisition of the core critical skills as compared with more traditional pedagogical methodologies.' Such a question need not be limited to discussion of the acquisition of skills, since 'benefits' can be understood more widely, but since the third question below deals with the value of a philosophical education and its concepts, it is best to reduce this question to one concerning the acquisition of core, critical skills. In comparison with the more traditional programme, students at Newcastle University are aware of a broader set of skills than their traditional counterparts and the testimonies of past and current students expresses a strong link between the skills acquired on the degree programme and tasks carried out in everyday and work life. The overall impression given by the data, both formal and informal, seems to suggest that yes, Newcastle University students are more aware of the acquisition of core critical skills as an implicit benefit of their degree programme in philosophy.

Research question 3: Are students aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy?

This last question, the discipline-affirming nature of the personalised, object-based learning methodology, is the most definitive of the successes. Both the statistical data and, more specifically, the personal testimonies of the students at Newcastle University demonstrate the bridge between philosophical theory and the 'real world' is one that is both in the students' awareness and one they are sincerely confident to traverse. Many of the testimonies tell of the personal development of viewing philosophy as merely the subject matter of the degree to a realisation of its importance in other (almost all other) aspects of the students' life. The connection between their studies and their prospective workplaces or further educational destinations is often explicitly

made. Even if no other achievement had been made in the current investigation, the confirmation of the intuition that the personalised, object-based learning approach is discipline-affirming for philosophy, then it would have been a success. So, the answer to the final research question would be, yes, students are aware of the value of philosophical knowledge and concepts beyond the academy.

There was an initial complacence in the belief that the object-centred approach was better at developing the core critical skills, when a little reflection would perhaps have reminded the researcher of the long standing traditional success of philosophy degrees and their graduates in this country. However, the explicit awareness of the acquisition of these skills in concrete situations as well as the awareness of the value of philosophical knowledge should not be underestimated. The personalised, object-based learning approach, if nothing else, serves to demonstrate why one might want to engage with and pursue a philosophical education even if (and so few will) one will not concern oneself with exclusively philosophical concerns after graduation.

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Appendix: examples of the questionnaires

All questionnaires required students to indicate how far they agreed with a statement (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = agree somewhat; 4 = disagree somewhat; 5 = disagree; 6 = strongly disagree) except for a free text box where students would simply asked to list answers.

Questionnaire 1: expectations

1. By undertaking my current course of studies and degree pro gramme:
   - I shall become better at expressing ideas and arguments in writing.
   - I shall become better at expressing ideas and arguments in oral situations.
   - I shall be able to persuade people of my own views and ideas more easily.
   - I will learn to recognize good arguments about a range of issues.
   - I shall be more prepared to change my own ideas in light of good reasons.
   - I shall improve my ability to interpret and comprehend other people's views and ideas.
   - I shall learn to be tolerant of ideas that differ from my own.
   - I shall learn to be more creative in responding to problems and situations.
   - I will develop the ability to think for myself and to support my own ideas.

2. The knowledge I have learnt on my course will be useful after I graduate.
3. Potential employers will be interested in what I have learnt in the degree programme's modules.
4. I will retain much of the knowledge and facts from my course after I leave university.
5. The material and content of lectures is useful only for passing my degree.
6. I consider my degree to be appropriate for a specific employment niche.

7. Please list the three most significant skills you will develop on the degree programme:

Questionnaire 2: evaluations

1. My degree programme has improved my ability to:

- express ideas and arguments in writing.
- express ideas and arguments in oral situations.
- persuade people of my own views and ideas more easily.
- recognize good arguments about a range of issues.
- be more prepared to change my own ideas in light of good reasons.
- interpret and comprehend other people's views and ideas.
- learn to be tolerant of ideas that differ from my own.
- learn to be more creative in responding to problems and situations.
- develop the ability to think for myself and to support my own ideas.

2. The knowledge I have learnt on my course will be useful after I graduate.
3. Potential employers will be interested in what I have learnt in the degree programme's modules.
4. I will retain much of the knowledge and facts from my course after I leave university.
5. The material and content of lectures was useful only for passing my degree.
6. I consider my degree to be appropriate for a specific employment niche.
7. My degree has helped me to clarify ideas about future career paths and life choices
8. Please list the three most significant skills you developed on the degree programme:

Questionnaire 3: reflections

1. My degree programme helped me to choose and pursue my current career and life choices.
2. I often use skills and methods from my degree programme in my work.
3. My degree programme prepared me for my current work.
4. My work would be more difficult had I taken a different degree.
5. I can confidently communicate the worth of my degree to other people.
6. I use material from courses and my degree programme in the context of my work.
7. The concepts and ideas from my degree programme are useful for my work.
8. My employers are aware of the subject of my degree.
9. The subject of my degree programme was useful in securing a job.
10. Please list the skills which you developed on your degree programme that are most useful at work:

Only Connect:

A Web-based Approach to Supporting Student Learning in the Philosophy of Social Science

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Background

The University of Nottingham School of Nursing has 15 years experience in the development of high-quality e-learning resources, using a wide range of methods and platforms. A large number of its staff is involved in e-learning developments, and the

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School has attracted over £2 million in funding for these projects. An overview of the School's activity in this are can be found at **http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/sonet/**.

'Philosophy of Social Science' is a compulsory module for post-graduate students in the School of Nursing (and Sociology) at the University of Nottingham. This is necessary in order for postgraduate programmes in both schools to achieve ESRC recognition for funding. However, it is also thought to be a good introduction to post-graduate study. A major object of the philosophy of social science course is to increase students' awareness of the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that underpin various research strategies. Students employ or encounter these concepts in the studies they read and rely on to extend their knowledge of the world, even if the assumptions are implicit rather than explicit. The module aims to help students understand debates in philosophy and about the nature of knowledge claims so that they are able to critically examine assumptions that are built into the available methods of data gathering and analysis.

Most of the students on this module have never studied any philosophy before. Many are experienced health care professionals (for example, nurses, occupational therapists and so on). As such, they tend to be 'concrete' thinkers and are often uncomfortable with abstract concepts. It is perceived as being a difficult module, though our own research (Morgan et al 2008) shows that students find it very valuable, but not until they are further on with their research. One of the issues that students unfamiliar with philosophy find difficult is making the links between different ideas and concepts discussed in the taught sessions, and the connections with their own research. There is insufficient time in the lectures to draw out all of these connections, and seminars often end up being devoted to going over the key concepts again. Hence there is a need to help students to make these connections. In addition to these problems, students are often very anxious about studying philosophy.

In order to better support students, a project to create a module website was funded by the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies. This project was completed in 2008, and more details of the module, the website and the evaluation data can be found in Timmons (2008). As has long been recognised with all IT projects, (Brooks 1975) what seems at the planning stage

like a straightforward project turned out to be more complex than originally assumed.

A website was developed that used the hypertextual nature of the Internet to help students understand the connections between philosophical ideas. The website is integrated with, and supplementary to, existing programme of lectures and seminars. It elucidates how various themes thread through the material covered in the module, and how philosophical innovations are often a reaction to others. It situates each of the lectures in the wider history of philosophical ideas, and provides links to high-quality web resources in this field. Philosophy is not a subject that lends itself to linear exposition, and it was hoped that a web representation would be more productive in explaining philosophical concepts and their connections.

What the website is not

The website was not intended to be a substitute for doing the reading or coming to the lectures and seminars. As such, the material included comprised brief summaries, with the clear intention of showing the links between different concepts and philosophers, not expositing them in depth. The students were explicitly told that they could not reference the website in their assignments.

e-Learning in the PRS Subject Area

Mossley (2003) provides a useful overview of the advantages and disadvantages of using e-learning in the PRS subject area. However, the student groups discussed in this report are quite different from those studying the module reported on here. The approach taken has some parallels with that used by Victoria Harrison (reported in Lamb 2006).

Existing e-learning resources

Both the Stanford Encyclopaedia (**http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/contents.html**) and PhillWeb (**http://www.phillwebb.net**) are brilliant resources but are not suitable for these students as they are too

advanced.

The Content

The site is based around the nine lectures which make up the teaching, but only uses them as a starting point. Links are provided to definitions of terms, but in addition, themes are threaded through the whole site to help students understand the evolution of debates within the subject. A historical time line is also provided to help show how more recent thinkers are critiquing or adding to the whole canon of the subject.

The module covers the following topics:

- Introduction: ontology, epistemology, methodology.
- Epistemology: an introduction to positivism and beyond
- Structure and agency
- Hermeneutics and phenomenology
- Is truth the purpose of enquiry?
- Feminism as situated methodology
- Social constructionism and critical realism
- Ideology
- Scientific paradigms and the sociology of knowledge

Due to the diverse nature of the students on this module both in terms of level (studying Master's, PhDs and professional doctorates) and subject (Nursing, Sociology, Social Policy and Education), the website provides links to examples which show the relevance of the philosophical debates to research in each of these subjects.

Building the website: the process

The function of the website was explicitly not to be a repository of the module content in the form of lecture notes and slides, but to show how the different ideas covered in the module related to each other. This meant that the individual pages had to be fairly short, and focussed on links, rather than content. Philosophy, by its nature, tends to be discur-

sive, and relies on the reader making the connections through a knowledge of the background to the issues being discussed. This was, in a sense, the main rationale for the project, in so far as the students taking this module did not have that background knowledge. Therefore, the links had to be made explicit (in fact, hypertext links are probably the best way of doing this). However, this made the task of writing the material for the individual pages harder, as it is difficult to express complex ideas briefly.

There are philosophical texts that are written in a compressed format. *The Tractatus* and *The Philosophical Investigations* spring to mind. Intriguingly, there are hypertext versions of both at **http://www.kfs.org/~jonathan/witt/tlph.html** and **http://users.rcn.com/rathbone/lwtocc.htm** respectively, suggesting that the hypertext format works well with ideas expressed in this way. However, they could not be said to constitute a model for the website discussed here.

The process I used started with the topics covered in the lectures for the module. In collaboration with the lecturers who delivered these lectures, I broke each lecture up into between 5 and 10 topics. So, for instance, the lecture which covered the sociology of knowledge was broken up into Merton, Kuhn, critique of Kuhn, sociology of science, the 'strong programme' and actor-network theory. These sub-topics formed the basis for the individual web pages. Before being coded as html they were written on index cards. An initial set of about 40 cards was created. These were then all placed on a large table to attempt to draw the connections between them. This also proved to be harder than it might appear, as it was difficult to keep track of which connection had already been made. Connections to other cards/pages were noted at the bottom of the card. It was at this point that the first phase of coding and site-building took place. The grant enabled me pay a student studying computer science to write the html to create the individual web pages and links.

This proved to be the next practical problem: explaining the website and its function to a non-philosopher. As I tried to do this, it became clear that he did not, conceptually, see the website as I did, in terms of interlinked ideas, but in terms of a data structure (Standish 1980) ; a fundamental concept for a programmer, but one which I struggled to remember. This proved to be more successful at explaining what I want than trying to give a computer scientist a crash course in

epistemology. Once I explained (and he understood) the site as a data structure, he was able to work quickly and efficiently to produce the pages. At this point, the website was 'released ' to the module team for comments. This generated a new list of pages to be created and links to be included. I wrote most of the content for the new pages myself, but this time five were written by another member of the team.

Additional features

The main additional feature implemented at this stage was a timeline, originally written by a member of the module team. This showed the historical development of the main themes of the module, with key thinkers shown in their historical context. It can be seen at **http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/students/research/social_science/timeline.php**. I did not appreciate until after the website was complete that this use of a historical approach would signify to some that we were 'Continental' rather than analytic philosophers. Neither myself not the module team have any clear allegiance, and it was not my intention to identify the project with any particular approach.

A feature which probably should have been included, but was abandoned due to its complexity, was some sort of concept map, which would reprint the various ideas and connections graphically. It is possible that this sort of representation may help certain types of students to understand these ideas better than a more text-based approach. I was quite attracted by something akin to 'The Great Bear' by Simon Patterson, (the picture based on the London Underground map). I hope to develop this in the future.

The Final Website

The module website created to help these students (**http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/students/research/social_science/index.php**) is about making the connections between the various topics in the module, and showing how philosophy is an ongoing debate between different thinkers and schools. This is difficult to achieve in the lectures (and hard for these students). Topics are broken into 'bite-sized chunks', in common with other e-learning approaches in the University

of Nottingham School of Nursing (see, for instance, **http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/sonet/index.php**). The material included (over 50 individual pages) is richly interconnected, taking full advantage of the Internet in its original manifestation as hypertext.

Evaluation

The formal evaluation of the website, via a survey, is reported below (and Timmons 2008). However, some interesting points were made by students informally, which were not covered in the main evaluation. The first of these was that the website showed that the ideas covered in the module were connected, and that those connections were important. This concept, which seemed so obvious to the module team, was, up until that point, unclear to some of the students. Some students also appreciated that the team were making an effort on their behalf. For them, the website said, symbolically, that the module team acknowledged that the subject was difficult, and that we were prepared to make an effort ourselves to help students make progress.

In addition to the survey another technique that I should probably have used in the evaluation is the kind of simple usability testing suggested by Nielsen (2000) who argues that fairly simple observation of as few as five users can generate almost all the useful usability information that can be gathered about a website.

Evaluation data are given below. Evaluation was done using the University of Nottingham School of Nursing's e-learning evaluation instrument, to enable comparison with other e-learning projects within the School of Nursing. 12 students returned surveys (out of 20 on the module). Questions marked with an asterisk allowed multiple answers.

	At home	At university	Else-where	
Where do you have access to the Internet?*	8	9	2	
	Only used by me	**Shared with family**	**Shared with others**	
The computer I use is*:	4	5	4	
	Very high	**High**	**Low**	**Very low**
How do you rate your confidence in using computers?	2	8	2	
How do you rate your confidence in using MS Office?	2	8	2	
How do you rate your confidence in using the web?	3	8	1	
How do you rate your confidence in using multimedia?	3	4	5	
	Yes	**No**		
Any problems in accessing the module website?	4	8		
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Dis-asgree**	**Strongly dis-agree**
Was the website clear about its purpose?	4	8		

	Strongly agree	Agree	Dis-asgree	Strongly dis-agree
Was the website easy to navigate ?	3	8		1
Did it introduce new concepts/language clearly ?	3	8	1	
Would you recommend the module website ?	4	8		
Should there be more of these websites in other modules ?	3	8	1	
Was the content appro-priate for the course ?	4	8		
Was the content well integrated ?	3	8	1	
Was the content pitched at the right level ?	3	9		
I enjoyed being able to learn on my own	4	8		
The website helped me address specific gaps in my knowledge	2	10		
The website helped me meet the requirements of the course/module	1	10	1	
The website helped me retain knowledge in this area	3	8	1	

These data are encouraging, in so far as they are almost exclusively positive. The difficulties in accessing the website were all due to an incorrect URL being published in an early version of the module handbook.

Using the 'CAMEL' model of tangible benefits from e-learning (Ferrell et al 2007), the website provided benefits for students in terms of student achievement. Overall marks were higher on the module than in previous years. While this cannot be directly attributed to the website, and is certainly a product of several factors, the website may have contributed to this improvement.

Possible Future Developments

Among the future developments actively under consideration by the module team is the transfer of the platform to the University of Nottingham standard VLE, Blackboard. An idea which was initially considered as part of this project, and will be implemented in the future, is using the existing website as the basis for a wiki, with contributions from both students and the module team.

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The Value of Studying Philosophy for Postgraduate Research Students in Nursing

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Introduction and Background

Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions since no definite answers can be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which

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> closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great." (Russell, 1912)

With the exception of ethics, it remains relatively uncommon for students in nursing to formally study philosophy. While its relevance to a practice-based discipline may be questioned by some, there is sufficient writing and scholarly activity (such as the International Philosophy of Nursing Society and its journal *Nursing Philosophy*, and centres such as the Centre for Philosophical Nursing Research at the University of Alberta) to suggest that it is in the mainstream of intellectual work in the discipline worldwide. The value of philosophy to nursing was asserted by Griffin (1980). Cash (2004) presents a strong argument for the central relevance of philosophy in the development of nursing, both as knowledge and as practice. Yumul (2004) presents a similarly strong argument, though from a more personal, reflexive stance. Porter (2001) points to the value of philosophy in underpinning the practice of research in nursing. There are several writers who argue that there are benefits for research students in nursing, in particular, to study philosophy, including Appleton and King (2002), Drummond and Standish (2007) and Pesut and Johnson (2008). These authors broadly agree that the benefits include helping 'nursing students to learn to articulate and defend their own ideas while refining their critical thinking skills.' (Butts and Lundy 2003, p91). Butts and Lundy are among the few authors to report on experience of teaching philosophy to nursing students, though theirs is not an empirical study.

While there is only a limited literature that explores the teaching of philosophy to nursing students, there are relevant papers which consider more generally teaching philosophy to non-philosophy students. These include Taylor (2003) who explores teaching philosophy to students of architecture and town planning. The relevance of Taylor's work is that the link between philosophy and a practice-based discipline such as town planning may not be apparent to everyone. Taylor shows how valuable the students found the subject to be, particularly in terms of developing their skills in conceptual analysis, and academic debate, both of which are important for postgraduate students in nursing. Evans (2003) points to similar benefits, in terms of reasoning and argument, for the teaching of philosophy to students in general,

and Kuçuradi (2003) makes a plea for the teaching of philosophy to students from a wide range of disciplines. Kunkel (1983) argues that in addition to developing critical thinking, the teaching of philosophy to non-philosophy students can have more general educational benefits.

In the light of this fairly positive view of the value of learning philosophy, it therefore seems odd that it so rarely plays an explicit part in postgraduate education in nursing. Within the UK, the General Nursing Council Trust Evaluation of professional doctorates for nurses found that while philosophy had initially been a part of some doctoral programmes, it had largely been abandoned as irrelevant (Ellis, 2008). In the light of this contradiction between the literature and practice, we wished to establish whether there was any value in continuing to teach philosophy to postgraduate research students, from the perspective of the students. This approach has successfully been applied to the debate in the literature over the relevance of sociology, where students' views had not largely been taken into account. (Edgley, Timmons and Crosbie 2008).

The Module

'Philosophy of Social Science' is a compulsory module for postgraduate students in the School of Nursing where this study was conducted. A major object of the philosophy of social science course is to increase students' awareness of the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that underpin various research strategies. The module aims to help students understand debates in philosophy and about the nature of knowledge claims so that they are able to critically examine assumptions that are built into the available methods of data gathering and analysis. More broadly, the module seeks to improve the critical awareness and abilities of students. A supplementary reason the module is offered is in order for postgraduate programmes to achieve Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) recognition for funding (ESRC 2008).

Data Collection and Sample

Following Avis (2003) we do not believe that it is necessary for qualitative research to follow a specific methodological prescription. This was, broadly, an interpretive, pragmatic project. Data collection was by interviewing students who had completed the Philosophy of Social Science module within the last five years and who were still engaged in research in the School of Nursing. Involvement in the study comprised a 30-45min, one-to-one interview with the researcher (JP, not one of the module team). Fifteen students who responded positively to an email were invited to be interviewed. The interview schedule is attached at Appendix One. The topics chosen were derived from the literature, and from student evaluations of the module. Although most interviews took place within the School of Nursing in a private room, for logistical reasons three of the interviews were conducted by telephone.

Participants had a wide variety of backgrounds in philosophy. Although three quarters of the students had experienced some study of philosophy prior to the module, it was in less depth. In addition some of the students had either forgotten or struggled with their previous exposure to philosophy, and for some this had been a considerable time ago. At the time of interview around one half of students were at the stage of designing their project and reading background literature, a quarter were doing fieldwork or analysis and the remainder were writing up their research. Research topics that students were investigating covered prevention of and patient experience of injury or specific disease, palliative care, lifestyles, diagnosis and nurse education.

Ethical issues

Ethical approval for the study was given by the relevant Research Ethics Committee. Written information was sent in advance of the interview, and written consent taken at the interview. Confidentiality was guaranteed. Numbers in brackets following quotes indicate interviewee codes. Further identification has been avoided in order to maintain confidentiality.

Analysis

All interviews were tape-recorded and the resulting transcripts analysed for using NVivo 7. The analysis involved two stages, first coding the transcripts into an evolving tree structure of concepts and themes through a process of iterative modification. The coded text was then drawn upon to illustrate the emergent themes.

Findings

Of the participants: three were on the taught Doctor of Health Science (DHSci) course, one was doing a Master of Arts in Research Methods (MARM) and 11 were undertaking a PhD. Four students were on part-time courses—two PhDs and two DHSci. Nearly half were in their second year. Nine participants were female and six male, with one female and four males being international students.

The interviews generated a large amount of data. From this we will focus on their perception of the relationship between what they learned on the module, and their own research, as this is the principle issue that is discussed in the available literature. Although many students found the philosophy module hard and had not always enjoyed the experience they nonetheless valued the ways in which participation in the module had prompted a perceived development in their abilities, often not immediately, but on reflection. The students interviewed did not appear to experience the same sorts of difficulties in studying philosophy as the students discussed by Cantor (2007), such as inexperience in writing essays, or with expressing themselves in seminars.

Encouragement to read further

The students perceived knowledge and understanding had been broadened by being encouraged throughout the module to read more extensively around philosophy and their subject, in preparation for the lectures. For some, the additional reading, as opposed to the lectures and tutorials, was the most effective aspect in the preparation and writing of their assignment. One student described how, in relation to

their assignment they now understood their approach to their research, returning to re-read the literature from a new perspective by considering the economic, cultural and social conditions at the time. From their perspective, breadth of reading gave more credence to students' research by placing it within a context and giving breadth to their work.

Having been encouraged and given ideas for reading some students had been opened to the multiple approaches that were possible, enabling them to put their research in a particular philosophical context. For others it provided confirmation of a choice of method, for example a qualitative exploration as appropriate for the question asked in their research. An increased awareness of the available philosophies enabled students to reconcile decisions that they had taken, again giving them confidence in their stance.

> Well it's encouraged me to do some reading about interpreting what people say, and I've joined a narrative research group (8)

Alternative frameworks

During and following the module, students argued that they felt better able to choose appropriately from the variety of philosophical standpoints that they had been introduced to during the module. Even when they had decided on their research question and method beforehand, students were then able to re-evaluate and, for some, to change or confirm these decisions while broadening their thinking on the research they were undertaking.

In being able to understand a variety of alternative approaches appropriate to their research they were then able to rationalise their decision to embark on the route they had chosen. This resulted in them gaining greater confidence that they were embarking in a sensible direction for the research and self-assurance that they would be able to justify their decision-taking both verbally and in the written thesis.

> … all these approaches, I'm not looking at them from one angle, but oh this is a good one, and the reason why I choose it because of this and that. I also look at the ones which I wouldn't use. (15)

Students linked knowledge gained as a result of the philosophy module

to their choice of methodology, creating questionnaires and the ways their methodology section was written. However, where students had followed several modules all of them had to different extents contributed to their increased knowledge.

> I would say that it has guided, even my methodology in particular because the way I now structure my methodology is in relation to the epistemological way of thinking. [In] particular I want to ground my research on particular epistemological assumptions, so that guides my research, that analysis and interpretation and finally writing up.'(14)

Students said that being exposed to philosophical thinking, the variety of philosophical approaches, together with the reading for the module and their research, alongside discussion and sharing of ideas both in and out of tutorials expanded their perspectives and enabled them to be more perceptive. They talked about changing their thinking and compared their position before, to after, experiencing the philosophy module. They appreciated these developments and described them as 'thinking beyond', 'thinking in a different way', the module 'opened up ideas', 'broadened horizons', 'gave the experience of a new style of philosophy'. Another aspect of students' thinking was to realise that there is no absolute right or wrong and that everything is debatable. For nurses this challenged their previous scientific training and positivist philosophy. They felt they had advanced and were now better able to challenge and would have been poorer without taking the module. For others breadth of thinking was in learning how to explore and investigate, probe and consider claims and evidence.

> I'm doing an ethnographic study so obviously I believe that truth isn't clear cut and can be mathematically tested, around that sort of area it has helped, and also understanding how the research paradigms came about, why they have particular beliefs and values and it's the assumptions that everything begins from and it's helped in being able to challenge assumptions as well, so it's helped quite a lot. (10)

Critical thinking

According to the respondents, the module challenges students' thinking and encourages them to be more critical not only in relation to their research but also in their reading. In appreciating the absence of right and wrong they realised that their task was to provide and justify the rationale for the particular philosophical stance adopted in their thesis. This resulted in some students reflecting on previous work or completed parts of their thesis and the ways they would now approach this.

> Interviewer: Can you think of any ways in which what you learnt on the course has actually influenced the research?

> Student: It's more around my thinking, my ability to critique things, reading research articles and writing my literature review. So it's more when you read other studies being able to think they're very much influenced by Marxism […] Making me be more critical. It's definitely helped. I just feel different. (5)

Reflexivity

As well as providing students with wider knowledge and encouraging them to think further and be more critical, students saw the module as providing them with a greater depth of understanding and insight. Some students began to appreciate the effect their own beliefs also had on their research and this came as insight to some.

> Before,…, I'd actually got a very simplistic view, but the philosophy module […] has made me kind of think can I actually get to the depth of somebody's experience simply by talking to them. I've realised I can't and that is something that I've got to write in to my methodology chapter. Whereas going back to the Master's it was, I talked to people and this is how it was for them, and now I realise, that probably isn't how it was for them ... But it was this kind of the ontology of how can we know something, can we actually know something by simply interviewing somebody. (6)

> What I've done in terms of my research I think is the module did

> kind of open my eyes to the issues and to an understanding that I didn't understand. So before then I was in a fog but didn't know it. Afterwards I knew I was in it and somehow had to find my way out of it. So it was good for that and it did introduce me to the basic concepts. (11)

Students' focus during the module varied according to the stage of their own research and previous experience. However all had at least some idea about their area of research interest and during the later part of the module had a focus on the topic for their assignment. Consequently there was diversity in students' desire, and need to make linkages between elements of the course and their own research. Many of the effects of the module already discussed have demonstrably been directly related to the students' theses in particular their reading and thinking around particular philosophical topics. However it is pertinent to identify further aspects of the way in which projects overtly show links to the philosophy module. Such links included effects on proposals, the philosophical approach to a project, claims and conclusions. Students were very clear that it was only they who could make such links with their project, although they did acknowledge that some peers found this difficult and had not yet succeeded. The impetus for one had been their upgrade in which they had to express their philosophical thinking. Others described 'key' lectures during which they had realised they 'had a light-bulb moment', the topic was fitting for their research, this resulted in students' increased interest as they realised that philosophical knowledge was appropriate.

> … it's about making a connection with your own research and your own methodologies. I guess for some people maybe that doesn't happen, but I think it's understanding even if that doesn't happen while you're actually doing the philosophy course you might find that clicks kind of later on and it falls into place. (2)

> At the beginning I wanted to do sort of feminist, but then I realised my sex, gender, sexuality, would probably not allow me to do a feminist study, so, but that was really useful for my thinking, and I realised why it would be difficult for me to do a feminist study, which was the original plan. (3)

In being more able to critique their study students described

themselves as being more perceptive and cautious in relation to the claims and generalities that they would be drawing on their research. An example given was about 'truth' in relation to being able to define medication in different ways.

> But yes, it [philosophy] helped me to understand how things work in the study … and I need to be cautious when I critique the study. (12)

> …. all the conclusions I make are going to be about how I accept what people are saying, are their beliefs, you know I make these inferences from those assumptions, using the data and all the other techniques that you use but ultimately it's my beliefs about what I'm getting which has been an insight for me. (11)

The students thought that having a clear philosophical approach to a project gave it both a basis and coherence. This was evident for students in later years of their research. This also enabled and gave students confidence to write in a more reasoned way, and encompassed having to relate their conclusions to the theoretical framework. Students valued the way that learning philosophy had helped with writing the different sections of their thesis. As a result the philosophy was described as permeating the whole research process and thesis.

> It also gives a coherency to research. If you have something that underpins what you do and you can carry that forward to the analysis and therefore through into the recommendations, it gives the whole thing a coherency and consistence. (7)

Broader life context

In addition to the uses of the module in respect of their research projects some students anticipated that they would be able to draw on aspects of the module in their future years. They argued it had given them a broader and more enlightened understanding and awareness and in so doing had increased their confidence in general. For one student their own philosophical stance and thinking had been challenged while another, someone already attracted to philosophy, expressed an interest

in pursuing philosophy teaching. Others were now reflecting on previous research, which they could now criticise from new standpoints that they had learnt about in the philosophy module. For some, learning from the module would be a continuing process.

> One of the things that I've fallen down on in my interviews is when people asked me about theoretical basis for my work and I didn't have a clue … because then I would have done some reading before the interview, but I didn't know where to start. (8)

International students

International students mostly talked about other international students struggling with the module, although there was acknowledgement that this could have been the same even if the module had been in their own language, especially for science graduates. Students were anxious not only in terms of the course content and cultural differences but also because foreign funders expected them to pass the module to demonstrate value. They therefore spoke of feeling extra pressure to get through the module. Students from countries with a greater philosophical understanding and where philosophy is part of their cultural experience showed exceptions to this—they could be less able with the practical aspects of the research or with putting their thoughts into English.

Speaking of international colleagues UK students were not surprised by the difficulties experienced with this course, relating that some international students had been very disappointed with their results despite at least one seemingly having a better grasp of philosophy that the UK student. Another student expressed the view that the module was taught, especially from a European or American perspective, in relation to a 'very Western philosophy'. They also thought Asian students had considerable difficulty with the alien concept of feminism and viewed this as a 'handicap' for them in relation to the module.

> They felt there was no kind of trying to make it accessible to them in a way that they would understand in a way that could link to some of their beliefs and I think, again from some of the conversa-

> tions that I've had, they have felt that they are handicapped from being from that culture. (7)

> Yes, even though it is difficult but I think it's useful for students and also international students to learn. (9)

Discussion

The findings support the claims both in the nursing (Griffin 1980, Appleton and King 2002, Cash 2004, Yumul 2004, Porter 2001, Drummond and Standish 2007, Pesut and Johnson 2008) and philosophical literatures (Russell 1912, Kunkel 1983, Taylor 2003, Evans 2003, Kuçuradi 2003) that the formal study of philosophy has tangible benefits for postgraduate research students in nursing. These included critical thinking and a deeper understanding of the research process as well as confidence in the choices that they made on the research journey.

Additional benefits not extensively discussed elsewhere in the literature were a depth of thinking that most students had not experienced before. Related to this was an appreciation that the various methodological alternatives available to them as researchers were not simply neutral 'tools' to be selected on purely pragmatic grounds, but that each approach existed within an epistemological framework and tradition. Intriguingly, some students spoke of philosophy as giving them a broader understanding and an approach that was applicable outside their research in their wider lives, supporting the argument of Russell (1912) and Kunkel (1983) that philosophy has a much wider relevance than any other subject.

Conclusion

Students almost unanimously recognised and commented that the philosophy module was both difficult and challenging. Overall many had not, at the time, found the experience enjoyable and there was concern about a heavy reading load to cover prior to lectures.

> it's a hard course, but absolutely imperative. (5)

Most students had understood the relevance of the module to their research, though others did not make this link, while for many recognizing a link came towards the end of the module. Although students found the assignment difficult it had made them think, talk, and write about how to apply philosophical thinking to their work. Having to put their learning into a context meant that they only then began to understand why they had been obliged to experience the Philosophy of Social Science module.

The students interviewed had, they felt, all benefited from the experience of philosophy either through the module or their own reading, though for some this had not been until a considerable time after the module. Benefits of the module had been to expand their knowledge, critical thinking and understanding which resulted in some literature becoming more accessible. Of those who had made the links, they had linked all stages of their research to a philosophical framework. In particular they talked about the module's effects on their methodology, literature and writing. They recognised that it facilitated the justification of their research approach thereby resulting in greater awareness and depth to the research, and increasing its credibility. They also indicated greater insight into drawing the research claims and conclusions.

Students pointed to the value of the philosophy module by not wanting to have missed the experience, despite not finding it enjoyable. It was described as being 'quite relevant despite the terminology', 'confusing but necessary' and existed in stark contrast to their previous more pragmatic and practical experience.

> It [the module] opened my eyes to where I was at, opened my eyes to some of the very basics and then doing the assignment was amazing ... now having got through to some conclusion myself I see it's absolutely vital. (11)

We would therefore argue that the formal teaching of philosophy to postgraduate research students should be more widely considered, and, where possible, revived.

Appendix One: Interview Topic Guide

1. Introduction

- Topic of your research project – your course, year of study
- Preparation modules for research – what were they?
- Positive/negative, easy/difficult, understood them, relevant?
- What about philosophy of social science module how would you describe that? What did you feel about it before you took the philosophy module – expectations/concerns? Did module compound or reduce these?
- How long since you took the philosophy module?
- Previous experience/knowledge of philosophy – at school, undergraduate, own reading? Which type/s of philosophy?

2. The module

- Impression/s of philosophy before the module?
- What did the module cover?
- Your impressions during the module
- Your impressions after the module - relevance of whole philosophy module package for you?
- Think about elements within the philosophy module – which can you recall? Which were particularly meaningful – any meant less/? Which?
- Words to describe elements of the module other than meaningful or not?
- How did you feel you related to philosophical principles or thinking? (what way, why, why not etc) Did elements affect your own thinking?

3. Your research

- More about your research
- Has the module influenced /been useful to or relevant to

your research?
- How/in what ways? (nature of the research problem, changed your approach, changed your understanding of the research, how you undertook the research) - Examples
- Actively incorporated philosophical ideas? How did that come about?
- Links between the development of thinking and philosophical debates?
- Other effects of philosophy on your research?
- Useful or relevant to your research? Or in other ways?
- At this stage in the research can you look back and see relevance of the philosophy to what you have done so far? Are intending to do? Has philosophy become more or less relevant during your research? Describe.

Summarising:

Effect of philosophy module on
1) your learning?
2) your critical thinking? (other processes contributed here?)
3) the claims of the research, how if at all? Links from conceptual ideas to practical things?

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Exploring Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church:

Mixed Expectations and Missed Opportunities

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Thesis

As an academic theologian, part of my teaching role has involved contributing to the education and formation of individuals for lay and ordained ministry within the Christian Church. My students at the University of Exeter have been involved in a complex arrangement between their sponsoring churches (mostly Church of England, but also Methodist and United Reformed Church), the South West Ministry Training Course (SWMTC) and the University of

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Exeter's Department of Theology. In basic terms, their churches oversee their practical work experience, SWMTC facilitates their general spiritual and vocational formation, and their time with me in the classroom contributes to what the Church of England refers to as developing their 'quality of mind'. Although the churches and the SWMTC describe the entire process of formation for ministry in holistic and integrated terms—so as to prevent candidates from viewing any one part of their formal-formation as more or less significant than the other—I have concerns that the Church of England's framework for ministry formation presently devalues the role of academic theology, which problematizes its relationship with HE institutions.

The way in which the Church and its training courses perceive theological education in an HE context appears to contrast with the benchmarked aims and objectives of the discipline (critical engagement and reflection, personal transformation, sophisticated understanding, etc.).[1] Rather than viewing HE theology as a vehicle for personal transformation; within its wider ministry formation remit the church views HE theology purely as an instrument for the acquisition of knowledge. To demonstrate this problem, this paper will outline the complexities of ministry formation by examining recent changes in the ideology and methodology of ministerial formation in the South West of England (Cornwall, Devon and parts of Somerset), with specific reference to the partnership between the SWMTC and the University of Exeter's Department of Theology. I will begin by examining key developments in the Church of England's approach to theological education and ministerial formation, as prompted by the rise of the Churches' Validation Framework for Theological Education in the late-1980s.[2] Following this, I will examine the publicly available documents produced as part of the SWMTC's own validation process with the Church of England in 2002 and 2007, paying special attention to the

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[1] See Subject Benchmark Statements, Theology and Religious Studies, 2007 **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/Theology.asp**

[2] Because it represents the single largest Christian denomination served by the SWMTC, questions regarding the historical development and contemporary shape of ministry formation will centre on the Church of England, unless otherwise explicitly stated.

changes in how the SWMTC has conceived of the Church's mission and ministry in these two iterations of the document. In particular, I hope to note how—if at all—these changes in ideology and stated methodology have shaped the HE remit for ministerial formation.

After having established the context for ministry formation at the University of Exeter, and touching upon the curious relationship which the university shares with the SWMTC, I will turn my attention to a critically-reflective discussion of what I perceive to be the principal obstacle to an intellectually robust and personal transforming theological education (which reflects the discipline's QAA benchmarks). I will take the partnership between the University and the Course as my case.

Method

This piece of research, though 'critically reflective', is not the work of an educationalist. It is a theologian's critique of a theologian's work. As noted by the Subject Centre for PRS Academic Co-ordinator for theology, Rebecca O'Loughlin, in the UK there has historically been very little subject-specific development in the area of pedagogical method within theology and religious studies. In theology we tend to be sceptical of the empirical research paradigms used in the harder social sciences, favouring instead our more theoretical and discursive research methods.[3] When engaging with education theory, I often feel overwhelmed and somewhat intimidated by the fundamental difference in research languages used by these other disciplines. As O'Loughlin notes, 'TRS [Theology and Religious Studies] academics and educationalists have traditionally been at cross purposes in dialogue.'[4]

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[3] O'Loughlin, Rebecca, 'The Relationship Between Pedagogical and Discipline-Specific Research Methods: Critical Perspectives', *Discourse* vol. 7, no. 2 (2008), p. 69. Despite Dr O'Loughlin's concerns, there is a considerable wealth of writing which centres on the unique challenges of teaching in the cognate fields of theology and religious studies, although most of them are American. In addition to three very useful journals (*Discourse*; *Teaching Theology and Religion*; and *Christian Higher Education*), our central disciplinary body, the American Academy of Religion, produces two regular newsletters on teaching in theology and religion (*Spotlight on Teaching* and *Spotlight on Theological Education*). Additionally, an excellent collection of essays was produced in the late 1990s, *Theological Perspectives on*

This last year I have been working towards a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, as part of my University's professional development scheme for new lecturers. As a result of this course, I have begun to consider what a discipline-specific pedagogical research method for theology would look like. Such a method would leverage the unique methods and strictures of my own discipline in order to critically analyse academic practices associated with teaching and learning in theology.[5] The project that I am pursuing here will reflect this discipline-specific pedagogical research method by employing textual and discursive skills to analyze changes in educational ideology and methodology within the SWMTC and, more broadly, the Church of England's Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church remit. In addition, I have also used action research and ideographic or narrative research methods to convey my own experiences as a teacher and to consider the experiences of recent students of the course, who I interviewed for the purposes of this paper.

Ministry Formation in the Church of England

Ministry formation in the Church of England has developed in the last century and a half through an ongoing process of growth, decline and renewal. In the late nineteenth century, formation for ministry in the Church moved away from the exclusive purview of Oxbridge colleges to include newly formed Red Brick training institutions located throughout the country. At this time, concerns were raised about the quality of theological education provided by these nascent institutions and many within the church's hierarchy feared that Red Brick trained priests would be of a significantly lesser quality than their Oxbridge

Christian Formation, which gathered together the writings of several prominent theologians to discuss their perspectives on the challenges associated with teaching in theological education.

[4] O'Loughlin, ibid., p. 64.

[5] For the purpose of this discussion I will not engage more broadly with the question of discipline specific pedagogies. For further information see: Gibbs, G., 'Are the pedagogies of the discipline really different?', in Rust, C. (ed), *Proceedings of the 1999 7th International symposium Improving Student Learning: Improving Student Learning Through the Disciplines*, (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford Brooks University 2000) pp. 41-51.

contemporaries.[6] As colleges of various kinds of churchmanship became increasingly more established, much of the Red Brick versus Oxbridge antinomy gradually became replaced by an anxiety of a new sort. Since the 1960s and 1970s in addition to the residential colleges, diocesan courses of study arose to offer a more contextual form of theological education for new forms of local or non-stipendiary ministry. These part-time courses were designed to offer basic ministerial training for lay or ordained ministers whose work would be based exclusively in their local communities. Courses were designed in such a way as to offer education and training for ministry without radically upsetting the lives of potential ministers.[7] Presently there are 26 ministerial training institutions recognised by the Church of England[8] of which twelve are part-time courses that have developed in response to regional needs for diocesan-based ministry training. Of these twelve, nearly all are involved in some form of partnership with an HE institution.

A product of the times, the SWMTC finds it origins in the late 1970s when the Dioceses of Exeter and Truro separately developed schemes to train individuals for non-stipendiary ministry.[9] Gradually the two schemes merged into a single course and by the early 1980s candidates were being received from traditions out with the Church of England. To address this widening partnership, and the growing numbers of those involved in the Course, in 1995 SWMTC was re-constituted as an ecumenical training scheme, governed by representatives of all the sponsoring churches. It is authorised by them to prepare women and men for ordained ministries—stipendiary, itinerant and non-stipendiary. In the past, candidates for ministry from the United

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[6] See Dowland, David, *Nineteenth-Century Anglican Theological Training: The Redbrick Challenge* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

[7] Today, Ordained Local Ministry (the OLM scheme) or non-stipendiary ministry (NSM) is increasingly the norm rather than the exception in rural dioceses such as the Diocese of Truro and the Diocese of Exeter. In Truro, for example, it is estimated that by 2012 75% of all priests will be engaged in self-supporting ministry.

[8] The Working Party on Structure and Funding of Ordination Training, *Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: the Structure and Funding of Ordination Training* (The Archbishops' Council, 2003), v.

[9] Non-stipendiary ministry was an innovation to Canon Law and church custom which allowed ordained priests to continue working in secular employment whilst serving the church in an unpaid capacity.

Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Plymouth and the Russian Orthodox Church have studied on the Course.

Despite its ecumenical stance, the majority of the course's graduates are candidates for ministry in the Church of England and the Church of England's educational philosophy guides the course's curriculum design. Although a significant part of the course has been delivered by University of Exeter staff and the Certificate, Diploma or Bachelors Degree which one earned through the Course was awarded by the University, SWMTC was careful to state that the ideology which underpinned its ministry formation was ecclesial rather than academic. In the SWMTC handbook it was noted that, 'The primary purpose and goal of training is preparation for ministry. The primary validation body is, therefore, the Church.'[10] Nonetheless, the course still situated itself within the context of a partnership with the University of Exeter wherein theology was allowed to take on a more 'public' dimension. Again the handbook noted that theology's 'claims to be a 'public truth' cannot be the exclusive business of the Church. Theology has a proper place in Higher Education and its claims to truth have to be debated and tested in that arena.'[11]

That the University of Exeter and SWMTC were engaged in a partnership was not at all uncommon. As noted above, the majority of the Church's provision for ministerial education is sustained through partnerships with UK universities, either through validation arrangements between HE institutions and ministerial training schemes, or through the use of HE institutions for the attainment of degrees awarded by and part-taught by HE institutions. Positively, the HE partnership has encouraged more rigorous learning among candidates and it potentially lays the foundations for life-long learning. Encouraging HE qualification for ordinands has raised standards in the delivery of training and contributed to a sense of professionalism amongst clergy.[12]

Whilst clergy undoubtedly benefit from the culture and excellence of theological education in the HE context, concerns are consistently raised by Church authorities regarding the conflation of

[10] Course Handbook and Guide, South West Ministry Training Course, 2008, p.15.

[11] Course Handbook and Guide, South West Ministry Training Course, 2008, p. 15.

[12] The Working Party on Structure and Funding of Ordination Training, *Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: the Structure and Funding of Ordination Training* (The Archbishops' Council, 2003), pp. 13-14.

academic theological qualifications and ministerial fitness. The church's guidelines explicitly focus 'not on curriculum content, but on the character and personal qualities of those who will serve the church in ordained ministry.'[13] It is clear that the church views the attainment of character and quality, over the award of a degree, to be the marker of successful ministerial formation.

The Process of Validation

The period in which part-time courses emerged within the Church of England's ministry formation remit was marked by organic and somewhat untamed development. Coinciding with the advent of part-time ministry training courses, the Church's training provision began to offer candidates training in practical ministry skills, pastoral counselling, management skills, and a variety of other more directly applicable skills-based modules. In the taxonomy of theological education, this represented a shift away from what Francis Schüssler Fiorenza calls a 'theological vision of ministry' training towards a 'professional model of ministry' training.[14] With the curriculum swelling, it became necessary for the Church to directly address the content and quality of its theological education.

Under the guidance of Archbishop Robert Runcie (1922-2000) and Daniel Hardy (chair of Church of England Working Party on Assessment, 1987), the Church began to critically evaluate the nature and character of its ministry training. As Archbishop Runcie noted in his preface to his report, 'The rationale of theological education in the Church of England has never been made fully explicit.'[15]

In 1987 Runcie and Hardy produced *Education for the Church's*

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[13] The Parameters of the Curriculum Task Group, *Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: Shaping the Future - New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), p. 64.

[14] Fiorenza,Francis Schüssler, 'Thinking Theologically About Theological Education,' in *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian education*, ed. Astley, Jeff, Francis, Leslie J. and Crowder, Colin (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1996), pp. 331-332.

[15] *Education for the Church's Ministry: The Report of the Working Party on Assessment, ACCM Occasional Paper*, vol. 22 (London: Church House, 1987), p. 7.

Ministry (ACCM-22)[16] which recommended an overhaul of the Church's ministry formation provision. Instead of suggesting a centrally mandated theological curriculum, ACCM-22 called for the devolution of centralised control and proposed the development of a validation process facilitated by inspections of institutions at regular intervals. The Church wished to determine the 'rationale' of ministerial education, rather than mandating particular forms of content or modes of delivery.[17] One of the benefits of ACCM-22's decentralization of curriculum is that it empowered regional providers of ministry training to offer curricula and formation opportunities which played to the strengths of individual colleges, courses, and departments. Moreover, this move to a decentralised curriculum allowed colleges and courses to offer curricula which more directly reflected the unique demands of each region. The move away from centralised curriculum towards more regionally determined curricula has meant that the Church's central authority is now more concerned with mandating ministerial culture and character than it is concerned with mandating the acquisition of core knowledge. The document notes that the goal of ministry formation is 'wisdom and [a] godly habit of life… exercised in and through the corporate ministry of the Church of England for the world.'[18]

The current directive for ministerial formation in the Church of England is outlined in three recent documents which build upon the framework outline in ACCM-22: *Mission and Ministry* (2003),[19] *Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England* (2005)[20] and *Shaping the Future* (2006).[21] In all three of these documents, a

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16 *Education for the Church's Ministry, The Report of the Working Party on Assessment, ACCM Occasional Paper*, vol. 22 (London: Church House, 1987).

17 *Education for the Church's Ministry: The Report of the Working Party on Assessment, ACCM Occasional Paper,* vol. 22 (London: Church House, 1987), p.23.

18 Ibid., p. 37.

19 The Theological Education and Training Committee, *Mission and Ministry: The Churches' Validation Framework for Theological Education*, 2nd ed. (London: Church House Publishing, 2003).

20The Continuing Ministerial Education and Development Panel, *Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England (Ordained and Accredited Lay Ministry* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005).

21 The Parameters of the Curriculum Task Group, *Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: Shaping the Future - New Patterns of Training for Lay and*

general description of ministry formation is given which situates academic theology within a constellation of other key formational elements. *Shaping the Future* outlines five elements of a 'balanced' curriculum, including 'Affective learning: development of self-understanding; Generic Skills: Critical thinking, collaborative working, leadership; Disciplinary learning; Performance practice; Contextual learning.'[22] Within this curriculum, the component which is most readily identified as 'academic' theology (and thus uniquely in the purview of the HE sector) is 'disciplinary learning' which consists of elements dealing with Church (mission/practice), Doctrine (History/Tradition) and Scripture (Hermeneutics/Homiletics). These curriculum guidelines are intended to be observed by courses and colleges alike.

SWMTC: Validation in 2002 & 2007

Following the basic guidelines issued by the Church, the SWMTC is divided roughly into four components: Evening classes, Ministry Development Modules (MDMs), Tutorial Groups, and Ministry Placement. Though all four of these components count towards the award of a University of Exeter degree, only the evening classes are, in large part, directly overseen by University of Exeter theology staff. MDMs, tutorial groups and ministry placements are co-ordinated by SWMTC and overseen by their own tutoring staff. Students on the course will attend evening classes which are offered by the University of Exeter and taught at either the Streatham Campus or in Cornwall. Students take core modules in theology and biblical studies as well as a choice of electives in related theological and biblical studies sub-disciplines. MDMs are delivered over six residential weekends, with two weekends assigned to each MDM focus. Here, students develop skills for reflective practice, ecclesiastical polity, and mission. These residential weekends are supplemented by an annual eight-day Easter School which focuses on an intensive study of either pastoral theology or bereavement. Monthly, students meet together with their tutors in a

Ordained (London: Church House Publishing, 2006).

[22] The Parameters of the Curriculum Task Group, *Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: Shaping the Future - New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006) p. 75.

regional tutor group (based either in Exeter, Launceston, or Truro) where they cover a rotating diet of themes including arts and imagination, Christian ethics, and spirituality. In their penultimate year, students have a ministry placement and each year throughout the course, students are assessed on a led service and sermon.

Given that the course is designed with the needs of adult part-time learners in mind, the programme offered by SWMTC relies heavily upon flexible and distributed learning paradigms. All taught modules are run in the evenings and the use of learning technologies such as WebCT is highly encouraged.

Assessment on the course takes two principal forms. The SWMTC managed portion of the course relies upon an exhaustive learning journal to which students contribute throughout their time on the course. The journals encourage reflective practices and are intended to help students learn more about themselves and their ministerial development. Added to this is the student's portfolio which includes reports on their placements, orders of church services, liturgies, and devotional reflections. It is important to note that this portion of the ministry formation, though assessed, is intended to assess only the spiritual, personal and ministerial development of students and not their intellectual development or capacity. According to the SWMTC handbook, 'Assessment of intellectual development, theological understanding and learning takes place primarily in relation to the modules taught in evening classes, which address key areas of the theological curriculum….These assessments contribute to the assessment of…interpretive skills…'[23]

Validation

The inspections and validation process which was catalyzed by ACCM-22 suggested that theological institutions determine their rationale for ministry formation by periodically submitting answers to three questions about the mission and ministry of the church. In the original document the following questions were suggested:

[23] Course Handbook and Guide, South West Ministry Training Course, (2008) p. 15.

- What ordained Ministry does the Church of England require?
- What is the shape of the educational programme best suited for equipping people to exercise this ministry?
- What are the appropriate means of assessing suitability for ordination to exercise this ministry?

As the validation process developed, the issues raised by the first question, 'What ordained ministry does the Church of England Require?' expanded to reflect both the increasingly ecumenical context of ministry formation and broader questions regarding the church's underlying mission. In 2002 and 2007, the following questions were to be answered for the validation process:

- What is the training institution's understanding of the mission to which the Church of God is called and of the patterns of Church life and order through which the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church respond to that calling?
- In the light of that understanding what are the main characteristics of ordained and other public ministries for which the training institution seeks to train its candidates?
- What is the process and content of ministerial education and formation which will most appropriately prepare candidates to begin the lifelong exercise of these ministries?
- What forms of assessment are most appropriate for determining the suitability of candidates to begin the exercise of these ministries?

The primary sources for my research into the ideology behind SWMTC's ministry formation provision are the two sets of answers to these four validation questions, produced in 2002 and again in 2007. In the five intervening years between the inspection periods, the ideology which underpinned the SWMTC's answers to these questions shifted dramatically as a result of a number of critical reports issued by the Church. These reports analyzed the adequacy of the inspection process itself and the quality and consistency of the Church's ministerial formation provision across the country. Below, I will note how the course's founding conception of the Church's mission and ministry shifted away from one which was rooted in a critical engagement with the self-described 'story' of the Church, to one which was more explic-

itly concerned with a critical engagement in the practice of ministry itself. This shift from narrative identity to a praxis-centred identity resulted in the marginalization of academic theology and further problematizes the course's relationship to the HE sector, in light of HE Theology's stated QAA benchmarks.

Validation in 2002

The 2002 iteration of the document is a formidable piece of theological writing. It begins by locating the church within the historical work of the Trinitarian God who made himself manifest through the lives of the 'Chosen People of Israel', in the Person of Christ and through the power of the Spirit (for the life of the World) in the ministry of the Church. This history is revealed to the Church through the Scriptures, and it is this scriptural revelation of a covenant making and covenant keeping God which guides the church's mission and informs its understanding of ministry.[24] By placing the in-breaking of the Divine as the 'ground and goal'[25] of the Church's life and work, the kind of Church that is characterised by this document is one that is exceedingly counter-cultural. The Church is the agent of God's non-possessive and sacrificial love in the world and represents a tightly-knit community of individuals who have acknowledged the story of this God as one which challenges the structures of power that exist in the world. The mission of the Church to the world is one which embodies this specific story through a ministry of non-possessive and sacrificial love (despite the apparent failure of the Church to live out this ministry in the past[26]). To facilitate this mission, the church must form ministers who will 'discern, embody and confess the creative and redemptive activity of God, made known in the story of Israel, Jesus and the Church.'[27]

In broad brushstrokes, SWMTC's answers to the validation questions in 2002 reflect a more properly 'theological' understanding of the

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[24] Application for Validation By the South West Ministry Training Course Through the Churches' Validation Framework (2002), p. 3.

[25] Ibid., p 2.

[26] Ibid., p.4.

[27] Ibid., p. 4.

church and its ministry. The language it uses is intentionally reminiscent of ACCM-22, particularly when it describes the extent to which the church and its ministry are counter-cultural.[28] Training for this sort of ministry emphasises collaborative interdependence,[29] ecumenism,[30] and is rooted in the centrality of rigorous and holistic theological education.[31] As such, theological education is that which forms students to 'grow in those personal qualities by which…the creative and redemptive activity of God may be proclaimed and realised in the world.'[32] Academic theological education fosters within individuals the capacity for a critical engagement with the story of their faith and the critical application of this story to the church's work at present. The qualities of a minister formed under the ideology of this document are those which can be developed through a programmatic and instrumental approach to teaching and assessment. That is to say, all effective ministers could be selected based upon their participation in these four main attributes which the ministerial formation curriculum is intended to develop.

Validation in 2007

The context for SWMTC's validation in 2007 was markedly different than 2002. By 2003, the church faced a significant financial crisis that was in part brought on by the costs of supporting a large number of training institutions around the country. Moreover, theological education was markedly bogged down by the increasingly elaborate system of inspections and validations. *Mission and Ministry*[33] and *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*[34] sought to critically evaluate

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[28] *Education for the Church's Ministry: The Report of the Working Party on Assessment, ACCM Occasional Paper*, vol. 22 (London: Church House, 1987), p. 27.

[29] Ibid., p. 30.

[30] Ibid., p. 32.

[31] Ibid., p. 34.

[32] Ibid., p. 37.

[33] The Theological Education and Training Committee, *Mission and Ministry: The Churches' Validation Framework for Theological Education*, 2nd ed. (London: Church House Publishing, 2003).

the church's remit for theological education, by addressing, once again, the rationale for ministry training.

Mission and Ministry attempted to overhaul the validation process by reframing the ACCM-22 questions. In the decades since ACCM-22, institutions had provided inconsistent answers to the validation questions and *Mission and Ministry* sought to give much needed guidance on how training centres could more effectively respond to the validation process. Additionally, the document brought into light concerns regarding the failure of courses to 'demonstrate, on educational and formational grounds the appropriateness of using traditional university theology degrees as part of educational programmes for the church's ministry.'[35] Because concerns had been raised nationally about the quality and consistency of ministry education, and because there was little in the way of demonstrably proven learning outcomes, *Mission and Ministry* hoped to produce from courses more clearly articulated aims and objectives for ministry formation.

Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church was aimed at addressing the rise of 'mixed-training' and mixed-provision contexts. Since the mid-90s, as is indicated by SWMTC's own history, courses and colleges around the country began to accept students from a variety of denominational backgrounds. Moreover, students with various ministerial aspirations (lay, ordained, part- and full-time) would study together in a single educational environment. As the demand for courses increased, partnerships with the HE sector placed new pressures on ministry formation training and brought into question the necessity of HE qualifications for all forms of ministry. As addressed by the report, changes in the shape of initial ministry education (IME) brought to light the need for the church to offer more in the way of continuing ministry education (CME) or post-ordination training (POT) for candidates. In the world following *Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church*, it was widely recognised that adequate ministry formation exceeded what could be feasibly attained in a traditional 3-year

[34] The Working Party on Structure and Funding of Ordination Training, *Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: the Structure and Funding of Ordination Training* (The Archbishops' Council, 2003).

[35] The Theological Education and Training Committee, *Mission and Ministry: The Churches' Validation Framework for Theological Education*, 2nd ed. (London: Church House Publishing, 2003), p. 13.

university course.

The 2007 Framework Agreement reflects the critiques of ministry formation levied by *Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church* and *Mission and Ministry* and the agreement builds upon the vision for ministry formation described in *Shaping the Future* and the most recent version of the Church's Selection Criteria. Rather than taking the historical activity of the Divine as its starting point, the 2007 documents emphasised the more constructive role played by culture in shaping the mission of the Church. Though it is still clear in this document that the church consists of a group of people who have responded to the story of God's activity in the world, unlike the 2002 document, the emphasis on the Church's 'counter-cultural' identity is diminished. This reflects the burgeoning interest within the Church in notions of mission and outreach, as evidenced in such publications as the mission-shaped church from which the document quotes, 'it is not the church of god that has a mission in the world but the God of mission who has a church in the world.'[36]

The qualities to be engendered by ministers under the rubrics of the 2007 agreement were intended to enhance an individual's sense of the Church's missional context. Candidates were encouraged to recognise the specific and particular ways the gospel is enculturated in their own ministries. Part of this included an awareness of 'fresh expressions of church' and exposure to new and creative forms of worship and witness. Other areas to be developed in students under the 2007 scheme included openness to ecumenism, spiritual leadership and collaborative ministry skills. In light of the church's need to 'top-up' education following IME, emphasis was also placed on the importance of life-long learning for clergy.

Mission, Story, and the Role of Theological Education

Because mission rather than story had become the determining factor in ministry formation after SWMTC's 2007 submission, the benefits of a rigorously academic theological education were marginalised. The

[36] Application for Validation By the South West Ministry Training Course Through the Churches' Validation Framework (2007), 1.

2002 framework emphasised the importance of the historical narrative which is told by and lived within the Church. It was in the light of this narrative that the church interpreted its present mission and ministry. In its current iteration, SWMTC stands in agreement with the Church's own selection criteria for ministers, where it notes that 'without faith, spiritual depth and a sense of vocation, intellectual ability in a minister counts for very little.'[37] But does the church really undervalue HE theology, or is it rather undervaluing a caricature of HE which conflates theological education with 'intellectual ability', at the cost of diminishing personal transformation? I will argue below that what is most likely behind the church's seemingly anti-intellectual bias is a fundamental misunderstanding of academic theology, which can be rectified by an examination of the QAA subject benchmarks.

As noted above, the church divides its learning outcomes into broad categories of vocation, ministry, spirituality, personality and character, relationships, leadership and collaboration, mission and evangelism, faith, and lastly, quality of mind.[38] This final outcome, 'Quality of mind', is the only category specifically designated as pertaining to academic theology. It is explained further in the Criteria for Selection that quality of mind is explicitly linked with the HE or academic element of formation, but only insofar as it relates directly to an increase of knowledge and understanding, the enhancement of critical and reflective skills, the development of understanding, the ability to use evidence to support opinions and to discern valid from invalid arguments for the purposes of good communication.[39]

Though the traits which the church associates with higher education are clearly in keeping with what one would expect from education in the humanities, they ignore the broader cultural and political benefit of learning theology in a higher education setting, as conceived of by

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[37] The Continuing Ministerial Education and Development Panel, *Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England* (Ordained and Accredited Lay Ministry (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), p. 45.

[38] The Parameters of the Curriculum Task Group, *Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: Shaping the Future - New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006, pp. 68-72.

[39] The Continuing Ministerial Education and Development Panel, *Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England (Ordained and Accredited Lay Ministry)* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), p. 42.

the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education benchmarks, which speaks of such an education as that which 'engenders knowledge, understanding and informed critique of human culture and existence.'[40] Academic theology surely involves the 'acquisition of knowledge and understanding', but such acquisition is not an end to itself. It involves a fundamental change in one's perspectives and attitudes. To quote again from the benchmarks:

> [Studying theology] may have a profound impact on the student's life and outlook. The experience of studying this subject may contribute to a student's personal development, transforming horizons by engaging with cultures and societies other than their own, whether ancient or modern. It may foster a lifelong quest for wisdom, respect for one's own integrity and that of others, self-examination in terms of the beliefs and values adopted for one's own life, a better understanding of its role in geo-political conflict and, not least, the challenging of prejudices. The multidisciplinary nature of much TRS also means that students have breadth of vision and intellectual flexibility. [41]

Theology's transformational potency is shared in common by cognate disciplines within the humanities family. As noted by educationalist Philip W. Martin:

> broadly the Arts and Humanities have this in common: they do not understand themselves to be an education primarily structured around the imparting of skills and competences, but one primarily structured round a series of engagements with a body of knowledge….[42]

As with all humanities disciplines, theology takes part in the chorus of

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[40] Ward, Keith, 'Why Theology Should Be Taught at Secular Universities', *Discourse* vol. 4, no. 1 (2004), p. 37.

[41] Theology and Religious Studies Benchmark Statement, 3.2 (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007). See **http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/Theology.asp**, 1.13

[42] Martin, Philip W., 'Key Aspects of Teaching and Learning in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences', in *A Handbook for Teaching & Learning in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice*, ed. Fry, Heather, Ketteridge, Steve and Marshall, Stephanie (London: Kogan Page, 1999), p. 302.

university voices in offering critical transformation to its students by exposing them to new ideas and perspectives and by offering them a fresh perspective on current and historical events.[43]

Perhaps the church's hesitancy regarding the study of Christian theology in an HE context reflects the trend within academic theology towards a more 'religious studies' orientated curriculum. Perhaps the church fears that in a secular university context, theology will be treated from a supposedly neutral or exclusively sociological perspective. American educationalist and theologian Edward Farley proposes that despite the rise of religious studies, universities will always benefit from the unique insights and methods of confessional theology. He notes that the study of a 'specific faith…with the attempt to uncover and understand its power, attractiveness, or authenticity' is itself a respectable and vigorous form of scholarship.[44] To be sure, theological scholarship is not a value-free pursuit. Indeed, like all forms of humanities discourse it trades heavily in conceptions of culturally strong values and encountering and challenging these values in the classroom leads to the development of critical insight and personal transformation.

Historical and Cultural Excurses

If this is what academic theology is capable of accomplishing, why is the Church reluctant to acknowledge the HE component of ministry formation as more than simply the acquisition of knowledge? In interviews with high-ranking ecclesiastical figures, I encountered many instances where bishops voiced the opinion that the church does not need all of its priests to be theologically proficient. Though no one wished to go 'on the record', a principal reason for this was that the church did not want to view the attainment of an academic qualifications as a benchmark for ministerial fitness. Representatives for the Church were clear that it is their conception of ministerial fitness and

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[43] See also Martin, Philip W., ibid., pp. 303-7.

[44] Farley, Edward, *On the State of Theological Education in the US (Resources for American Christianity, 2008)* available from **http://www.resourcingchristianity.org/Interview.aspx?INTID=fa25f3ad-fde9-4ab8-8319-7dc184971b2d**.

calling which warrants the acceptance of candidates for Holy Orders and not the accreditation of such candidates by higher education institutions. Moreover, representatives for the church were concerned that Higher Education, as a sector, was more interested with fees and tuition than with facilitating transformation and critical reflection amongst students. Part of this concern over creating an overly academic clergy rests on the Church's understanding of the role of ordained ministry and the nature of contemporary congregations. Those within church hierarchy, though generally very well educated, do not believe that parishes (principally rural parishes) require priests who possess rigorous academic theological training. Instead, the church should be staffed by individuals who are concerned with outreach, community work, and who possess the other spiritual qualities that are listed amongst the selection criteria for ministry, discussed above.

This sentiment is furthermore reflected amongst recently trained clergy, as well. To corroborate the discursive work of this project, I ran a series of interviews with former students of SWMTC who were currently engaged in Christian ministry. When asked to describe their 'ministry formation experience', these former students consistently told their stories in such a way which portrayed ministry formation as a process which transcended their years with SWMTC. They all mentioned their previous work with the church, their previous experiences undergoing training (e.g. Reader training or Bishop's Certificate courses) and some mentioned influential books that led them towards their current vocation. In most cases it has been my prompting in interviews which encouraged them to explicitly reflect on their experience in the higher education component of their formation.

This suggests two things to me. First, it would seem that SWMTC is effectively helping candidates to situate their formation within the students' broader life-narrative. By this I mean that for the students, their academic formation is perceived as being continuous with the activity of God throughout their lives. This is accomplished in no small amount by the work of theological reflection journaling which, though universally disliked, functions to successfully re-narrate the lives of these curates. Second, because formal training tends to recede into to the background, there is a sense in which a student's academic formation is not adequately relating to a candidate's work in the parish. One candidate commented that he is putting his training 'on

the shelf for now' because his parish found him to be too academic. A new curate in Devon, who described herself as generally academic, commented that there needed to be more in the course about 'how to go about using training to communicate this [theological education] to the people.'

Though the relevance of the academic aspect of formation is disputed, nearly all candidates praise the residential weekends. In particular, two NSMs who came from an Anglo-Catholic background made explicit reference to the formational benefits of the ecumenism of the course, citing that for them worshipping with Christians from different backgrounds was the most important aspect of formation. It is interesting to note that diversity for these students was expressed in terms of worship-style, piety and polity and not theology.

Given that all interviewees expressed some sense of frustration with the administrative inefficiencies that they encountered along the path to ordination (lost paperwork, delayed selection conferences, problems negotiating academic credits), their tolerance for 'hoop-jumping' exercises seems low. The attitudes expressed by these candidates regarding the applicability of their formal training suggests to me that more work needs to be done to situate the academic element of formation within their broader discipleship narrative. To this end, we should endeavour to find ways of connecting formal theological, biblical and historical study with the life of ministry in the church.

My research seems to indicate that the marginalisation of theological education amongst clergy and within the church's hierarchy is the norm rather than the exception. This would appear to stem from the Church's suspicion that the University is principally interested in the Church's money, and the University's suspicion that the Church lacks a sufficient commitment to academic rigour. This is, of course, a gross over-generalization of the problem, but nonetheless I believe that it indicates the underlying dichotomy that is tacit to ministry formation: the tension between formal theological training of ministers *qua* education and distinctively ecclesial formation *qua* discipleship. The reason for this curious conflict—beyond mere curmudgeonly attitudes on the part of ecclesiastical and academic figures—is remarkably complex.

The structure, government, and founding philosophy of ministry within the Church of England polity reflects the development of the

national church in the 16th century when it forged its unique ecclesiastical identity apart from both the Roman Church and various Continentally Reformed churches. A key figure in developing the polity of this new national church was the famous Devonian Divine, Richard Hooker. Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, were published in 1594 and again in 1597 and sought to establish a set of principles for the proper ruling of the church. Though not a binding document—in the sense in which ecclesiastical canon law might be binding in the Church of Rome—the document sets a precedent for the church's polity which is still very much influential to Anglican self-identity today.

In Hooker's day, very much as in our own, the church was under pressure to staff rural parishes with priests who could serve the 'cure of soules'. Then, as now, the church possessed a large number of parishes and benefices all of which needed to be staffed with trained clergy. Indeed, the institutionalised English Church has always wrestled with providing sufficient quality of ministers for the quantitative need of the church. The question thus arises, how does one offer to all churches a sufficiently well trained priest given the demands of formation? Hooker notes the following:

> to furnish all places of cure in this realme it is not an armie of twelve thousand learned men that would suffice, nor two universities that can alwayes furnish as manie as decaie in so greate a number, nor a fourh part of the livnges with cure that when they fall are able to yeeld sufficient maintenance for learned men, is it not plain that unless the greatest parte of the people should be left utterlie without the publique use and exercise of religion there is no remedie but to take into the ecclesiasticall order a number of mean meanelie qualified in respect of learning?[45]

In simple terms, the need of the church surpasses the ability of the church to produce priests. The dirty compromise which the church must strike is appointing 'meanelie qualified' ministers whose skills and training are sufficient enough for the task.

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[45] Hooker, Richard, 'Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity Book V', in (ed.) Hill,W. Speed, *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, vol. 2 (London: Belknap Press, 1977), p. 479.

This, for Hooker, brings up considerable theological issues, particularly regarding the Pauline admonition that there be 'learninge in presbyeters….to exhort in doctrine which is sound and to disprove them that gainesaie it.' The question, raised by Hooker and indeed germane today is 'what measure of habilitie in such thinges shall serve to make men scapable of that kinde of office he doth not himself preciselie determine…' which is to say, when determining the skills of the individual inhabiting the priestly office, one must consider the context of the ministry and the innate quality of the minister when designing a course of study. Clearly, as Hooker notes, the Apostle, 'requireth more in presbyters then there is found in maine whome the Church of England alloweth', but in light of its need, the church must allow for the lesser evil by allowing the consecrating of 'such presbyters as are so farre foorth sufficient although they want that habilitie of preaching which some others have.' In other words, the needs of the church for ministers engaged in services, outweighs the need of the church (or the command of scripture) for learned ministers. He concludes:

> the question in truth is not whether learning be required, but whether a church wherein there is not sufficient store of learned men to furnish all congregations should do better to let thousands of soules grow savage, to let them live without any publique service of God, to let theire children die unbaptized, to withhold the benefit of the other sacraments from them, to let them depart this world like Pagans without any thigne as much as red unto them concerning the waie of life. [46]

Hooker's astute assessment of the position of the church regarding the formation of ministry echoes concerns raised by ecclesiastical figures and theological educators today. The church's formation provision, with its declining academic standards, reflects the tacit acknowledgment that what is most important for the church is that posts are filled, not that they are filled well.[47]

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[46] Ibid., p. 481.

[47] This notion that rural-churches demand less academically sophisticated clergy is certainly not a new one: even prior to the reformation these attitudes existed. In 14th century England, it was not at all uncommon for urban priests to be articulate, well-trained, and well-paid and for rural priests to be virtually untrained and to live in relative poverty. Such rural priests were not even expected to have basic scriptural

Conclusion

The Church and the University appear to have conflicting views of what is accomplished by teaching and learning theology in an HE context. By way of conclusion, I wish to suggest two simple corrections that may make steps towards remedying this problem.

Clearer partnership

When I started teaching on the BTh(Ministry) course which was jointly run by the University of Exeter and the SWMTC in the winter of 2008 I had very little sense of how my module related to the broader aims and objectives of my student's course of studies. Compared to other courses of academic study, the requirements for the BTh(Ministry) are complex insofar as they are determined by factors which extend well beyond the immediate purview of an academic. Work placement, retreats, MDMs, all of these elements were provided by different institutions and because the course was designed and developed outside my immediate department, I felt like my role as a lecturer was more like that of a hired-hand than a career academic. Although it is certainly financially expedient for Church training institutions to 'buy-out' the time of its partner University's staff, it does not serve the needs of students to take courses that are delivered by alienated instructors. Until I began to research the history, aims and objectives of the course, I had very little sense of how my own teaching contributed to my student's broader goals. If Church courses and colleges are to develop further collaborative relationships with the HE sector, it would be of paramount importance for constituent members of the partnership to collaboratively develop courses and modules.

Of course, not all courses are up for perennial redevelopment, and staff turn-over can mean that individual lecturers may not be able

literacy and were encouraged, rather than forcing their congregations to endure poorly thought-out sermons, to read sermons given to them from their bishops or other more sufficiently trained clergy. For an excellent survey of problems regarding clerical abilities in the late medieval church see: Duffy, Eamon,*The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England C. 1400-1580*, Second ed. (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 53-87.

to contribute to the course development process. Nonetheless, individual lecturers and tutors must be made explicitly aware of the aims and outcomes of their particular courses, if their teaching is to have any continuity with the students' overarching learning experience. It would be my hope that fostering a closer partnership between courses and their HE partners would go some way to alleviating the suspicion which those in the ecclesiastical hierarchy sense about the HE sector, as well as the misgivings which some in the HE sector have about their Church-based partners.

Theology and imagination

The research above suggests that the Church views academic theology as an instrument for the acquisition of knowledge. Moreover, stifled by confusion regarding the overarching aims and outcomes of their students, academic theologians are scarcely given the encouragement or the freedom to creatively design their teaching, thus contributing to the misguided understanding of theology on the part of the church. Rather than succumbing to an instrumentalist pedagogy, I would suggest that theology must be taught not exclusively as a collection of ideas and dates, but also as a constellation of encounters and experiences. As noted above, theology shares with other humanities disciplines in its ability to transform students' lives. Academic theology must be encouraged to engage with the entirety of lived-experience and not simply the exposition of texts. It must exist within a polarity of textual hermeneutics and the phenomenology of religious experiences. Michael Gallagher of the Gregorian University in Rome has noted that theology is often guilty of zooming in 'on the religious content of literature at the expense of the aesthetic experience.' For theology to be relevant to the student's encounter with language, theologians must be aware of the entire 'process of being invited into a different wavelength of sympathetic consciousness' which theology encourages. This 'wavelength', Gallagher notes, is shared in common by 'theology and imagination [and it] lies in a whole adventure and joy of self-transcendence in its many forms.'[48] In teaching and research theological scholarship

[48] Gallagher, S.J.Michael Paul, 'Theology and Imagination: From Theory to Practice', *Christian Higher Education 5* (2006), p. 95

must grapple with the experience of the theological object through the captivation of the intellect as well as the enchantment of the imagination. Although the SWMTC course does encourage creativity and reflection, such aspects of the course are not expected from the academic theological component. As such, students do not come to a theology course expecting to be challenged, transformed, or engaged by the entire 'process' of theological study, as they would, for example, from a course on liturgy, arts or cultural studies.

Such integrative forms of teaching and learning would benefit students from any context. Yet given that the SWMTC is principally made up by mature adult-learners, the need of imagination and integration is even more pronounced. Alison Le Cornu, the Director of Open Learning at the London Bible College argues that age, more than any other demographic category, affects the learning styles of students. In her studies, older students have a demonstrable need for a creative interplay between subject matter and personal experience and that students in her studies have responded best when modules are designed to foster imaginative insights.[49] Her research is echoed in the more anecdotal research of Andrea Kenkmann, who finds that with adult learners 'a more open and learner-centred approach to teaching,' is required. She notes that 'the key to high quality adult education is the idea of making learning fun as well as stimulating.'[50]

For both Le Cornu and Kenkmann, teaching in their subjects is most effective when students can anchor learning in their life experiences. In the context of HE theology, this would involve lecturers creatively interacting with student's own stories and experiences, in much the same way that ministry students are encouraged to do in their reflection journaling or portfolio work for the formational component of their courses. What I propose is not a new envisioning of theological education, but simply the integration of the various disparate components of ministry formation to include more explicitly HE theology's capacity to facilitate transformation in student's lives. As Kenkmann

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[49] Le Cornu, Alison, 'Learning Styles, Gender and Age As Influential Issues Amongst Students of Theology', *Journal of Beliefs & Values: Studies in Religion & Education* 20, no. 1, pp. 110-114.

[50] Kenkmann, Andrea , 'Creativity and Enjoyment in Philosophy Teaching: Lessons From Adult Education', *Discourse* vol. 7, no. 2 (2008), p. 205.

notes in her work as a continental philosopher:

> [the task of philosophy lies in] asking and exploring fundamental questions about the world and our lives. The aim of philosophical enquiry is not neutral and detached knowledge but the hope to make sense of our lives and flourish as human beings. Ideally, philosophy should make us happier, better, and more critical people…Philosophy thus reflects our engagement with life in general and returns to our practices. [51]

I would argue that in developing the theological curriculum, regardless of its application within ecclesiastical or non-ecclesiastical courses, attention to creativity in pedagogy and creativity in content is central. Theology's rich history with the arts and culture, and the recent surge in the advanced study of theology's relationship with values and practices, attests to the potential fruitfulness of such an approach. If the relationship between church colleges and courses and HE departments of theology are to thrive, more attention needs to be paid to collaborative development of theological education and to the specific pedagogical needs of adult learners. But most importantly, theological education must be allowed to foster the creative transformation of student's lives—a goal which is embraced by other cognate humanities disciplines.

[51] Ibid., p. 215

Foundation Degrees for Ministerial Training:
Their Potential and Challenges

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This paper sets out to identify some of the potential and challenges in the development of Foundation Degrees for ministerial training. It draws on the experience of developing new Foundation Degree programmes from first principles, and re-configuring an existing certificate and diploma programme into a Foundation Degree. It illustrates how the Foundation Degree Framework [QAA 2004] can be effectively exploited in the development of ministerial training programmes, and identifies some of the challenges faced by ministerial training providers and Higher Education Institutions in the validation of such programmes. It is hoped that this will open up discussion of some of these issues and facilitate sharing of good practice and support for those developing Foundation degrees for ministerial training in the future.

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The Church of England's review of ministerial training published in *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church* [Church House Publishing 2003], colloquially known as 'the Hind Report', and the subsequent publication of *Shaping the Future: New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained* [Church House Publishing 2004], have had a significant impact on ministerial training. In terms of organisation, in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, it has led to the development of the Regional Training Partnership (RTP) made up of five Dioceses; the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church; a number of training organisations; and two Higher Education Institutions. In terms of curriculum it has challenged all these stakeholders to work together to review their provision and develop a coherent strategy in re-configuring and developing a range of ministerial pathways.

Whilst this initiative has been instigated by the Ministry Division of the Church of England, rarely are such developments solely 'top down', and the new formal requirements for training put into place in the new Regional Training Partnerships are building on long established and effective partnerships developed between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), dioceses and other theological training institutions and organisations who have HE validated Certificate and Diploma courses in Theology and Ministry.

When Foundation Degrees were first mooted in the early years of this decade, colleagues at York St John University (YSJU) identified this as an ideal format for the continuing engagement with long standing diocesan partners in lay ministerial training. Their vision resulted in the first nationally recognised Foundation Degree in Theology and Ministry (FDTM), which was validated and launched in 2003.

While there has been some steady growth in Foundation Degrees within theology and ministry in the last five years, it has been somewhat surprising that there have not been more. Of the approximately 2500 validated Foundation degrees listed on the Foundation Degree Forward website (**http://www.fdf.ac.uk/courses**), at the time of writing (Summer 2008) only seven relate to Theology/Evangelism /Pastoral Care/Youth Ministry. However, two significant factors may affect this situation over the coming months. Firstly, as the churches continue to reflect on how training will move forward in the light of the

on-going development of RTPs there is scope for the review of existing training provision to be reconfigured within a Foundation Degree framework, which facilitates the integration of ministerial skills formerly deemed inappropriate for inclusion in an academic programme. Secondly, and perhaps more pressingly, the Government's recent consultation on the Withdrawal of Funding for Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQ) [Hefce 2008] has concluded that Foundation Degrees should be exempt from the withdrawal of funding for those who already have a degree or other HE award, and it is therefore in the financial interests of current providers to re-configure their existing certificate and diploma programmes into Foundation Degrees in the near future. This is of particular significance within the realm of ministerial training, when many, although by no means all, ministerial trainees have a degree or HE qualification in their professional field, but need to access theological training at HE levels one and two. National figures show that 28% of all entrants to Foundation Degree programmes in 2005-6 had previous experience of HE [Hefce 2008]: YSJU figures for 2006-7 show that 56% of students had previous experience of HE on entering the Foundation Degree in Theology and Ministry programme; significantly higher than the national average for Foundation degrees and a trend that is likely to be repeated in other RTPs.

The Foundation Degree in Theology and Ministry at York St John University

The York St John University Foundation Degree in Theology and Ministry programme was devised with reference to the Final Draft of the QAA Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark, (QAA 2004). This document prescribes the criteria for Foundation Degrees, which are designed to:

> …integrate academic and work based learning through close collaboration between employers and programme providers. They build upon a long history of design and delivery of vocational qualifications in higher education, and are intended to equip learners with the skills and knowledge relevant to their employment, so sat-

> isfying the needs of employees and employers…. They are designed to appeal to learners wishing to enter a profession as well as those seeking continuing professional development … [and] can provide pathways for lifelong learning and the opportunity to progress to other qualifications.[QAA:2004:3]

Both the institution and the training partners have found the Foundation Degree Framework a creative and engaging model, which provides extensive scope for the integration of theological education and ministerial training. We do not claim to have all the answers—indeed, having just re-validated the programme under the University's cycle of review we continue to be challenged by the need to exploit the full potential of the framework in the integration of theological and ministerial training. This paper explores some of the exciting potential and some of the challenges, based on extensive experience of validating, reviewing and improving FD programmes in theology and other subject areas.

Foundation Degrees are defined by the terms of the QAA [2004] Foundation Degree Framework, which outlines five distinctive features of a Foundation Degree: employer involvement, accessibility, articulation and progression, flexibility, and partnership. The first task will be to explore some of the potential within these features, drawing on examples from experience. The second task will be to explore some of the current challenges inherent in developing Foundation Degrees for ministerial training.

Exploiting the Features of Foundation Degrees for Ministerial Training

The order of the features in this section reflects the FDTM experience of the relative importance of different aspects of Foundation Degrees for running partnerships in ministerial formation. Central to the process has been the capacity to build on strong relationships with existing partners and the development of new partners; their engagement in every aspect of programme development has been the key to its success. This in turn provides a robust framework within which placement activity can be effective and purposeful for the student. These relationships in turn facilitate an ongoing conversation between

partners to identify ways in which the programme can respond to training needs and facilitate the many and varied training routes for students.

Employer Engagement and Partnership

'Employer Engagement' and 'partnership' are so thoroughly integrated within the context of the FDTM that it is almost impossible to separate them out. Within the FDTM programme they are articulated as 'partnership'. Central to the notion of this particular partnership is the engagement of the training partners in the development of the programme and the concept of placement based learning—where the 'employers' in this case are the training partners who provide part of the learning experience. This section explores the notion of partnership within the particular context of the FDTM as it delivers a training routes for a range of lay and ordained ministries in the Yorkshire Regional Training Partnership.

The notion of partnership is fundamental to the nature of a Foundation Degree. In the FDTM this notion of partnership developed naturally because strong links were already well established with three local Anglican dioceses, the Methodist Church and a Roman Catholic diocese. Working in partnership with a range of church traditions from the outset highlighted both the common aims of the partners, as well as their particular needs. In some instances the aims and content of modules could easily be shared by these different partners; New Testament and Old Testament modules were core to all partners. This commonality nonetheless required sensitivity to particular denominational perspectives and sometimes careful use of language so that modules could be used by everyone; for example in the articulation of the learning outcomes in a module on history and doctrine to ensure that these were inclusive. Some aspects of training or theological emphasis were so distinctive that dedicated modules were developed to meet specific training/theological needs; for example a module on Sacraments to meet the needs of the Roman Catholic diocese. The result was a set of core modules that were common to all students on the programme and a range of modules that were available to partners to meet their particular training needs.

The FDTM team has a very 'hands on' approach to partnerships. Engaging partners in this context is not just about engaging them in the development and review of the programme, but is evidenced in their central role in the management and delivery of the programme. Key to this process are mechanisms such as:

- The development of quality documentation which clearly and simply outlines the framework for delivery;
- a programme committee which includes all the training partners and members of the HE and that meets once each term to discuss all aspects of policy, delivery and quality assurance;
- an identified training partner responsible for oversight of all aspects of delivery and student progress at a particular centre;
- shared planning of modules, which draws together all those running a particular module each term to plan a programme, share resources and agree the details of assessment strategies, ensuring equity of provision across the delivery centres; and
- a moderation system for all formats of assessed work which involves both training partners and institution staff.

This framework facilitates an engaged understanding of the programme, which was commended by a recent re-validation panel, and reflects the high level of commitment of the training partners who spend a considerable amount of time facilitating a high quality student experience on the programme.

This engaged notion of partnership has taken us on a long journey in a relatively short space of time, which has seen the programme grow from four partners and five centres to ten partners and fourteen delivery centres in less than five years. This growth has to a great extent been facilitated because the training partners feel that they have ownership of the Foundation Degree in Theology and Ministry: they wrote it, it meets their training needs and they are continually engaged in its ongoing development. As a result they were keen advocates for it as the new Regional Training Partnership came into existence, resulting in the adoption of the programme by the remaining dioceses within the RTP. It is evident that in this particular context this notion of partnership extends beyond a set of formal words as we have

gone on the potentially difficult journey of engaging with the RTP as it grappled with decisions about how to move training forward in this new context. The outcome is a flexible programme that now meets a wide range of ministerial training needs for Readers, Pastoral Workers, Evangelists and Ordinands through a variety of training routes. As the team continues to explore the Foundation Degree Framework, this notion of engaged partnership continues to be an underlying theme.

Work Based Learning

A second central concept to Foundation Degrees is that of 'work based learning'. In the context of ministerial training, we originally articulated 'work based learning' as 'placement based learning', which more accurately reflected the nature of the relationship between ministerial trainees and their training providers in the early stages of the programme. Students at this stage of their training have no official role to play within their placement based contexts, which are identified in consultation with training partners. However, as the students are authorised to various ministries and take on a specific role within a context their learning becomes more typically 'work based', normally, from mid way through level two of the programme. For example, Readers and lay preachers are normally licensed to preach after three years training, when they are mid-way through level two, and ordinands will normally be ordained as Deacons mid way through level 2 and move into a first post. In both these instances, students will move from 'placement' to 'work' based learning contexts as they complete their programme. The programme retains this flexibility of language in order to accurately reflect the training contexts of the students.

All placement and work based learning is embedded in taught modules. At level one there are two compulsory modules for each training route with 40 hours of placement activity attached. The modules are delivered in a way which supports the student in the integration of and reflection on what is taking place in the classroom and the placement context. This provides a clear and focussed structure to placement work for students and security in the assessment process. As the programme has developed, the programme team has developed in its understanding of how progression can be facilitated within these

contexts. At level one, this context is normally the student's own parish or work place. At level two students are required to engage in a different context, which will be identified in consultation with their training provider. In each context the module learning outcomes and assessment strategies are designed to help the students to utilise the learning within the module and reflect on their placement context in the light of this. At level one they explore the mission and ministry and worship of their own parish. At level two, when they are normally licensed as Readers or ordained, they do an independent study reflecting theologically on their ministerial activity. Although this is an effective model, the challenge is always to provide effective engagement with, and assessment of, ministerial and formational skills. The aspect of ministerial and formational skills development is one of the most significant challenges to the development of Foundation Degrees for ministerial training, and is an issue raised later in this article.

As the programme developed the team were increasingly aware of the many opportunities within non-placement modules where students could integrate their experiences in their churches as a ministerial trainees with their learning in the classroom. In the re-validated programme hours were identified for 'experiential learning' within almost all of the modules. For example, in the New Testament module students reflect on the use of NT texts in contemporary contexts and keep a diary of how texts are used in a range of contexts; sermons, radio 'thought for the day' slots, Bible Studies etc, which can then be utilised in their assessed work.

Accessibility

The nature of theological and ministerial training is such that the student body for Foundation Degrees for ministerial training has a quite different profile from most other Foundation Degree programmes. Whilst national statistics [Hefce 2008] show 91% of part time FD students are over 21, the distribution curve of student numbers from aged 23-60 shows a steady decrease. Within the FDTM, with 99% of students over the age of 21, the distribution curve of students aged 40 -60 shows a steady increase, as many ministerial trainees take on this role as families have grown up, and in a significant number of cases,

retirement leaves time to pursue ministerial training. The number of students who have previously engaged in HE considered earlier shows a significant proportion of students in this category on the FDTM.

Alongside these well-qualified students, approximately 24% left school without any formal qualifications. For these students access to degree-level study requires strong support in study skills and this is particularly important during their first module, which they must successfully complete in order to be fully matriculated onto the programme. This balances the need for open access to those who have little formal education while maintaining the standards of a degree programme.

The success of this latter group of students is attributable to the high level of oversight, academic support and pastoral care and the sound educational principles underlying the teaching and learning strategies provided by the training partners who manage the provision at the off-site delivery centres. All Centres provide an induction programme which includes an introductory study skills session, which is followed up in modules by regular input on study skills. Modules are designed to facilitate skills development and tutors are supported through module planning meetings and training sessions on how to plan and deliver interactive learning strategies. A good example of this sort of process comes from a session in the New Testament module, where students are introduced to the skills of exegesis using one synoptic gospel. In taught sessions they engage in a range of group activities and work together to practise and develop the range of skills required. In one such session the tutor asked a group of new and very nervous students to bring their work and share their findings with each other. After a cautious start, they were soon sharing different perspectives and resources and arguing about who wrote the gospel, why and when. These arguments drew on the different sources the students had read: when it became clear that these sources held different opinions, the tutor was asked to adjudicate. The tutor then used these conversations as a teaching tool and helped the students to begin to really understand how to approach the task: how to say that there were two different views; how to reference these views to their sources; how to structure the exegesis and so on. This session helped towards the students' first piece of assessed work on the programme and they were supported and enabled by this process to understand what the nature of the

academic task actually is.

Articulation and Progression

The FDTM is based on 240 credits across levels one and two. As a part time programme, this requires students to engage with 12 modules; one module a term for four years. A number of factors have led the institution to develop a range of interim awards. In addition to the standard exit award of Certificate of Higher Education [120 credits at level one], the programme includes a 60 credit University Certificate at level one and a 60 credit University Diploma at level two. These awards have enabled students to engage with the programme at a level appropriate to their ability, experience, training needs, work and domestic circumstances, and ensured that there is flexibility and responsiveness to partner needs. More importantly, it has enabled students for whom academic study had previously been beyond their grasp to take an exit award with a sense of achievement, and avoided any potential notion of 'failure' if they were unable to complete the whole programme.

The level three programme similarly has a 60 credit exit award, including the option of a Graduate Certificate in Ministerial Practice developed in partnership with the RTP, to meet the needs of those newly ordained as part of their Initial Ministerial Education [years 4 – 7] and develop a coherent approach to ministerial training as lifelong learning as articulated in the Hind Report [op cit].

Accredited Prior [Experiential] Learning has been utilised by training partners both for individual students who have completed courses elsewhere, and for cohorts of students who have completed diocesan or Methodist training programmes which were not validated by an HEI. This has helped training partners manage the sometimes difficult transition from local non-validated training programmes to the FDTM. Increasingly, students who decide to pursue ordination training are using their transcripts of credits gained on the Foundation Degree in Theology and Ministry to negotiate an appropriate route which builds on their academic experience at their training institution. The willingness of ordination training providers to accept these credits reflects a status for Foundation Degrees not hitherto evidenced within the certificate and diploma programmes, as well as a greater coherence

in the national understanding of accumulation of credits and the 'fit for purpose' nature of the Foundation degrees. There is still room for improvement in institutional confidence in other awards but it is to be hoped, that as the RTPs become more confident in the equivalence of provision nationally, which again, may be helped by the development of Foundation Degrees, students will find moving between training providers a smoother transition than has hitherto been the case.

As a partnership it was decided early on that the programme should remain open access to those who were not engaged in any formal ministerial training. This is not without its problems, particularly when considering the integration of ministerial and formational skills, but has in fact been very fruitful, as a number of students who enrolled as independent students have gone on to explore opportunities to engage in lay training with their dioceses, and indeed some who enrolled for lay training have moved into ordination training. Some of these students have been able to continue their training within the FDTM and others have been able to utilise the credits they have already gained to continue their training elsewhere.

Flexibility

For training partners, flexibility has been a key to the continued success and development of the Foundation Degree in Theology and Ministry, and this is evident in a number of different contexts. During the first few years of the programme a range of issues emerged requiring minor amendments to the validated document and module documents. These included such things as:

- the development of new modules to meet emerging training needs: the publication of *Children and Young People in the Church* [2005] led to the development of a level 2 module which was included in the Reader training route;
- new pathways to facilitate the training of pastoral workers, parish evangelists and ordinands;
- additional exit awards to facilitate achievement and progression for students with different training and academic needs.

The institution's willingness to engage in and facilitate these ongoing

developments has been central to the success of the partnerships.

Flexibility is also required to cope with the very varied student profiles and expectations. In addition to the standard routes taken by a student on the training programme, students may, in consultation with their training partner and YSJU, develop a training route appropriate to their particular needs. This process is formally agreed and recorded on an Individual Learning Plan, and again provides the flexibility training partners need in order to provide routes tailored to individual learning needs.

With such a wide range of partners, the range of delivery modes available must inevitably be flexible. The programme is currently being delivered at fourteen Centres throughout the region. Initially the most common pattern of delivery was twelve two hour sessions on one night a week each term. However, over the life of the programme, other models have emerged, which include weekend, mid-week blocked delivery or a combination of these. The latest development has been the notion of 'Sunday Schools of Ministry'. In this model, the pattern of one module a term remains, but students from across the diocese meet for one Sunday a month to engage in academic study, and develop a sense of 'community' through the sharing of worship and meals. Whilst there was some initial resistance to the use of Sundays [which were chosen specifically to take the pressure off students and avoid the problem of studying on Saturday and still doing church things on Sunday], students indicate a high level of satisfaction with this model. This is mainly for pragmatic reasons: it saves travelling time, and in the words of one father '…this is easier: it is planned in the family diary, and I'm not rushing in from work and out again and feeling guilty about leaving my wife to deal with the kids'. This development has in turn fed back into the weekly models of delivery, with some centres delivering collaboratively at a central venue on Sundays which include opportunities for worship or the addition of an act of worship and a meal to the final week of the term.

As the RTP Covenant was signed, the institution was commended for its 'can do' attitude, which had contributed significantly to the building up of a broad range of partners who are working effectively together to facilitate a wide range of training routes within the region. This facilitation and high level of support by the HEI is vital to the success of partnerships as envisaged by the training partners as they

develop existing and new partnerships with HEIs.

Challenges

The preceding section illustrated how a partnership between HEIs and ministerial training partners can work effectively within a Foundation Degree framework through the centrality of partnerships, the careful management of placements, potential to ensure accessibility and progression, and the necessity for flexibility. This section will consider some of the challenges that can arise in this process, in the hope that this will open up the potential for sharing of good practice, and debate as the potential for new Foundation Degrees for ministerial training are explored.

The original vision for this new type of award was that [in ministerial terms] the academic, ministerial and experiential can be drawn together with 'appropriate academic rigour' [QAA 2000:3]. Experience of Foundation Degree validation panels both within and outside the subject area of theology suggests that this creates challenges at both ends of the academic spectrum. In the FDTM validation event in 2003, it was suggested that the programme was 'too academic' in requiring students to operate at the equivalent level of the undergraduate programme in Theology and Religious Studies. On the other hand a number of Foundation Degree validation panels, both in theology and other subjects, have raised concerns that whilst the skills development was strong, there was a lack of academic engagement: a concern identified by QAA in the conclusions of their *Review of Foundation Degrees* [QAA 2005]. To retain this balance between academic integrity and the development of ministerial and formational skills is one of the most significant challenges for Foundation Degrees for ministerial training, as training partners balance the requirement for validated training provision whilst desiring to maintain ministry as dependent on a God-given vocation rather than simply the acquisition certain skills or achievement of learning outcomes.

Skills acquisition is central to the FD ethos, and central to training for ministry in churches. In the initial development of the programme, the writing team, made up of YSJU staff and training partners, explored together the notion of skills development, and how some of

the ministerial skills could be developed through different forms of assessment. The main skills training partners were initially looking for in their students were related to those associated with lay preaching, for example: the ability to interpret sacred texts, create an act of worship and deliver it convincingly in a manner appropriate to a particular group.

Although the FDTM programme incorporates a number of ministerial skills, it is clear from mapping our programme to the criteria in *Shaping the Future* [op cit], that there are elements of training that are not covered within the programme but which are provided by each individual diocese over and above the Foundation degree. This can be a cause of frustration to students who begin to make artificial distinctions between the academic and the ministerial/formational. Integrating these ministerial formation skills into the remit of academically robust assessment is one of the most challenging and pressing issues to be explored as new foundation degrees are developed. Both the institution and training partners are continuing to explore how the foundation degree framework—which after all is by its very nature a formational and vocational framework—can facilitate the integration of ministerial and formational skills within the programme with academic integrity, and without alienating students who wish to take the course for their own interest. The key to this is in the creative use of module learning outcomes and related assessment strategies. As the 'keeper of quality' perhaps HEIs have not been as creative or flexible as they could be in this respect. On the other hand there are perhaps some elements of formational training which can happily sit within a ministerial training framework, but simply cannot be assessed in an HEI framework—such as 'prayerfulness' or 'spirituality'. This is the sort of discussion in which the FDTM team and partners are beginning to engage.

Identifying the relevant key skills for a particular ministry is only part of the difficulty in this sort of FD programme. A further challenge lies in finding ways of meaningfully incorporating their assessment into a programme that is mainly run off-site and delivered by around sixty YSJU approved Associate Tutors. Teaching and assessing ministerial skills such as the ability to communicate a sermon cannot be done solely through paper-based exercises and must necessarily involve a large number of assessors, which in turn raises issues about quality

assurance.

A further challenge is what is colloquially known in HE as 'the key skills agenda'. The *Foundation Degree Framework* [QAA 2004] sets out the need for students to engage in the development of generic key skills, which have become central to education at all levels. At its worst, this can find a validation panel discussing how a Foundation Degree for ministerial training can contribute to numeracy skills (this is a challenge!) At a more critical level, given the relatively high number of non-standard students entering such programmes, programme development teams do need to engage carefully with questions of how literacy, communication and IT skills will be developed within the programme. To a training partner, skill in ICT may be seen as unnecessary for a 60 year old trainee reader, whereas to an HEI validating a foundation degree, ICT skills are perceived as essential whatever the subject area. The expectations and requirements of both partners need to be carefully negotiated and articulated.

As increasing numbers of church-based organisations are looking to deliver Foundation Degrees, an important question that needs to be tackled is whether to adapt existing traditional HE courses or to write a new programme. The FDTM involved both, and experience suggests that converting an existing programme is actually a greater challenge than developing a FD from first principles. One of the questions in helping to make this decision may be to ask who actually wrote the existing programme; was it the HEI who offered it to the training partners or were the training partners fully engaged in the writing process? If the former, then to fully exploit the Foundation Degree framework, gathering partners to identify their training needs will be vital to the programme's success. It is important to include a wide range of existing and potential partners in this process; experience suggests that one of the major weaknesses validation panels have identified in Foundation Degrees has been that the engagement with partners has been limited to asking them to look at the final document and comment on the general usefulness of the programme. This observation is substantiated by the conclusions of the QAA Report of a survey of Foundation Degrees converted from existing Higher National Diplomas since 2001 [QAA 2008] which identifies one of the main weaknesses of converted programmes as the lack of engagement with partners throughout the whole process of developing a Foundation

Degree. The distinctive nature of a Foundation Degree is that partners are engaged in all aspects of programme design, delivery and evaluation as outlined in the first section of this paper. They need to be engaged in the validation process and be able to talk coherently and knowledgably about how they have and will continue to contribute to the programme.

Careful consideration also needs to be given to the nature of the partnership between the training partners and the HEI. In the current climate where churches have increasingly sought to engage with HEIs, a number of HEIs have closed or down-graded their theology departments. This is an important consideration for training partners seeking HEI validation. Ideally any partnership needs significant input from an experienced member of the HEI who understands the validation requirements and standards expected of such documentation; who has a good understanding of the distinctiveness of the Foundation Degree Framework; and, most importantly, understands the distinctive nature of ministerial training, and has the ability to help training partners to work through these issues to ensure a positive validation experience.

Training partners should be very clear about the nature of their relationship with, and the support that they will receive from, the HEI before making decisions about setting up a relationship with them. Where training partners are working externally to the HEI and seeking validation, they would be well advised to seek such advice at an early point in the process. Similarly as the ELQ framework is established and Foundation Degrees become increasingly financially attractive, HEIs should be wary of stepping outside their expertise. Without theological insight, training providers are in danger of developing programmes which do not meet the increasingly demanding standards required for validation, or produce ministers who can act in ministry but not engage with sufficient academic integrity to be able to reflect theologically.

Church-based training institutions with an existing certificate/diploma course do need to take account of the fact that the world of HE has moved on significantly in the last ten years in terms of the clarity of expectations with regard to articulation of a programme within a validated document, which are now very demanding. Validation panels will interrogate both the documentation and the proposing team about a wide range of issues such as:

- the clarity and appropriateness of programme and module

learning outcomes;
- the evidence that programme outcomes are met through the module learning outcomes and the assessment strategies;
- detailed information on how placement activity will be integrated, managed and quality assured;
- requirements of cross-referencing training requirements to programme outcomes;
- how QAA codes of practice are implemented—particularly regarding placements;
- the range of assessment strategies to ensure a range of skills development;
- the identification and availability of recent resources;
- the quality assurance processes in place.

Careful consideration should also be given to the clarity and purpose of modules, particularly where modules are being merged from, for example, 2 10 credit modules to 1 20 credit module, as this is the point at which concepts, skills and range of assessment strategies can be lost in the aspiration to ensure that subject knowledge is squeezed in. Sometimes, two into one really will not go and a team may have to abandon particular bodies of knowledge in favour of developing concepts and skills so that students are given the skills they need to engage in lifelong learning and have the ability to access the greater breath of knowledge in the future.

Conclusions

This paper set out to identify some of the potential opportunities and the challenges in the development of Foundation Degrees for ministerial training. It has drawn on the experiences of writing a new programme, converting an old programme, the process of revalidation, and experience of FD validations both within and outside of the subject area of theology and ministry. It has illustrated how the five elements of a foundation degree can work effectively in a ministerial context with examples drawn from experience, and identified some of the challenges facing the FDTM and other training partners as they seek to develop or form new relationships with HEIs in order to develop programmes to meet the emerging needs of ministerial training. It is hoped

that this will open up discussion of these issues and lead to the facilitation of a forum for discussion, sharing of good practice, and support for those involved in HEIs and training partnerships as new foundation degrees are developed over the coming months.

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