

Institution: University of Bristol
Unit of Assessment: 31: Theology and Religious Studies
1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy

Unit context and structure

The Department of Religion and Theology [RETH] is based in the Faculty of Arts within the School of Humanities, the largest School in the University of Bristol comprising five units: Classics and Ancient History, English, History, History of Art and RETH. At the REF census date RETH had 7 academics, 1 postdoctoral researcher and 13 research students, while over the course of the REF period it had 8 academics, 37 PhD students, and 2 postdoctoral researchers. RETH's **productive research activity** is exemplified by the publication of **7 monographs, 4 edited volumes, 65 articles, 1 documentary, 23 short articles, 1 exhibition catalogue, 23 PhDs awarded and the establishment of close working partnerships with the Clifton Diocese and Benedictine Order during the REF2021 cycle.**

RETH generates four thematic areas based on subject specific expertise of individual scholars as well as research groupings: **Religion, Medicine and Psychology (Askin, Deane, Gethin, Leech, and Lomi), Religion and Ritual (Askin, Langer, Lomi, Muessig), Religion and Textual Studies (Askin, Balserak, Gethin, Langer, Leech, Lomi, Muessig) and Religion and Theological Reform (Balserak, D'Costa and Muessig).** The unit's **research strategy** is led by the Head of Department (HoD) **in consultation with all departmental staff.** The **School's Research Committee**, consisting of the School's Director of Research, Head of School and all five of the School's HoDs, support and guide the research initiatives within each Department as well as collaborative interactions with Departments across the School and the Faculty of Arts. Three of the six Faculty research centres facilitate some of RETH's initiatives: **the Centre for Health, Humanities and Science (CHHS), the Centre for Material Texts (CMT) and the Centre for Medieval Studies (CMS).** The **Faculty of Arts** provides funds for international conferences organisation as well as research travel, impact activities and interdisciplinary research clusters. The Research, Enterprise and Development unit (**RED**), which has a Faculty and University team, supports researchers in grant writing and budget planning for external and internal funding.

Research Strategy

RETH is the only Department in the UK recognised as having a characteristic and outstanding dual concentration on Buddhism and Judeo-Christianity. As indicated in REF 2014, its strategy was to sustain and build this reputation, while realising interdisciplinarity and complementarity between its two groupings. Over the last six years, RETH has nurtured research initiatives between its **Judeo-Christianity (Askin, Balserak, D'Costa, Leech, Muessig) and Buddhist Studies researchers (Deane, Gethin, Langer, Lomi),** while showcasing its two distinct research areas with pioneering publications. **D'Costa's** conclusions on Vatican II's treatment of other religions in relation to the teachings of the magisterium in two monographs have stimulated considerable international attention (keynote speaker five countries, journal round table discussion, and an [AAR panel discussion](#)). **Gethin's** comparative assessment of Pali, Sanskrit and Chinese texts on early Buddhist meditations has engendered international attention with invitations as a keynote speaker at [Stanford University](#) (2018) and [Leiden University](#) (2019). These two research areas were brought together in a volume edited by **D'Costa** on *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging* where both **D'Costa and Gethin** contributed articles.

Departmental colleagues work collaboratively to enhance its research culture in the four areas mentioned above. Through its use of themed research topics, RETH articulated its aim to enhance cooperative work within the Department. Its **strategic appointments** of **Lomi**, (East Asian Religions, 2016) and **Askin**, (Jewish Studies, 2018) **facilitate the Department's reinforcement and development of its subject-specific research interests that complement wider faculty and university initiatives** (see below).

1. Religion, Medicine and Psychology

Grant successes in this area reflect **RETH's international reach**. **Lomi** won a **Japanese Studies Fellowship (JSF) in 2019–20 (£30,000)** for her project *Bile, Arsenic, and Gall Stones* that explores the performative and material dimension of different therapeutics and establishes correlations between religious ritual and medical approaches to the body and its wellbeing. Her publications investigate performative, healing, and transformative dimensions of Buddhist rituals, scriptures, and objects. **Gethin's** established work on mindfulness and Buddhist psychology challenges tendencies in scholarship and medical practice that remove the metaphysical aspects from mindfulness and reduce it to psychotherapy. He won an **American Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Research Fellowship** in 2017-18 (**£54,055**). Deane's project on Tibetan perspectives on mental health, illness and how medicine and religion overlap gained a **British Academy three-year postdoctoral Award** from 2017–2020, with a covid extension (**£300,555**).

2. Religion and Ritual

This theme runs throughout **Langer's** research on food, merit and cosmology in Theravada Buddhism. **Langer has made a series of documentary films** ([open access](#)) on food rituals in Sri Lanka that reveal women's ritualistic involvement as food makers and ritual specialists. **Muessig's** work on medieval and early modern stigmatics and [female preachers](#) demonstrates that women's roles were closely tied to 'performative Christianity' whereby they taught the Gospel through ritualistic forms of dance, mime and singing. **Askin** and **Lomi's** investigation into the connections between medicine and religion in premodern societies interrogates the roles of both body and mind in devotional performance, and of religious communities in the production and circulation of medical knowledge. This is pertinent to researchers across the Faculty of Arts working on [Medical Humanities](#) and associated with the [CHHS](#) and the [CMS](#).

3. Religion and Texts

RETH has long been committed to the production of critical editions, commentaries and translations of religious texts. **Askin** and **Lomi add a new dimension by assessing religious texts as evidence of material and scribal culture as well as objects of devotion**. They also employ more traditional aspects of textual studies. **Askin** uses lexicographic, philological, and text-critical perspectives in her analysis of ancient Jewish scribal culture, with the crucial inclusion of documentary writings such as papyri and epigraphy to shed light on Greco-Roman Jewish literature. **Lomi's** translations of medieval Japanese Buddhist rituals into English make these texts accessible to a wider audience of academics and research students. **Langer's research** on Buddhist charity **draws on several ancient Pali texts** as well as the fifteenth-century Sinhala Kāvyaśekharaya that, **until now, have never been translated into any European language**. **Leech's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded project on the Cambridge Platonists** includes first-time transcriptions of early modern manuscripts of Cambridge Platonists, their defenders and critics available as an **Open Access** resource ([Cambridge Platonism Sourcebook](#)). **Muessig's** research on holy women is based on her translations of vernacular and

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Latin sources, arising from her **discovery of rare manuscript copy of Catherine of Siena's office (Dublin Trinity College 1765)**. This was funded by her **Trinity College Dublin Fellowship** and **University of Bristol Research Fellowship**. This led to her pioneering monograph on religious stigmata, spanning the patristic to early modern era. **Gethin** is President of the [Pali Text Society](#) which promotes the study of Pali sources. Some present-day Buddhists (Aukana Trust) established a free [audio website](#) using **Gethin's translations of ancient Buddhist sutras** because his translations demonstrate how repetition performs not only a mnemonic function, but also a meditative function. These ground-breaking studies into ancient, medieval and early modern texts reflect the breadth of linguistic skill that RETH brings to the study of Judeo-Christian and Buddhist texts. RETH has also organised international workshops and conferences jointly with the Italian Department and the CMS, bringing together international interdisciplinary researchers who broadly explore the theme of religion and texts (e.g. [Dante and Origins December, International conference, December 2016](#); *Re-Imagining the Bible, International Workshop*, June 2019).

4. Religion and Theological Reform

Balserak, D'Costa and **Muessig** examine catalysts for religious change across the medieval, early modern and contemporary period that clarify transformations in practice and belief. **Their work is notable for its scholarly reputation, public engagement and impact.** **Muessig's** long-term research on medieval monastic identity, preaching and reform has facilitated the Benedictine community in Somerset to establish itself as a beacon of monastic heritage in the Southwest and informs one of our Impact Case Studies ([ICS](#)). **Balserak's expertise** on the early modern reformer John Calvin was recognised when Oxford University Press (OUP) contracted his [Calvinism: A Very Short Introduction](#), which has been translated into Chinese and Korean. **D'Costa's** ground-breaking monographs on Vatican II reform (2014 and 2019, the latter supported by a **Leverhulme Research Fellowship**, £20,146) reassess the Catholic Church's views of the 'other'. His research **has influenced pedagogical and doctrinal treatment of interfaith dialogue by shaping school curricula and the local diocese treatment of interfaith dialogue** and forms one of our ICS. Three doctoral dissertations have been written on **D'Costa's** approach to interfaith dialogue.

RETH has been committed to collaborative projects. In 2015-16 **Muessig** organised RETH's 50th anniversary celebration that included 13 public lectures featuring RETH's distinctive legacy in Christianity and Buddhism presented by former staff and research students; and a [public lecture in Bristol's Great Hall by Rowan Williams](#) on Christian meditation, chaired by **D'Costa**, responded to by **Gethin** on Buddhist meditation. This was the most replayed public lecture on the University of Bristol's website. **D'Costa** organised an international conference on Buddhist-Christian dual belonging, resulting in publications by **D'Costa** and **Gethin**. **Gethin, Langer** and **Lomi** organized the annual [UK Association for Buddhist Studies Conference \(UKABS\), June 2018 on the theme Buddhism and Material Culture](#), featuring international scholars and PhD students working on the topic from the perspective of Art History, Anthropology, Religious Studies, Museology. **Ferzoco** [RETH teaching staff] and **Muessig** organized [Medieval Monks, Nuns, and Monastic Life, 21st Biennial Symposium of the International Medieval Sermon Studies Society \(IMSSS\)](#), July 2018, which included an exhibition of medieval manuscripts on monastic preaching at Downside Abbey. The conference exhibition led to [Voices from the Cloister](#), the first public exhibition at Downside Abbey co-curated by **Ferzoco** and **Muessig** with the Downside community (see ICS case).

These collaborative activities highlight what the REF2014 Panel noted as RETH's 'imaginative interdisciplinary methods', which include ethnography, history, philosophy, theology, philology, lexicography and visual studies. RETH's approaches invite wider public engagement with the

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implications and benefits of its research. This is apparent in the formats in which our research/impact has been mediated: [blogs](#) (Leech), [exhibitions](#) (Muessig), [film](#) (Langer), [poetry](#) (D'Costa), [public discussions on public policy and religion](#) (Gethin), [magazine articles](#) (D'Costa). RETH's more traditional publications formats have been translated into several languages, including Chinese and Korean (Balserak), Chinese, Dutch, Hungarian, Italian and Polish (D'Costa), Italian (Muessig) and Hebrew and Spanish (Gethin).

Future Plans

The four thematic interests that define the Department's research/impact and its distinctive composition of Judaeo-Christian and Buddhist studies scholars will inform RETH's enterprises as individuals and teams in the next REF cycle. RETH will 1) ensure that staff at every stage of their career are supported in research/impact plans through robust research rotas and institutional support; 2) develop projects that bridge its two research groupings of Judeo-Christian and Buddhist studies; 3) appoint staff to maintain and develop significant areas in its research agenda; 4) introduce a Faculty-wide research cluster; 5) increase postgraduate researcher (PGR) recruitment.

1. RETH will ensure that its staff at every stage of their career are supported in their research/impact plans

A rigorous implementation of study leaves along with grant capture has facilitated RETH's outputs and this will be maintained. **Lomi's** funded research leave (2019-2020) allowed the exploration of archives across Japan. **Lomi's** study demonstrates the ritualistic context of healing drugs and the social networks in which these drugs were embedded, thereby offering a comprehensive insight into premodern Japanese Buddhism and its sacred economies. **Gethin's** research leave 2019-20 has enabled him to produce a draft of *Buddhist Maps of the Mind and Body: A study of Indian Buddhist thought in the Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra Abhidharma*, for OUP. **Balserak's** study leave in 2020-21 lays the groundwork for his monograph *Geneva's Use of Lies, Evasion, and Deception in their Efforts to Reform France, 1536–1563*, which considers the use of dissimulation and espionage in the name of religious reform. **D'Costa's** study leave (2020-21), will work on two chapters for his **third volume on Catholic theology of religions stemming from Vatican II**. The scope of these two projects makes a significant contribution to the **Religion and Theological Reform** theme.

Looking to the future: **Askin's** first research leave (2021-22) will be dedicated to the completion of her second monograph: *Medicine in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism*, which challenges the popularly espoused theory that a Hebrew/Israelite medical tradition is largely absent from the Bible. **Langer** research leave in 2021-22 will lead to a draft of her monograph, *Food Rituals in Sri Lankan Buddhism*, which includes working with untranslated texts (Pali and Sinhala). **Lomi, Askin, Gethin** and **Langer's** forthcoming monographs will highlight three of RETH's research themes: **Religion, Medicine and Psychology; Religion and Ritual; and Religion and Texts**. **Leech's** study leave in 2022-23 facilitates his completion of a monograph on religious emotion, while investigating a potential impact project that explores the possible clinical usefulness of this research. He is preparing a two-year AHRC Standard Research Grant bid - 'Madness and Religion among the Philosophers 1621-1689' - to map conceptualisations of the relationship between religious emotion and madness in the period.

All of RETH's research/impact is supported with funding and advisory resources provided by the School, Faculty and University (see below).

2. RETH will develop projects that bridge its two distinctive research clusters of Christian and Buddhist studies

Langer and **Muessig** submitted a £1M AHRC standard grant application entitled 'Preaching in Buddhism and Christianity: Transformational Pedagogies in Pre-Modern and Present-Day Asia and Europe'. In the next REF cycle the Department will develop the interdisciplinarity between the two religious clusters. **Askin** and **Lomi** are exploring the conceptualization of mental health in the pre-modern world in Judeo-Christian and Asian religious traditions. They conducted workshops on *Madness and Mental Illness* with colleagues across the Faculty and with external partners at Exeter University. This project formed a bid to the Wellcome Trust (2019) and will now be developed to apply to **AHRC and Leverhulme Trust schemes**. **Askin** and **Lomi's** collaborative interests build upon and crystallise departmental research pursued by **Gethin, Deane** and **Leech** that falls under the theme Religion, Medicine and Psychology. At Faculty level it aligns with the [CHHS](#), and at University level its assessment of the history of health and wellbeing support the values of the [Elizabeth Blackwell Institute for Health Research](#) (EBI).

3. Appointment of staff to maintain and develop our research agendas

With **Muessig's** departure to an endowed Chair (University of Calgary), and other possible departures likely to happen over the next REF cycle, replacements will be appointed strategically to build on RETH's wide-ranging involvement in the Faculty, facilitating collaborative work in the Abrahamic religions (**Askin, Balserak, D'Costa**), and in philosophy of religion (**Gethin, Leech**), and strengthen its profile further in the areas of global and comparative religion.

4. Development of a research cluster

The Faculty funds 'research clusters' that investigate a given theme across different Departments. Four colleagues, **Askin, Gethin, Leech** and **Lomi** all work on mental health connections with their own research. They participate in the work of the EBI and hope to develop collaboration. Such clusters **also support the PGR community**, as participants and seminar leaders, to explore innovative ideas.

5. Increase PGR recruitment

With the publication of ground-breaking monographs and articles, an increase of synergies between our two research clusters and a rich research culture we aim to increase PGR intake.

2. People

Staffing Strategy

In the last REF cycle, appointments were made (**Askin** and **Lomi**) to enrich our internationally recognised expertise in Buddhism and Judeo-Christianity. Staffing strategies are developed keeping this core identity in mind alongside departmental, Faculty and University research themes. **In the next REF cycle, RETH will appoint an ECR replacement for Muessig to broaden and develop one of its four research thematic groups.** The Faculty of Arts currently has no provision for this important intellectual religious tradition in any of its departments.

RETH's strategic planning builds on the commitment of, and support offered by, the Faculty and University (<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/inclusion/supporting-our-staff/>) to ensure that **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) issues are considered in all practices.** The focus is maintained through participation in both School and Faculty EDI committees: matters raised at these meetings

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are reported and discussed at Departmental meetings and vice versa. EDI matters are tabled at School Planning and Resource Committees (SPARC), chaired by the Head of School, who then takes them to Faculty Board chaired by the Dean. The Head of School also sits on the School EDI committee to ensure issues are addressed.

RETH staff range from very early career to senior researchers: three professors (**D'Costa**, **Gethin** and **Muessig**); three Senior Lecturers (**Balserak**, **Langer** and **Leech**); two Lecturers (**Askin** and **Lomi**). Before **Muessig's** departure (June 2020), the department's configuration of full-time staff consisted of four males and four females, three of whom came from North America; two from the European Union and one from Africa and two from the UK. We are replacing **Muessig** with a Pathway 1 to ensure early career candidates to sustain the discipline. Staffing goals are achieved through **Recruitment and selection training**: this is mandatory for those involved in the interview selection process. This includes discussion of what EDI means, and the legal framework, as well as focusing on awareness of unconscious bias.

RETH offers the **Returning Carers Scheme** for those returning from parental/carer leave. Parental/carer leave counts as one of the six semesters that need to be accrued before one can (subject to approval) take a semester of research leave.

RETH offers maximum flexibility (**Flexible working opportunities**) where that does not conflict with the requirements of delivering the teaching programme, aiming to support colleagues with particular needs (e.g., offering reduction in FTE and concentrating teaching on particular days of the week in order to support the needs of caring responsibilities or illness).

RETH's REF submission represents our EDI ethos: submitted items demonstrate a balance of junior, senior colleagues and genders.

Appointments Since REF2014

RETH's recent appointments reflect its research strategy expressed in REF2014: RETH aims to appoint the best researchers available who strengthen research interests across the Faculty and University, and nationally and internationally. In 2016, **Lomi** replaced **Greene**, Lecturer in Chinese Buddhism who departed in 2015 to take up a post at Yale. **Lomi** provides expertise in Buddhist studies with specialisms in Chinese and Japanese religions, and complements the work of **Langer** on Southeast Asian Buddhist rituals. **Lomi's** concentration on East Asian Buddhism is a counterpart to **Gethin's** focus on South Asian Buddhism and Indian religions, which provides a considerable geographical range and methodological diversity in our Buddhist Studies cluster.

In 2015, **Lyons**, former Reader in Biblical Interpretation, moved across the School of Humanities into History to follow his interests in Colonial history. In 2018 **Askin**, lecturer in Jewish Studies, replaced Campbell, a Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Early Judaism (retired 2017). **Askin** offers expertise in biblical and post-biblical texts in ancient Israel and Greco-Roman Judaism; she also researches material aspects of literacy in Judaism and early Christianity. Her appointment facilitates a continuity in research in biblical studies and early Judaism.

Postdoctoral Awardees

Dr Susannah Deane was awarded a British Academy three-year postdoctoral research fellowship for her project, *Madness, mental health and Buddhism: an examination of smyo nad ('madness') in the Tibetan context*, with **Gethin** as Principal Investigator (PI). Her research explores

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contemporary religious and medical perspectives on the Tibetan concept of ‘madness’ and is based on ethnographic fieldwork and an examination of Tibetan religious and medical texts. Her methodology underlines the diversity of approaches used in this discipline. Deane’s specialism restores Tibetan Buddhism to the Department since the retirement (2011) of Paul Williams, Emeritus Professor of Tibetan Buddhism. Deane’s appointment followed Dr Kourilsky’s successful completion of his Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship Scheme with **Gethin** as PI; this project focused on ancient Buddhist monastic texts from south-east Asia. Kourilsky is now the Director of the Bangkok Centre of the École française d’Extrême-Orient.

Teaching Staff

Ferzoco has been a member of the Department’s teaching staff since 2007. He is a contributor in RETH’s public engagement and [ICS](#), working with **Muessig** on medieval monasticism and its relation to cultural/religious heritage.

Staff Development

RETH offers **effective staff development**. In accordance with the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, staff are fully supported at every level and at all stages of their careers, through several integrated systems and structures. **New staff** receive inductions at departmental, School, Faculty and University level to introduce them to their role and to make them aware of the support and organizational systems available to them. At departmental level each new member of staff is assigned a mentor for the first two years of employment. Thereafter, staff are encouraged to join a mentoring programme and choose a mentor from within the Department or from across the Faculty.

Each member of staff has an **Annual Research Review (ARR)** where they discuss with two other departmental colleagues the interviewee’s publications, current research and impact plans and grant capture. ARR allows an opportunity for colleagues to assess where they are presently and where they want to be in the next year. For the ARRs, usually one interviewer is the HoD and another interviewer is chosen either for his/her expertise in the subject under review or the overall experience in grant writing, impact, and publications. In addition to the ARRs, each member of staff has an annual Staff Review and Development (SR&D) meeting with the HoD where the reviewee reflects on their work accomplished over the year. This allows each person to articulate career aspirations and development prospects. (Career development can be taken forward by enrolling on a number of [courses the University of Bristol provides](#).) The discussion is entered online as a personal record that is signed off by both the HoD and the interviewee and then the Head of School. The HoD for their SR&D meets with the Head of School and the final record is read and signed off by the Dean of Arts.

Departmental meetings are fortnightly. RETH’s compact size and frequency of meetings provide ongoing opportunities for all members of staff to make contributions to the unit’s research strategy. At departmental meetings, ARR, SR&D and in one-to-one meetings, the HoD encourages staff to partake in research opportunities offered at Faculty level. [See section 3 for further details.]

Study leave arrangements

RETH is supported by the Faculty policy of study leave of one semester after six served, with oversight to support grants capture and achievable plans. The latter is provided by the HoD, the School Director of Research and RED to individuals ahead of their study leave application through meetings, comments on draft applications and support for grant applications.

Research funding and strategies for generating income

In making grant applications RETH members are supported by a dedicated Faculty team, based across Finance, RED, and IT Services, who identify potential funding streams, develop bids with academics, and provide extensive feedback on grants as they proceed. The Faculty's Knowledge Exchange team advises on the development of impact. Researchers at all levels receive support from the Faculty, their home School and RED. All submissions go through the Research Excellence Advisory Panel (REAP), and, where necessary the Faculty Research Ethics Committee. This is a peer-review process jointly devised by Faculty and School research directors and RED to support and mentor the individual through the application process to ensure the quality of external bids. It is mandatory for all applications over £10k. All pathway 1 staff are members of the REAP college, which facilitates knowledge sharing across disciplines.

Faculty Conference and Research Fund

The Faculty assists in the support of conference attendance and research activity for personal research for members of staff whose research contributes to the REF research profile. For example, in 2016, **Muessig** was awarded £900 to present a paper on female monastic preachers at the 20th International Medieval Sermon Studies Society Symposium in St Augustine, Florida, USA. In 2018, **Langer** was awarded £900 to for a research trip to Sri Lanka to investigate Sinhala pamphlets and handbooks related to Theravāda ritual.

PGRs and funding REF 2021

Research students can apply for funding through the AHRC Block Grant Scheme, the South West & Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (SWWDTP) and the University of Bristol Arts Scholarship. During the current REF cycle RETH awarded 23 PhDs. Twelve of these were funded by scholarships: 5 AHRC Block-Grant awards, 2 SWWDTPs and 5 government/charity awards. Six RETH PhDs were overseas. Four were co-supervised with colleagues in Drama, History, History of Art and Music. During REF2021, RETH awarded 6 MPhils, 2 were overseas students and 1 was co-supervised in History. Presently, RETH have 13 PhDs, 2 are overseas, 3 are SWWDTP funded and 1 has a University of Bristol Scholarship. For 2 of the 3 SWWDTP studentships, the lead supervisor is from RETH. We currently have 1 MPhil student.

1. Each postgraduate student is assigned two supervisors

In some cases, the supervision is 50/50 where both supervisors provide equivalent expertise and support. One supervisor is designated as the lead supervisor. They take responsibility for procedural matters such as monitoring progress to the point of submission, arranging suitable assessors for the upgrade assessment and arrangements for the appointment of examiners in agreement with the HoD. In cases when a second supervisor does not have exact expertise they serve as a 'secondary supervisor' and provide guidance to the student in the wider domain of study in which the research is taking place, and/or on particular aspects of the research in which the secondary supervisor has expertise. Supervisory meetings normally take place once a month. **D'Costa, Leech** and **Muessig** have served as second supervisors to students in other UoA's.

2. PhD students are reviewed annually through the Annual Programme Review (APR) process

The student provides an outline of the proposed thesis and a plan for completion to upgrade and to proceed. The student has his/her work read by two independent reviewers from the department who are not the student's supervisors. The independent reviewers provide feedback on progress

for both the student, the supervisors, and Graduate Education Director. At departmental level all PGRs, in addition to having co-supervisors, can seek mentoring from the HoD. The School also provides Senior Tutors who can offer counselling and direct students to other support services.

3. The Department runs fortnightly Religion and Theology Research seminars that are organised expressly for our postgraduate students

These feature outside speakers. Occasionally departmental and faculty staff and research students are presenters. The expectation is that all RETH postgraduate students attend and participate in a 30-minute Q&A that follows each 60-minute presentation. There is a **regular slot for PGRs to give papers at the department's Research Seminar**. Students are encouraged to give papers at national and international PGR conferences. PGRs are supported in the development of their own international networks, and in running national and international conferences in collaboration with staff and PGRs at other universities. **Research students are expected to present at our annual joint postgraduate conference in Religion and Theology**. In May 2020, it was organised virtually. The joint conference, established 25 years ago at Bristol, includes the participation of Bristol, Cardiff, Exeter and Gloucester. Students give a 20-minute paper, followed by a 10-minute Q&A, chaired by an academic from one of the four participating universities. After the event, Bristol students are given feedback by their supervisor.

4. The Department creates initiatives to enable supervisory as well as peer learning

D'Costa runs a monthly seminar group where one PGR or a member of staff presents a paper that is circulated in advance and discussed in detail for 1.5 hours. The Buddhist Studies cluster has a weekly coffee hour for postgraduate and MAs students to have informal exchanges about research and projects. **Students are encouraged to organise reading groups that will provide peer learning to share and improve their research skills**. Sutcliffe (AHRC, graduated 2017) ran a medieval Latin reading group (2014-2017) for staff and research students across the Arts Faculty. In 2018, Gale (SSWDTP-funded) instituted a faculty Middle English reading group for students and staff that meets fortnightly. At University level the [Bristol Doctoral College \(BDC\)](#) automatically enrolls PGR students upon their arrival. BDC offers workshops, training days and professional training through every step of our research students' programme.

RETH offers regular paid opportunities for teaching and marking, along with **specialist training**, related to Impact and Research in which students can publish research that is associated with impact activities (see **Ferzoco/Muessig** ICS).

The Graduate Research Centre (34 Tyndalls Park Road) is a **designated space for PGRs** in the Faculty of Arts, offering a supportive and enriching environment in which research students can attend lectures or seminars, conduct individual study and meet other postgraduates from other disciplines.

5. Professional Development Activities for PGRs

The Graduate Education Director and University of Bristol Alumni Foundation have separate **funding pots for postgraduate conference attendance and planning**. Students can apply to these sources which will enable them to gain experience in subject specific skills as well as gain the practical experience in the organization of conferences. Students are offered teacher training, leading to formal accreditation.

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Intellectual exchange with postgraduates in other universities is encouraged through formal links nationally and regionally (through the GW4 research alliance, and AHRC SWW DTP).

Between 2014-16 **Muessig's** [GW4 Medieval Studies bid](#) (with Wei, History) facilitated ongoing workshops, conferences and study groups for PGRs across Bristol, Exeter and Cardiff universities. RETH and CMS have funded conferences organised by RETH PGRs.

The effectiveness of PGR professional development is **underlined by the success of RETH graduates in the REF2021 cycle** who have taken up national and international posts in academia and related fields including: [Dr Dag](#), Theology Lecturer, Sakarya University, Adapazari, Turkey; [Dr Arcadi](#), Assistant Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL, USA; Dr Norman, Research Fellow, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne; [Dr Farris](#), Associate Professor of Metaphysics, Houston Baptist University, Texas, USA; [Dr Grey](#), Associate Professor of Catholic Theology, Durham University; [Dr Faircloth](#), Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies, Palm Beach Atlantic University, Fla, USA; [Dr Levy](#), Head of Operations for Faith Forum London. Leo Baeck College; [Dr Maneewattana](#), Assistant Professor, Dean of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok; [Rev. Dr Morris-Chapman](#), Director, Methodist Ecumenical Centre Rome, Italy; [Dr Rondilino](#), Associate Dean of the Arts and Sciences, Carroll University, Wukesha WI, USA; [Dr Sutcliffe](#), Postdoctoral Fellow, British School at Rome; [Dr Thorn](#), Journals Executive at Policy Press, University of Bristol.

3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

The University of Bristol is enhancing its infrastructure to improve the facilities available to staff and students across the Faculty of Arts. A new £103 million library will be erected within the heart of the Faculty of Arts. This will include exhibition spaces, digital 3D printing, reading rooms and a cultural collections centre to give access to the University's world-class collections of historic books, archives and the Theatre Collection. A new Humanities Hub building was completed in January 2020; it contains large lecture theatres, studies, seminar rooms that are used by RETH, and an exhibition centre.

Part of the sustainability of RETH's research agenda results from internal and external funding and institutional support provided to assist in the preparation of grant applications.

Internal Funding

1. Research and Public Engagement

The Department sustains and promotes its research profile on an international stage through the organization of a dynamic array of conferences, workshops and public engagement events which are supported by the Arts Faculty. Up until 2017 BIRTHA (Bristol Institute for Research in Humanities and Arts) funded Faculty initiatives such as workshops, conferences and postgraduate conferences. In 2017 The **Faculty Research Director** took over the overseeing of funding of conferences, workshops and Research clusters. In April 2018, the Faculty Research Office was established, with the appointment of three permanent members of staff, to nurture and embed **a culture of research and impact** across the Faculty. The Research Office is led by the Research Impact and Knowledge Exchange Manager, who has responsibility for championing impact, knowledge exchange and partnerships, and provides support through mentoring, training and sharing of best practice, developing a series of online toolkits and guidance for impact and knowledge exchange.

BIRTHA funded (£1490) RETH's international and collaborative workshop *Dual belonging and the future of religious identity* (15 June 2014), organized by **D'Costa**. BIRTHA funded (£1000) the conference [*Dante and Origins*](#) (organisers **Ferzoco** and Kay [Italian Department]), 16 December 2016. In 2015-2016, BIRTHA (£1300) and the Bristol Alumni Foundation (£2050) funded RETH's 50th anniversary celebrations, ending with a large public lecture on March 2016 given by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams. The **Faculty Research Director** awarded £2000 to fund the organization of two international conferences hosted by RETH in 2018 [*UKABS, Buddhism and Material Culture*](#) (organizers **Gethin, Langer** and **Lomi**) and [*Medieval Monks, Nuns, and Monastic Life, IMSSS*](#) (organisers **Ferzoco** and **Muessig**).

2. Internal Funding to Support Interdisciplinarity

Muessig submitted with Wei (History) two successful GW4 applications, an initiator grant (£2,542) and an accelerator grant (£45,715) in 2014 under the banner of [*GW4 Medieval Studies*](#). These grants enabled research clusters of medievalists at the Universities of Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter to develop grant proposals as a team in the fields of medieval literature, history and language. In 2016 **Muessig**, with Dr Tristan Kay (Italian), secured funding from the Institute of Advanced Studies to, [*co-host the Benjamin Meaker Visiting Professor Alessandro Vettori \(Fordham University\)*](#), whose research interests cut across the fields of religion, literature, Italian and medieval studies. In 2017 the Faculty of Arts ran a competition to create funded research Centres with the aim of consolidating, expanding, and promoting cross-faculty research strengths. **Muessig and Wei submitted a successful bid to establish a Faculty Centre for Medieval Studies, which is given a £5,000 p.a. budget for five years to run a variety of research activities, including research impact.** [See Section 4]. The CMS is one of six centres established in 2017 that promote individual and collective research excellence from across the Faculty of Arts. The others are: Centre for Black Humanities; Centre for Environment Studies; CHHS; CMT; and Centre for Science and Philosophy.

The [*Institute of Greece, Rome and the Classical Tradition \(IGRCT\)*](#) supports a wide range of topics that are broadly associated with the classical tradition. To this end, the IGRCT funded (£400) **D'Costa's** *Dual Belonging* conference. It funded **Ferzoco** and **Muessig's** (£1200) [*Medieval Monks, Nuns, and Monastic Life, IMSSS*](#). The IGRCT has funded staff/postgraduate research reading groups on Petrarch and theology.

3. Internal Funding for Impact

RETH staff received Faculty funding initiatives to support their impact agenda. At University level, **Muessig** received £4000 in 2017 from RED's **Arts Impact Accelerator Fund** to assist with her and **Ferzoco's** ICS. The funding enabled **Ferzoco** and **Muessig** to curate the exhibition and to assist the Downside monastic community in the organization of the Abbey's first ever public exhibition *in situ* of some of its medieval monastic holdings. In 2018, **D'Costa** was awarded £800 from the **Faculty of Arts REF 2021 Impact Fund** to test new resources for non-academic beneficiaries and to engage with groups of stakeholders in relation to his impact case Engaging the Religious 'Other'. Building Best Practice and setting national standards in interfaith dialogue in Churches and Schools. **REF 2021 Evidencing Impact Fund** awarded **D'Costa** £780 to hire an assistant to collect and analyse data for his ICS. In July 2018, the **Faculty of Arts Research Internship** scheme award **Muessig** £300 to fund her PhD student Gale to transcribe and catalogue a medieval manuscript at Downside Abbey. This manuscript featured in the exhibition. In 2019, the Impact Fund supported a studentship (£500) to assist **Ferzoco** and **Muessig** in curating

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the exhibition [Bibles of Downside Abbey](#). These initiatives were provided with careful guidance from the University's RED team and the Faculty Research Office led by the Research Impact and Knowledge Exchange Manager.

External Funding

1. Conferences

Colleagues also apply to external funding bodies to support conferences. **D'Costa** received £1000 from the Spalding Trust for his *Dual Belonging* conference. **Lomi** secured funding (£1200) from the Japanese Foundation to pay for the travel expenses for the keynote speaker at the UK Blue Shield Conference. **D'Costa** secured \$USD 50,000 from Philos for an international conference held in Jerusalem on Catholics and the Land (July2019). [See section 4].

2. External Funding Individual Research

Bristol grant applications are supported by Finance, RED, and IT Services who assist in identifying potential funding streams, develop bids with academics and provide extensive, invaluable feedback on grants as they proceed. Grant writers are provided with an academic mentor to assist with their grant applications. The Faculty operates a Research Excellence Assessment Panel (REAP). Knowledge Exchange Managers advise colleague about their impact statements. Colleagues are provided with support through grant-writing retreats, specific training events include Funder Mock Panels and workshops on funding. The Faculty Research Office give support in the development of impact cases. This infrastructure of support has resulted in grant capture: **D'Costa** (PI) secured a **Leverhulme Research Fellowship** [£20,416.00, 1/9/17-31/7/18] for his monograph project, *Judaism after the second Vatican council, 1965–2015*. **Gethin** (PI) submitted by Deane for a (British Academy) [BA Postdoctoral Fellowship 2016, Madness, mental health and Buddhism: an examination of smyo nad \('madness'\) in the Tibetan context](#) [£256,998.00, 1/10/17 → 30/09/20, plus 43,557 covid extra time]. **Gethin** (PI) received a [Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Research Fellowship](#), [(£54,055), 1/10/16 → 30/06/17] to research a monograph on the Abhidharma. **Gethin's** study considers Buddhist systematic thought as formulated in the Abhidharma using sources in Sanskrit and Pali (some of which have never been translated into a European language) from a comparative perspective. **Langer** (PI) was awarded a [BA Small \[£5884, 1/04/14 → 1/10/14\] Feeding Humans and Non-Humans in Theravada Buddhism](#). This project studies the relationship in a series of short documentaries in mixed medium (film, stills, sounds) of the relationship between the living and the dead in Southeast Asia by way of food offerings or feasts. This aspect of **Langer's** research makes up part of crucial component of RETH's research theme **Religion and Ritual**.

Other funding successes include, **Leech** (Chief Investigator (CI)) as key researcher and project leader on the [Cambridge Platonists at the origins of Enlightenment: texts, debates, and reception \(1650-1730\)](#) (Cambridge University Lead, total £666,777: Bristol award £267,392.00 01/09/16-01/09/19). This study looks at the neglected Cambridge Platonists, the most important school of Platonic philosophers between the Italian Renaissance and the Romantic Age. The project produced the digital open access *Cambridge Platonism Sourcebook* that is based on hitherto unedited manuscripts.

As indicated in Section 1, the Department has ongoing plans for grants and funding that build upon and enhance its research foci.

4. Collaboration and contribution to the research base, economy and society

Many of the Department's activities are contingent on internal and external collaborations within and outside of academe. Colleagues create opportunities for impact through the employment of diverse media in the dissemination of their research.

International Collaborations

In 2018, **Lomi** co-edited a special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* with Dr Caroline Hirasawa (Waseda University, Japan). **D'Costa** organized an international conference with Dr Faydra Schapiro, Director - Israel Center for Jewish-Christian Relations, Tel Hai College, Galilee, Israel on *Catholic Thought and the Land/State of Israel*, with a \$50,000 grant from Philos, USA (June 2019). **D'Costa** is a founding member of the international [Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology](#), a theme that is central to **D'Costa's** research on Christian/Jewish relations. In 2021–2022 **D'Costa** will be **Aquinas Chair**, Angelicum, Rome (this was due to occur in 2020-21 but was postponed because of the pandemic). Whilst there, he will **organise an international conference** with Etienne Veto, Professor of Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University and Professor Thomas Joseph White at the Thomistic Institute, Angelicum on the topic of 'Catholic and Jews on the Land of Israel'. From January to March 2020 **Rupert Gethin** was **Khyentse Foundation Visiting Professor** in the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Savitribai Phule Pune University, where he led seminars related to his forthcoming book, *Buddhist Maps of the Mind and Body* (OUP) and read the Pali Mahāpadāna-sutta alongside its Sanskrit parallel, the Mahāvadāna-sūtra. While in India he delivered three lectures at the University of Calcutta.

National and Internal Collaborations

The Faculty has a widespread and well-established interdisciplinary culture as witnessed by the vibrant exchange between several Departments. In 2014, **Muessig** and Wei (History) formed [Medieval Studies GW4](#) (Section 3) consisting of nearly 65 medievalists from Bristol, Exeter and Cardiff belonging to the Departments of Archaeology, English, French, History, History of Art, Law, Italian, Music, Religion and Theology. In 2017, **Muessig** and Wei (History) established Bristol's [CMS](#) (Section 3) **as one of six Faculty Centres and became its co-directors**. [CMS](#) has over 30 members of staff and 20 PhD students across the Faculty and funds postgraduate speakers, visiting speakers, conferences, workshops, and study days.

Staff are involved with other faculty research themes and clusters. **Gethin** participated in Professor Havi Carel's (Philosophy) project *Breathing and Breathlessness*, taking part in a panel discussion, and contributing a paper on mindfulness to the *Life of Breath* research group. He participated in a workshop on Buddhist mindfulness of breathing to the Life of Breath 'Feel It Festival', again organised by Carel. **Gethin** presented in the GW4 series on religion and law (organised by Gleave, Exeter): 'Keeping the Buddha's rules: notes on Buddhist monastic law', Understanding Religion and Law (GW4 funded).

D'Costa developed an ongoing collaborative theology/poetry-music partnership with Professor John Pickard (Music Department, Bristol) on two projects leading to two recordings of the outputs and public performances. [D'Costa wrote the poem 'Daughters of Zion' \(Christian-Jewish issues\) which was put to music by Pickard; first performance, Victoria Rooms, Bristol, 2017 with Angharad Lyddon \(Mezzo-Soprano\), conducted by Mark Forkgen](#). The soundtrack was recorded and

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published by Bardic Edition. The second collaboration has been **D'Costa's** poem, 'Mass for the Uncertain' (Christian-Muslim issues) put to music by Pickard (2018) and has been performed by the BBC Choral Singers (2019). The soundtrack was recorded and published in 2020. This reflects his concern to develop outreach in non-theological formats of religious themes.

The Department actively engages with three of the six collaborative Faculty Centres. **Askin**, **Deane**, **Gethin** and **Lomi** are members of the [CHHS](#). **Askin** and **Lomi** are members of [CMT](#). **Balserak**, **Muessig** and **Lomi** are members of the [CMS](#).

Contributions to Research Base

RETH colleagues are recognized for their outstanding research through special conferences dedicated to their work, keynote invitations and public lectures. In 2015 at the University of Leuven, a half day conference was dedicated to **D'Costa's** monograph, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* and in 2020, an American Academy of Religion (AAR) panel on his book on Catholic doctrines on Jews after Vatican II. **D'Costa** has given international keynote lectures (e.g. Amsterdam, Budapest, Rome, Boston, Jerusalem, New York and Uppsala) related to his research and impact on Vatican II, including in 2019 the [Gershom Lectures on Judaism and Christianity](#), at Hillsdale College (Michigan, USA). **Gethin** has given keynote public lectures across the world, including: [Karma, consciousness and cosmology in Indian Buddhist thought](#), CEU, Budapest, Hungary November 2017; and in 2018 he gave the [Evans-Wetz Lecture at Stanford University](#) (USA), entitled *On death and rebirth, and what happens in between: two Buddhist accounts of why it matters*. **Leech** was keynote speaker at the conference [Facets of "Participation" in the Renaissance and the Early Modern Period in Bucharest, Romania](#), 19-21 April 2018. **Lomi** was invited to present her work on premodern Japanese healing practices to the general public as part of the [2017–18 History of Pre-Modern Medicine seminar series at the Wellcome Trust](#). **Muessig** as Trinity Long Room Hub, Visiting Research Fellow, Trinity College Dublin gave a public lecture, [Responses to a most unusual miracle: the stigmata in the Middle Ages, 18 November 2014](#). She gave a public lecture on 'Women in Motion: Performing the Bible in the Late Middle Ages' at the Museum of the Bible, Washington D.C., 22 March 2018; she gave a keynote lecture at the international conference [Medieval Mystical Theology in Dialogue with Contemporary Thought](#), Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, 31 May 2018 and spoke on *Signs of leadership: women and invisible stigmata in the late Middle Ages*. **Leech** is in discussion with Mike Jackson (Research Director, North Wales Clinical Psychology Unit - part-time clinical) to organise workshops on patients' experiences of compassion and shared loving feelings. **Askin's** book *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira* won the British Association for Jewish Studies 2020 Book Prize (£500) in the early career category.

Colleagues make a contribution through their editorial work. **D'Costa** is series editor of *Religion and the University*, Bloomsbury (since 2012) and on Brill's board serving the series *Currents of Encounter* (since 2014). **Gethin** is co-editor of the *Journal of the Pali Text Society* and the President of the Pali Text Society (since 2003). **Lomi** has acted as guest editor of *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (issue 45, 2019). **Muessig** was *Encyclopaedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, Section Editor for medieval entries, de Gruyter (2010-2017) and co-Series Editor, Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture (1999–).

Partnership

In 2017, **Muessig**, with the Director of Heritage at Downside Abbey, facilitated the University of Bristol's signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with Downside Abbey. RETH is a leading

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partner in the University's partnership with Downside. **Ferzoco** and **Muessig** worked closely with Downside Abbey Library and its heritage team and monastic community assisting them in their endeavour to become a beacon of monastic heritage. **Ferzoco** gave training classes to volunteers at Downside on handling manuscripts and precious books. **Muessig** organised PhD placements between Downside and the University of Bristol, where students training to become curators, archivists and medievalists work on the cataloguing of premodern manuscripts. **Ferzoco** and **Muessig** organized Downside's first public exhibition on medieval monastic books and material culture. This forms one of RETH's ICS.

Wider Activities and Contributions

In November 2015 **Langer** featured her documentary film 'A Buddhist Cosmology in Food' at the Arnolfini, Bristol, during the InsideArts: Festival of the Arts and Humanities. During the InsideArts Festival, **Gethin and Leech's work** was featured in a panel discussion, 'Buddhism, Mindfulness and Being Human'. Since 2015, **D'Costa**, through his research impact, has galvanized the organization of an annual [Catholic-Jewish-Muslim triaologue](#) during interfaith week, which has established Clifton Diocese as a key model for good practice regarding Catholic interfaith relations with Jews and Muslims. **Balserak** gave an interview on Muslim-Christian relations on 'Voice of Islam Radio' (www.voiceofislam.co.uk) on 7 February 2018. The interview focused primarily on points of similarity between Christianity and Islam. **Balserak** was interviewed on 28 September 2018 by [Premier Christianity magazine](#) about the impact John Calvin has had on the UK today, culturally, politically, religiously, and in relation to the arts. **Ferzoco** and **Muessig** organized two public exhibitions on medieval monasticism and material culture, *Voices from the Cloister* and the *Bibles of Downside Abbey* at Downside Abbey. On 15 September 2019, **Muessig** gave a 25-minute interview on [Slovenian National Radio](#) regarding the medieval holy woman Catherine of Siena. On 25 April, **Leech** was interviewed by BBC Radio Bristol regarding faith as a form of comfort in times of crisis.

RETH has established complementary research themes that maximise its potential to produce pioneering studies that attract grant capture, PGR students and international recognition. Bristol's institutional mechanism of guidance and funding have enabled RETH to develop a creative approach to the study of Religion and Theology that is witnessed in its fertile publications, the development of staff excellence, and the training of the next generation of researchers.