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Landscape of Learning and Teaching in Religion and Theology: Perspectives and Mechanisms for Complex Learning, Programme Health and Pedagogical Well-being.

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines some of the key drivers in undergraduate teaching and learning in the subject area of Religion and Theology. The focus of the paper is on positive and widening opportunities and methodologies used in pedagogical practice at Higher Education institutions in the UK. Examples of good practice and key changes in modes of delivery indicate a rich area of growth and new learning experiences, identified here as 'complex learning'. However, the fecundity might belie stress factors that mark a more negative turn in the future of studies in these areas.

This overview seeks to uncover the relative health of the area of academic study. The resultant image is not either that of 'lights going out' or of surging luminescence. Rather the view of the landscape is as if from above: a patchwork of practices and variegated levels of health. As a reflective perspective on pedagogy this paper also includes pedagogical purpose in highlighting successful and innovative forms.

Recognising the significance of the information rich web, and the increased use of web-based sources used by prospective undergraduates in their selection of educational institution, the paper examines the kinds of information available and the value of such information as markers for the well-being of Religion and Theology.

Maps and Markers for Healthy Learning.

Amidst the profusion of data, performance indicators and digital analyses for measuring quantitative inputs and outputs there remains something essentially organic about learning and teaching. In the exchange of learning and the process of growing understanding there are both quantities and qualities. Measuring the relative health of learning and teaching for students requires a balanced perspective that assesses them

by amount (by grade and output) and value (by positive experience and increased well-being). Measuring the success of the programmes in which learning and teaching are carried out requires three features: numeric data, qualitative data *and* consideration of contextual factors. Any observations derived from an imbalance of the three may lead to wholly inaccurate conclusions. Consider, for example a simile: It is a seeming irony that under stress plants will, even as they are dying, produce a mass of flower. What distinguishes the flowers of the healthy plant from that which is sickly? Counting flowers is insufficient. It is only through close inspection that one can determine the underlying health of such an organic body, and by consideration of its growing conditions and context. Similarly, identifying genuine health in a taught programme requires careful observation of clearly understood indicators both as to quantity and quality and consideration of broad contextual conditions.

In the contemporary world of undergraduate teaching in UK universities there are a number of markers that help identify the relative health of courses and programmes increasingly effectively with regard to quantity and quality. At a nationwide level key statistical detail can be found on the revised government supported web site, released in August 2012, 'Unistats' which produces comparable UK wide data on 'Key Information Sets' (KIS). The focus of the data, as much as it's primary source of information (the National Student Survey), is student experience and student feedback on that experience. National research bodies engaged with generic perspectives on learning and teaching, which represent a growing area of academic expertise and career pathway for learning developers and learning technicians, also have this student experience focus. In 2012, the Higher Education Academy national conference was titled, 'Great Expectations – Are you Ready?' a topic that emerges directly from the trope of the student learning experience, while the prestigious Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) 2012 spring conference was called 'The Student Journey'.

On a more local level higher education institutions have multiple internal quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms that measure and evaluate the success of courses. Tools range from end of module questionnaires to end of course reviews such as that advocated by Paul Ramsden in the 'course experience questionnaire' (1991).

Increasingly Higher Education Institutions are investing in high end analytic products that aim at complete data capture of each individual student and enable courses (and managers at institutions) to cross-reference independent and co-dependent variables of the student experience. These academic progression tracking tools provide a wealth of data that inform key performance indicators for future planning and analyse outcomes for the purposes of review. The lenses of analysis are increasingly sophisticated, data-led and focused on student experience.

Though these quantitative and qualitative measurements cannot but have positive consequences for generic student learning across the UK, it may be that this has led to oversight or omission of the very local conditions of course and programme specificities. One might recognise that from a distance one's observations tend to flatten out a landscape and miss the local detail that distinguishes one feature from another. Jonathan Z Smith famously remarked that in the study of religions 'map is not the territory' (1978) a kind of pithy aphorism such as might have been attributed to Nietzsche or Wittgenstein. At rather more length Smith might have been referring to Clifford Geertz's terrific caution against academic fabrications, and frameworks

as to whether particular analyses (which come in the form of taxonomies, paradigms, tables, trees and other ingenuities) reflect what the natives 'really' think or are merely clever simulations, logically equivalent but substantively different, of what they think (1973: 11)

Despite the much vaunted mechanisms of quality review and quantitative measurement at local and national level it is clearly important to ensure that these multiple 'ingenuities' map what is actually out there, rather than some "logically equivalent but substantively different" picture.

The purpose of this paper is to vary the focal length or purview between close observation of local factors and specific conditions which are markers of the health in the pedagogy of Religion and Theology and an overview that seeks to take in the broader landscape of learning and teaching at undergraduate level in Higher Education institutions.

Complex learning and 'Inheritance Mechanisms'.

The mechanism by which knowledge accrues can be as simple as the means by which a mountain top cairn is raised by each passing walker as they drop a stone atop the pile. Incrementally the body of knowledge grows with each additional fact. In previous historical periods a shortage of facts put those with large 'cairns' in privileged positions. Just so, an old reductive model shows that the most elementary form of teaching by which the tutor informs the class of certain facts in the form of a simple delivery system, such as a lecture, may be highly effective. But pedagogical practice in the 21st century is neither a Durkhemian practice of reduction to primal and basic forms that presuppose elementary to be authentic and better, nor is contemporary pedagogy a Taoist aphoristic attempt to express essences with simplicity and, perhaps, silence. Rather teaching and learning in a twenty-first century class is a fractal festival of multi-disciplinary references and multi-modal platforms for delivery and engagement. The driving creative force in HE lecture-seminar-real-and-virtual rooms is complexity. Access to knowledge and ownership of knowledge, even sophisticatedly connected knowledge, is no longer a marker of privilege and academic status. Rather, it is the creative integration, re-imagination and application of varied knowledges that indicates richness of knowledge. In a world of super-abundance of information it is no longer possible for teachers to pass on bare facts as if they were wisdom. It is beholden on teachers to show and share how they are co-users of open access information. The authority of the gatekeepers through narrow pathways to secreted and protected hordes of knowledge for the few has passed. What was once apparently esoteric has become exposed.

Good teaching practice has never been a one-way system of delivery. The lecture form of teaching and learning continues as a putative example of one-way delivery. If it only functioned as a means of delivering information from the learned to the unlearned it would have limited value. But the lecture was never so simple a construct. It was always dialectic. The notion of a delivery model is flawed for the recipient of a teaching experience is not a *tabula rasa* awaiting inscription. Students, even in silence, are processing, meaning-making machines.

In the context of late modernity student learning is conducted amidst a true wealth of 'noise' in multi-tasking, interactive and multi-platform scenarios of which the lecture theatre is merely one input. In the study of Religion and Theology there are ample examples of the increasingly rich sound-scape of learning, which may be said to function like a network (cf Castells, 1996; 2000). Manifold teaching modes and learning systems are evidence of this new process of complex learning. This section of the paper identifies three overarching areas of teaching that are increasingly evident in programmes in this field of study, which is often at the forefront of such developments. These areas are: new technological developments; varied 'inheritance mechanisms' (Chang and Jackson, 2007; see below); and multiple instances of interdisciplinary working. This section also identifies three related areas of student learning practice, undergraduate research, reflective practice and personal development planning as bringing fresh and fecund student led learning experiences in Religion and Theology programmes.

Manuel Castells averred, seventeen years ago, that the network society of late modernity is differentiated from earlier forms by an 'information technology paradigm' which 'provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure' (1996: 469). This paradigm is developing in influence through pedagogical institutions at all levels. New technologies and ever-updating systems and platforms are providing new learning experiences through access to e-resources for research, analysis and dissemination and for social networking among students and within programmes – specifically, most significantly through Facebook groups and Twitter. Technologies are new platforms for delivery of new courses for distance and part-time students through computer applications and handheld 'apps'. (see, for example, VC Open University, Martin Bean, HEA Annual Conference keynote paper 2012)

The consequences have been significantly beneficial to students and to teaching and learning. One example of the review of the role of students in their learning has been a shift of pedagogical perspective from students as passive receivers of their education to students as effective independent learners able to engage with authentic practices of research. Correlate consequences of this are evidenced in the growth of Undergraduate

research conferences at local university level (see for example, The University of Warwick's with Oxford Brookes University Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research - a collaborative project which funds undergraduate students to undertake research) and at national events (see, for example, British Conference of Undergraduate Research, BCUR).

A detailed example of this is well illustrated by the Yatra project established at Oxford Brookes University by Corrywright and Cosgrove (2012). Students who have undertaken a study trip to India use the data and experience of their fieldwork to carry out a supervised research project which they then present at the annual Brookes UG research conference. An 'inheritance mechanism' is built into the structure of the project for this student work is then incorporated into research topic modules on the course Virtual Learning environment for Religion and Theology and thereby become a resource for further and future student defined study trip projects and topics specific to each piece of research.

Engaging students in their own learning processes through reflective journals has, for a number of years, been a growing aspect of undergraduate studies (see, for example Langer, 2002; Park 2003; Moon 2006). This reflective approach to student learning has been further advanced in the use of personal development planning strategies and activities. Deirdre Burke initiated a project among Religion and Theology students at Wolverhampton University to improve their ability to reflect upon, manage and raise standards in their own learning.

The theoretical foundation for this approach is based on the work of Biggs, 2003, who identified metacognitive skills as a third level of skills, which goes beyond generic and study skills. Metacognitive skills are in essence involved with 'what a learner does in new context' (2003, 94), and an awareness of the self as a learner. This links to Race's 2001 work on leading students to conscious competence, which involves possessing the self-awareness to assess their own learning against specified outcomes. We want students to know why they achieved a particular grade for an assignment, to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and to set targets for their own development. (Burke, 2006)

Evidence of increased collaborative working - inter and cross-disciplinary teaching, projects and opportunities for students – abounds in this subject area. Exemplary evidence of cross disciplinary interest and projects is especially strong in the growing field of studies in spirituality. A primary site for contemporary studies in spirituality, the British Association for the Study of Spirituality (BASS) was promoted and launched in 2010 by Professor Margaret Holloway, Director of the Centre for Spirituality Studies at Hull University with a specialism in social work. A key focus of the association is the relationship between spirituality and health. (See, for example, Gilbert, 2011). While research from members of the association, such as the Department of Health sponsored analysis of 248 relevant publications, *Spiritual Care at the End of Life: A Systematic Review of the Literature* (2011) provides source material for programmes from undergraduate Religion and Theology to Nursing, Chaplaincy, Social work and Palliative care.

Cross-disciplinary research at Durham University directly feeds into undergraduate teaching in Religion and Theology. The Durham Centre for Death and Life Studies, (director, Professor Douglas Davies) A year 2, level 5 module entitled 'Death, Ritual and Belief' which is informed by and allows students to continue to dissertation research on topics ranging from roadside shrines, to woodland burials and theories of grief, mourning and emotion (undergraduate handbook 2012-13).

A further example that links both themes of reflective practice in writing learning journals and interdisciplinary working, whereby students have been able to compare notions and applications of spirituality in diverse fields such as Early Childhood Studies and Religion and Theology (see Corrywright and Swarbrick 2010) Such collaboration has been further evident in high profile research programmes such as the 'Religion and Society Research Programme (itself 'a cluster of research projects') funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council the resources of which, with its conclusion in 2012, will feed into student learning programmes in Religion and Theology and programmes across humanities and social sciences.

Not all complex learning is digitally based or remotely enacted through ether-enabled platforms. But it is true to affirm that complex teaching and learning largely conforms to Manuel Castells, 'network society' modalities: "Networks ... and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture" 1996:469). The networking logic of complex learning recognises varied centres of power from which learning achieves its impetus or from which it is fed. These centres of power include the 'old' hubs of the geographically material locations of HEIs as well as the drivers and sources of income, government bodies, non-governmental, third sector organisations, research councils and increasingly parents and loans companies. Complex learning further highlights the significance of students not only in 'voice' but also in being the focal point of the teaching and learning experience.

Emergence: Student satisfaction and Key Indicator Sets.

The strongest feature of change in UK universities in the last fifteen years has been the shift in perspective from the perception that the major product of HEIs is research, to the view that students and their outcomes are of equal significance. It has become a commonplace understanding among academic practitioners that there are two keystones of the business of universities: research and teaching/learning. However, funding changes and decreasing sources of external funding, especially in this specific period of austerity and government budget cuts, is bringing about a shift in income stream balances and recognition that, for many universities, students, and therefore learning and teaching, is the major product of their activities. The change in student fees brought about in 2012 in English universities is increasingly supporting a model that students are consumers and universities offer consumable products as services, rather than creating outcome-products. As Ramsden identified in 2008, reporting to the UK government,

Government and agencies should be ready to introduce funding models and quality systems that will realise a vision of higher education as an engaged partnership between students and providers (2008)

These forces have brought about a significant shift in emphasis for University mission statements, aims, purposes and practices. No UK HEI is able to avoid the nomenclature and activities related to 'student experience initiatives'.

Another important emergent feature of this shift in perspective has been the combined emphasis on choice and data, used to support these choices. The primary location for student informed data is Unistats. According to the website:

Unistats is the official site that allows you to search for and compare data and information on university and college courses from across the UK. The site draws together comparable information on those areas that students have identified as important in making decisions about what and where to study. The items that students thought were most useful have been included in a Key Information Set (KIS) ... (<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>)

The primary sources of data for the KIS are taken from: the National Student Survey (Ipsos MORI). The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); the 'Data service' ('an independently managed organisation, established and funded by the Department for Business, innovation and Skills and supported by the Skills Funding Agency to act as a single, central point of information for further education' – the dataservice.org) and, universities and colleges themselves.

Examination of UK wide data sets for Religion and Theology indicates a field of studies widely supported as excellent from the perspective of student experience. The range of courses defined as excellent by the Key information sets consistently shows students who combine TRS with another subject to provide higher satisfaction rates with the TRS component of their course. Responses of 95-100% to the question, "Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course" are recorded in 2011-12 for both old and new universities and include, University of Chester, Roehampton University, University of St Andrews and York St John University. Equally, data belie the supposition that TRS is not an area of successful employability with most Universities achieving 85% and above for students in employment six months after graduation (<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk>).

Data from the last three years on the number of students studying RE at AS and A2 likewise points to a healthy environment of interest.

Students Studying TRS at Level 3

A2 Level All UK

GENDER	NUMBER SAT 2010	NUMBER SAT 2011	NUMBER SAT 2012	% OF TOTAL 2012
MALE	6788	7102	7298	1.8
FEMALE	14445	15223	15744	3.4
TOTAL	21233	22325	23042	2.7

AS Level All UK

GENDER	NUMBER SAT 2010	NUMBER SAT 2011	NUMBER SAT 2012	% OF TOTAL 2012
MALE	9010	10901	10888	1.7
FEMALE	18732	23014	22766	3.2
TOTAL	27742	33915	33654	2.5

(Source data: Joint Council for Qualifications, GCE A and AS Level Results –2010-12)

Students express high comparative satisfaction ratings for TRS courses across the country in NSS. Routes to employment are increasingly emphasised in marketing to prospective undergraduates, in course design and in support systems within HEIs that provide career advice and guidance. In course design for example, in line with a number of HEIs, Oxford Brookes University introduced in 2012 a set of five 'Graduate Attributes' applicable across all undergraduate subjects. These attributes, also defined as 'literacies', include: academic literacy; research literacy; critical self-awareness and personal literacy, digital and information literacy; global citizenship. The focus is on increased data on employability and promotion of transferable attributes deriving from subject based curricula. One effective way these literacies are developed in TRS courses is through a range of work placement and community related activities within academic programmes. The approach has for some time been common in US

universities. For example, Scott Seider's examination of community based learning programmes links two key features of student experience, engagement and employability, "Deepening College Students' Engagement with Theology and Religion through Community Service Learning" (2011).

Moreover with UK-wide University developments that are encouraging specific teaching/learning specialist posts and career tracks there are lecturers and posts in Religion and Theology that balance subject specialist expertise with Reader-level and Professor-level pedagogic expertise thereby further enhancing the student learning experience.

Entropy or 'Dissipative Structures'?

Contrary perspectives on the wider condition of Religion and Theology in UK HEIs point to polar opposite conclusions than those of the foregoing as to its relative health. There are context indicators that may signify entropic aspects and depleting energy resources. These indicators suggest that dreams of growth and fecundity in the subject area may not bear fruit.

A single year of comparative data, between 2011 and 2012 entry figures points to an unhealthy downturn. The UCAS figures 2012 entry application figures were down 7.7% across the UK (female 7.1%/male 8.6%); UCAS application figures for Group V Historical and Philosophical studies were down 7.1% while those on the specific area V6 Theology and Religious Studies were down 14.5%. These figures do not, however, directly link conversion from application to attendance, nor are they evenly distributed across UK HEIs. Some departments are expanding and growing while others are reducing, merging or closing.

Academic departments are dependent on students and funding. A significant quantum of the latter follows the former. At the beginning of 2012 students from England, attending English Universities were required to pay full teaching costs as decided by each institution and endorsed through access agreements by the independent public body the Office for Fair Access. (OFFA). For many students course costs have trebled. A cost-benefit analysis of undertaking any 3 year study now involves higher risk factors. The

impact across all undergraduate subjects will be variable but a significant factor in decision making relates to employability. Employability (outside vocational) data is limited but Religion and Theology is frequently perceived as lower value in job market than comparative humanities subjects.

While the first systematic study of religion, flawed in methods and fact as it was, may have been conducted as long ago as by Herodotus in *The Histories*, the existence of any specific department the study of religion is much younger – being the department established and chaired by Ninian Smart at Lancaster University in 1967. In the bare half century since its establishment study of religions at UK Universities has risen and fallen.

Extending perspective to a yet broader overview of contextual factors requires some consideration of the roots for students who select TRS at University. Here we find a challenging and significantly bleaker picture. To exemplify: an email by this author to the executive committee of the newly reconstituted and renamed professional body. Association of University Departments of Theology and Religious Studies (AUDTRS) to Theology and Religious Studies UK (TRS-UK) in April 2013 stated

The matters you raise are of considerable concern in all areas of education in the UK. The governments' cuts in funding for RE PGCEs, the sidelining of the subject outside the EBacc and the use of non-specialist teachers of RE at primary and secondary, represent a serious disregard for the subject even before UCAS applying students are *un*-informed by the notion of 'facilitating subjects' and instrumental fee-reduced vision which places Religion and Theology as a degree with low employability.

A number of colleagues are members of the RE Council which has been vigorous in challenging these negative trends. A recent All Party Parliamentary group on Religious Education reported to government. I attach the report and the media release from REC for those who haven't seen them. On the 19th March 2013 Sara Smalley from REC emailed members of REC:

"the final report from the APPG Inquiry into the supply of and support for teachers of RE was released. The document, entitled *RE: The Truth Unmasked* was

presented to the Department for Education by two of the APPG members, MPs Stephen Lloyd and Mary Glendon, along with a group of masked campaigners.

The report has received some significant press coverage, with articles in *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Independent*."

Thus we can define four significant contextual indicators detrimental to the health and well-being of TRS courses in the UK:

1. Funding challenges to sustain discrete departments in TRS and to justify their existence as small units against large departments in REF terms
2. Reduction in number and availability of RE PGCE courses
3. Continued perception of TRS as 'RE' or a sub-discipline of Philosophy
4. Widespread use of hourly-paid and associate lecturers without security and tenure.

These withered fruits suggest a decline. But there are, equally, what may be termed hopeful ironies: God is dead; long live God. Ilya Prigogine, the Nobel laureate for chemistry, identified a process by which internal instabilities in certain structures led to collapse, but not entropy. Out of this collapse emergent organisational forms arise to create new and higher order 'dissipative structures'. Significant aspects of pedagogy in Religion and Theology rely on these dissipative or helpful ironies.

It is a peculiarity of the study of Religion and Theology in the UK that in 2013 its main topic is the subject of rising interest even as it wanes in terms of personal commitment, and, perhaps, academic study. Proponents of secularisation and de-secularisation may abound in the sociology of religion, but the issue of their debate is the same: the decline of religion, whether it is in practice, material culture or daily salience. Moreover, perhaps the single most strident voice discussing religion in the public arena in the UK today is a stringent atheist, Richard Dawkins. Publishing of texts against religion has expanded significantly (Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2006; Grayling, 2007; Hitchens, 2007a and b, de Botton 2012). Equally there has been a wave of contrary challenges (McGrath 2007; Ward 2008). This has been accompanied and followed by multiple overviews and texts for the study of the debate suitable for undergraduate programmes (Beattie, 2007;

Walters, 2012). And these texts are core to new modules on Religion and Theology courses such as that offered in 2012-13 at University of Wales: Trinity St David's on non-religion.

Similar debates exist on the significance of spirituality: Scholars such as Jeremy Carette and Richard King (2005) challenge the religious nature of spirituality by defining it as a product of consumerism, and journalist pundits such as Francis Wheen excoriate a perceived new superstitious set of worldviews in *How Mumbo Jumbo Conquered the World* (2004) on the distaff side; while alternative scholarly voices such as Paul Heelas in *Spiritualities of Life* (2008) and Ursula King in *The Search for Spirituality* (2009) promote a positive perspective; and further texts amenable to undergraduate courses examining the phenomenology of spirituality multiply as much as they link with other dominant themes in the religion/anti-religion discourse, such as Andre Comte-Sponville's *A Book of Atheist Spirituality* (2009).

On digital platforms novel sites that home resources and act as portals are having an increasing significance as tools for learning and teaching. One area of considerable growth is in the area of Non-Religion. The Non-Religion and Secularity Research Network (NSRN) was founded in 2008 by Lois Lee and Stephen Bullivant. This was followed by a new journal in 2012, *Secularism and Nonreligion*, sponsored by NSRN and Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture. In 2013 the anthropology department at London School of Economics offers a "Programme for the Study of Religion and Non-Religion".

Equally the digital landscape points to extended networks that are flourishing in TRS. *The Religious Studies Project*, founded by PhD candidates David Robertson and Chris Cotter and sponsored by *British Association for the Study of Religions*, offers pedagogical resources, networking opportunities and links to employment.

The Religious Studies Project (RSP) is an international collaborative enterprise producing weekly podcasts with leading scholars on the social-scientific study of religion. Since January 2012 we have released over 50 interviews (of around 30 minutes) on cutting-edge theoretical, methodological and empirical issues, which is available through the website, iTunes and other portals. In addition to the

podcasts, the website also features weekly essays, roundtable discussions, book reviews, resources, and conference reports, plus our weekly digest of opportunities (jobs, journals, conferences, etc).

(<http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/about-us>)

Resilience: Routes to Well-Being in Pedagogy and in Religion and Theology

There has been a notable rise in interest, political, economic and religious, to the idea of 'wellbeing culture'. These studies point to some significant debates and themes in the academic study of religions, specifically on the nature and extent of secularisation (see, for example, Corrywright, 2009). Graham Ward and Michael Hoelzl (2008) note that American sociologist Daniel Bell predicted the 'return of the sacred' in 1977. This prediction, of course, ran counter to the prevailing sociology of religion at the time which took a strong post-Weberian perspective on the inevitability of secularisation. The return or re-emergence hypothesis has gained ground in a global perspective with significant quantitative data on the number of people committed to faith traditions and the spread of religious ideologies and institutions, of which the growth of religious fundamentalisms and the spread of subjective wellbeing culture are two divergent parts, while the study of them is a rich vein for students and researchers in departments engaged with the study of religions.

Ward and Hoelzl argue that the idea of return or re-emergence as a model is limited for it predicates a theory of the reinstatement of old forms, while Ward and Hoelzl's model promotes a theory of 'new visibility' that recognises both a 'new awareness' of 'old' religion and novel expressions and forms, 'manifestations that we have never encountered before' (2008:2). Interestingly, their suggested fields of new expressions and forms of religion in *The New Visibility of Religion* (2008) do not include health and wellbeing. As we have seen, aspects of ostensibly secular culture such as Nonreligion and secular culture, like wellbeing culture, are actually very much the subject of TRS. Wellbeing practices indicate an emergent or resurgent religiosity and healthy interest in the phenomena of religion.

Wellbeing is achieved through nurture. It is vital that ground of TRS is nurtured to the needs of a changing environment and that its visibility as a viable academic choice is raised for prospective students. The following TOPUP model offers some directions for routes undertaken by successful departments of TRS

1. **T**ransfer interest to applications - from secondary to tertiary education, from AS to A2; from A2 to UG.
2. **O**pen up – through wider use of electronic media, electronic platforms and development of Open Educational Resources.
3. **P**rofile – high achieving graduates of study of Religions
4. **U**ppdate, communicate and inform – through such as public role of scholarly study of religion and through direct contact with schools, colleges and other feeder networks.
5. **P**ublish and research - in scholarly journals, in more publically accessible media, and on scholarship of learning and teaching in TRS.

Everywhere we look there is evidence of a flowering in the study of Religion and Theology. Equally it is important to extend the kinds of courses offered at undergraduate and graduate levels and the range of learning opportunities offered to students. Here we might emphasise three further directions that will support and enable flourishing:

1. Innovate – develop media and resource rich courses that support student research, offer field work, and provide career and employment opportunities.
2. Analyse and disseminate – data on applicants and leavers; achievement and employability; NSS:
3. Link – use associations and networks to support sharing of good practice and publication of Learning and Teaching; share good practice inter and intra HEIs.

Successful management of TRS at University level is increasingly challenging in its multiple modalities. TRS programmes have been remarkably successful in facing contextual challenges and meeting the needs of an “age of supercomplexity” (cf Barnett, 2000). But with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels we may equally observe that “all that is

solid melts into air”, or to extend the metaphor of this paper, “all that flowers will wither”. The epitaph to *RE: The Truth Unmasked* provides a salutary vision of decline

The international perspective highlights a tragic element to the fortunes of RE: it is being undermined by current policies just at the time when the subject as it exists in England is gaining international recognition. (37:7.4,)

The debate about the future for the study of religions in UK HEIs is contested. There are competing directions in the in the study of religion and non-religion from new visibility to diminishing profile. An overview of the landscape of academic study in this area affords varied views. There is evidence of growth amid the rich soils of pedagogies that enhance complex learning and widen the student experience. Equally, there are contextual factors that inhibit growth and even foretell significant decline. With care, the inheritance for students, researchers and departments of religion will be renewed growth in a new environment, will become a dissipative structure and avoid the dissipation of more gloomy prognoses.

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