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Religions, Philosophies and Ethics: Curriculum Change in the Marketised Academy.

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Abstract

This article is a case study of curriculum change centred on the introduction of a new Religions, Philosophies and Ethics degree. This innovation was necessitated by shifting patterns of student demand and government policies at both school and university level but also responded to some factors specific to Bath Spa University. Here we analyse and evaluate the resources upon which we drew in our own heritage as a teaching team, some issues we faced in terms of different Benchmarking Statements, the opportunities we discovered in developing a shared ethos and the threats we identified related to the status of Religious Education, in the expectation that many of the points are of wider relevance. We conclude with some ideas for creative ways forward, entailing cross-institutional co-operation, in a hostile environment.

1. Introduction

In this article we will explore the development of a new programme at Bath Spa University, our Specialised Award in Religions, Philosophy and Ethics, with the purpose of examining the current pressures on the subjects of Theology and Religious Studies and Philosophy, with some suggestions for future directions. Although in some ways peculiar to our own context, the story of our new programme may resonate with other 'providers' of undergraduate degrees in the subject(s).

2. Rationale for a New Programme

The main reason for introducing the new programme was responding to the popularity of philosophy of religion and ethics papers within A level Religious Studies. This emphasis has also affected the topics on offer at earlier stages of the school curriculum where teachers find that pupils, with little personal experience of religious communities, respond more positively to philosophical and ethical questions on which they may have personal opinions than learning 'facts' about 'religions' which seems very remote from their concerns and interests (see, for example, Hannam, 2006). Anecdotal evidence suggests that many school departments are changing their names to include philosophy

and downplay religions, for instance, 'Philosophy and Beliefs'. The curriculum at university level is in part driven by developments at school level, in what has become a competitive market.

Survey questionnaires with students on our existing undergraduate programmes revealed an award in Religions, Philosophies and Ethics would have been attractive to a majority of students currently registered for either Study of Religions or Philosophy or a Combined Degree (Major/Joint/Minor) in both. Further reasons for introducing the new programme were specific to our own situation, but may be familiar to colleagues elsewhere.

3. The Bath Spa University Context

Religious Studies has a long history at Bath Spa University, reaching back to the late 1960s and early 1970s when the institution was a Local Authority College of Higher Education and the subject was part of innovative moves towards education in 'world religions' within school Religious Education and likewise in Teacher Education. As a result of staff interests, there was also an unbroken strand of philosophy of religion, notably for this era, including Indian as well as Western forms of philosophy. When, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the College 'diversified' into degree programmes other than teacher education, Study of Religions continued to emphasise both 'world religions' and philosophy of religion, the latter being treated as part of Religious Studies. During the 1990s, the subject of Study of Religions grew from its origins as part of a teacher education programme, through being part of a Combined Degree programme to Single Honours Study of Religions, always retaining an option in philosophy of religions. Our initial response to the change in emphasis at A level was to develop a separate subject of Philosophy and Ethics up to Major within a Combined Degree, this being validated in 2006. Following further revalidations in 2008 and 2009, when we retained the Single Honours Study of Religions and both Study of Religions and Philosophy and Ethics within the Combined Degree up to Major, we decided to explore the idea of a Specialised Award combining the two subjects. This was validated in 2010/2011 for a 2012/2013 start. As well as continuing to respond to changes at A level, local incentives for change included the following:

- The need to exploit economies of scale and reduce the number of modules offered by the teaching team to release staff time for other activities such as research, research bids and new developments, in a context of changing university priorities.
- A management decision in 2009-2010 to discontinue Single Honours Study of Religions on efficiency grounds as numbers were relatively small (although following student activism, the possibility of Single Honours has continued to this day as an internal possibility for students recruited to the joint degree). The new programme enabled us to re-establish a Single Honours programme.
- The new programme allowed us to rationalise a collection of modules that had grown up over the decades and focus on strengths of the

current teaching team, to create a distinctive programme which we hoped would be attractive to students.

4. The New Programme

In the context of the Bath Spa University Undergraduate Modular Scheme, a Specialised Award indicates a programme where all the modules can be specified by the programme. Other Single Honours Awards require students to study a second subject in their first year, currently known as a 'complementary subject'. The decision to create a Specialised Award meant that this requirement would not apply.

However, in addition to the Specialised Award, we considered it important to retain the possibility of applying to study either Study of Religions or Philosophy and Ethics in combination with other subjects, for those applicants who wanted one of our subjects but not the other. Applications proved this a wise decision, for although applications and registrations for the new programme exceeded the target, we continued to recruit students for the separate programmes, particularly in Philosophy and Ethics.

The new programme sought to build on the existing strengths of the two subjects and expand into areas which would draw upon both. Thus in the first year, compulsory modules were derived from existing core modules in Study of Religions and Philosophy and Ethics with the addition of another module which brought religious and philosophical thinkers and traditions together. In the second year, a common compulsory module was identified in what had previously been the Philosophy and Ethics core as this has a strong philosophy of religion component centred on India and China. Among the optional modules, Philosophy, Religions and the Environment brings the two subjects together as, potentially, does the project module. In the third year, the compulsory module builds on what was previously the second year Study of Religions core, focussed on religions in the contemporary world and incorporating a one-week fieldwork placement. Various optional modules allow students at this level to make connections between Study of Religions and Philosophy and Ethics, especially Religion, Philosophy and Gender but also the dissertation, employment-related placement and the advanced project. For more details, see Appendix.

5. Resources for Curriculum Change

In designing our new programme, we were able to draw upon a number of existing strengths. For over thirty-five years, the Study of Religions at Bath Spa University, in its various incarnations, has continued to include a compulsory one-week placement in a religious or belief community. This opportunity to engage in first hand ethnographic fieldwork has always attracted students and provides an invaluable form of experiential learning. In 2009 we received an HEA mini-project grant to research and extend this part of our provision, the results of which can be seen on our website (www.livingreligions.co.uk) and in articles relating to aspects of the project (Cush and Robinson, 2010, 2011a and 2011b). The website was awarded the

2013 annual Shap prize for making “a profoundly significant contribution to the field of the study of/education in religions”.

We have also long specialised in religious traditions ‘beyond the big six’, including new religious movements and various forms of contemporary Pagan and ‘new age’ traditions. As a result of the effort of previous staff we have an archive of material, the *Bath Archive of Contemporary Religious Affairs*, on these less familiar traditions which we are in the process of organising with the aim of having at least the catalogue available on-line.

A third strength is in our links with religious education at school level, resulting in part from our origins in a teacher education institution, but also from the research interests of current staff. In addition, there is an advanced module on religion and education in international perspective, in part designed to prepare for postgraduate teacher training.

A final strength is our long tradition of philosophy of religion and ethics from a world perspective, which we have continued since the innovative team of the late 1960s, and which has drawn upon the specialist fields of staff appointed in more recent times.

6. Issues in Curriculum Change

One of the challenges encountered was creating a coherent Specialised Award from two distinct subjects with their own Benchmarking Statements. A comparison of the two Benchmarking Statements reveals, as would be anticipated, that they diverge in respect of “[k]nowledge and understanding” and what in Theology and Religious Studies is called “[d]iscipline-specific and intellectual skills” and in Philosophy is divided into “[g]eneral philosophical skills”, “[e]ngaging in philosophical debate” and “[b]readth of view” (QAA, 2007b pp. 4-5 cf. QAA, 2007a pp. 15-16). In crude terms, the Theology and Religious Studies Benchmarking Statement is more interpretive and analytic whereas the Philosophy Benchmarking Statement is more critical and evaluative in tone. There are areas of convergence when it comes to historical and textual approaches (e.g. QAA, 2007b pp. 15-16 cf. QAA, 2007a pp. 9-10), as well as the role of multidisciplinary and the recognition of real-world relevance (e.g. QAA, 2007b p. 16 cf. QAA, 2007a p. 10). Moreover, “[g]eneric skills” in both Benchmarking Statements reveal much common ground, notwithstanding some distinctive attributes. Theology and Religious Studies specifies “[e]ngaging] with empathy, integrity and critical reflection with the convictions and behaviours of others” and “[working] collaboratively as a member of a team or group in a way which allows each individual’s talents to be utilised effectively” (QAA, 2007b p. 17). These skills are not represented in Philosophy nor are Philosophy’s “ability to remember relevant material and bring it to mind when the moment of its relevance arises” and “flexible and adaptable mind able to face new situations” (QAA, 2007a p. 5) found in Theology and Religious Studies. In some ways, these differences do seem significant given the importance of empathy, especially in phenomenological approaches that are often seen as foundational to Religious Studies, and the emphasis on intellectual rigour that defines Philosophy. Yet overall the skill

set is similar, encompassing effective oral and written communication, appropriate use of library resources and Information Technology, and independent research and reflection (QAA, 2007b p. 17 cf. QAA, 2007a p. 5). However, in any case, such skills sets relate generically to 'graduateness' and would be much the same irrespective of the subjects considered.

One possible way forward would have been to concentrate on crossover between the subjects, notably the philosophy of religion. Philosophy is mentioned in the Theology and Religious Studies Benchmarking Statement as one of the methodologies that might be employed (QAA, 2007b pp. 15-16) while in the Philosophy Benchmarking Statement religion is listed as one of the fields of endeavour that Philosophy can examine (QAA, 2007a p. 2). Interestingly, the Philosophy Benchmarking Statement does allow for the inclusion of non-Western philosophy (QAA, 2007a p. 3) and it is in treating Indian and Chinese philosophy in the second year core module, featuring Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Daoist and Confucian thought, that philosophy of religion comes to the fore though not to the exclusion of secular ideologies, chiefly Marxism. However, instead of concentrating on the philosophy of religion, we opted for a broader-based curriculum that includes some features particular to either subject, such as the focus on experiential learning and ethnographic approaches in studying religions and engagement with classic and more recent philosophical debates including free will and determinism and issues surrounding human extinction.

An alternative crossover would have been ethics, despite the fact that it had been introduced as a clearly identifiable part of the provision when Philosophy and Ethics came on stream. In practice, ethics has remained more closely connected with what was previously the Philosophy and Ethics programme, particularly in one of the two first year compulsory modules on Truth and Value, though this could be an area for development. This is because ethics features in both the Philosophy and the Theology and Religious Studies Benchmarking Statements. In the former, the general themes of "duty" and "goodness" and "applied ethics" as an example of what might be studied are set out when defining the possible content of a Philosophy degree leading to mention of moral philosophy and the subject's wider applicability. In the latter, it is emphasised that religions have "[e]thics, morality, and values" which students might be expected to address within the lives of members of faith communities and in religious interventions in public discourse (QAA, 2007a pp. 2, 9-10 cf. QAA, 2007b pp. 8, 14-16).

In any case, the range of provision in the new Specialised Award posed challenges in articulating unified learning outcomes and marking criteria. With the advantage of a year's experience of teaching on the programme, it has become clear that we were not entirely successful in maintaining the distinctiveness of both subjects within the provision, particularly that of Philosophy and Ethics. The reason for this is the polymethodic nature of Religious Studies whereby it includes some philosophical approaches alongside other aspects that relate to its toolbox of disciplines. When reviewing learning outcomes, it will be necessary to indicate not only the inclusion of certain areas of enquiry and types of enquiry but the extent to

which such enquiry is characteristic or representative of the discipline. Fortunately, this is not a problem for the new Specialised Award because it combines the learning outcomes for both Study of Religions and Philosophy and Ethics and we have developed marking criteria that give prominence to qualities expected in Philosophy (the development of argument, the consideration of competing arguments and the engagement with relevant concepts, debates and theories) in addition to analysis, evidence and factual accuracy which could be deemed more typical of Religious Studies.

Nevertheless, the wider context in which the new Specialised Award was proposed necessarily imposed some constraints. In addition to the differential expertise of the staff in post which tends to favour the religious over the philosophical given the longer history of the former, we were required to plan a programme that could be sustained with a small and, in some respects, shrinking staffing base. This required the design of modules that could attract students registered for the Specialised Award but also for either Study of Religions or Philosophy and Ethics combined with another subject. While double-coding modules for both the Study of Religions and Philosophy and Ethics programmes affords students greater choice, it cannot be denied that it can detract from the distinctiveness of the contributory subjects, especially when constituting a major proportion of the modules on offer to students taking Study of Religions or Philosophy and Ethics. Among the double-coded modules validated are thematic ones on ecology and gender that combine multidisciplinary and real-world relevance consistent with both subjects' Benchmarking Statements. Beyond the two subjects, it has been possible to borrow modules from other areas of the University, for example, a module on Islam taught by a colleague in History for Study of Religions students and a module on evil taught by a colleague in Cultural Studies for Philosophy and Ethics students. Such modules not only increase choice for students but can, in fact, reinforce the distinctiveness of the Study of Religions and Philosophy and Ethics programmes. Even so, reliance on other areas of the University has its drawbacks in terms of planning as other subject teams have their own priorities and modules may not run in a given academic year or, as we have found, be retired with the replacement being unavailable and/or unsuitable.

7. Opportunities of Curriculum Change

In planning the Specialised Award, we did benefit from a shared ethos in our approach to Study of Religions and Philosophy and Ethics which could be further developed in establishing the distinctiveness of the new programme. Broadly conceived, this shared ethos consists in the following: a global vision that examines a range of religions in a variety of settings, and extends beyond Europe and North America to treat philosophy in India and China; a stress on the contemporary that determines which religions are included and weights recent developments in philosophy; and a focus on the applied nature of Study of Religions and Philosophy and Ethics whether in terms of elucidating wider relevance or in the 'doing' of the subjects, be it by conducting fieldwork in religious communities or constructing one's own philosophical case rather than rehearsing the views of famous philosophers. This shared ethos has made it easier to devise an appropriate range of modules that relate to these three areas of specialisation.

One opportunity afforded by the new Specialised Award was the ability to define a full first year programme, combining modules in Study of Religions and Philosophy and Ethics with others selected from across the University. This not only allows some measure of choice but also serves to broaden students' experience in relevant ways. For instance, students may study Medieval and Renaissance Worlds, thereby gaining new insights into Christianity, or Philosophy and Thinking in Schools, relating to a possible future career in teaching as well as to an important initiative taking philosophy beyond the academy.

In addition, at least potentially, other components of the award could be planned and integrated in a holistic manner that can be more difficult in the context of Combined Awards where students are taking either Study of Religions or Philosophy and Ethics alongside another subject. This has facilitated the continued and consistent use of formative assessment, and the focus on Personal Development Planning and Employability that have been part of our practice.

A number of writers have pointed to the usefulness of formative assessment though often with a focus on the first year of study and students making the necessary adjustments to the requirements of Higher Education. In this connection, James Nelson remarks upon the failure on the part of lecturers to "make our expectations explicit ... so students are unsure about what we want them to do" and the value of formative assessment in enabling "learners to learn from their own mistakes" (Nelson, 2007 pp. 179, 180). However, while a case can be made that this is crucial for first year students for whom University inevitably poses new challenges in assessment that may take new forms and will involve greater independence, as students progress they continue to meet new challenges in respect of which it is vital for them to understand what their lecturers require and to be able to get feedback on initial attempts. Accordingly, formative assessment features throughout the programme in a variety of ways intended to support student learning, particularly where a new mode of assessment is introduced or in respect of an initial item at the start of a year as students move to a new level. Formative assessment generally includes essay plans of different kinds and the option to submit either sections or first drafts of written work such as critical analyses, discussion board posts and skills audits. In addition, as some indication, in the first year, referencing exercises and a practice group presentation feature, mainly to assist students for whom referencing is often difficult to understand and for whom assessed presentations are outside their experience. In the second year, students are invited to have a tutorial on work in progress on individual presentations as they move from group to individual delivery. In the third year, students can produce a version of their dissertation research proposal before committing themselves in the final version and, of course, receive comments on their dissertations as they write them.

Personal Development Planning and Employability are also treated throughout the programme. As Deirdre Burke has emphasised, Personal Development Planning has a strong academic and reflective dimension so

that her Personal, Academic and Career Enhancement module was intended to promote students' "independence as learners" on the basis that "[w]e 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, 2007 pp. 110, 111). However, Personal Development Planning goes beyond these dimensions, important though they are not least in engaging with and using tutor feedback, to include wider aspects of students' experience and hence relate to their Employability. Such considerations inform the Higher Education Achievement Report which its website explains "enables institutions to provide a detailed picture of student achievement throughout a students' time at university, including academic work, extra-curricular activities, prizes and employability awards, voluntary work and offices held in student union clubs and societies that have been verified by the institution" (HEAR, 2013). Similarly, Hinchcliffe and Jolly propose a model of what they call "graduate identity" in terms of "four types of experience" (Hinchcliffe and Jolly, 2011 p. 575). These experiences comprise: values which encompass "personal ethics, social values and contextual, organisational values"; intellect which may be "creative, situational or applied and reflective"; performance which concerns "the application of skills and intellect in the workplace"; and engagement which involves "a willingness to meet personal, employment and social challenges head on" (Hinchcliffe and Jolly, 2011 pp. 575, 577, 578, 580). Both the Higher Education Achievement Report and Hinchcliffe and Jolly's model have a broader conception of employability with the latter featuring, among other things, a sensitivity to diversity including religious and cultural literacy (Hinchcliffe and Jolly, 2011 pp. 574, 576) where students specialising in Religions, Philosophies and Ethics have particular strengths.

Consistent with this, students receive introductions to Personal Development Planning and input from the Student Union's Volunteering Co-ordinator to alert them to the importance of involving themselves in community initiatives both for individual enjoyment and for relevant experience. They also receive input from the University's Careers Service to alert them to the services offered to help them identify future career options and support them in making applications, preparing for interviews and other selection procedures. These sessions are scheduled in core modules so that all students have access to them and can be linked to assessment, as in a first year learning portfolio that requires students to evaluate a lecture and a seminar, consider feedback on their coursework to date, comment on their achievement of learning outcomes and discuss their career prospects. Another way in which a link is made with assessment is with applied elements, as in the second year core module where one assignment requires that students apply their knowledge and understanding of Indian and Chinese thought to a real-world context, be it narrowly academic (a research proposal), broadly educational (philosophy for children and the A level curriculum) or broader yet (a book proposal for a popular imprint and an article for a general interest magazine). This assignment has students think about how their studies might relate to life after University, how to communicate complex ideas for specific audiences and how to follow a brief. There are also project modules, including an alternative to the dissertation, that have an employment-focus. These modules include

reflective elements such as learning logs as well as concentrating on project management. Recent projects have included a film on Sound System culture that examined its Rasta roots and an activity day at Fairfield House, Bath, where Emperor Haile Selassie lived in exile. Other recent projects have been a questionnaire on students' beliefs and values to assess the extent of religiosity (based on the survey conducted with staff and students in universities by Weller, Hooley and Moore 2011) and evaluating a series of talks and workshops on religious topics (convened as part of discharging the duties of the Student Union's elected officer for Religion and Belief).

The decision to locate Personal Development Planning and Employability mainly, though not exclusively, within subject provision was made at an institutional level after a previous model based on a discrete module in personal and academic development relating to identified employment sectors had not proved popular. Of course, this change does not of itself ensure successful participation with a significant number of students, when asked, expressing at best apathy and at worst antipathy. As it is vital that students do participate, one strategy has been to make direct connections with the subjects they are studying and how they are studying them. Our own research on experiential learning has confirmed the findings of research undertaken by Sophie Gilliat-Ray on fieldwork projects that "fieldwork gives students an opportunity to immerse themselves in their subject in the 'real' world outside academe" (Gilliat-Ray, 2005 p. 121). In the Skills Audit we conducted as part of the Living Religion project, we identified how experiential learning, including fieldwork placements, facilitates the acquisition of employability skills alongside other subject and generic aspects of student learning (Cush and Robinson, undated) and were at pains to point out that the employability agenda can be addressed without changing the curriculum as this already provides students with the resources to develop their skills (Cush and Robinson, 2011a p. 5).

However, students do need to be able to recognise and articulate the skills they are developing and, in this respect, there are obvious advantages if the conversation about skills can be located within and arise out of the curriculum rather than remain generic and thus leave students struggling to relate their subjects to their future goals. Writing about expertise as an approach to employability, Mark Addis refers to the work of Hall and Williams that "conceptualizing important values for employability and professionalism in virtue ethics terms has the potential to promote student understanding of these" (Addis, 2012 p. 7). Indeed, a benefit of concentrating on virtue ethics is its cross-cultural applicability, notwithstanding the hegemonic position of Platonic, Aristotelian and Thomistic versions in Western discourse and possible objections predicated upon the incommensurability of different perspectives and the absence of equivalent terms in other languages (van Norden, 2003 pp. 99-102, 116). Examples can be found globally such as in Confucian morality where social ills are attributed to ethical failings and deficient ethical motivation, and where Confucianism exhorts the practise of virtue in accordance with moral rules and in association with the principle of self-cultivation (Yao, 2000 p. 33).

More than this, perhaps a case can be made for subjects such as Religious Studies and Philosophy and Ethics having a special resonance for Personal Development Planning taken in the round, as they involve students asking the biggest questions of all about the meaning and purpose of life and reflecting on an array of answers to these questions in formulating and articulating their own responses. Yet, for the very same reasons, students of these subjects may be particularly critical of the employability agenda or at least of the prominence it has come to enjoy because what they are studying inevitably entails engagement with a range of value systems, some of which embody entirely different aims and aspirations from those endorsed by mainstream society that turn on professional and material success (cf. Cush and Robinson, 2011a pp. 5-6). The prophet and philosopher both may espouse a life of searching after truth and subordinate career and wealth to this as an overriding priority and students, confronted with these challenging voices and troubling visions, are likely to raise queries about the notion of Employability. This makes it all the more important to establish links between Personal Development Planning and Employability, on the one hand, and the subjects students are studying, on the other, especially where the curriculum offers a springboard for consideration of such themes.

8. Threats to Curriculum Change

The current marketised academy is not necessarily a comfortable place for either Theology and Religious Studies or Philosophy. A stress on subjects that are regarded as more vocationally and economically useful such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics has compelled Humanities subjects to justify their own existence in instrumental terms. Simultaneously, perceptions on the part of prospective students and their families of a degree as a major financial investment directs attention towards the marketability of a subject. Consequently, there are fears of declining applications, especially in subjects that do not enjoy the cachet of being 'traditional' or 'classical' with a heritage in prestigious institutions.

Moreover, Theology and Religious Studies, in particular in England, is in danger from the current uncertain situation of Religious Education in schools, which is the source of our applicants and a major career choice for our graduates. This also applies to some extent to Philosophy where interest in the subject is encouraged by the study of philosophy of religion in A level Religious Studies, or an intention to teach Philosophy in schools. Although the current Coalition government has stressed in correspondence that Religious Education is still a statutory part of provision by state maintained schools, it has not been proactive in getting that message across to schools. Rather, a number of initiatives have had the effect of calling into question the value of Religious Studies as a subject to take seriously. The invention of the so-called 'English Baccalaurate' which, although defeated as a proposed qualification, still functions as a list of subjects upon which schools will be judged against each other, thus implies which subjects are important. Religious Education was excluded from the list of Humanities subjects in order to emphasise the importance of History and Geography. The fact that Religious Education is organised locally, rather than being part of the National Curriculum, means that it is not mentioned nor funded in current curriculum review debates, and

the Religious Education Council of England and Wales is having to fund a parallel review of Religious Education. Similarly, the fact of local organisation means that cuts to Local Authority budgets affect Religious Education unlike other subjects. In particular, the proliferation of Academies, state funded schools detached from Local Authority control, and Free Schools means that fewer schools, including over half of secondary schools, are no longer legally obliged to follow the Local Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, but may make their own arrangements.

Cuts to numbers of places for the Postgraduate Certificate of Education in secondary Religious Education, along with the requirement to pay full fees also undermines the status of the subject. In contrast, many other subjects have bursaries, for example £20,000 for candidates with first class degrees wanting to teach physics, chemistry or mathematics, or £4,000 for candidates with an upper second in the “priority secondary subjects” of “English, geography, history, computer science, Latin, Greek, music, biology and physical education” (Department for Education, 2013). Again the message is that Religious Education is not a priority in spite of being the subject with fewest specialist teachers – over 50% have no qualifications in the subject (All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education, 2013). Colleagues working in this field consider that the current climate is very hostile for the subject (Keast, 2013). Adding to the difficulties for Religious Education itself, the fact that the ‘Russell Group’ of prestigious universities is not including Religious Studies as one of its recommended ‘facilitating subjects’ for gaining a place at these universities. There are, then, many pressures against schools and pupils viewing the subject as a serious option for study.

9. Future Directions in Curriculum Change

Looking forward, cross-institutional co-operation and collaboration could be a way to mitigate some of the worst effects of small staff teams and pressures associated with the viability of subjects. There are any number of obstacles to this, chiefly the increasingly competitive environment in which Universities seek to recruit students by presenting an attractive package with ‘unique selling points’. This might lead to some reluctance to work with another provider and, even if that were to be overcome, there would still be some practical difficulties in terms of credit structures (the ‘size’ of modules), modes of delivery (term-, semester- or year-long; distance learning or conventional) and quality assurance and enhancement procedures (validation requirements; resource availability; student and staff evaluation; periodic review). Nevertheless, a consortium of institutions each making available to students from participating institutions one module that makes the most of its specialism, location or links would extend student choice and manage staff workloads without conceding the distinctiveness of each institution’s offering or placing undue demands on particular individuals. It would be possible to build on the work of the Religious Studies Project (<http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/>) in taking advantage of digital forms to provide films and interviews as well as facilitate online discussion and debate. It would also be possible to base a module on an experiential element of some kind such as a trip or placement backed up by ancillary materials, perhaps in a summer school. For example, we might offer a module on

contemporary spirituality centred on Glastonbury which has been a focus of staff interest for some years. In return, we might look for our students to gain insights into an area with a large ethnic and religious minority population or to join on a study visit abroad. Similarly, if applicable to Philosophy and Ethics, we might offer a module on ecophilosophy. In return, we might look for our students to have the options to investigate the philosophy of a particular activity such as education or the chance to work with a not-for-profit organisation to explore ethical campaigning.

10. Conclusion

Mirroring developments in schools where departments of Religious Education have begun to rename themselves and direct their attention towards Philosophy and Ethics at A level albeit within a Religious Studies framework, a number of University departments of Theology and Religious Studies have also come to place more emphasis on Philosophy within their programmes such as the University of Gloucestershire and York St John University. It is clear, therefore, that we are not alone in making such a move and, in all likelihood, to take account of the same factors, changing student demand and the need for retrenchment and diversification in the face of government educational policy that has had detrimental effects on Religious Education and, surely, in due course on Religious Studies at University. Certainly, there are many institutions where it is possible to combine Religious Studies with Philosophy and some where a programme in Religion, Philosophy and Ethics (variously titled) can be studied (in addition to Gloucestershire and York St John, a UCAS search reveals Birmingham, Essex, Heythrop, King's London, Leeds Trinity and Liverpool Hope with Newman offering these subjects in combination with another subject). No doubt, as in our experience, curriculum change driven by market factors has both positive as well as negative aspects. The challenge now is to maximise the positive and minimise the negative, and this may require more than working together as University departments but reinforcing our sense of common cause with colleagues teaching in schools as both the problems and the solutions are shared.

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The website of the Association of University Lecturers in Religion and Education (<http://www.aulre.org.uk/heaprsarchive.html>) contains the archive of the now defunct Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies.

Appendix

Specialised Award in Religions, Philosophies and Ethics

Year 1 (Level 4)

Code	Title	Credits	Status
SR4000-40	<i>Beyond Belief: Introduction to the Study of Religions and Spiritualities</i>	40	Compulsory
PE4000-40	<i>Truth and Value: Introduction to Philosophical and Ethical Enquiry</i>	40	Compulsory
SR/PE4003-20	<i>Global Religions and Philosophies</i>	20	Compulsory
SR/ED4014	<i>Spirituality, Culture and Civilisation: an Introduction to Faith and Belief in a Global Perspective</i>	20	Option
ED4006	<i>Philosophy and Thinking in Schools</i>	20	Option
HT4006	<i>The Business of Heritage</i>	20	Option
HY4009	<i>Medieval and Renaissance Worlds</i>	20	Option

Year 2 (Level 5)

Code	Title	Credits	Status
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SR/PE5000-40	<i>Darshana, Dharma and Dao: Philosophy in the Indian and Chinese Traditions</i>	40	Compulsory
SR5001-20	<i>Buddhism: Historical and Doctrinal Developments</i>	20	Option
SR5002-20	<i>Exploring Global Christianity</i>	20	Option
SR5004-20	<i>Power, Duty and Desire: Life and Liberation in the Hindu Tradition</i>	20	Option
PE5003-20	<i>Ethics, Religion and Humanism: Contemporary Moral Dilemmas</i>	20	Option
PE/FL5007-20	<i>Philosophy and Film</i>	20	Option
SR/PE5009-20	<i>Philosophy, Religions and the Environment</i>	20	Option
SR/PE5010-20	<i>Special Project</i>	20	Option (project module)
SR5013-20	<i>Saints and Soldiers: Mysticism, Militancy and Modernity in the Sikh Tradition</i>	20	Option
HT/SR5020-20	<i>Religious Dimensions of Heritage</i>	20	Option

Year 3 (Level 6)

Code	Title	Credits	Status
SR6001-40	<i>Studying Religions in the Contemporary World</i>	40	Compulsory
SR/PE6000-40	<i>Dissertation</i>	40	Option
SR/PE6090-40	<i>Employment related placement (alternative to dissertation)</i>	40	Option
SR6004-20	<i>The Song of the Lord: Hinduism, Religion, Scripture and the Bhagavad-Gita</i>	20	Option
SR6006-20	<i>Religion, Culture and Society in Japan</i>	20	Option
PE6009-20	<i>Life and Meaning</i>	20	Option
SR6011-20	<i>Spiritual Revolution: Pagan, New and Alternative Religions in the 21st Century</i>	20	Option
SR/PE6014-20	<i>Religion, Philosophy and Gender</i>	20	Option
SR6025-20	<i>Buddhism in Practice</i>	20	Option

SR/PE6033-20	<i>Advanced Special Project</i>	20	Option (project module)
HY/SR6003-20	<i>The Muslim World</i>	20	Option
ED/SR6077-20	<i>Without Fear or Favour: National and International Perspectives on Religion, Culture and Education</i>	20	Option
*HY/SR/PE 6067-20	<i>Culture and Counterculture: from Orientalism to the 'hippy trail'</i>	20	Option