



## **A Report into the Issues Surrounding the Progression of Students to Undergraduate Studies with Particular Reference to GCE RS and Undergraduate TRS**

Author: Natasha Pyne

---

Journal Title: Discourse

ISSN: 2040-3674

ISSN-L: 1741-4164

Volume: 8

Number: 1

Start page: 29

End page: 55

---

[Return to vol. 8 no. 1 index page](#)

---

In 2007, the Subject Centre for Philosophy and Religious Studies commissioned a report to investigate some of the issues arising out of student transition to undergraduate studies with particular reference to progression from GCE Religious Studies (RS) to undergraduate Theology and Religious Studies (TRS).

I began my research into issues or problems arising from GCE RS progression to undergraduate TRS the usual way, that is, a quick but thorough search of journal articles and books. Not only did this produce little response, I realised that this type of report was not to be a means to an end in itself. Rather, it should be a springboard into the unacknowledged and sometimes unknown lands of student voices, experiences and opinions concerning studying for a TRS degree. Of the educator's, that is, teacher's, tutor's, lecturer's and careers guidance advisor's, experiences of guiding GCE and first year students to a fulfilling, meaningful and useful academic journey. Of the way in which TRS

departments recruit, support and maintain students via prospectuses, posters, visits to schools and how a subject not known for its acceptance or full use of next generation tools is coping to attract and retain students in a booming digital age.<sup>1</sup>

As with any academic journey, the finished product, in this case a report, is not always the end of the voyage and so it was with this report. A shortened version was given as a paper at the well-received conference 'Spoon-Feeding or Critical Thinking? A Level / Higher to First Year Progression in Religious Studies and Theology' in Oxford, July 2008. It also raised interest surrounding departmental use of the Internet and the need for more guidance, training, and practice in employing the web and its software as a means to reach out and connect with potential students as well as building upon and been further informed by established student communities within the department.

Initially it was difficult to find tested and reliable data specific to GCE RS and TRS. Nevertheless, much information can be gleaned from the reports of those examination boards who offer RS GCE. This was then supplemented by examination reports from the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), Edexcel, Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR), Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment for Northern Ireland (CCEA), and reports on Religious Education by Ofsted and the Religious Education Council of England and Wales. Whilst this gave an overview of the quality of papers being written in examinations, it hardly allowed for the experiences of the tutors, teachers and indeed, the students themselves. Consequently, two online questionnaires were created in order to capture student experience but unfortunately, both were restricted by a short time frame and were only online for thirty-four days in total.<sup>2</sup>

The questionnaire aimed to gather general information about student motivations to study RS, learning experiences, use of resources including the Internet and set texts, and the expectations students held at the beginning and the end of their RS A2 study. Out of the 72 schools targeted for the GCE questionnaire, 35 students responded.

The second questionnaire was more reflective in its approach, raising questions relating to the ability of the A2 RS curriculum and teaching practices to successfully prepare students for undergraduate studies, the use of learning and e-learning resources and some of the key motivations and motivators that lay behind studying TRS. This questionnaire was intentionally aimed at second year TRS undergraduates, as they would have had time and the skills to reflect upon their undergraduate transition period. Recruiting from three regional TRS departments, the University of Leeds, York St John and Trinity and All Saints University College, enabled access to a potential audience of 45 students and out of those, 27 second year undergraduates responded.

In addition, an opportunity arose to discuss progression issues with undergraduate TRS students when the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (PRS) organised a one-day nationwide philosophy and theology/religious studies focus group in 2007.<sup>3</sup> With 11 students participating, one session was devoted to exploring student experiences of GCE and Highers and comprised three reflective written tasks, several group discussions and two short student-led presentations. Although the questionnaires and the focus group session allowed the students to have a voice in what they believed to be the key factors to a successful transition, it has to be noted that the results from the focus group and the questionnaires were not always in agreement!

## **The status of TRS at undergraduate level**

The 2000-2001 inspections held by the QAA examined all undergraduate TRS courses in Northern Ireland and England. The findings showed that overall:

- Most TRS undergraduate departments were showing signs of a concerted effort to improve the structure and delivery of courses, with teaching and learning strategies implemented and good practice being observed in the majority of institutions.<sup>4</sup>
- Women are still more likely than men to study a TRS degree.<sup>5</sup>

- In TRS at least, progression and retention rates are high, with approximately ninety percent of TRS students progressing onto their second year.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the debate about ethnicity in relation to recruitment and retention in TRS remains largely unexplored or in some cases relegated to the margins.<sup>7</sup>

Good practice found in TRS departments included the constructive use of:

- Open days
- Information packs for prospective students
- Introductory sessions that included information about or introducing the person responsible for student welfare etc.
- Existence of a strong academic support network
- Effective personal tutor systems
- Good quality pastoral support which showed an awareness of the importance behind encouraging students to have a positive sense of self and well-being<sup>8</sup>
- Efficient, informed and pro-active career guidance including input from outside agencies and businesses
- Flexibly scheduled and repeated IT and library inductions
- Enough set texts available for loan in the university library
- Free access to relevant TRS online journals
- Good quality teaching spaces, including the use of teaching aids and tools such as laptop power points, overhead projectors, etc
- Social groups and networking opportunities within and outside of the department
- Easy registration processes with friendly trained, approachable and accessible staff
- Specific material meeting the needs of international students and mature students
- Financially enabling or assisting towards, childcare provision<sup>9</sup>

The following are examples of good practice in TRS teaching and learning informed primarily by reports from several examining bodies, SACRE reports and confirmed by the focus group and the questionnaire results:

- Lucid and focused learning objectives and outcomes<sup>10</sup>
- Informed, rich, diverse and challenging curricula which reflect and engage with the political and cultural diversity found in the UK<sup>11</sup>
- Well delivered and informed lectures and seminar groups which involve a wide range of learning formats that reflect the needs of the Net Generation. Examples would include more encouragement for multi-media images with an audio and visual soundtrack to be part of course assessment or group presentations, for teaching styles to encourage the students to be more actively engaged in tasks and to acknowledge the preference of Net Generation students and therefore potential undergraduates to work in groups as they regard social interaction as a high priority in teaching and learning
- For course work, presentations and dissertations assessments to be a combination of oral or written exams
- Enthusiastic and informed lecturers
- Prompt and accurate oral and written feedback about assessments
- Encouragement for, and opportunity to show, independent learning
- External markers to second mark essays and blind marking of papers

- Sympathetic and informed student guidance and support<sup>12</sup>
- Informed careers guidance and accessible information relating to employment<sup>13</sup>

The findings from the questionnaires and the focus group confirmed several universal issues that may be encountered by any potential transition student. These included:

- Issues surrounding the quality and availability of career guidance advisors
- The stigma attached to clearing students as well as the clearing process itself
- Issues surrounding ethnic minority grouping (EMG)
- Finance and employment
- Gender
- Perceived or real inferior standard of study skills
- Motivations to study, which also include the personal development aims and achievements of students
- The quality of previous learning and teaching experiences
- The quality of academic support

## Issues surrounding TRS and ethnicity

Unlike a recent survey by the HEA, the category 'white/non-white' was not used as 'non-white' has been criticized by leading black sociologists, commentators, Womanists and Black theologians as a pejorative label and serves only to further alienate students of black and mixed-heritage ethnicity.<sup>14</sup> In both questionnaires, the ethnicity categories were broken into fourteen groups with an option to refuse information if required.<sup>15</sup> The National Student Survey confirmed the importance of breaking ethnicities into relevant and accurate groupings in that its findings revealed that Black African students were less positive about their experiences of undergraduate study than those who were Black Caribbean.<sup>16</sup> If the category had merely been 'Black', this would have remained unknown.

Predictably the overwhelming ethnicity of those surveyed in the undergraduate questionnaire was White British, despite legislation, reviews, reports, and yet more studies.

In higher education, reports confirm that ethnic minorities are receiving lower than expected grades.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the number of Black British students who apply and are accepted for degrees, in particular TRS, remains low, despite high attendance to Black churches in the United Kingdom and attempts to raise the profile of potential Black British students to undergraduate TRS by prominent Black British theologians and pastors. Unfortunately, but alas predictably, the questionnaire reflected the current student situation in that the ethnic majority was White British with Black British Caribbean and Asian British Pakistani in the minority.

## Demographic information collected from the students

Results from the undergraduate questionnaire revealed that, in this survey at least, Theology single honours was statistically the most popular degree followed by joint honours Theology with a strong bias towards Theology and Religious Studies and Theology and Primary Education. One of the perpetually advertised strengths of studying TRS at degree level is that it lends itself to interdisciplinary subjects and this was reflected in the joint honours TRS degree where the second area of study included business management, music and philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

## Motivations to study GCE RS

The primary motivations to study GCE RS were linked to previous good teaching and learning experiences at GCSE level. Another popular motive for opting to study GCE RS was its relevance to modern societies, closely followed by the opportunity to study different religions. It is important to note that even at GCE level, students were planning on studying undergraduate TRS. This would suggest that TRS departments would do well to create or further relationships with sixth forms and colleges to access this potential audience. Results from the questionnaire and the focus group also showed that there is a tendency of students to choose GCE RS in the belief that it would complement their other GCE options as well as to inform or encourage their own faith.

## **Undergraduate TRS**

Linking the material gained from the focus group with journal articles and the results of the questionnaires it is possible to break down the motivations of students to study TRS at undergraduate level into four main categories:

- School based encouragements and experiences
- Academic resources, incentives, and indirect experiences and influence
- Employment prospects
- Personal

## **School based encouragements and experiences**

It is an established fact that good teaching and learning experiences can have a profound impact on student attitudes towards further study, which subjects to choose, and student achievement levels and this was confirmed by the experiences of the questioned TRS students. It would seem that over half (66%) of the students questioned said that it was their good experiences at GCE level that motivated them to opt for further TRS study at undergraduate level. Although family influence was an important contributing factor, it seemed that, of those questioned, family influence did not equate to family pressure and students appeared to show no resentment towards family involvement in their choice of study.

Results from both questionnaires and the focus group revealed that the questioned TRS undergraduates said that they would go to their GCE RS teacher before career guidance advisors and students themselves were acutely aware of the difference that good teaching can make upon their own academic understanding and future achievements.

To sum up, TRS material gathered suggests that family encouragement did not amount to family pressure and good teaching and learning practices by GCE RS teachers are intrinsic to a successful transition between GCE RS to TRS. Other issues raised by students included the disappearing role of student advisors as a legitimate point of contact when choosing which degree or where to study and the potential impact of school expectations to undermine student aspirations of undergraduate studies.

## **Why study undergraduate TRS?**

According to the questionnaires and the focus group the key academic factor to studying TRS at undergraduate level was to deepen understanding of other faiths followed by the desire to study different religions. The small number of the sample will of course have affected this result and factors such as whether the student was studying a RS or Theology degree may have affected the results. However, it seems that TRS students have a genuine interest in other faiths and cultures and this may influence which institution the student chooses.

## **Academic motivations**

It was surprising how many students chose TRS at undergraduate level because they thought it would complement

their other subjects, although which subjects were never specified. It was interesting to note that a continuing belief is evident, from GCE through to degree level, about the interdisciplinary nature of TRS. Further academic motivations include the challenge of detailed text work, interestingly an issue often identified in English Literature as a factor for further study.

The candour of the students was appreciated? a small amount of students rated TRS as an 'easy' option for undergraduate studies although in the focus group discussion this was amended to the fact that they had thought it would be easy but it turned out to be 'hard but fun!' Nevertheless, other more positive motivations included the wish to clarify personal beliefs and to encourage and inform their own beliefs. It would be interesting to ascertain, in a longer study than was possible here, to what extent those beliefs are challenged or clarified as the degree progresses and which religion or denominations students belonged to (if any), however, additional motivators also included wanting to study in a similar faith environment and the relevancy of TRS to modern society.

When given an opportunity to say in their own words the personal motivations behind TRS study at undergraduate level students spoke more about the following as key motivators:

- To understand other faiths and cultures
- To understand people and the way in which society works
- To contextualise religions and its role in society
- To inform own beliefs
- To study the subject in greater detail
- To study the interactions between politics, religion and society

## **Factors which influence choice and place of TRS study**

### **UCAS website**

Most of the undergraduates questioned had used the UCAS website as part of their research into which course or institution they wished to attend and it was generally agreed to be a useful resource and helpful when applying for and choosing a desirable university. Broadsheet ranking systems of the top 100 universities, however, did not figure highly in resources that assisted choice. Of more importance to student decision about where and what to study was the course content and this was found to be of more importance than university entry requirement or university location.

### **Staff profiles**

Staff interests and research were not influencing factors to undergraduate choice of course or institution and it may be that this type of information is more important to postgraduates, as, potential undergraduates are unaware or unused to the demands on staff to be involved in research as well as teaching.

### **Department websites**

Clearly, the university and department website is one important way for potential undergraduates to access TRS information and resources. However, it would be wise for departments to realise the full potential of their websites and to understand that the department webpage is not just a way of giving potential students information but a way in which students can relate to and create an identity with the department. A brief exploration into twenty TRS departments online revealed a catalogue of technical and grammatical mistakes, such as out of date information concerning programmes of study, staff profiles and contact details. There was also a distinct lack of ethnic diversity in the pictures used to represent generalised happy TRS students, and many other missed opportunities to connect in a

more meaningful way with students.

Most sites underused web technology and TRS departments would do well to explore resources and software that engage students by capturing student experiences in a more meaningful way. Suggestions would include using tools such as Photo Story 3 or iMovie to give a range of short reflective digital stories, to articulate current and past student reflections and experiences of seminar debates or reading a particularly challenging text for example. This software is at its most effective when explaining or exploring an academic metanoia moment or experience and can be used to connect with potential and established students in a more meaningful way than pictures, power point displays and audio. Samples of lectures, and podcasts of debates and discussions, could be placed online as well as student/department committee meetings and any changes that ensued because of student participation, examples of student-led groups and TRS in the community, and a selection of real or ideal graduate e-portfolios.

## **University prospectuses**

Results from both questionnaires and the focus group highlighted the importance to potential students of the university prospectus and open days?they were a high priority for potential students in deciding where to study. It is, therefore, essential that departments make the best use of their prospectuses to attract their audience. Students do look at the prospectuses and do use them as the basis for attending open days, and research has shown that students will use them as a visual and textual reference guide, reminding the potential student not only which institution offers which courses but also their experiences of that particular TRS open day.

## **TRS department open days**

Research has shown that good experiences at open days are intrinsically important to the decision making progress for potential students. TRS departments can make sure that open days run smoothly by showing good time management and adhering to a previously arranged timeframe.

Informal research has shown that students find that open days that include a mixture of interactive sessions left them with positive feelings towards the department and the courses on offer, even if the interactive sessions were not directly related to any particular course. This is, in part, due to the shared identity that is created in such sessions and that students can contribute to, as well as be informed by, such sessions. All members of the department need to be informed and prepped for the open day, including non-academic staff, as evidence suggests that a poor reception by any member of staff towards potential students can negatively sway decisions against studying at that particular institution. It seems unnecessary to say that all advertising, handouts and other forms of literature associated with open days should be inclusive, current and easy to read with clearly signposted links for further information and yet students have spoken about badly produced and inaccurate literature given to them at such events.

Open days are an ideal opportunity for sixth formers and college students to explore and experience university life and as such sample lectures are very popular with GCE students as well as a visit to the student union and library. This type of opportunity to experience academic endeavour is of particular importance to those students who had little or no experience of higher education.

Of the students sampled, all were acutely aware that good relations between staff and students are vital to the learning process. Well thought-out and informative websites are one way to create a sense of shared identity between department and student and with the addition of blogs, students can create several TRS based identities between themselves if they choose to do so. Websites also show how adept the department is in its use of technology, an important factor even in TRS, as well as a tool to convey information about course details and important academic dates.

In conclusion, questionnaire results highlighted that the university prospectus is viewed by students as more than just a guide to the institution and its courses on offer. The departmental prospectus will also be used as a visual stimulus

to recollect the formal and informal experiences of the prospective student. Although an easily dismissed element of the prospectus it is important to realise that for the students questioned, the atmosphere of a department was rated as more important than the academic reputation of individual lecturers and students are more motivated to choose a department by course content than location or the reputation of the institution. Clearly, departments need to do more to recruit and retain potential students than provide tea, coffee and an informal chat at their open days.

## Employment

Similar to other disciplines, a degree is understood as one way of increasing job opportunities, yet the primary employment motivation behind studying for a TRS degree was to obtain a teaching qualification, with secondary teaching as the most popular choice. Students were asked which jobs they believed were best suited for TRS graduates and they suggested the following (in order of preference):

- Teaching
- Lecturer in higher education
- Faith guidance advisors/chaplaincy advisors
- Counselling
- Civil service/ clergy/ community work in multi-faith centres or politics
- Armed forces/ campaign and human rights worker, such as Amnesty International / charity work /care work/ marketing or historian
- Advancement in own faith community (although neither role nor faith community specified)
- Personal reasons

## RS GCE student opinions

A series of questions were given to GCE students asking them to compare their experiences at AS and A2 levels in an attempt to ascertain which skills students believed they had gained from studying RS GCE. Results indicated that, of those questioned, A2 GCE RS students:

- Felt more capable of locating key arguments in academic texts
- Felt strongly that they were more capable of writing essays using critical arguments at A2 than they had been at AS level
- Were more confident in writing a précis
- Felt that their basic study skills were of a high standard

RS GCE students found that by A2 they were:

- More able to manage their time effectively
- More confident in working in large groups
- Much more able to work in smaller groups
- Much more confident in giving individual presentations
- Very confident in showing two or more aspects about RS
- Very confident that they possessed a good overview of RS at this level

Clearly, the students questioned had learnt key skills surrounding group work and group dynamics as well as skills surrounding time management.

## **TRS Undergraduates**

The TRS questionnaire aimed at second year undergraduates gave similar results to the GCE questionnaire results with most students in agreement that they are now:

- More knowledgeable about religions in the UK
- More able to make critical assessments of religious rituals and attitudes
- More able to make critical assessments of faith and believers
- More knowledgeable about the relationship between religion and politics
- More knowledgeable about world religions
- More knowledgeable about philosophy of religion

However, these results were not unanimous and many students opted to be neutral about whether or not they were more knowledgeable about NAR, Philosophy and local religious beliefs and customs. There was some disagreement surrounding to what extent undergraduate students felt able to enter into discussions surrounding politics, religion and science. When asked about the depth and quality of their study skills, undergraduate responses were, in the main, positive with over half agreeing that they felt that they were now more confident and efficient in:

- Locating key texts arguments in texts
- Organising note taking in lectures and seminars
- Managing challenging texts and opinions
- Contributing meaningfully in seminar discussions
- Conveying two or more aspects of their TRS studies
- Thinking independently

However, discussions with the student focus group surrounding the effectiveness of GCE RS in preparing students for undergraduate TRS painted a different picture, perhaps in part, due to the informal approach in which students felt more able to articulate some of their experiences and views.

### **'Spoon-feeding'**

The focus group revealed that 'spoon-feeding' (students' own words) at GCE and GCE RS in particular, made the first year of undergraduate study more difficult. Students commented on the way in which their lack of independent thinking and learning skills became quickly apparent in semester one when students began to write essays, select key texts to critique and participate in seminar groups. Most students felt overwhelmed by the expectations of having to write and read in a critical manner and some said that they were glad that their first year marks did not count.

### **Pastoral and academic departmental care**

The focus group and questionnaire students recognised that the way in which TRS departments deal with student problems could either assist or hinder a successful transition. One student commented on the way in which her department 'made it a priority that undergraduate students in their first year could feel comfortable?' Another student spoke about the detrimental effects to her studies when there is a lack of support by departments when things go wrong.

It seemed that most departments offer a draft essay review service and rather than a purely administrative role this is understood by students to be essential contact time with the tutor. As such, the students questioned commented on how such contact was an essential help to student academic progression as well as student well-being. In those places where this service was not offered, it was felt to contribute to feelings of academic isolation as well as stunting opportunities for self-reflection and academic critical assessment of their work. Both TRS and RS questionnaire results initially suggested that students have a positive attitude toward the effectiveness of RS to prepare them for undergraduate TRS. RS GCE satisfactorily equipped students with skills to understand, construct and write critical arguments and gave further insights into the subject. Although in the minority, comments in the TRS questionnaire included concern about:

- The lack of continuity between GCE RS and TRS
- The limited nature of the GCE curriculum to fully prepare potential undergraduate students
- The fact based nature of GCE RS becoming problematic especially when facing a more investigative and evaluative approach inherent in a TRS degree

For those TRS undergraduates who took part in the focus group, the difficulties faced by student transition from GCE to undergraduate studies was further exacerbated by:

- Insufficient study skills
- Spoon-feeding at GCE level
- A lack of training in critical and independent learning
- A lack of continuity between GCE and undergraduate studies
- Compared to GCE, the limited contact between tutors and students

## **Recommendations**

### **Careers guidance officers**

Alongside GCE RS teachers, career guidance officers should be the first point of call for potential TRS students. With students showing as early as their first year in RS GCE that they wish to study TRS at undergraduate level, it is imperative that careers officers should be allocated sufficient time in their working week to:

- Forge relationships with all their students
- Familiarize themselves with that year's TRS undergraduate course literature
- Be able to attend workshops and open days
- Forge links with TRS departments

### **GCE RS teachers**

Whilst GCE RS and TRS teaching and learning standards have improved enormously, and congratulations are due to those members of staff who work so hard to provide such high standards, bodies such as Ofsted believe that more needs to be done. Certainly, the focus group highlighted the importance of GCE RS teachers as initial points of reference for potential TRS students. GCE RS teachers need to be teachers who have specialized in TRS; it is shocking that even now there are RE teachers who have no TRS qualification. Therefore, recommendations include the need for RS GCE educators to:

- Have a TRS undergraduate qualification as well as a teaching certificate
- Be kept up-to-date with current TRS course content
- Have free access to relevant periodicals and other areas of TRS research and interests
- Take part in an on-line community which would be open to TRS university staff

In addition, TRS departments need to further relationships with local sixth forms and colleges that offer GCE RS and Access courses. It is important for such departments to supply this audience with specifically designed open days, handouts and other such materials, as well as give mini-seminars and open discussion groups.

## **The clearing process**

The clearing process is tasked with placing those students whose first choice for study is no longer available in institutions that still have some places available. Recent reports have questioned the appropriateness and timing of such a system. However, for the purpose of this study, it is enough to suggest that clearing students may be more vulnerable in their first year, having not originally intended to study at the university, and may suffer some of the issues arising from early walker syndrome. It must be remembered that early exits in clearing students are exacerbated by the course of study not having been the initial choice of the student. Recommendations would include the need for:

- All staff to be aware of clearing students and the additional factors that may affect this particular group of vulnerable students such as, unscheduled or poorly managed changes in the timetable, and mismanaged administration.
- More training offered to clearing officers who have to cope with distraught students and/or parent(s). The (overly) hasty matching to cope with the volume of callers may be inappropriate for that student and in the long-term, counterproductive. With RS GCE students in particular, care has to be taken that potential TRS students do not end up opting for, for example, an RS degree when their interests lie more in Theology.
- More information available which counteracts the myth that clearing students are more likely to fail.

## **EMG**

It is very difficult to evaluate the effect of belonging to an EMG on a successful progression into TRS undergraduate studies due to the lack of EMG participation. Recommendations would include a full investigation into the lack of EMG in undergraduate TRS and the results used to formulate guidelines to all UK TRS departments advising on issues ranging from advertising to course content.

## **Gender**

It is recommended that there should be further investigation into why, at TRS undergraduate level, students are, in the main, female. It would be interesting to find out the reasons why at GCSE level there is a lot of interest shown by (white) boys in the themes and topics arising out of their study yet this interest does not encourage male students to go into undergraduate TRS. The roles and grades of female lecturers in TRS study would also be of interest for further study.

## **Study Skills**

Although most TRS students, on entering undergraduate study, appear to be enthusiastic, motivated and focused, it is poor study skills that cause the most anxiety amongst students and if not counteracted may lead to the student

leaving their course. Most TRS departments are aware of this and have study skills as part of the first year course but perhaps it would be a more efficient use of time and skills for students to arrive with these skills well honed.

## Websites

Departments also need to update and, in some cases, re-design their web sites and include more imaginative use of technology and software including podcasts, seminar downloads and digital stories.

## Appendix

Below, you can download two Excel spreadsheets that present the results of the survey in various graphs, tables and piecharts.

[GCE RS questionnaire results](#)

[TRS Undergraduate questionnaire results](#)

## Endnotes

1 Meriel Patrick has written an informative article in *Discourse* concerning resources for philosophy and TRS on the Internet, 'Best of the Web: Internet Resources for Philosophy and TRS', *Discourse*, vol.6 no.2, Spring 2007, pp.11-17. <http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/PrsDiscourseArticles/7>

2 Initially there were three questionnaires, each one asking about the needs of the three main groups affected by first year TRS progression, that is, GCE religious educators, GCE A2 RS students and TRS undergraduates. Unfortunately, the RS teacher questionnaire that sought to evaluate RS teaching practice, technological expertise, curriculum and teacher relationships with the four main examining boards was abandoned due to time constraints.

3 Lamb, D. and Saunders, C., 'What Do Our Students Really Think? Report on A Student Focus Group', *Discourse* vol.6 no.2, Spring 2007. This report can be downloaded in pdf format at: <http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/PrsDiscourseArticles/10>

4 Subject Overview Report, Theology and Religious Studies, QO2/2001, (QAA: (The Quality Assurance for Higher Education) 2001) point 14 ff. [http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/subjectlevel/qo2\\_01.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/subjectlevel/qo2_01.pdf)

5 In 2001, approximately 65% of students embarking on TRS undergraduate studies were female. (**Subject Overview Report, Theology and Religious Studies**, QO2/2001 (QAA: 2001), point 20). However, this trend can be traced back to RE at GCSE level where the gap between male and female attainment is larger in RE than in any other subject, yet, underachieving boys profess an interest in RE. (**Making Sense of Religion, A Report on Religious Education in Schools and the Impact of Locally Agreed Syllabuses**, (Ofsted, 2007), point 26 and 29.)

6 Subject Overview Report, Theology and Religious Studies, QO2/2001, (QAA: 2001), point 22.

7 An example of sidestepping the ethnicity and undergraduate theology issue can be found in the QAA's Subject Overview Report, point 20, where, rather than engage in why EMG are so poorly represented in TRS (despite high attendance to churches and other religious institutions), the report infers that it is more a matter of location rather than ignorance surrounding the importance of identity and theology in the UK or the lack of course options and modules in established Black theologies in the UK.

8 Michie, F., Glachan, Frances, M. and Bray, D., 'An Evaluation of Factors Influencing the Academic Self-concept, Self-Esteem and Academic Stress for Direct and Re-entry Students in Higher Education', *Educational Psychology*, 21:4, (2001), pp. 455-472, p.458. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01443410120090830>

9 Subject Overview Report, Theology and Religious Studies, QO2/2001', (QAA: 2001), point 27.

10 Ibid, point 32.

11 Ibid, conclusions b.

12 Interestingly this aspect of TRS undergraduate studies came out top in the QAA report with 95 % of departments achieving a grade 4. **Subject Overview Report, Theology and Religious Studies**, QO2/2001, (QAA: 2001), point 46.

13 QAA, Ibid, point 30 and one example of accurate and current information on TRS and employment is The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies employability guide which was sent out to interested TRS departments and is available on line as a pdf. SC for PRS, **Employability, Where next? Unlocking The Potential of Your Theology or Religious Studies Degree**, (2007)

[http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/emp\\_guide\\_for\\_web.pdf](http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/emp_guide_for_web.pdf)

14 HEA, **The First Year Experience of Higher Education in the UK, Final Report**, (January 2008), p. 16.

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/research/surveys/FYE/FYEFinalReport.pdf>.

Critique on the use of the term 'non-white' include the works of P. Gilroy, **Ain't No Black in The Union Jack, The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation**, (Routledge: 1987), b. hooks (sic), **Black Looks: Race and Representation**, (Southend Press: 1992) and J. Cone, **A Black Theology of Liberation**, (J B Lippincott: 1970).

15 The categories were as follows: Asian or Asian British ? Indian, Asian or Asian British ? Pakistani, Asian or Asian British ? Bangladeshi, Black or Black British ? Caribbean, Black or Black British ? African, Black or Black British ? Other, Chinese, White British, White ? Other, Mixed-White & Black Caribbean, Mixed- White & Black African, Mixed-White & Asian Other, Mixed background ? Other ethnic background, Not known and Information refused.

16 Surrige, P., **The National Student Survey 2006: Summary Report, A Report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England**, (2007).

17 The Higher Education Academy, 'The Final Report', (2008)

<http://www.bath.ac.uk/hr/equalities/ethnicitygenderdegreeattainmentreport.pdf>

18 For example, undergraduate RS at the University of Leeds is advertised as incorporating approaches from disciplines such as Anthropology, History, Sociology, Textual Studies, Theology, and Philosophy.

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/trs/> The Department of Theology at Exeter University proposes that students who study for a Theology degree will inevitably draw upon 'a wide range of intellectual disciplines: History, Languages, Philosophy, Sociology, Cultural Studies, Art History, and others' <http://www.huss.ex.ac.uk/theology/ug/index.htm>. At York St John, a Theology joint honours degree includes resources from Communication, Counselling Studies, English Literature and Film Studies. [http://www2.yorks.ac.uk/apps/Site/Prospectus/default.asp?Course\\_ID=375](http://www2.yorks.ac.uk/apps/Site/Prospectus/default.asp?Course_ID=375)

---

[Return to vol. 8 no. 1 index page](#)

---

Created on: November 25th 2008

Updated on: August 19th 2010