

Theology and Religious Studies Provision in UK Higher Education

May 2019

Foreword

Theology, the study of the divine, is a discipline as old as the institution of the university. While in some countries, theology was primarily centred on professional training for Christian ministry, in the United Kingdom, theology also emerged as a discipline in its own right, and since the 1960s, wider interest in the study of religion has led to the addition of distinct programmes in religious studies which have become integrated with other humanities and social science disciplines.

Today, Theology and Religious Studies is a diverse and interdisciplinary field covering many more religions from many different perspectives. It has had to respond to the changing nature of UK higher education as well as complex changes in religiosity and societal attitudes towards religion. While religious bodies still use universities for the validation of professional training, our universities are not seminaries and are no longer inextricably linked to the Church or reliant upon its financial or political support. The study of religion now, rightly, competes among and interacts with a wide range of disciplines in a much-expanded higher education sector with a vastly more diverse student body.

While the study and research of theology and religion remains an attractive area for many, it has seemingly fallen foul of the many challenges faced by the higher education sector, and particularly since the reforms to fees and funding in 2012: the number of students studying Theology and Religious studies degrees has fallen by a third. Fewer students means additional pressures on schools and departments to demonstrate their worth or face closure. The UK's specialist theological institution, Heythrop College, founded in 1614, closed its doors in 2018 after over 400 years of teaching.

This report comes at a critical time for the discipline. As the academic community debates the future direction of the discipline, the Academy hopes that this report will inform the debate about the future of theology and religious studies in the UK.

The British Academy is considering how it might best support its constituent subjects by acting as an observatory of trends within them, and this study forms part of its evolving work in this area. The Academy welcomes comments and feedback on the value of studies like this as an attempt to better understand the development of the humanities and social sciences in the UK.

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Executive Summary

Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) disciplines are studied by over 10,000 students at both public and private higher education providers in the UK. The study of religion in UK higher education attracts students from around the world and continues to provide professional training and qualifications for authorised religious personnel and other religious vocations.

However, as this report reveals, the overall trend in enrolment onto TRS courses in UK higher education is downward, in contrast to other humanities subjects like philosophy and history.

There were around 6,500 fewer students on Theology and Religious Studies courses in higher education institutions in 2017/18 than there were in 2011/12.

Since 2012, TRS student numbers have declined year-on-year. Enrolment on first degree (i.e. bachelor's degree) programmes in UK universities was 31% lower in 2017/18 compared to its peak in 2011/12, while foundation degree¹ enrolment fell by 83% and other undergraduate programmes by 69% over the same period.

This is particularly concerning as, while other humanities subjects have seen a bounce-back in recent years, Theology and Religious Studies numbers have continued to fall. Decline in student enrolment at publicly-funded institutions may be being partly offset by an increase in study at alternative providers, but overall there has been a worrying fall in enrolment across undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.

Changes to fees and funding in England look to have played a key role in the decline in TRS student enrolment.

The drop in TRS student numbers in 2012/13 and beyond coincided with the introduction of up to £9000 annual fees for full-time undergraduate degrees. The increase in fees may have created both demand-side and supply-side effects leading to a collapse in enrolment.

When student enrolment is broken down by UK nation and student domicile, TRS enrolment has been falling mainly among English-domiciled students, suggesting that it could be linked to the increase in fees.

The availability of funding may also be a contributory factor in declining enrolment, particularly with foundation degrees. Foundation degrees have seen a sharp fall in external funding for fees. HESA figures suggest that in 2007/08, as many as 40% of students on foundation degrees in TRS had funding from charities or international organisations to cover their fees, but by 2016/17 the number of UK domiciled foundation degree students with their fees funded by charities or international organisations was effectively zero.

Almost two thirds of undergraduate first degree students in TRS are women, but the proportion reverses for doctoral study.

In undergraduate study, TRS has a female majority, with 64% female students on first degree programmes in 2017/18. The opposite is found in postgraduate study, where 48% of students on postgraduate taught courses were women and just 35% doctoral students were women. These proportions haven't changed notably in the last five years.

¹ A two-year undergraduate qualification, equivalent to two-thirds of a first (bachelor's) degree, with both academic and vocational elements. See Glossary for further details.

Gender ratios are also considerably varied between institutions, even between the most selective Russell Group institutions.

A large proportion of postgraduate students in TRS are from the United States.

The majority of overseas postgraduate students in TRS come from the United States. Around 20% of postgraduate research students studying TRS in UK universities were from the United States in 2017/18, down slightly from a peak of 21% in 2012/13. U.S. students also make up 8% of all postgraduate taught students in TRS, by far the largest non-UK nationality.

These trends may be reflecting an increased academic interest from within the evangelical wing of Christianity in the United States. The majority of the doctoral students coming from the United States are male, which is contributing to the skewed gender balance at this level of study.

The study of religion is becoming more dispersed and less likely to be housed in distinct theology and religious studies departments.

In recent years, TRS departments at several institutions have either merged with other departments or have closed altogether. The UK's specialist theological institution, Heythrop College, founded in 1614, closed its doors in 2018 after more than 400 years of teaching.

However, religion is increasingly becoming a specific study element of courses in other humanities and social sciences, including politics, international relations, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and history. While a number of more traditional courses in TRS have closed at UK universities in the past five years, new interdisciplinary courses have been opened at institutions that previously didn't offer any TRS.

Theology and Religious Studies has an ageing staff profile in universities which is predominantly white and male, signifying issues in both the diversity and the sustainability of the discipline.

More than 750 academics are employed in the teaching and research of TRS disciplines at UK higher education institutions. Academic research in the field receives over £8 million in funding and a large proportion of TRS research is world-class or internationally excellent.

However, the average age of TRS academic staff is 47 years compared with around 43 in Philosophy, Classics or History, and the average age has been increasing. Only education, nursing, and social work have a significantly higher average age of academic staff.

Staff in Theology and Religious Studies are predominantly male. The proportion of female academic staff in TRS increased from 35% in 2012/13 to 37% in 2017/18 but remains much lower than other humanities subjects. The similarly low proportion of female doctoral students is likely to be a barrier to addressing this imbalance.

Staff are also predominantly white, but the proportions of black and minority ethnic staff are more in line with all humanities and languages disciplines than they are for gender.

Introduction

This report is the conclusion of a pilot exercise conducted by the British Academy. The aim of this pilot exercise has been to assess the potential for collating a quantitative evidence base from which informed discussions on the health and future of a discipline can proliferate. It follows previous qualitative work examining specific disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, namely the *Reflections on Economics* study, published in 2015, and *Reflections on Archaeology*, published in 2016.

The report provides a summary of trends in the academic provision of Theology and Religious Studies in UK Higher Education. The analysis has been conducted using data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency², the University and College Admissions Service³, Research England and other sources as well as information and evidence gathered from key stakeholders such as the subject association TRS UK, the Church of England, and individual higher education providers.

The Academy believes that those working in the Theology and Religious Studies community, as well as those working more widely in higher education policy and management, will benefit from the analysis of data and trends observed in this paper and, we hope, will use this information to help inform decision-making and planning for the development and sustainability of teaching and research in Theology and Religious Studies.

A significant amount of technical terminology specific to higher education and to the study of Theology and Religious Studies is used throughout the report to ensure an accurate representation of the statistical findings. As well as contextual information in footnotes, a full glossary of terms is found at the back of the report.

As this report is part of a pilot exercise, the British Academy expects that, through consultation, reflection, and feedback, further improvements can be made to our research and analysis in support of the humanities and social sciences. The Academy, therefore, welcomes comment and feedback on this report and on the value of a rolling programme of subject reviews similar to this pilot.

Please send any comments and feedback by email to vpresearch@thebritishacademy.ac.uk.

² HESA Staff Record 2012/13 – 2017/18, HESA Destination of Leavers Survey 2012/13 – 2016/17, HESA Student Record 2007/8 – 2017/18, and HESA Finance Record 2016/17, all accessed under license via HeidiPlus. Copyright Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited. Neither the Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited nor HESA Services Limited can accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived by third parties from data or other information obtained from Heidi Plus.

³ UCAS applications and acceptances data for types of higher education course - 2017

Undergraduate Study

Providers of undergraduate courses

In 2017/18, students were enrolled on undergraduate first degree courses with the Joint Academic Coding of Subjects (JACS) principal subject code V6 (Theology and Religious Studies) at 49 Higher Education Institutions in the United Kingdom, 46 of which had at least five first degree students enrolled, and 17 which had more than 100 enrolled.⁴

The Complete University Guide (TCUG) and the *Guardian* university league table both include 36 providers of undergraduate degrees in Theology and Religious Studies for their 2019 rankings. They also both noted a further five providers with TRS courses but insufficient data to be included in the rankings, bringing the total for each to 41. However, not all providers are the same in these tables, possibly due to methodological differences between the league tables. Overall, a total of 44 unique providers were listed in either the TCUG or the *Guardian* for 2019.

The largest providers of TRS undergraduate first degrees in 2017/18 were the University of Edinburgh, Durham University, King's College London, and the University of Oxford, all Russell Group universities. The largest providers of TRS first degrees outside of the Russell Group were York St John University, University of the Highlands and Islands, and Canterbury Christ Church University.

There were 24 institutions with students enrolled on 'other' undergraduate courses⁵ with the JACS V6 code, 15 of which had at least five students enrolled in 2017/18. Two institutions (University of Chester and University of Roehampton) had 100 or more students enrolled on other TRS undergraduate courses in 2017/18.

Several institutions have either closed or downsized their TRS departments in recent years. Bangor University closed its School of Theology and Religious Studies in 2013, with some staff moving to the University of Wales, Trinity St. David.⁶ The Biblical Studies department at the University of Sheffield was subsumed into the Department of Philosophy in 2013/14 after a long-running fight against its closure.

In addition, several institutions appear to have stopped enrolling TRS undergraduate students in the past five years, although some of these cases relate to changes in validation agreements with other providers. The University of Lincoln⁸, Middlesex University⁹, Staffordshire University¹⁰, Glyndwr University¹¹ and Anglia Ruskin University all had at least 50 students enrolled in undergraduate programmes in 2012/13 but reported no enrolment in 2017/18.

4 These figures do not include ITT-designated courses for teaching religious education in schools. These courses are discussed later in the section.

5 Undergraduate level courses that are not first (bachelor's) degrees, such as Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs). See glossary for further details.

6 Bangor University still provides a religion element as part of some joint courses in other departments but no longer provides specific TRS courses.

7 This may relate to changes in the validation of Common Awards (see page 5).

8 Middlesex have validation agreements with several colleges providing undergraduate programmes in TRS, including the London School of Theology, St Mellitus College, and Oak Hill College. Students are registered at these private providers but have their degrees awarded by Middlesex.

9 Staffordshire continue to validate TRS undergraduate degrees provided by the Institute for Children, Youth & Mission.

10 Glyndwr validated degrees in Theology as part of a partnership arrangement, but this agreement ended in 2016/17.

However, other institutions appear to have started offering new courses in TRS in the last five years. For instance, Manchester Metropolitan University started offering an undergraduate programme in Ethics, Religion and Philosophy in 2014/15 and in Religion, Education and Community in 2016/17.

The Open University currently teaches two undergraduate modules in religion and students can take these modules as part of a specialist route BA Arts and Humanities (Religious Studies) or BA Social Sciences (Religious Studies). However, due to the Open University not using the V6 course code for these degrees, they do not feature in the HESA data. A separate note on OU student numbers is provided in the 'Student Numbers' section (page 9).

Enrolment at Alternative Providers

There are a further 20 alternative providers which return student data to HESA showing undergraduate enrolment in JACS V6 (Theology & Religious Studies) courses. The largest of these, with over 350 undergraduates enrolled in 2017/18, is St Mellitus College, which has colleges in London, Chelmsford, Liverpool and Plymouth. Other providers with significant numbers of students include For Mission College (London), the London School of Theology, Moorlands College (Hampshire), Spurgeon's College (London), Nazarene Theological College (Manchester), and The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education (Birmingham).

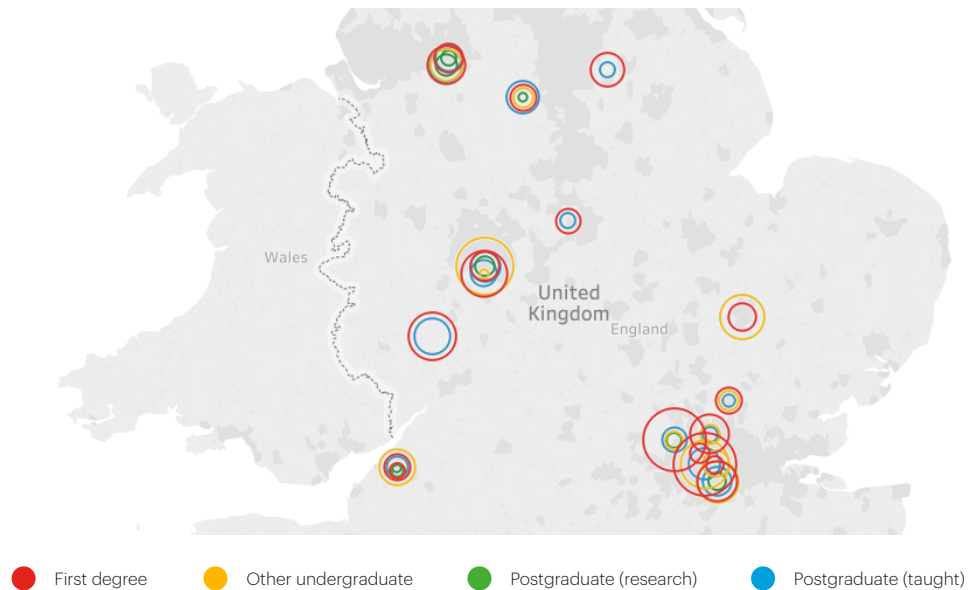
The majority of the alternative providers in the HESA data have affiliation to Christian denominations, including several affiliated with evangelical Christianity. There are also two alternative providers affiliated with Islam.

Three of the providers (St Mellitus College, the Cambridge Theological Federation, and The Queen's Foundation) are Theological Education Institutions (TEIs) approved by the Church of England. There are a further 16 TEIs on the Church of England's approved list, but these other TEIs do not, as of yet, submit student data to HESA.

Around 2700 students are on TRS undergraduate programmes in alternative providers who submit data to HESA. Undergraduate enrolment at these providers increased by 14% between 2016/17 and 2017/18. This suggests that while we are seeing declining enrolment in public HEIs, this may be partly offset by an increase in the private sector.

Below is a map of courses in England at alternative providers that submitted student data to HESA in 2017–18. It is clear from the map that the majority of providers are in the Greater London area and that the bulk of provision is at undergraduate level. Alternative providers tend to cluster in London so this isn't unique to TRS provision but rather a general trend in alternative higher education provision.

Map of TRS student enrolment at alternative providers in 2017/18



Common Awards

Common Awards are qualifications for ordinands and lay ministers within the Church of England and its partners in the Methodist, Baptist and United Reformed churches. Before 2014, Theological Education Institutions within the Church of England had used local universities to validate their qualifications, but in 2014 the Church of England decided to choose a single institution, Durham University, to validate ordination training.

There was a total of 632 undergraduate and 38 postgraduate common awards students studying full-time in 2017/18. Some of these students are captured in HESA data, but not all Theological Education Institutions submit data to HESA.¹²

Undergraduate Teacher Training

Several institutions offer undergraduate initial teacher training (ITT) for teaching religious education, usually a first degree that includes Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).¹³ The University of Edinburgh, Edge Hill University, the University of Stirling and Liverpool Hope University have the largest number of undergraduate ITT-designated students on undergraduate TRS programmes. It appears that the University of Cumbria and the University of Winchester recently stopped providing undergraduate ITT courses for religious education, although both continue to provide a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in religious education. In contrast, the University of Huddersfield began teaching a new undergraduate course in Secondary Religious Education in 2016/17.

Teacher training in England is becoming more widely offered outside of universities, through school-based teacher training options. The data therefore does not cover all those training to be teachers and, subsequently, all those training to teach religious education.

¹¹ Data on Common Awards students was provided courtesy of the Common Awards Team at Durham University and TRS UK. Three out of 19 TEIs return data to HESA (St Mellitus College, The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, and Cambridge Theological Federation), while Cranmer Hall students are included in Durham University's HESA return.

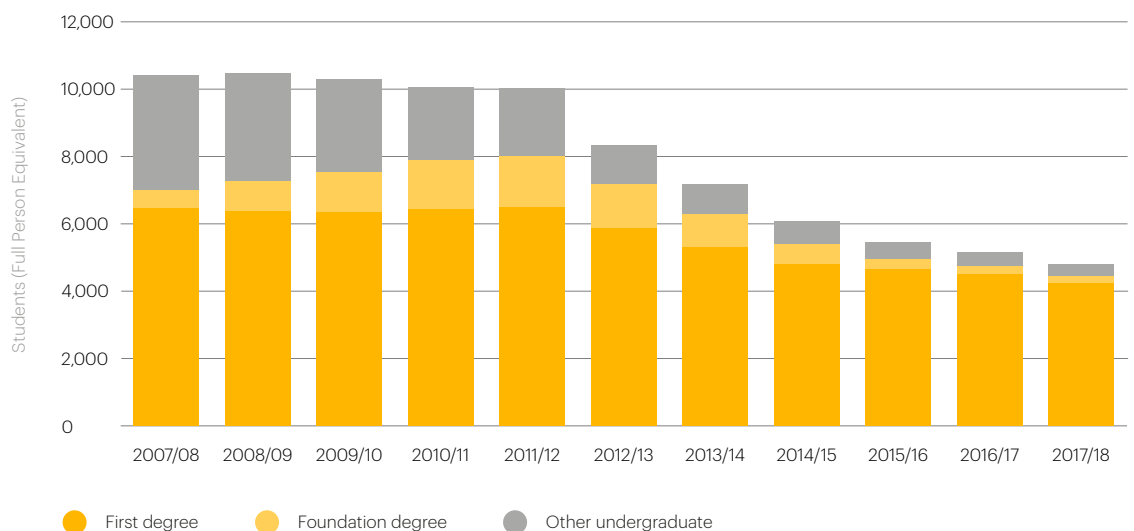
¹² This qualification shouldn't be confused with postgraduate initial teacher training such as the PGCE. We discuss the PGCE route later in the "Postgraduate teacher training" section.

Student numbers

Prior to 2012/13¹⁴, the sector saw growth in the provision of foundation degrees in TRS, while enrolment on undergraduate degrees remained largely the same between 2007/08 and 2011/12. Following the wider trend in the decline of HNCs/HNDs and adult education, numbers on other undergraduate programmes have been in continual decline over this period.

Since 2012/13, all undergraduate programmes have shown significant decline in enrolment. Enrolment on first degree programmes was 31% lower in 2017/18 compared to its peak in 2011/12, while foundation degree enrolment fell by 83% and other undergraduate programmes by 69% over the same period.

Student enrolment on undergraduate Theology and Religious Studies programmes at HEIs 2007/08 – 2017/18



Source
HESA student record

Due to the coding issues noted earlier, Open University students are not captured in the above HESA student data on TRS courses. However, from data obtained directly from the Open University, we know that around 370 students were taking OU undergraduate modules on religious studies in 2017/18. The OU has seen a similar decline in undergraduate student numbers in religious studies to the rest of the sector since 2012/13.¹⁵

First Year enrolment

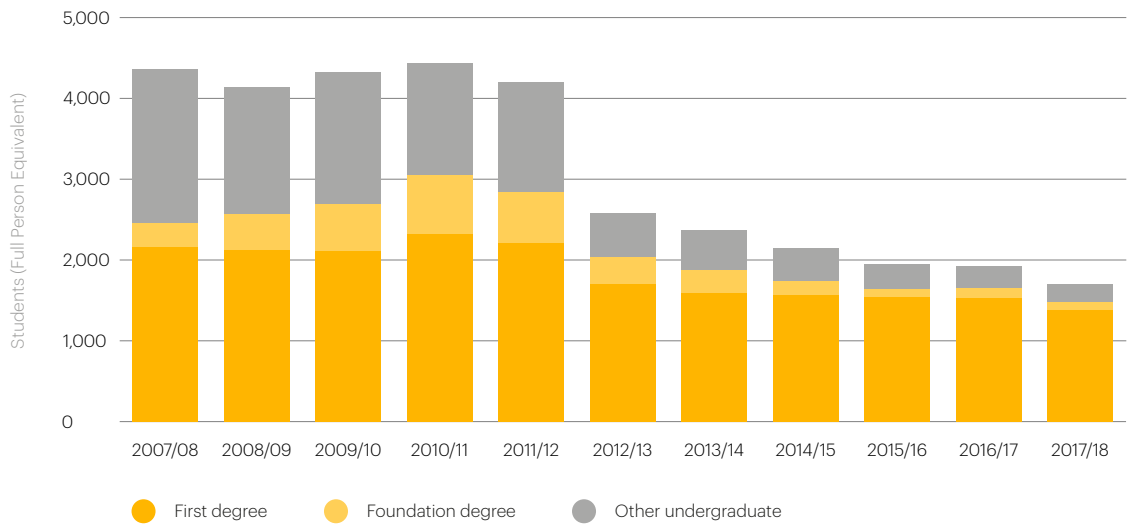
Looking specifically at first year enrolment provides a clearer picture of the year-on-year fluctuations in admissions to courses, as it focuses on the cohort which would largely have applied in the previous year.

¹³ In 2012/13, HESA changed the coding of courses from JACS 2.0 to JACS 3.0. This affected the continuity of data for some disciplines due to course coding changes. However, no obvious changes were made to the codes of TRS courses in the move to JACS 3.0. We can therefore say with a degree of confidence that the sudden change in trends is not the result of changes to course codes (although we cannot rule out some institutions coding courses differently in different years).

¹⁴ OU student information published with permission from the Head of Discipline, Religious Studies. The British Academy would like to thank the Open University for their assistance in the writing of this report.

The decline in student numbers on TRS courses from 2012/13 onwards appears to be largely due to a sudden drop in admissions in 2012/13. First year enrolment on to undergraduate first degrees fell sharply in 2012/13, and enrolments continued to decline in subsequent years to 2017/18. Other undergraduate provision was already in decline prior to 2012/13 while foundation degrees had been on the increase. Both appear to collapse in 2012/13 and continued to decline at a faster rate than first degrees over the period to 2017/18.

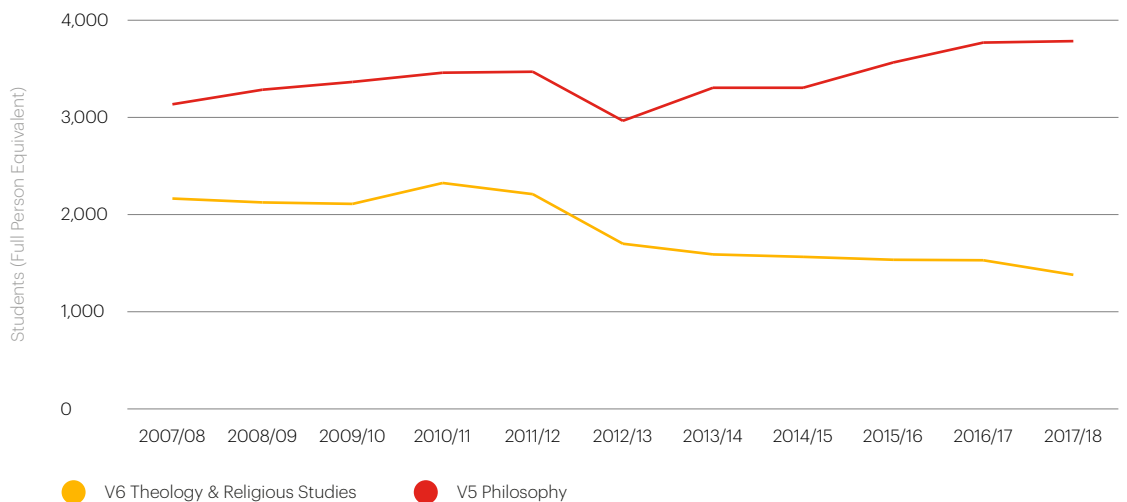
Undergraduate first year enrolment on Theology and Religious Studies first degree programmes at HEIs 2007/08 - 2017/18



Source
HESA student record

Enrolment since 2012/13 has been poor in comparison to other historical and philosophical subjects. The chart below shows a comparison between first degree enrolment in TRS and Philosophy. The latter has seen strong growth in enrolment since 2012/13 in contrast to the downward trend seen in TRS. History and Archaeology also saw a small increase in student enrolment over the period rather than decline.

First degree enrolment (first year of study) in V5 (Philosophy) and V6 (TRS) 2008/09 – 2017/18



Source
HESA student record

Reasons for declining undergraduate enrolment in TRS

The drop in TRS student numbers in 2012/13 and beyond coincided with the introduction of up to £9000 annual fees for full-time undergraduate degrees. The increase in fees may have created both demand-side and supply-side effects leading to a collapse in enrolment.

There is evidence that the introduction of higher fees may have been a key factor. When student enrolment is broken down by UK nation and student domicile, TRS enrolment has mainly been falling among English-domiciled students. Enrolment of Scottish-domiciled students onto TRS first degrees remained relatively stable between 2012/13 and 2016/17. Scottish-domiciled students do not pay tuition fees in Scotland.

Welsh-domiciled students have benefited from a tuition fee subsidy to study anywhere in the UK, but this has been scrapped from 2018/19 and replaced with a student loan. In Wales, numbers remained broadly stable among Welsh-domiciled students between 2012/13 and 2015/16, but over the next two years numbers halved. This appears to be largely the result of changes to courses and partnerships at Glyndwr University and the University of South Wales.

There was a fall in the number of Northern Irish students on TRS first degrees from 2012/13 to 2014/15 but numbers then recovered. Tuition fees in Northern Ireland are less than half of those charged in England. The decline in 2012/13 may have been down to Northern Irish students being deterred by high fees in the rest of the UK as, unlike Welsh students, they receive no cross-border fee subsidy. The data suggest that the decline from 2012/13 to 2014/15 was mainly in Northern Irish students enrolling at English institutions, thus supporting this hypothesis.

The availability of funding may also be a contributory factor in declining enrolment, particularly with foundation degrees. Foundation degrees have seen a sharp fall in external funding for fees. In 2007/08, 40% of students on foundation degrees in TRS had funding from charities or international organisations to cover their fees. Charity funding has declined year-on-year, and by 2016/17 the number of UK-domiciled foundation degree students with their fees funded by charities or international organisations was effectively zero.

Applications and acceptances

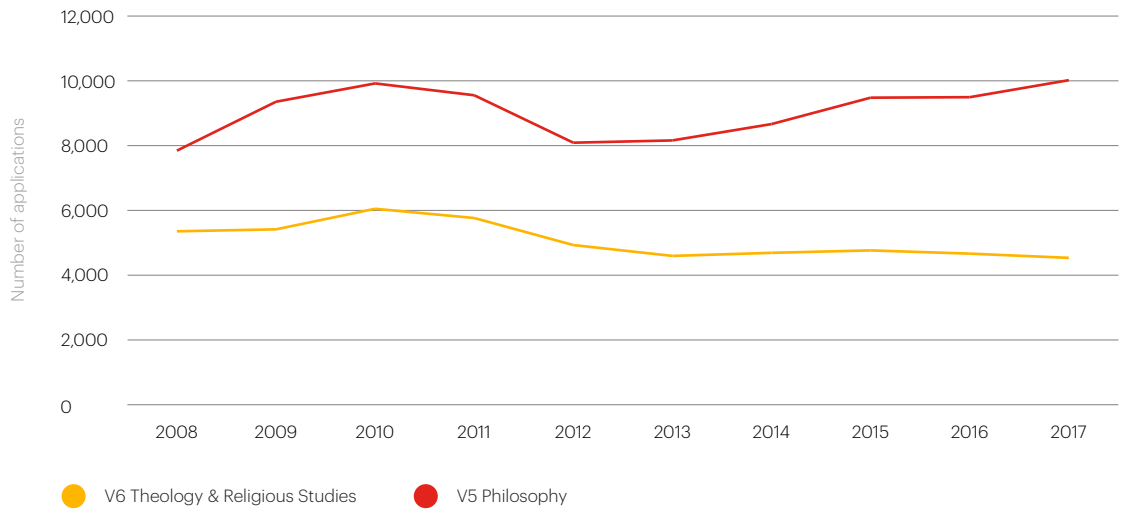
UCAS provides annual figures for the number of applications as well as the number of applicants who received and accepted a place on a course at the end of the UCAS cycle (acceptances), including applications and acceptances made through the summer Clearing process. This covers the vast majority of applications to full-time undergraduate programmes from people living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and around two thirds of young applications to full-time undergraduate programmes in Scotland.¹⁶

The application figures for courses classified V6 Theology & Religious Studies show a fall in applications since 2012. Most humanities subjects saw a large drop in applications in 2012, most likely because of the change in tuition fees, but their application rates picked back up again in later years. Philosophy, for instance, saw a sizable fall in 2012, but has seen a strong upward trend in applications since 2013.

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Around a third of undergraduate provision in Scotland, largely those programmes based in further education colleges, is not covered by UCAS data, but most programmes in Scottish higher education institutions are.

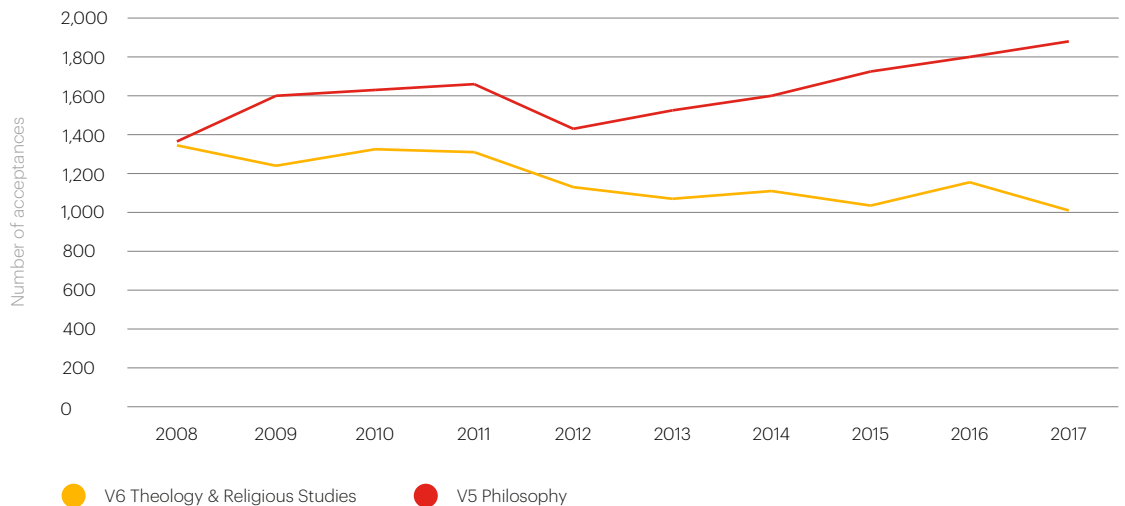
UCAS applications to undergraduate courses in V5 (Philosophy) and V6 (TRS) 2008 – 2017



Source
UCAS applications data

The number of acceptances has also fallen on TRS courses since 2012. In comparison, acceptances on philosophy courses rose consistently year-on-year following a single dip in 2012. The data suggest that acceptances in TRS may have already been on a downward trend prior to 2012; the trend was certainly less positive than in other similar subjects.

UCAS acceptances on undergraduate courses in V5 (Philosophy) and V6 (TRS) 2008 – 2017



Source
UCAS acceptances data

The UCAS figures suggest that the fall in enrolment onto TRS courses could be explained by a fall in demand for the subject. There are certainly falling numbers of applications onto TRS courses and this, in turn, has been matched by falling numbers of prospective students accepting an offer of a place on a TRS course. The fall in applications appeared to begin after the changes to tuition fees in 2012 and has continued, unlike in many other subjects where applications have picked back up.

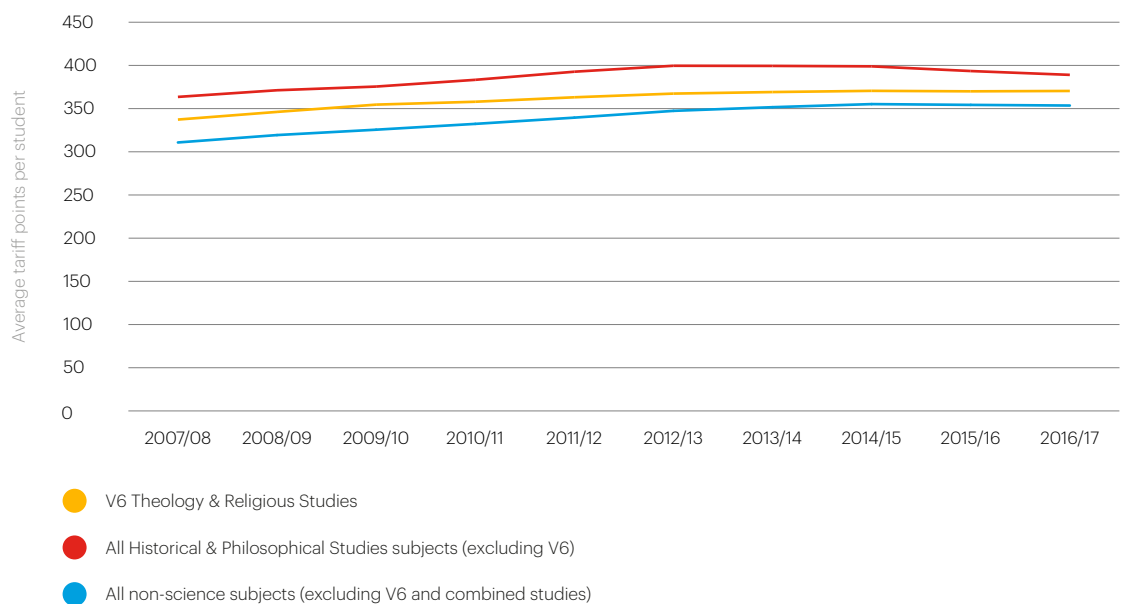
Entry requirements and tariff scores

The average number of UCAS points per student enrolled on a TRS undergraduate first degree had been rising steadily up to 2012–13 but has since fallen back slightly. This trend is in line with other historical and philosophical subjects as well as across all non-science subjects. The declining average tariff score may be the result of institutions accepting lower entry grades in order to maintain or expand student numbers. If the applicant pool for TRS courses is smaller, institutions may lower entry requirements or take students with lower grades through clearing.

TRS courses have tended to have lower average tariff scores than other subjects in historical and philosophical studies, although the gap appears to be slightly smaller in recent years. This difference is largely down to lower entry requirements.

Even the more selective institutions appear to have allowed entry tariffs to lag in TRS relative to other comparable subjects. For instance, Durham University had a standard entry tariff of AAB in A Level for its BA in Theology and Religion for 2019 entry, but an entry tariff of AAA for BA Philosophy and A*AA for BA History. Similarly, at Kings College London, the entry tariff for BA Religion, Philosophy & Ethics or for BA Theology, Religion & Culture is AAB, while a straight BA Philosophy or BA History is AAA.

Average UCAS tariff points per undergraduate first degree student 2007/08 – 2016/17

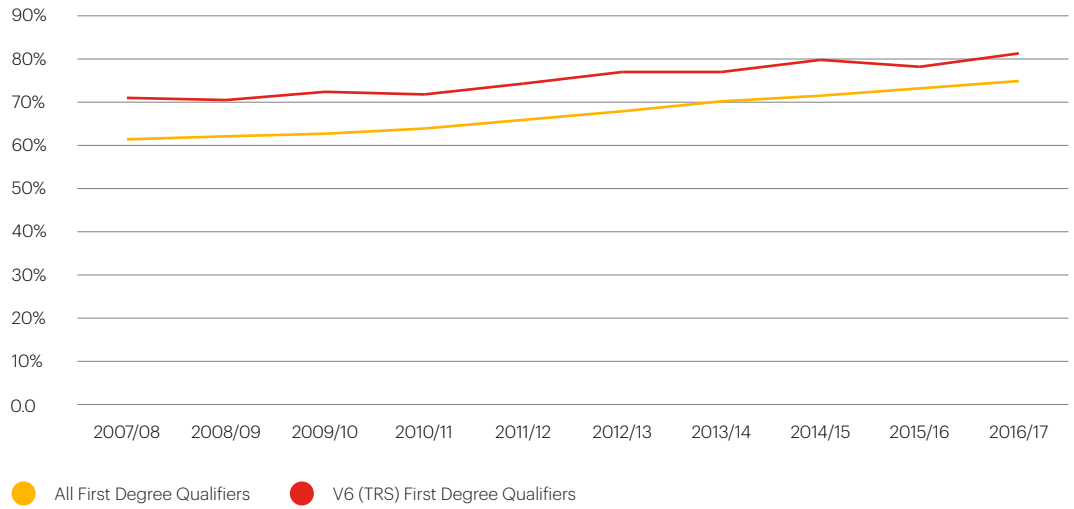


Grade Improvement

The higher education sector has recently been under scrutiny regarding the longstanding upward trend in the proportion of students graduating with first class or upper-second class degrees.

An analysis of degree outcomes for graduates of TRS undergraduate first degree programmes shows that the proportion of first degree qualifiers receiving a first or upper second class degree has increased by 10.3 points from 71% of all TRS degree awards in 2007/08 to 81.3% in 2016/17. This is a smaller increase in 'good' degrees than the average across the sector, which rose by 13.5 points over the same period. But TRS courses appear to have a particularly high number of upper seconds awarded each year (57.9% 2:1s in 2007/8 to 60.2% in 2016/17, compared with 48.1% to 49.1% across all subjects).

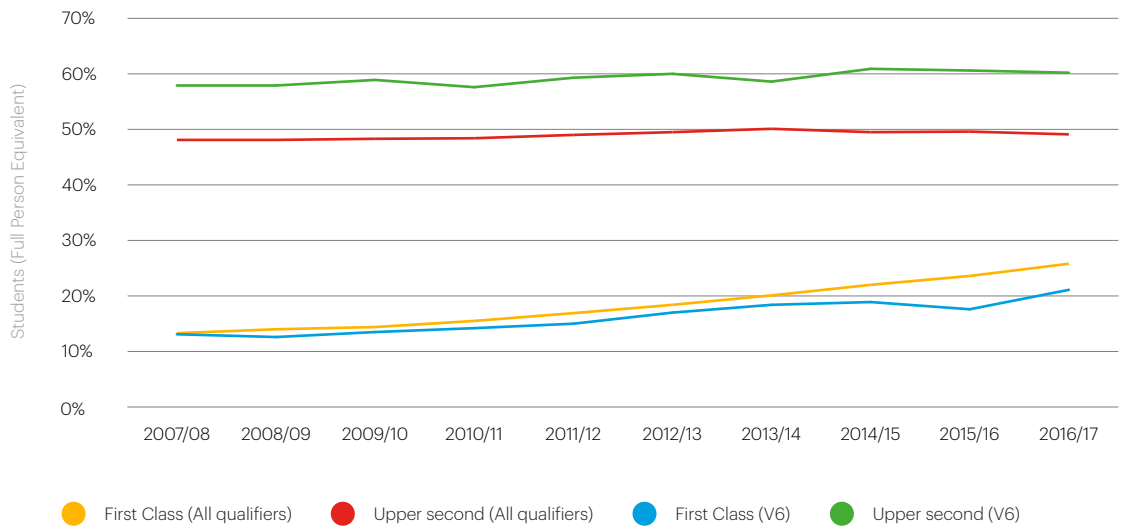
% First and Upper Second class degrees awarded 2007/08 – 2016/17



Source
HESA Student
Qualifiers data

It appears that the upward trend in TRS upper degree awards is only clear from 2011/12 onwards, while the upward trend across all upper degrees is observed across the whole period.

% First and Upper Second class degrees awarded 2007/08 – 2016/17 (disaggregated)



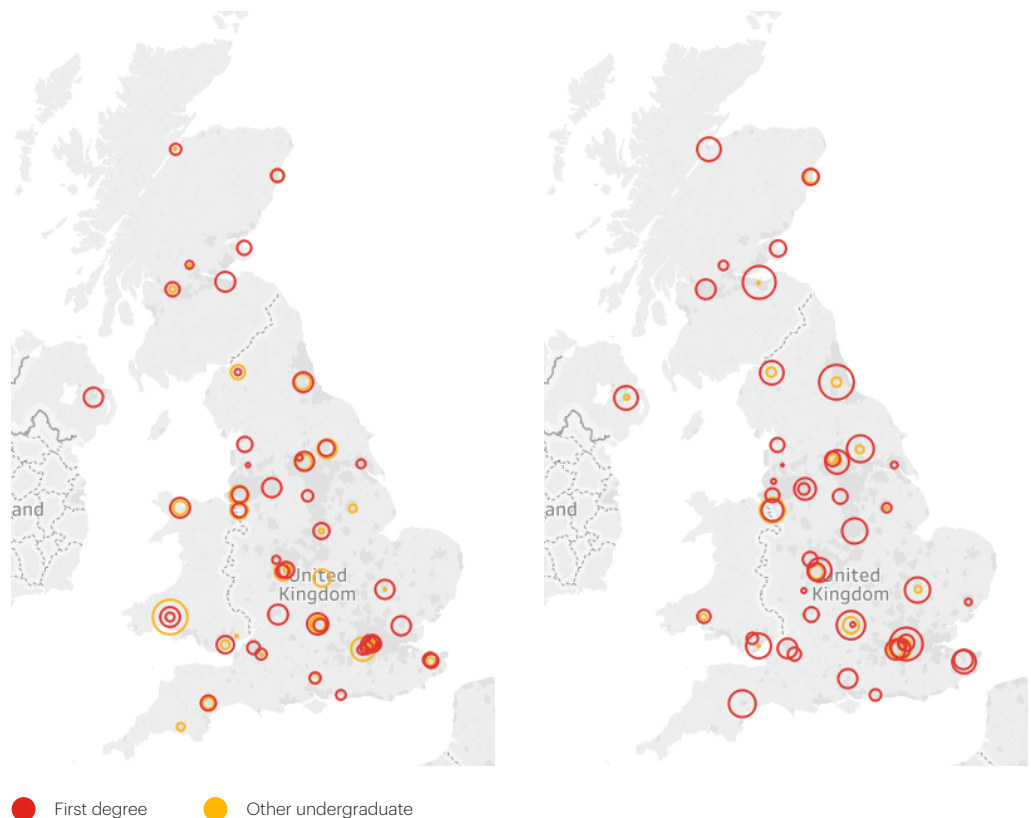
Source
HESA Student
Qualifiers data

The proportion of first class degrees in TRS rose by 8 points over the same period, from 13.1% in 2007/08 to 21.1% in 16/17, compared with a sector average increase of 12.5 points from 13.3% to 25.8%. This suggests that TRS departments have tended to award fewer firsts and more upper seconds than average, but both have increased by less than the average rise over the 10 year period.

Regional mapping

Using the HESA Student Record, we have produced maps of the regional spread of undergraduate TRS provision and how this has changed over time. Below are maps showing undergraduate student enrolment on courses designated as V6 (Theology & Religious Studies) at higher education institutions in the UK, one for 2007/08 and the other for 2017–18. The size of the circles represents the total number of students enrolled on either an undergraduate first degree (Bachelor's) or other undergraduate courses (e.g. foundation degrees, HNCs/HNDs) at each institution.

Maps of undergraduate TRS students at UK HE institutions in 2007/08 (left) and 2017/18 (right)



Providers of TRS courses are spread across the UK in a pattern that roughly corresponds with the overall geography of higher education provision. There are some regions where choice of institution is severely limited, such as in Northern Ireland¹⁷, parts of Wales, and the North East of England. This largely reflects the lower number of institutions in these regions and the fact that less than one in three institutions provide undergraduate courses in TRS according to the HESA figures.

While the geographical spread appears to have stayed roughly the same over the ten-year period from 2007/08 to 2017/18, there was a clear reduction in the number of institutions offering other undergraduate courses. In 2017/18 there appeared to be no providers of other undergraduate programmes in the South West or South East of England.

¹⁶ TRS provision in Northern Ireland has recently been further limited. In April 2019, Queen's University Belfast ended its relationship with four theological colleges and withdrew its undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Theology. The modules from the BA Theology are to continue as part of multidisciplinary opportunities in other humanities and social science programmes.

Postgraduate Study

Postgraduate Taught Provision

In 2017/18, the HESA student record showed enrolment on TRS postgraduate taught master's programmes (PGT) at 37 Higher Education Institutions. The largest programme was at Heythrop College, with around 130 students enrolled; however, this programme ceased when the College closed at the end of 2017/18. Oxford had the next largest cohort in 2017/18 with around 120 students.

13 of these 37 institutions also have students enrolled on other postgraduate courses, including postgraduate diplomas, certificates and professional qualifications, although numbers were small, the largest proportion being enrolled at Newman University and the University of Oxford, both with around 20 students on other postgraduate courses.

Enrolment on PGT courses in TRS has, like undergraduate, followed a downward trend over the last five years. Between 2012/13 and 2015/16, enrolment on master's programmes fell by 30%. Numbers held up in 2016/17, possibly due to the introduction of income-contingent loans for postgraduate courses, although most humanities subjects saw a clear increase in master's enrolment in 2016/17, suggesting that the introduction of loans had less impact on enrolment in TRS than in other subjects. In 2017/18, master's enrolments fell again by around 6% on the previous year.

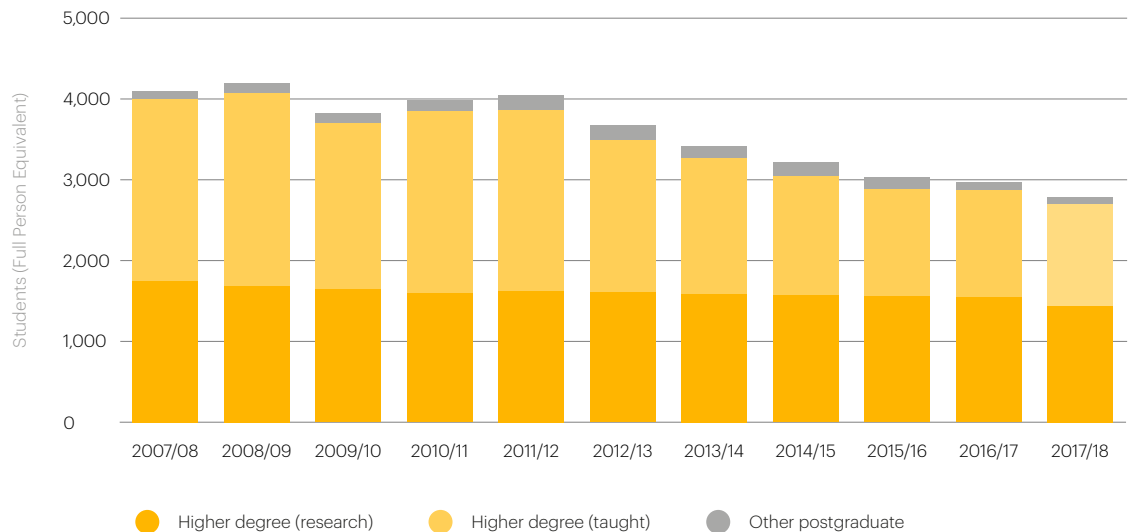
The Open University does not provide any postgraduate taught courses in TRS. It ceased providing its MA Religious Studies in 2013/14.

Postgraduate Research Provision

A total of 42 Higher Education Institutions had students enrolled on TRS research degree programmes in 2017/18. Middlesex University, Durham University and the University of Birmingham had the largest cohorts. At Middlesex, these research students are from collaborative partners, such as the London School of Theology and the Oxford Centre of Mission Studies. The Open University also continues to recruit postgraduate research students to their Religious Studies department; these students are included within the HESA data.

Enrolment on doctoral programmes has remained fairly stable although 2017/18 saw a sharper fall. It is too early to say whether this is an outlier year or the start of a downward trend. Certainly, with fewer master's students coming through, this may have a negative impact in the future on the number of doctoral students, as the master's degree is often a prerequisite for doctoral study.

Postgraduate enrolment on TRS courses at UK Higher Education Institutions 2007/08 – 2017/18



Source
HESA student record

Postgraduate courses at Alternative Providers

In 2017/18, a total of 16 alternative providers submitting data to HESA had students enrolled on TRS postgraduate courses. Around 665 students were enrolled on taught master's programmes in TRS at alternative providers in 2017/18. The largest providers of TRS master's programmes were Regents Theological College and Moorlands College. A further 45 students were enrolled on other taught programmes.

125 students were enrolled on postgraduate research programmes in TRS at alternative providers, of which 120 were on doctoral programmes and 5 on other research programmes.

It appears that alternative providers now account for a significant portion of the postgraduate market, although in most cases the validation of the degrees continues to be dealt with through agreements with a publicly-funded university.

Postgraduate Teacher Training

Many providers in England and Wales offer postgraduate teaching qualifications, namely the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (ProfGCE).

It is not been possible to provide enrolment figures for postgraduate teacher training in religious education. In their returns to HESA, institutions code most PGCEs and most ProfGCEs as X1 (Training Teachers) rather than by the subject area to be taught.

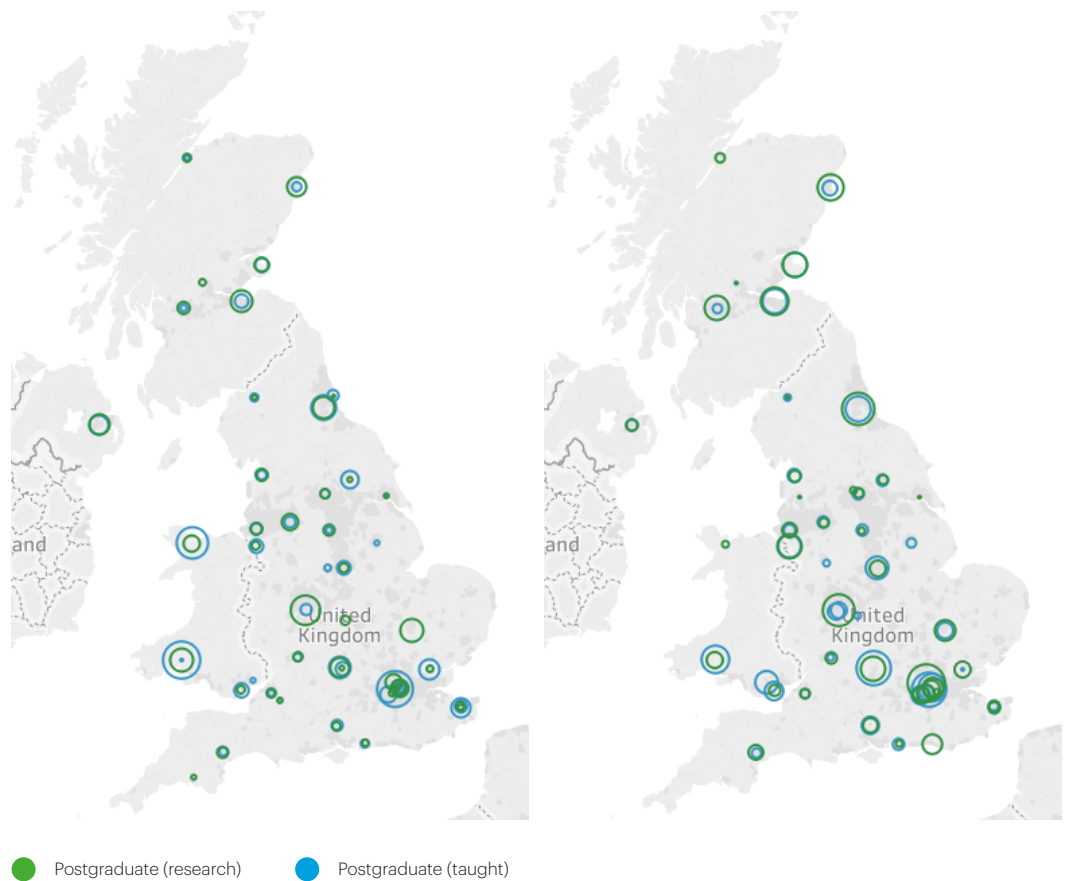
A search on the UCAS Teacher Training portal returned 38 results for postgraduate higher education programmes either at or validated by 34 different higher education providers in England and Wales.

In Scotland, another relevant qualification is a Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), a postgraduate-level qualification in teacher training that follows an undergraduate degree. The UCAS portal does not have course information on PGDEs but further online research suggested that at least two institutions in Scotland (University of Strathclyde and University of Glasgow) offered a PGDE in Secondary Religious Education in 2017/18.

Regional spread

The regional spread of postgraduate provision is similar to that for undergraduate provision and did not change considerably between 2007/08 and 2017/18. As with undergraduate courses, there are parts of the country where choice is considerably limited, perhaps to just a single institution. However, all regions of the country have at least one provider of TRS at postgraduate level.

Maps of postgraduate TRS students at UK HE institutions in 2007/08 (left) and 2017/18 (right)



Source
HESA student record;
OpenStreetMaps

Student Characteristics

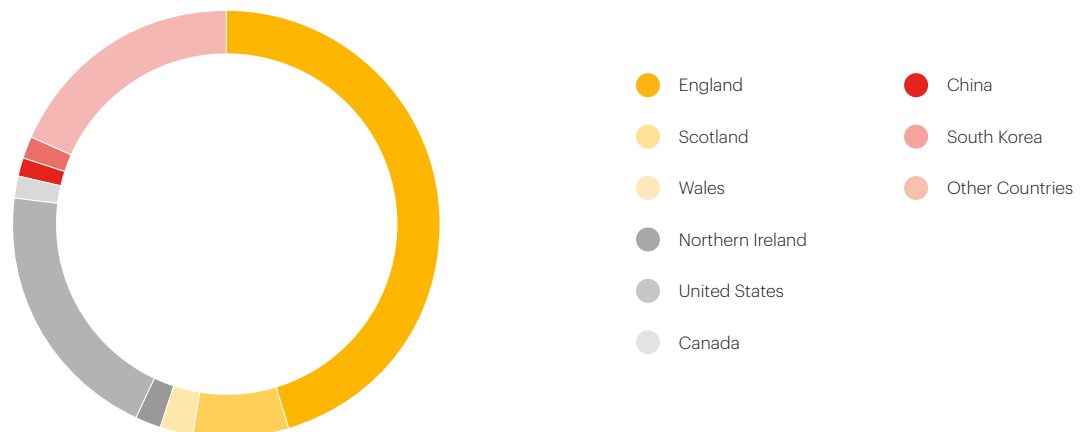
Domicile

Students on TRS undergraduate courses in higher education are predominantly from the UK rather than from overseas. In 2017/18, 95.9% of undergraduate first degree students on courses designated as V6 (Theology & Religious Studies) were UK-domiciled students (i.e. they were living in the UK prior to their course), with 1.8% from other EU countries and 2.3% from non-EU countries. These proportions have changed very little over the last decade. The proportions are similar for other undergraduate courses, although there has been a slight increase in the proportion of non-EU overseas students on some certificate and diploma courses. Foundation degrees, albeit now a very small portion of undergraduate provision, are taken almost exclusively by UK-domiciled students.

In contrast, postgraduate study attracts a much larger proportion of overseas students. On postgraduate taught degrees, 77.2% of students were UK-domiciled, 4.9% were from other EU countries and 17.9% from non-EU countries in 2017/18. On postgraduate research degrees, an even lower proportion (57.1%), but still a majority, were UK-domiciled students, with 5.8% from other EU countries and 37.1% from non-EU countries in 2017/18.

The majority of overseas postgraduate students in TRS come from the United States. Around 20% of postgraduate research students in TRS were from the United States in 2017/18, down slightly from a peak of 21% in 2012/13. U.S. students also make up 7.6% of all postgraduate taught students in TRS.

Postgraduate Research Students in V6 (TRS) by domicile (country level) 2017/18



Source
HESA student record

Gender

The ratio of female-to-male students on TRS courses varies considerably by level of study and by institution. In undergraduate study, TRS has a female majority, with 64.4% female students on first degree programmes in 2017/18. The opposite is found in postgraduate study, where 47.9% of students on postgraduate taught courses and just 34.8% in postgraduate research were women. These proportions haven't changed notably in the last five years.

The lower female-to-male ratio at postgraduate level is particularly driven by the higher proportion of male students from overseas. In 2017/18, 57.6% of non-EU overseas students on postgraduate taught degree courses were men; the proportion increases to 75% for postgraduate research students.

Gender ratios differ between institutions. The University of Nottingham, for instance, had a very high proportion (76%) of female students on undergraduate first degree courses in TRS, but a below average proportion on taught postgraduate (35%) and research degree programmes (29%) in 2017/18. Conversely, The University of Oxford had a low proportion of female students on undergraduate first degree programmes (47%), but closer to the average proportion in postgraduate taught (45%) and research programmes (32%).

It is not possible to tell from the data why some institutions have such vastly different gender ratios. There doesn't appear to be any correlation between student gender ratios and academic staff gender ratios. The difference also doesn't appear to be down to a higher proportion of overseas students. The differences could be the result of several factors, such as the types of course on offer, the relationships between certain courses and ministerial training (eligibility for which may be linked to gender), institutional policies and incentives to widen participation, and departmental or institutional culture.

Ethnicity

Due to the amount of missing data on student ethnicity, particularly for overseas students, it is difficult to build up an accurate picture using HESA student data, particularly at postgraduate level. However, the data suggest a growing proportion of students from black and Asian backgrounds are enrolling on TRS courses. In particular, there has been a jump in the proportion of black students on other undergraduate courses. These trends could reflect the continued or increased religiosity of ethnic minorities as well as increased academic research and study in Pentecostalism.

Among UK domiciled students, for which the ethnicity is known for almost all students, the proportion of black and minority ethnic students (BME) on undergraduate first degree courses classified as V6 (TRS) has increased from 12.9% in 2012/13 to 18.2% in 2017/18. The proportion of BME students on master's level courses increased from 13.2% to 17.8% and in doctoral study from 12.6% to 15% over the same period.

Age

TRS students are, on average, older than students in other disciplines. This is particularly the case for UK-domiciled students, who make up the majority of students on TRS programmes. TRS tends to attract a higher number of mature students, particularly as ordinands who are supported by their churches to study an undergraduate degree as part of their training.

The average age of students on TRS undergraduate first degrees was 23.2 years in 2017/18, higher than the average of 22.6 years across all subjects, and higher than other humanities subjects like philosophy (21.1 years) and history (21.9 years). This is largely down to the significant portion (13%) of mature students aged 30 years or over. In comparison, only 5.5% of philosophy first degree students were aged 30 or over, 8.5% in history, and 10.8% in archaeology.

Like many other subjects, the average age of TRS first degree students has been falling. This trend reflects the wider decline in undergraduate mature and part-time study since the changes to tuition fees and student finance in 2012/13.

At postgraduate level, the majority of TRS students are over 30, with an average age 38.3 and 40.7 in taught and research degrees respectively in 2017/18. The average age across all subjects in 2017/18 was 29.2 for taught degrees and 31.6 for research degrees.

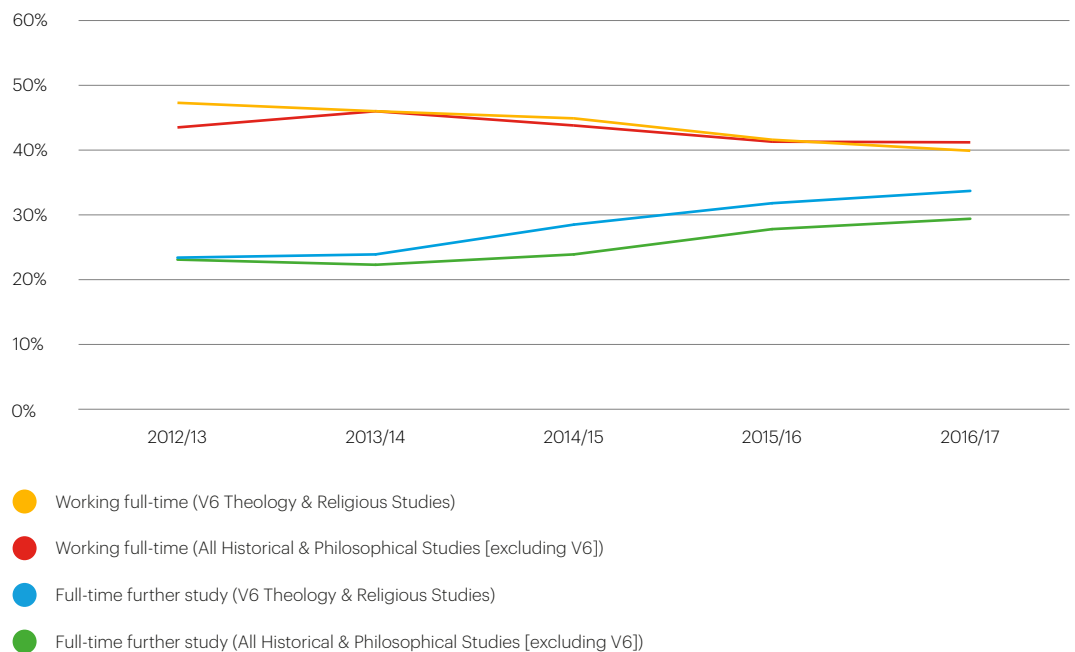
Graduate Destinations

Employment and Further Study

The Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey provides information on graduate outcomes six months after leaving their higher education course.

Of leavers from first degree (bachelor's) courses designated as V6 Theology and Religious Studies in 2016/17, 39.9% were in full-time work and 33.7% in full-time study as their main activity six months after leaving. A further 13.4% were primarily working part-time, while 4.5% were unemployed. The proportion of leavers from TRS first degrees in full-time work has fallen significantly, from 47.3% in 2012/13, while the proportion of leavers in full-time study has steadily increased over the same period from 23.4% in 2012/13. As the chart below suggests, TRS has largely followed the same trend as other historical and philosophical subjects, with falling numbers in full-time employment being mirrored by growing numbers staying in higher education for further study.

Proportion of first degree qualifiers in full-time employment or study six months after graduation

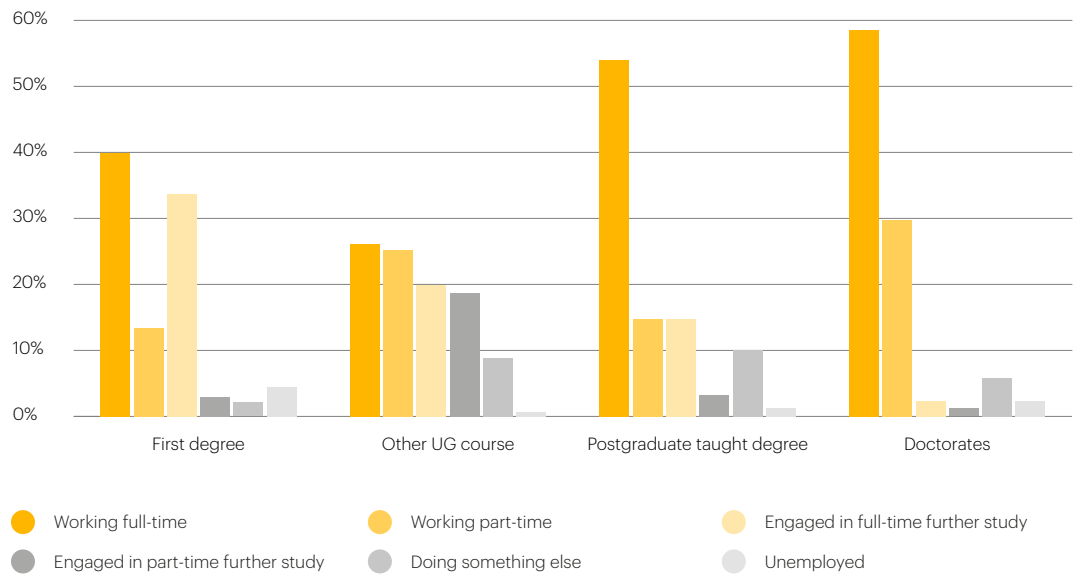


Source
HESA Destination of
Leavers from Higher
Education Survey

Leavers from postgraduate taught master's courses had higher rates of full-time employment, with 54% working full-time and only 1.3% unemployed; 14.8% of master's leavers were engaged in full-time study. Levels of employment and further study appear to fluctuate year-on-year and there is no obvious trend compared to that seen for first degree graduates.

While figures for doctoral graduates are small and not necessarily as accurate due to low response rates, the data show 58.5% of TRS doctoral leavers in full-time employment and 29.8% in part-time employment as their main activity.

TRS graduate destinations by level of study (2016/17)



Employment Characteristics

Of those leavers from TRS courses in employment, 63.8% of first degree leavers in 2016/17 were considered to be in a professional role according to Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes. This figure was higher for postgraduates, with 86.1% of higher degree (master's) leavers and 93.5% of doctoral leavers in professional roles. This proportion appears to have remained largely the same over the last five years.

Looking in more detail at the type of roles, around two-thirds of TRS graduates are employed in roles classified in Group 2 (Professional occupations) or Group 3 (Associate professions and technical occupations) of the SOC codes. There are differences here by level of study, with undergraduate leavers more spread out in terms of diversity of roles.

Within these large groups, the largest single sub-grouping is SOC 244 (Welfare professionals) where 20.7% of TRS graduates in 2016/17 were employed six months after study. The 244 code includes the clergy, which may explain the high proportion. The next largest group (12.9%) were in SOC 231 (Teaching and educational professionals) which would capture those going on to teach theology or religious studies at different levels of education.

Academic Staff

Staff numbers and contracts

The HESA staff record provides a breakdown of academic staff in higher education institutions by the cost centres to which their contracts are assigned.

A total of 43 Higher Education Institutions returned academic staff to Cost Centre 142 (Theology & Religious Studies) in 2017/18, employing 775 academic staff between them. Of these, 63% were on teaching and research (T&R) contracts, 11% on teaching-only contracts and 25% on research-only contracts. 150 (19%) of the academic staff in TRS were on professorial contracts and a further 20 (3%) in senior management positions. About two-thirds (65%) of academic staff were on permanent contracts compared with about a third (35%) on fixed-term contracts.

The overall number of TRS academic staff has fluctuated slightly over the past few years but has not shown a significant upward or downward trend, with a peak of 790 in 2013/14 and a low of 715 in 2016/17. The full time equivalent (FTE) number of TRS academic staff, which takes into account whether someone is full-time or part-time, peaked in 2013/14 at 605 FTE, and stood slightly lower, at 580 FTE, in 2017/18.

Gender

Staff in Theology and Religious Studies are predominantly male, although the proportion of female staff has slightly increased over the last few years. The proportion of female academic staff in TRS increased from 34.5% in 2012/13 to 37.2% in 2017/18.

These figures contrast with the gender balance across all humanities and languages academic staff, which was 53.1% female in 2017/18.

The gender balance is more male-skewed among staff on T&R contracts. In 2017/18, only 33% of T&R staff were female, compared with 44.7% of research-only and 44.4% of teaching-only staff. 45.7% of T&R staff across all humanities and languages disciplines were female in 2017/18.

Ethnicity

Staff in Theology and Religious Studies are predominantly white, but the proportions are more in line with all humanities and languages disciplines than they are for gender. 78.7% of TRS academic staff identified as white in 2017/18 and 10.5% identified as black and minority ethnic (BME).

Across humanities and languages, 80.6% of academic staff identified as white; 10.3% identified as black and minority ethnic (BME).

There have been no major changes in the ethnic diversity of TRS staff in the past five years.

Age

The age profile of staff in Theology and Religious Studies is older than for other historical and philosophical subjects. The average age of academic staff in cost centre 142 (Theology & Religious Studies) was 46.8 in 2017/18, compared with 42.5 in cost centre 141 (Philosophy), 43.3 in cost centre 139 (History), and 43.4 in cost centre 140 (Classics). The only disciplines with a significantly older average age are education; nursing and allied health professionals; and social work and social care. Music, dance and drama; and business and management studies also have a similar average age of

staff to TRS. The average age of TRS staff crept up slightly between 2012/13 and 2016/17 suggesting that staff profile might be ageing, although it fell slightly in 2017/18.

As shown by the bar chart below, TRS has a smaller proportion of younger academic staff compared with history, philosophy and classics, all of which have age profiles skewed toward the younger end of the distribution compared with the broader, flatter distribution in TRS.

Age profile of academic staff in selected cost centres 2017/18



Source
HESA Staff Record

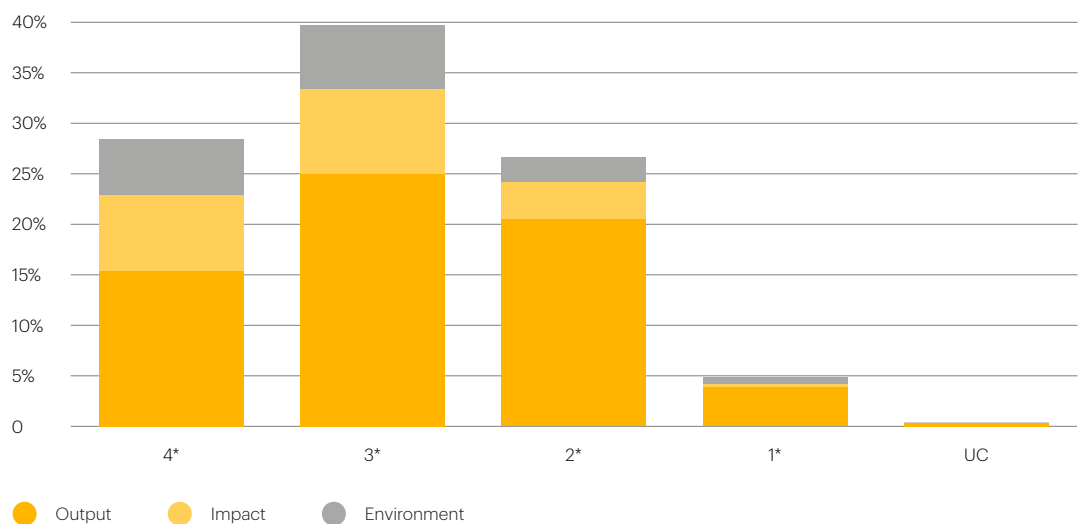
Academic Research

Research Quality

A total of 33 institutions submitted outputs to Unit of Assessment 33 (Theology and Religious Studies) in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014).

The overall quality profile of UoA 33 was 28% 4* (world-leading), 40% 3* (internationally excellent), 27% 2* (internationally recognised), and 5% 1* (nationally recognised). The overall profile is slightly weaker than other humanities disciplines, such as UoA 30 (History), UoA 31 (Classics), and UoA 32 (Philosophy), but around average across all non-science units of assessment.

Average overall quality profile for all submissions in UoA 33: Theology and Religious Studies (FTE weighted), REF 2014



Source
HEFCE / Research
England

The overall top performing institutions in REF 2014 for Theology and Religious Studies were Durham University, University of Birmingham, Lancaster University, University of Leeds, and University College London. The University of Leeds had the highest research output profile while Lancaster University was top for impact.¹⁸

Impact case studies

In REF 2014, 78 impact case studies were submitted to UoA 33 (Theology and Religious Studies).¹⁹ 17 of these case studies received funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, 7 from the British Academy, and 5 from the Economic and Social Research Council.

17 Times Higher Education REF 2014 results by subject. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/ref-2014-results-by-subject/2017594.article>

18 Only 75 of the 78 case studies have been published on the REF 2014 website <http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/> The figures are based on the 75 available case studies.

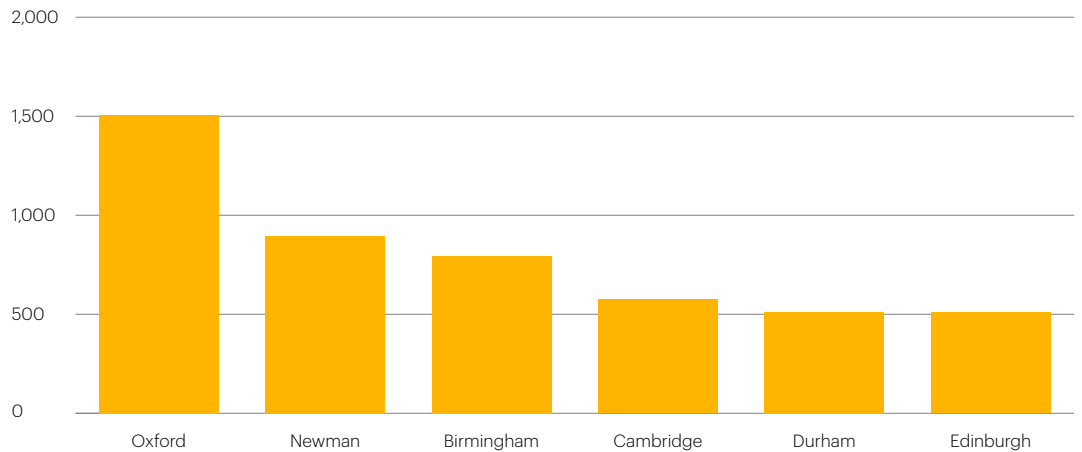
The most likely type of impact was cultural (44), followed by social (27), health (2) and political (2). 68 of the studies were considered interdisciplinary in nature.

In terms of quality of the case studies, 37.4% were deemed 4*, 42.2% 3*, 18.6% 2*, and 1.8% 1*.

Research Funding

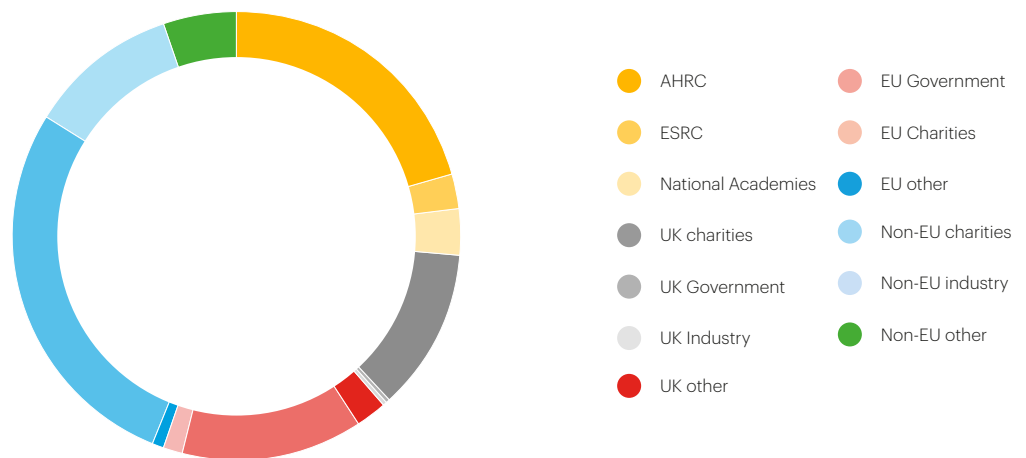
According to HESA finance returns, 33 institutions received a total of £8.3 million of external research funding in Cost Centre 142 (Theology and Religious Studies) in 2016/17.²⁰ Of these, six institutions received external grants totalling at least £500k. These six institutions received 57% of all research grant income for TRS in 2016/17.

Total research grants in cost centre 142 (Theology & Religious Studies) by institution (in £'000s) 2016/17



Source
HESA Finance Record

Total external research funding in cost centre 142 (Theology & Religious Studies 2016/17)



Source
HESA Finance Record

19 This includes all funding from Research Councils, National Academies, government departments, charities, industry, and the European Union. It does not recurrent research funding through mainstream QR. See https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c16031/table_5

The majority (59%) of research funding for TRS came from overseas in 2016/17, the largest chunk (28%) from non-EU overseas charities, which would include funding from churches and religious organisations. A further 11% came from non-EU overseas business and industry.

In the UK, the biggest funder is the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which provided around 20% of the overall funding in 2016/17. Around 12% of funding came from the UK charity sector and a further 1.5% from charities in the European Union. European Union governmental bodies (which includes European Union research funding) provided around 13% of the total funding.

Theology and Religious Studies research appears from these figures to be less reliant on funding from the European Union than other humanities disciplines such as Classics, Philosophy, and Modern Languages. It also tends to receive more funding from overseas charities rather than UK-based ones, unlike most other humanities disciplines (Classics being another exception).²¹

Theology and Religious Studies receives a similar amount of research funding as comparable disciplines after accounting for its size. The tables below show two different measures of research funding per head, the first using data from REF 2014 to calculate the amount of research funding per Category A full time equivalent (FTE) staff by Unit of Assessment, and the second using more up-to-date HESA data to calculate the research funding per FTE academic staff member on a Teaching & Research or Research Only contract in different cost centres. Theology and Religious Studies performs favourably on both measures in relative terms.

REF 2014

Unit of Assessment	Total external research income 2012/13	Total Category A staff	Research funding per FTE Category A
30 History	£23.8m	1786	£13,326
31 Classics	£5.94m	383	£15,509
32 Philosophy	£8.21m	591	£13,892
33 Theology & Religious Studies	£6.27m	413	£15,182

Source
HEFCE / Research
England

2016/17 HESA finance record

Cost Centre	Total research grants and contracts 2016/17	Total FTE research staff	Research funding per FTE
139 History	£36.2m	2545	£14,228
140 Classics	£5.1m	440	£11,520
141 Philosophy	£13.7m	735	£18,668
142 Theology & Religious Studies	£8.3m	525	£15,804

Source
HESA Finance Record
/ HESA Staff Record

Summary and Reflections

In this report, the British Academy has, through an analysis of the available data and evidence, attempted to create a detailed picture of the state of Theology and Religious Studies provision in UK Higher Education. This picture has covered the main trends for students, graduates, staff, and research across the discipline over a period of around ten years.

Is there a crisis in student enrolment?

Theology and Religious Studies has been on a downward trend in both applications and enrolment of undergraduate students from 2012/13 onwards. Postgraduate taught study has also followed a similar downward trend since 2012/13 which does not appear to have been curbed by the introduction of the postgraduate student loans. The drop in taught study in TRS is considerable and against the trend in other humanities subjects, which saw a resurgence after their initial slump in 2012/13 following the introduction of higher fees. If this trend continues, TRS provision will come under serious threat at many institutions and the department closures and mergers, which have already started, will likely continue.

It is difficult to determine the causes of the decline in TRS enrolment, but the evidence presented earlier suggests that the increase in tuition fees has played a part in deterring prospective students and in pressuring institutions to change the courses they offer for financial reasons. The disappearance of many bursaries and scholarships for students, particularly for foundation degrees, may have also had an impact.

In other disciplines, such as modern languages, falling enrolment has been linked to the choice of GCSE and A Levels, with a decline in the study of a subject in school affecting uptake at university. This doesn't appear to be the case in Theology and Religious Studies, however. A Level entries in Religious Education were on the increase over the same period, and more than doubling in England and Wales between 2003 and 2017.²² While there was a decline in A Level entries for Religious Education in 2018, the impact of this on higher education enrolment will not be revealed until the 2018/19 student data is published.

While there is certainly cause for concern, and potential to argue that TRS is becoming one of the more vulnerable disciplines in higher education, there remains a broad range of providers across the UK and a potentially growing number of alternative providers alongside existing universities. This leaves the sector in a good position to respond to the decline in enrolment and maintain a wide choice of options for students, at undergraduate level at least. However, the research profile of the discipline may well remain threatened, because alternative providers typically have limited research profiles and no access to public funding for research, even if they now support a growing number of doctoral students through validation arrangements with higher education institutions.

Studying religion in an interdisciplinary way

While traditional single and joint honours courses may be in decline, what has been hard to determine from the data is the role that religion plays in programmes across the arts, humanities and social sciences. There is evidence of new hybrid courses appearing at institutions, offering the study of religion as part of a more interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary syllabus, combining it with elements of art, culture, philosophy and ethics, sociology, politics, history, and language.

The study of religion is of increasing importance in understanding society and the challenges that it faces, but the deep understanding of religion may require closer correspondence with other disciplines in order to grasp the full picture and come up with solutions. Therefore, it is not surprising to find universities adopting a more interdisciplinary approach, one which reflects the complex and changing relationship that people have with religion in the 21st Century.

Nevertheless, further investigation is needed to fully understand what this means for Theology and Religious Studies as a distinct disciplinary field and for teaching and research within TRS departments.

The sustainability of the TRS staff profile

The analysis of data on TRS academic staff in UK higher education institutions revealed an ageing profile, suggesting that recruitment of research and teaching staff in the discipline could become more difficult in the future.

Theology and Religious Studies is not the only discipline with an ageing profile. A similar trend is identified in Education, where there is a problem in the pipeline of early career researchers into educational research.²³

However, the relative stability in the flow of TRS doctoral graduates suggests that the issue may be more complex for Theology and Religious Studies. The data cannot reveal the career intentions of doctoral students nor can it tell us whether the opportunities have changed for early career researchers to enter academic research in the discipline. While overall staff numbers have remained fairly stable in Theology and Religious Studies, the closure and downsizing of several departments suggests that new opportunities may be scarce and largely only available upon the retirement of an incumbent.

If it is a question of demand rather than of supply, correcting imbalances in the staff profile will prove difficult, as opportunities to recruit will be limited. This not only has implications on the age profile of staff but also on gender and ethnicity.

Theology and Religious Studies, despite recruiting considerably more female students than male at undergraduate level, has a male-dominated staff profile. The gender imbalance has improved slowly over time, but at the current rate it would take over 20 years just to catch up with the other humanities.

The staff gender imbalance reflects the split in postgraduate research, where only a third of TRS doctoral students are women. Although, for the reasons explained above, opportunities for recruitment may be limited, it would be wise to tackle the pipeline issue at postgraduate level and encourage more women to take TRS postgraduate courses.

What next for the TRS community

This British Academy's aim in this report has been to provide an objective analysis of the evidence to assess the overall health and development of Theology and Religious Studies as one of the key disciplines that the Academy represents.

It is clear from the analysis that the data only goes so far in uncovering the key trends and identifying problem areas. While there has been some effort made to contextualise the data through engagement with the higher education sector and the TRS community, it is the Academy's hope that this report is used as a starting point for the community to further explore the issues.

As the HESA data is limited by the coding of courses, such that not all courses with a religion element are coded within the V6 category for Theology and Religious Studies, the TRS community may wish to consider whether it could develop its own mechanism for collecting more accurate data

on the available courses and the student enrolment on them, perhaps under the direction of an organisation such as TRS UK.

In terms of the worrying decline in student numbers on TRS courses, the Academy will work with the TRS community to further assess the vulnerability of the subject and help to ensure a sustainable future for the teaching of the discipline in higher education. This would need to be explored in the context of the increasing importance of interdisciplinary study and the current policy debates over the future funding regime for higher education.

Glossary of terms

Alternative Provider (AP) – A general term used to describe providers of higher education that do not receive regular funding from government grants. They can be for-profit or not-for-profit in their organisational form.

Applications and Acceptances – This report looks at two types of student data published by the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS). The number of applications made to courses and the number of applicants who received a place on a course at the end of the UCAS cycle (known as acceptances), including applications and acceptances made through the summer Clearing process.

Acceptance rates differ from actual enrolment in two ways: enrolment numbers cover all students on a course including those who did not apply through the UCAS system; and unlike UCAS acceptance rates, enrolment numbers do not include people who accepted a course and met the entry requirements but, for some reason, did not actually start the course or dropped out in the first two weeks.

Entry Tariff – Entry tariffs or “UCAS Tariffs” are used by higher education providers to set the minimum standards for entry to a course based on post-16 qualifications. Qualifications such as A Levels, the International Baccalaureate, BTECs, and Scottish Highers, are converted into points, allowing prospective students to assess the qualifications and grades they need and institutions to more easily assess applicants.

In this report, we have analysed both the advertised entry tariffs set by providers for entry to courses and the average entry points achieved by students enrolled onto different courses.

First Degree – An undergraduate degree, also known as a bachelor’s degree, which will normally be a three-year programme if studied full-time (four years in Scotland). First degrees make up the largest proportion of higher education provision.

Foundation Degree – An undergraduate course which combines academic and vocational elements of learning, equivalent to two-thirds of a first (bachelor’s) degree and usually studied over two years if full-time. Foundation degrees are available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are often focused on specific professions and frequently lead to further study as they can be used towards a first degree by taking an additional ‘top-up’ year.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) – The Higher Education Statistics Agency is the official agency for the collection, processing and publishing of data about higher education in the UK.

HESA Cost Centre – The Higher Education Statistics Agency use cost centres as a way of coding higher education activities, such as income and expenditure or staffing. There are both academic and administrative cost centres and institutions code their financial returns and their staff record by cost centre. The current cost centre codes have been in use since 2012/13.

Higher Education Institution (HEI) – A term used in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 to describe any provider of higher education that is one or more of the following: a UK university; a higher education corporation; an institution designated as eligible to receive public grant money from one of the UK higher education funding bodies.

Impact Case Studies – A measure of research impact was introduced in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework to assess the positive effect that research has beyond academia. Impact is assessed through the submission of impact case studies. These are statements which describe how research conducted at an institution within a specific timeframe has resulted in a positive change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life.

Joint Academic Coding of Subjects (JACS) – JACS is a way of classifying academic subjects and modules in higher education. The current version, JACS 3.0, has been used since 2012/13 and has different levels of detail. For most of our analysis, we refer to the “principle subject” level of coding as this is the most detailed level of coding available in HESA student data.

Other Undergraduate – Undergraduate level courses that are not first (bachelor’s) degrees and include foundation degrees (although these are sometimes counted separately in statistics), diplomas in higher education (such as those for nursing, social care, and veterinary science), Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs), and the Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE).

Postgraduate Taught (PGT) – Courses at postgraduate level, usually taken after completing an undergraduate first degree or equivalent, and include Master’s degrees, Postgraduate Certificates, and Postgraduate Diplomas, where the taught element is the largest part.

Postgraduate Research (PGR) – Courses that require a student to produce and present original research, usually under the supervision of an academic staff member. These include Master’s by research or dissertation, Master of Philosophy (MPhil), research doctorates (PhD, DPhil), and professional or specialist doctorates.

Research Excellence Framework (REF) – The REF is the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions, managed by Research England. It replaced the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and was first used in 2014, assessing the period 2008 to 2013. Results in the REF are used to determine the distribution of quality-related (QR) research funding, an allocation of public funding for research given to higher education institutions. In this report, we use results from REF 2014; the next REF is in 2021 and will assess research for the period 2014-2020.

Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) – The standard occupational classification (SOC) is a common classification of occupational information for the UK. It is used in the HESA Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey to code responses of graduates in employment.

Student Domicile – The term “domicile” relates to the country of a student’s permanent home address prior to entry on their course. UK Home students are those who were resident in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man for at least three years prior to the start of their course. EU domiciled students are those who were living in a European Union country other than the UK prior to their course. Non-EU overseas students are from any country outside the European Union.

University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) – The University and College Admissions Service is an independent charity providing information, advice, and admissions services for progression onto courses in UK universities and colleges.

UCAS publish data at different stages of the annual application cycle. This covers the vast majority of applications to full-time undergraduate programmes from people living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and around two thirds of young applicants to full-time undergraduate programmes in Scotland. Around a third of undergraduate provision in Scotland, largely those programmes based in further education colleges, is not covered by UCAS data, but most programmes in Scottish higher education institutions are.

UCAS data is subject to a rounding methodology, which rounds the numbers to the nearest multiple of ten. This is to ensure compliance with data protection as student and staff data can be considered ‘personal data’ in its raw form.

Unit of Assessment (UoA) – Submissions to the Research Excellence Framework are made into different Units of Assessment, representing different disciplinary fields of research. Each UoA has its own expert sub-panel to assess submissions, working under the leadership and guidance of four main panels. In REF 2014 there were 36 Units of Assessment.

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