AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Programme

Research Programme Specification

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Arts & Humanities Research Council

E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

AHRC and ESRC Religion and Society Research Programme Specification

Consultations with both the AHRC and ESRC's communities during 2004 and 2005 highlighted the importance and timeliness of research focusing on religion and society both because of the significance of this area for contemporary society and the readiness of the academic community to respond to the interdisciplinary challenges posed. Over 10% of the themes suggested as a result of the AHRC's 2005 consultation on thematic priorities centred on the relationships between religion, belief and society. As a result of the largest ever consultation among both UK social scientists and users and stakeholders on future priorities for funding, ESRC Council identified seven key areas, which ESRC have called 'key research challenges', as urgently in need of research. One of these seven was 'Religion, Ethnicity and Society'. In recognition of their shared priorities, the AHRC and ESRC have agreed to support this area through the co-funding of the Religion and Society Programme.

This programme addresses questions of vital contemporary importance, both on a local and global scale. To appreciate these issues fully we have to understand them in historical and comparative contexts as well as through the perspectives of gender, age, sexuality, class, economic status, dis/ability and ethnicity. This programme offers a unique opportunity to engage publics, religious groups, policy makers, charities, creative and cultural sectors and others in dialogue about the role of religion in society and it is envisaged that many projects will have outcomes of significance for these groups.

This programme will make important contributions to our understanding of religion and society in the short-term through the workshops and small grants supported, the establishment of research networks and the activities of the programme director in forming links between related programmes both nationally and internationally, researchers, faith communities and policy-makers. The programme will also leave an enduring legacy through the adoption of new approaches to methodology and theory fostered through interdisciplinary collaboration, the development of international links and investment in new researchers.

Programme Aims and Objectives

This cross-Council programme aims to draw on the existing research base and bring researchers from the full range of arts, humanities and social sciences disciplines together in order to understand the role of religion in shaping our lives, communities and society. This programme will also aim to increase understanding amongst the wider public of these relationships, contribute to policy and practice, and engage end users through collaboration.

The programme will:

- develop the understanding of religion and society through its thematic focus;
- develop an enduring research field in terms of theories, methods, sources, materials and case studies which will enable comparative analyses of religion and society to be undertaken;
- explore new approaches for studying religion and society, including appropriate methods for the analysis of texts, narratives and non-verbal and non-textual material such as art, music, and products of popular culture;
- promote effective working between disciplines and build new connections and understandings as outcomes;
- promote effective working relations between researchers and the researched, including the development of user-led research;
- develop interdisciplinary themes and approaches that become embedded in the research agenda and resources of the arts, humanities and the social sciences;
- make a significant international impact within the field;
- facilitate exchange between researchers, and a wide range of individuals and organisations committed to understanding and promoting knowledge about religion and society, including those in government agencies, public, charitable and voluntary bodies, the creative industries, the cultural and heritage sectors (including museums and galleries);
- provide insights of practical and policy relevance;

- develop the research community by supporting new researchers and integrating them with established ones, including collaborating with researchers in organisations beyond the HE sector;
- contribute to public awareness by disseminating findings and addressing current issues of public concern through outputs directed at a wide audience (including web pages, exhibitions, performances, public lectures and broadcasts);
- promote effective use of existing data resources, and the development of long-term qualitative and quantitative resources; and,
- build capacity in quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in the study of religion and society.

Research Themes

The following themes, reaching across disciplinary boundaries, have been identified, informed by pre-programme consultations:

- Meaning, Defining and Being
- Identity, Community, Welfare and Prosperity
- Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution
- Religion, Media and the Arts
- Texts, Spaces, Rituals and Objects
- Education and Socialisation
- Law, Politics and the State

These themes are set out in the Annex to this specification with broad statements and indicative questions. Applicants will be asked to identify a maximum of two themes which will be addressed by their project. As the themes intersect, it is expected that some applicants will address issues in more than one theme and pose new questions which may arise.

Contributing disciplines and collaboration

The programme themes are intended to attract researchers across the full range of arts, humanities and social sciences. In focussing on research themes, the programme both charts common ground and breaks new ground. The use of a range of established and innovative methodologies relevant to the research questions is encouraged. The programme budget will be used to only fund projects of outstanding quality; many of these projects will intersect between the arts and humanities and social, psychological and economic sciences.

The programme will bring together grant holders to share ideas and discuss methods, and will put them in touch with others interested in their findings or in working together on future research plans. It will make links with related programmes, centres and research groups in order to seek out and develop new collaborative possibilities. Efforts will be made to connect the programme with other centres and programmes funded either wholly or partly by the ESRC and AHRC (such as 'Diasporas, Migration and Identities', 'Identities and Social Action' and 'Re-emergence of Religion as a Social Force in Europe' (of the NORFACE network), by the other Research Councils and charitable foundations. Public bodies, voluntary and community agencies, private companies, performance and visual arts practitioners, and informed individuals with an interest and stake in the research and its outcomes will be involved at both programme and, where appropriate, project and network level. The director of the programme will provide a lead in forging connections between UK-based researchers and their international counterparts. A database of researchers and others interested in the programme will be developed. They will be kept informed of progress, events, and connections to other programmes, relevant funding opportunities, and future developments. A website will be launched with regular updates.

Programme Timetable and Schemes

The development of this strategic initiative began with the deliberations of an advisory group and the production of a draft outline specification. Two consultative workshops followed over the summer of 2006.

The £8.3 million programme will run for approximately 5 and a half years from early 2007 under the oversight and management of a programme director and a steering committee. The programme will be commissioned in two phases. The first call for applications will be issued in October 2006. A further call will be issued in 2007/ 2008. All applications will be peer reviewed and specially convened panels will make the final funding decisions. In addition to specific research projects, workshops and networks, and studentships, the programme will also support networking events. A website will be developed to publicise information about these, to feature projects, make connections, and disseminate research (in the form of working papers and links to publications).

Support for research in the first phase will be provided through four schemes:

- Research Networks and Workshops (Networks up to £30k for two years full economic costs (fEC) and Workshops £15k for up to one year (fEC)

- Large research grants for up to 3 years and for between £100K and £600K fEC

- Small research grants for up to one year and for between £20K and £100K fEC

- Collaborative research studentships -3 year full-time awards

Workshop and Networks will support successful applicants to run *either* a series of workshops over one year (up to £15,000 fEC), *or* a network of researchers over two years (up to £30,000 fEC) to enable researchers to share ideas, to develop collaborative proposals or publications, and to support engagement between scholars in the UK and beyond, and between scholars and other stakeholders. It is expected that about ten grants will be awarded under this scheme in the first phase. The closing date for this call is 29th March 2007.

Small Research Grants (for between £20,000 and £100,000 fEC) will support projects from less established as well as established senior scholars, and from those wishing to undertake small scale innovative or short projects of up to one year. It is

expected that about ten of these grants in the first phase will be awarded. The closing date for this call is 29th March 2007.

Collaborative Research Studentships will encourage and develop collaboration between Higher Education Institution (HEI) departments and non-academic bodies under the Religion and Society Programme. These studentships will provide opportunities for PhD students to gain first hand experience of work outside an academic environment. It is expected that about eight grants will be awarded for 3 year, full-time awards that will commence in October 2007. The closing date for this call is 11th January 2007.

Large Research Grants (for between £100,000 and £600,000 fEC) will support about eight to nine projects under the first phase with a duration of between one and three years. Applications for three-year grants may propose a single studentship in association with the project. The competition will be conducted in two stages, an outline phase, followed by a request for full applications from short-listed candidates. The closing date for outline applications is: 11th January 2007 with the subsequent closing date for full applications 24 May 2007.

Programme planning, management and evaluation

The director of the programme is Linda Woodhead, Head of the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University, she will be supported by a steering committee comprised of academics from a range of arts and humanities and social sciences disciplines and other stakeholders. With their help and that of a part-time programme administrator the director will oversee the running of the programme, develop its coherence, ensure that it meets its objectives, contribute to its dissemination, maximise its wider impact, and report annually on its work.

The steering committee, as part of its responsibilities, will contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the programme (individual projects will also be monitored using normal AHRC processes). Its members will receive annual reports, the final programme report and will ensure that the objectives of the programme as stated in this specification are met. They will advise the director, the AHRC and ESRC on the development and management of the programme.

The programme's focus on research matters of common interest provides potential for linkage, mutual reflection on common issues or findings, and the added value that comes from separate researchers and research teams coming together to extend their thinking and ambition beyond their own project boundaries. To these ends, grant-holders will be expected to attend one or more workshops at which they will share and discuss their research, to submit annual reports which will contribute to the annual programme report and provide material as requested for the website. To ensure co-ordination within the programme, the director will support exchanges between researchers on different projects, and between networks and projects. Existing ESRC and AHRC award-holders working on relevant projects may be invited to participate in programme events and to contribute to the website during the life-time of the programme. A final programme conference is anticipated, and the programme will also feed into national and international conferences throughout its duration.

Non academics will be involved in the programme through participation in the projects supported and workshops and seminars, and representation on the programme steering committee. The involvement of non academics will be vital in terms of fully understanding and providing access to the communities and individuals involved in the research supported. They will also form an important audience for the programme outcomes in terms of translating evidence into policy recommendations.

It is through activities such as those outlined above that the coherence of the programme and its impact will be assured. In addition, monitoring and evaluating the amount, level and quality of activity (e.g. of conferences, workshops, lectures, media and electronic output, exhibitions, publications, creative work and performances, and other spin-offs and opportunities) will demonstrate the value added by the programme and its contributing projects to public knowledge, understanding of, and policy on religion and society. Moreover, it is anticipated that building of capacity in quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in the study of religion and society will contribute to the sustainability of programme activities. The legacy of the programme – the extent to which issues continue to be discussed and researched within the social sciences and arts and humanities beyond

its lifetime- will also be a mark of its success. A full evaluation of the programme will be conducted up to two years after it has concluded.

Enquiries about the scholarly content of the Religion and Society Programme, its aims and themes should be directed to Linda Woodhead at the contact address below:

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Enquiries about the application procedures, competitions and timetables, application forms and application process should be directed to one of the AHRC/ESRC officers as detailed below:

Research Awards Officers

Victoria Waite   e-mail: v.waite@ahrc.ac.uk   Tel: 0117 987 6668

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Programme themes

The Religion and Society Programme is structured around seven research themes which raise a range of research questions. Comparative historical and cultural work can play an important role in answering these research questions. Without a rich historical and cross-cultural understanding, the programme would be at risk of providing only limited insights. Sensitivity to the significance of forms of social and cultural difference, including age, gender, ethnicity, economic status, class and sexual orientation – as well as diverse forms of religious and cultural background – is equally essential to effective work in this programme.

The programme as a whole is underpinned by certain fundamental questions about the relationships between religion and society. These are:

- How might we better understand the nature of 'religion' and the role of religious traditions, communities and identities in relation to various aspects of social and cultural life?

- What intellectual, educational, and cultural traditions shape (or possibly limit) the study of religion, and how might richer and more reflexive scholarship in this area be developed?

- How might religious groups negotiate their relations with each other and the wider public sphere in late modern society?

- How can we understand the complex relationships between the religious and the secular in different social and cultural contexts?

- In what ways are religious traditions, structures, identities and practices changing, and what are the implications of this?

- How might religion play a constructive role in the welfare of societies? How can more adequate ways of understanding religion and the sacred in the various aspects of social, political and cultural life be developed?

The research themes listed below provide a framework through which these key questions will be explored.

Meaning, Defining, Being

Understanding more about the way in which social and historical contexts have shaped assumptions about the nature of religion, and its study, will form an important part of this programme. For example, British scholarship in the study of religion has been shaped by its social and political history (including its colonial history), as well as the distinctive approaches to the academic study of theology and religion which have developed in British universities. What are the implications of this historical and intellectual legacy, and how does it differ from assumptions and traditions in the study of religion in other parts of the world and in other languages? The programme will also seek to generate richer insights into how specific assumptions and uses have become attached to terms such as religion, spirituality, secular and sacred, and how these influence not only academic research but also wider public policy and debate.

Greater reflexivity about these assumptions will provide an important context for asking more general questions about the nature of religion. What do we mean by the term 'religion'? Is religion, in some form, a central part of all human societies? Are human beings innately religious, and if so, in what ways? How does religion relate to ethics, aesthetics and the generation and legitimation of certain kinds of knowledge? How do identity, belief, values, emotion and practice interact in religious life? How might we approach questions of truth and beauty in the inter-disciplinary study of religion? How can we understand the quest for spirituality both as an aspect of and also as a possible reaction to organised religions? Is it possible to have general theories of religion which have value when applied to different cultures and periods of history? If not, what alternative theoretical insights might help us to better

understand the relationships between 'religion' and society? Interdisciplinary approaches, and learning from the analysis of particular case examples of lived religion in different times and places are likely to be important in answering these questions.

Identity, Community, Welfare and Prosperity

Issues of identity, and social forms of religion, will be explored in a way that takes seriously the role of human agency in shaping religious identity and community.

The programme will examine religion as an aspect of identity. For example, what is the significance of religion in relation to other elements of human identity such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, language, cultural and national background? When do religious aspects of identity assume particular importance? How are religious identities shaped by migration or membership of diasporan communities? What are the social correlates of religious identity and group membership, such as specific attitudes, behaviours, and other indicators relating to health, education and social and economic welfare? The programme will increase knowledge of the cultural, social and economic demographics of religion, providing a basis for exploring more specific questions of religion, health and welfare.

The programme will explore religious traditions as resources for shaping identity, for example through theological, philosophical and religious ideas about the self, or various religious practices such as self-refinement or selflessness. How do different theologies and religious practices shape the way in which people think, sense, feel and act? What role do factors such as age, gender or ethnicity play in the creation of religious identities and practices? And what are the philosophical, moral and cultural sources on which people draw to develop secular or 'spiritual but not religious' identities?

Questions about religious communities and institutions will also be explored. Why do certain religious traditions and communities thrive and others decline, and how do religious groups deal with changing social conditions? The rise of spiritualities outside the context of traditional religious institutions will also be explored. The programme

will encourage the search for theoretical explanations of the changing nature of religious identities, beliefs and communities in contemporary society.

The programme will also explore a range of questions relating to welfare and prosperity in relation to religious beliefs, identities and communities. For example, when and how do particular religious groups suffer from social and economic marginalisation or benefit from prosperity and what significance does this have for these groups? How do the theologies, spaces, leadership, structures and/ or demographics of religious groups affect the development of social capital and social integration? What are religious understandings of welfare? How do religious notions of economic welfare (including justice and sustainability) influence the ways in which religious individuals and groups engage in economic behaviours or other forms of social and political activism? How do religious groups and individual religious beliefs otherwise influence health care choices, health-related behaviour, coping, and health and welfare outcomes?

Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution

Religious groups and ideas have, in different times and places, played a significant role in both violent conflict and conflict-resolution. The programme will seek to encourage innovative, inter-disciplinary research in this area which offers a more complex understanding of the relationships between religion, peace and violence.

It is important for this work to build on and extend existing knowledge. For example, what are the implications of past work on religion and prejudice, and inter-group relations, for current perspectives on religiously-legitimated violence? Can these perspectives be applied and developed? What are the social and psychological conditions, correlates and causes of prejudice and hostility? What is fundamentalism, and how is it manifested in different social and historical conditions? And what perspectives on these questions might be brought from multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural approaches?

The programme will offer a critical examination of both formal and popular theological and religious legitimisations for violence, and consider how these might

create public support for violence undertaken by both State and non-State actors, and influence political decisions about military and other interventions. It is also important to ask how religious legitimations for violence are disseminated, and under what conditions they gain wider support. Understanding more about the effects of representations of religion and violence in both the media and political discourse will also be a priority, as will examining the role of ethical models from different religious traditions (such as Just War and Holy War theories) in relation to contemporary conflicts.

Issues of peace-making will also be explored. In what ways do religious ideas and organisations contribute effectively to conflict-resolution or the use of non-violent forms of intervention in the public sphere? What role have and might religious groups play in challenging religiously-endorsed or other violence, and in promoting constructive progress?

Religion, Media and the Arts

The growing influence of a range of media in contemporary societies raises a number of questions to be addressed by the programme. The nature and effects of the representation of religion – from broadcast news to children's literature – remains a significant area of study. But the programme will also explore the ways in which religious groups use media in its widest forms (including the internet), and how this might transform religious beliefs, identities, rituals and concepts of sacred space as well as shaping religious engagements with wider society. What is the role of such media use in the globalisation of religious ideologies and identities? How are various media used by trans-national religious networks? And how do readers and audiences make use of media that address religious or spiritual issues?

A range of questions concerning religion and the arts will also be explored. Does art, or other forms of media, technology and popular culture, have a religious significance in societies in which membership of religious institutions is dwindling? What are the implications of religious beliefs and aesthetics for artistic and cultural performance? And what role might the arts and media play in the development of sacred space? The programme will also examine the recent rise of religious protests over artistic and cultural representations of religion in plays, novels, film and other

visual and performing arts. Placing these in historical context, it will explore what such conflicts might tell us about the nature of religious and secular values, censorship, freedom of speech, toleration and the place of religious tradition in contemporary society.

Texts, Spaces, Rituals and Objects

The study of religion and society inevitably involves asking questions about the social and cultural significance of sacred texts, rituals, spaces and objects. In the case of sacred texts, this will mean exploring the ways in which sacred texts, in the original and in translation, shape the lives of individuals and religious groups, and spill over into religious activity in wider society. Attention will be given to the hermeneutical approaches that are used when individuals and groups read texts which they regard as sacred. What religious and theological assumptions underpin these reading strategies? And how is the reading of sacred texts, or the content and performance of ritual, influenced by particular social, political and economic contexts? Comparing the way in which sacred texts are read at different times and places, and by different religious and scholarly traditions, will be a valuable part of this process of enquiry. The contexts in which sacred texts, rituals and music are used are also important. How does the performance of text, ritual, or music within sacred space provide a formative environment for religious belief, identity and practice? And what happens when sacred texts, objects or music are used outside of their religious groups – for example, as a focus for study in universities or as a resource for artistic and cultural work? Also it is important to explore the significance of visual, musical and material culture for religious life in different contexts. How is religion represented in various non religious art forms (including objects) and what might the wider impact be on performers and audiences?

The programme will explore the social, theological, economic and political significance of real, virtual and imagined sacred spaces. Thinking about the practical and aesthetic dimensions of sacred space is also important. For example, what makes for effective and inclusive sacred space, and how might design and architecture facilitate this? Equally, in what ways are sacred spaces designed to be exclusive or to reinforce particular social hierarchies? In secular and pluralist

societies, is it possible to have a concept of public sacred space, and if so, what forms of sacred space might be considered as acceptable and appropriate? And, how might the social and cultural contributions of the existing heritage of sacred sites be maintained and developed for the future? Attention will also be given to the significance of everyday spaces, such as the household, that might, in some contexts and cultural settings, be regarded as 'sacred' and as sites for religious and spiritual activity. The religious and spiritual significance of the natural environment also deserves attention. What functions do sacred cultural artefacts serve? And how might art and design contribute to the meaning and usefulness of such objects?

Education and Socialisation

Religion plays an important role in educational and social formation in many different historical, cultural and political contexts. The programme will therefore encourage attempts to understand the place of religion within formal and informal learning. Within this context, deeper exploration might be undertaken of the roles of mainstream and faith schooling, higher and further education, parents, peers and family, youth workers and religious leaders in affecting religious development, change and identity, spirituality, beliefs and values, and the understanding of other faiths. What pedagogical and developmental approaches are preferred, believed to be effective or ineffective, are actually used, and what outcomes do they produce? It may also be valuable to explore how particular beliefs within faith traditions shape the aims and processes of educational and social formation. For example, significant areas to consider here may include religious understandings of the nature of the person, the child, truth and knowledge, and of what constitutes an authentic representation of particular religious traditions. Learning more about the significance of religion and education in contrasting social and political contexts will also be important. For example, how can we better understand the control or suppression of religious education in particular contexts? What specific tensions arise around the place of religion in education, in societies (for example liberal and secular, or repressive and statist) that may restrict or prevent teaching about religion in schools? When education systems allow for the teaching of religion in schools, what forms of religious education are seen as acceptable in educational terms? Exploring these latter issues may focus not only the role of religion in the formal curriculum,

but on questions such as the role of public acts of worship or religious dress in schools as well.

The programme will also consider a range of questions relating to religion and professional education. It is important to develop our understanding of the processes and effects of recruiting and training for religious leadership and educational roles. How are religious professionals trained in different societies, religious traditions, and communities, and how do they engage with their own and other religious groups, and civil society? In what ways is the training of religious professionals shaped by globalisation and trans-national networks and resources? Attention will also be given to how the training of other professionals, for example in health, social care, management and education, affects their engagement with the religious and spiritual life of individuals, institutions and communities.

Law, Politics and the State

The programme will consider a range of legal, political and constitutional questions concerning religion and society. There are varying traditions and arrangements in different countries concerning the relations between religions and the state, for example concerning state-recognised religions and the forms of toleration extended to different religious traditions. What challenges do these constitutional arrangements and political settlements face in contemporary societies? How are different religious groups represented in politics and law, and what alternatives are there? How are the standing and autonomy of religious groups affected by legislative arrangements and changes that are a response to wider (e.g. security) issues? The programme will also explore the role that secular and religious ideas and values play in shaping the ways in which public institutions and religious groups negotiate their relationships with each other.

Religion continues to play a significant role in shaping political ideologies, structures, decision-making, and activism. The programme will therefore explore how politics and legislation are affected by religious beliefs and values, input from religious groups (and possible backlash opinions), faith-based NGOs, and trans-national

religious networks. How might politically-significant religious ideas, values and activities be critically appraised?

The programme will also address a range of legal questions, including how religious law is affected by changes in civil society and law, and how specific issues relating to blasphemy, freedom of speech and worship, censorship, and the co-operative functioning of religious and civil law (for example) might be managed. In relation to the latter issue, consideration may also be given to tensions between religious law and civil law, and to differing interpretations of both civil and religious law by different groups. In modern liberal societies, how are dissenting religious views accommodated especially if they pose a threat to security? How does managing such threats conflict with the liberal values (e.g. freedom to worship) at the centre of notions of democracy? How does the concept of tolerance vary and function, how are the boundaries and conflicts of loyalty between religion and state managed? As in other areas, historicised and cross-cultural treatments of these issues are likely to be of value. Attention will also be given to legislative changes affected by such issues and by changes in the religious composition of the population, by changes in such areas as: equal opportunities, pluralism, devolution, international relations and, or globalisation.