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15th April 2021

Re: Threat to jobs in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Chester

Dear Prof. Simmons, Bishop Tanner and Dr Brandreth

As the executive committee of the British Association for the Study of Religions, we write to urge you to reconsider the threat of job losses in Theology and Religious Studies, a department that is greatly valued within our subject. We recognise the pressures on the university in the current economic climate but consider this to be precisely the wrong time to diminish scholarly debate about religion and religions. The academic study of religion has a key role within higher education institutions in its critical examination of the essential role of religions in culture and society. Moreover, the study of contemporary religions in a global perspective is a vital aspect of scholarly studies informing current geo-political debates, issues of religious identity, sustainability, social justice and what it is to be human.

The Theology and Religious Studies department at the University of Chester is a vibrant and dynamic department and colleagues are at the cutting edge in terms of research in a huge diversity of areas – from Buddhism to Judaism, Christianity and Social Justice, Religion and Healthcare, to name just a few. Their work is recognised across our sector – indeed, the BASR annual conference was held at Chester in 2017, and two recent recipients of our prestigious BASR Teaching and Learning Fellowship are amongst your staff.

The accurate and informed study of religion is of necessity a multi-disciplinary enterprise and requires staff investment. TRS Chester is a strong department precisely because of its breadth and diversity. It is one of only a few departments in the UK which can claim that traditions are taught by genuine specialists and that training in all the major relevant disciplines is offered to students. Consequently, it is highly regarded in the sector. The intersection of the growing importance of understanding religion and the quality of your Theology and Religious Studies department encourage us to hope that you will find ways to support the continued work of our valued colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Bettina Schmidt, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, President of the British Association for Study of Religions

Dr Stephen Gregg, University of Wolverhampton, President-elect of the British Association for Study of Religions and current Honorary Secretary of the British Association for Study of Religions

Dr Chris Cotter, University of Edinburgh, Honorary Treasurer of the British Association for Study of Religions