

**How the Bible is Taught  
in the Common Awards Institutions**  
*An Initial Investigation*

A Report from the  
Common Awards Research Network  
Seedcorn Grant project  
November 2016

Project Leader:  
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### *(1) The Nature of the Project*

The project was convened to meet two objectives, concerning the question of how the Bible is taught in the Common Awards institutions:

- (1) to establish the current state of biblical teaching in Common Awards programmes that are training for ministry – specifically in terms of content and coverage; theological and hermeneutical aspects; and, in Church of England settings, any extent to which the context of formation for Anglican ministry shapes the biblical studies syllabus
- (2) to develop focused proposals for further research

The project was called *How the Bible is Taught in the Common Awards Institutions: An Initial Investigation*. After a delayed start it ran between April and November 2016, and consisted of two 24-hour consultations in Cranmer Hall, Durham and an initial questionnaire circulated and analysed between these two meetings.

The project was led by Richard Briggs, who gathered a team of biblical studies practitioners, representing a range of institutions (residential, course, and mixed-mode, although the mixed-mode representative was unable to attend the gatherings); male and female; Old and New Testament specialisms; and theological traditions. The project permitted valuable time in shared discussion of issues. The first meeting also produced guidelines for a questionnaire to circulate to TEI's, which was then done by researcher Ruth Perrin. The collated results were discussed at the second meeting, where questions for further research were also explored. A list of participants in the project is appended to this report (*appendix 1*).

### *(2) Headline Outcomes*

- the teaching of the Bible in the Common Awards institutions operates across a broad range of interpretative approaches, rooted in near-unanimous adoption of historical-critical and literary approaches
- coverage gravitates towards teaching major biblical books, while a significant number are not covered at all. To some extent Christian ministerial interests influence which parts of the canon are emphasised
- (where relevant) the teaching is subconsciously rather than intentionally shaped by its Anglican context
- there are strong similarities between the teaching emphases (regarding both content and method) in otherwise very different (Anglican) institutions
- there appears to be minimal awareness of cross-disciplinary relating of the use of the Bible in biblical studies to its use in other areas of the curriculum
- there is scope for considerable further research in this and related areas, both to obtain more data, and to explore possible future developments

### ***(3) Regarding Objective #1: The TEI Questionnaire and its Analysis***

#### *(i) Nature of the Questionnaire*

A simple questionnaire was devised consisting of eight questions, some with open answers and others involving selected alternatives. (A copy of the questionnaire is appended to this report as *appendix 2*.) Questions related to coverage of the Bible and interpretative approaches; Greek and Hebrew teaching; staffing specialisms; MA work; and – where relevant – relevance of Anglican context to the nature of the teaching practised.

The questionnaire aimed for an initial survey of what biblical studies representatives in institutions that run Common Awards believe is being taught. It solicited self-reported impressions, using limited categories and inviting participant judgement as to what might count as ‘major’ or ‘minor’ emphases, or ‘coverage’. The institutions were not of comparable size, and in some cases offered multiple responses pertaining to delivery of courses in different centres. Therefore no attempt is made here to suggest that percentage figures relate to proportions of people studying under Common Awards. What is in view is relative emphases in the self-reporting of *decisions made by educators* under Common Awards. Similarly, we asked for the respondent’s understanding of emphases, rather than a detailed breakdown of actual teaching, on the basis that this is more illuminating with regard to *understandings* of the nature and practice of teaching the Bible.

Despite these limitations, the response rate was extremely high. The questionnaire was circulated to relevant (i.e. biblical-studies related) representatives of 29 institutions offering Common Awards programmes, and we were pleased to receive 26 completed questionnaires. This unusually high response rate of 90%, indicates good levels of interest in the work and confidence in the value of its findings.

#### *(ii) Key Results and Analysis*

The questions produced the following data. An appendix (*appendix 3*) reproduces the data tables relating to questions 1–4, upon which these summaries are based.

##### *Q1: Biblical books taught at some level*

There was widespread reference to general survey courses, such as OT/NT intro. Only one answer mentioned books outside the Protestant canon, suggesting a notable restriction as compared to typical University undergraduate courses.

OT:

- Strong preferences for the Psalms (85%), Isaiah (62%), and Genesis (50%), usually specified as chapters 1–3 or 1–11

- Some coverage of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Job, Song of Songs, and Amos. Historical (esp. Deuteronomistic) books and prophetic books in general received limited coverage
- Almost no coverage of Leviticus–Numbers; Chronicles and associated books; or specific other prophets (except Jonah)

These figures suggest the impact of some Christian theological emphases. The prevalence of the Psalms perhaps reflects the impact of the work of Walter Brueggemann on disorientation, and the popular or accessible nature of the Psalms as texts for those unfamiliar with the OT. Given Christian interests, arguably Deuteronomy has a low representation; and given ministerial interests, it may be surprising that Daniel does not receive more coverage (e.g. regarding culture/exile).

NT:

- Unsurprisingly focused on the gospels: John (77%), Mark (65%), Luke (42%), Matthew (35%) + 'synoptics' an additional 31%
- Coverage of Paul was strongly focused around Romans (54%), 1 Corinthians (54%), and Galatians (39%). Other emphases included Revelation (46%) and Acts (31%)
- No other epistles were mentioned by more than two TEI's (except Hebrews, mentioned by 4). Many are not taught at all

With three exceptions (Romans, 1 Cor, Gal) coverage of the epistles is surprisingly low, including the pastoral epistles, with regard to (Anglican) ecclesial interests. The book of Revelation is more often selected than two of the gospels, perhaps because it affords the chance to explore interpretative approaches, or address public perceptions of the Bible.

### *Q2: Use of the Bible in Other Modules*

There was a range of positive responses regarding the use of the Bible in modules in other areas of the syllabus, including some use in preaching, mission, worship/liturgy, ethics, and apologetics. Less use was reported in discipleship, spirituality, leadership, pastoral courses, or church history. It is hard to draw specific conclusions from this data, other than to note the broad range of ways in which scripture is in view, ranging widely across diverse institutions. However, it seemed significant that biblical studies representatives answering the questionnaire often knew little about specific ways in which the Bible is used across the syllabus, suggesting a lack of intentional integration across the breadth of any given TEI. This is understandable in practical terms, but one consequence may be that the Bible is

being used in other subjects in quite different ways to those taught in biblical studies. This may contribute to a frustration, noted by some respondents, that some students subsequently report leaving behind their biblical studies training as soon as they emerge from the programme and enter ministry (a point also noted by Keith Beech-Gruneberg in his oral report on his own Common Awards Seedcorn Project, 'An assessment of the impact of biblical studies teaching in IME 1-3 on the use of the Bible by some curates in the Diocese of Oxford').

### *Q3: Approaches to Biblical Study*

Almost all institutions mentioned teaching historical-critical and literary approaches. It is worth noting that nobody selected only 'historical-critical' approaches. While such approaches are clearly key for many teachers, suggestions that they singularly dominate biblical teaching may be over-played. Why this view persists may relate to the struggles some students have with integrating such approaches with the many other approaches being taught.

Self-reporting of 'major' and 'minor' emphases is difficult to calibrate, so for initial impressions we group together here all mentions: feminist approaches (73%), theological interpretation (73%), sociological approaches (69%), liberationist approaches (58%), Jewish approaches (58%). An open response option solicited a range of answers, with ministerial focus perhaps accounting for a significant sub-grouping of narrative/canonical approaches, which with other related categories (arguably including reception history) indicate attention paid to relating courses to how students will be expected to use scripture in their future ministries.

### *Q4: Hebrew and Greek Teaching*

The quantity of Hebrew and Greek teaching is not high, but it is maintained in a number of institutions. Capacity to teach it on courses is mainly limited to non-credit-bearing options. Most residential colleges offer some language teaching. About half offer as much as 20+ credits. There may be approximately 75 people involved in taking credits in Greek or Hebrew in Common Awards programmes in any given year, with around 30 of them taking 20+ credits. This is not a high number, but indicates continued significant commitment to biblical languages.

### *Q5: Staffing for Biblical Teaching*

About 50 people were reported as primarily teaching biblical studies in CA residential TEI's, of whom about 80% are core staff, with the rest being mainly part-time or retired associate lecturers. In mixed mode TEI's, the percentage of primarily biblical studies teaching staff who are core staff is 55%. In non-residential courses, it is 30%, and the biggest category of primarily Bible-teaching staff is local clergy (45%). There is a clear distinction in these figures between different categories of TEI.

Although we asked about the relative numbers of OT and NT specialists, this proved difficult to analyse in terms of how numbers related to different categories. In all about 50 teachers were identified as being OT, and about 50 as NT, which is perhaps surprising in suggesting no relative emphasis either way. It was not possible to draw conclusions about the extent or impact of having specialist subject teachers in NT/OT terms.

*Q6: (Where relevant) Impact of Anglican Context*

This open question produced a variety of responses, and seemed to prompt reflection rather than uncover prior conscious rationales for decisions taken. There was widespread suggestion that Anglican context made little or no difference, but several factors suggest a more nuanced picture. There was considerable evidence of implicit impact of context, in terms of choices of books studied or methods prioritised. There was evidence that those operating in Anglican institutionalised contexts may not always appreciate that their decisions reflected Anglican emphases, whereas other partners reflect on the strength of Anglican influence. There was some general recognition of Anglican commitments to operate in broad contexts, open to multiple traditions, or to scripture–tradition–reason as a framework. Among the complexities of this question is the point that aspects of Anglican identity are not necessarily exclusively Anglican, and thus practitioners may not adopt teaching practices for Anglican-related reasons, even if they are entirely congenial to Anglican convictions.

*Q7: Masters-level CA teaching*

Few institutions reported CA work at Masters level. Many seem to offer MA-level courses through local university providers. There is no data of significance to report in this category, with the few answers provided indicating only a small scattering of various biblical emphases in MA teaching.

**(4) Objective #2: Questions for Further Reflection**

In response to the open final question about ideas for further research, there was a range of suggestions (19 answers), discussed further by the team in their second meeting. These included: how to balance the benefits and drawbacks of teaching at an overview level as contrasted with more in-depth specific studies; how to address the problems of de-skilling in Bible reading as reported by students; how to develop methods of assessment within Common Awards that avoid over-valuing historical-critical competence in comparison to other aspects; how to factor in to biblical teaching the questions of what teachers expect their students to do with scripture in congregations in the future; how to develop joined-up thinking across the biblical and other disciplines; how to address the perceived problem that many students

revert to pre-training models of handling scripture once in ministry; how to assess the biblical literacy of students at the beginning (and end) of their studies; and how to share good practice between institutions.

A digest of six resultant areas for further potential research projects (R1–R6) is presented here, with initial ideas about ways to approach them. These suggest research proposals, though will need developing in each case:

- (R1) What is the purpose of teaching biblical studies in TEI's? In particular this might relate to balancing emphases on preaching, leading small groups, and reflecting on scriptural significance in other areas of ministry. It could be addressed by asking about the use of the Bible in current ministry in a longitudinal study addressing those x, y, and z years beyond their training (for short-, medium- and long-term review of that training).
- (R2) How can Bible teaching inspire people to be inspiring with scripture? This responds to widespread reporting that one (if not the most) significant factor in how Bible teaching/training is received concerns the character and modelling provided by the teacher; and it also addresses concerns about deskilling. Students (past and present) could be asked 'Who were the Bible teachers who had the most impact on you and why?' and equally 'Which methods of approaching scripture have inspired you and why?'. This project could be related also to:
- (R3) What is the vocation/identity/motivation/character/calling of a Bible teacher? This might involve interviewing those who teach the Bible to ask why they do this and how they make the pedagogical choices they do.
- (R4) How can assessment in biblical studies serve the mission and ministry aims of the Common Awards programmes? Given the name of the CA programmes, this idea looks at how biblical studies teaching might best be shaped and then assessed in line with its emphases. This could involve opportunity to explore the interface between biblical studies and (potentially) related disciplines such as practical theology and theological reflection. It could include analysis of current practice and the search for new ideas.
- (R5) How should biblical studies teaching respond to current levels of biblical literacy? Such a project would involve assessing those current levels, which further involves defining them. Biblical studies teachers frequently report that classes/churches are 'not biblically literate', but what do they mean by this, and how does it make a difference to teaching? This might involve interacting with the role of scripture in spiritual life and disciplines; and as mediated by the lectionary; as well as addressing whether there was ever a time of widespread biblical literacy.

- (R6) What difference does it make (in conception and in outcome) if those teaching biblical studies have significant on-going local church involvement, as compared to those full-time occupied with their work in the TEI? Ministers involved in on-going (initial) ministerial education report that teaching by practitioners is highly valued; but how might this relate to the teaching of scripture by those employed full- or part-time in TEI's? (On this point see further the report *Vocational Pathways: Perspectives from Curacy*, by Ruth Perrin, published by the Ministry Division Archbishop's Council in April 2016 (available at [http://www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/UserFiles/File/RME/Perspectives\\_from\\_curacy.pdf](http://www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/UserFiles/File/RME/Perspectives_from_curacy.pdf)).

Several other ideas were explored by the group, in dialogue with responses to the questionnaire, but these six were the ones that came closest to offering focused ways ahead.

#### ***(5) Further Resources***

Among the resources discussed and considered by the group, relevant to this work, were the following:

Richard S. Briggs, 'New Directions in Teaching Scripture to those Training for Ministry', *Theology* 118 (2015), 250-57

Collin Cornell and Joel M. LeMon, 'How We Teach Introductory Bible Courses: A Comparative and Historical Sampling', *Teaching Theology and Religion* 19.2 (2016), 114-42

Dale Martin, *Pedagogy of the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) – a significant survey of US seminaries on similar matters

***For further discussion please contact:***

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – List of Participants in the Project

Principal Investigator:

Rev Dr Richard Briggs –Lecturer in Old Testament and Director of Biblical Studies at Cranmer Hall, Durham

Team:

Revd Dr David Bryan –Director of Studies for the Lindisfarne Regional Training Partnership

Canon Dr Christine Gore –Director for Formation of Ministry at the Diocese of Sheffield, and formerly Principal of the Yorkshire Ministry training course

Rev Dr Philip Jenson –Lecturer in Old Testament & Biblical Theology at Ridley Hall, Cambridge (1<sup>st</sup> block only)

Dr Ruth Perrin –Qualitative Researcher and Trainer, based in Durham and during the project also working for Ministry Division in the Church of England

Team member but unable to attend:

Revd Dr Mark Scarlata –Tutor in Old Testament Studies at St Mellitus , College, London

Additional dialogue partners:

Rev Dr Keith Beech-Gruneberg –Director of Local Ministry Training for the Diocese of Oxford; and then Initial Ministerial Education Pathways Adviser, Ministry Division; who also ran another Common Awards seedcorn research programme relating to the use of the Bible in ministry

Prof Mike Higton –Professor of Theology and Ministry in the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, leading the Common Awards team in Durham

Rev Prof Walter Moberly –Professor of Bible and Theology in the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University

## Appendix 2 – the Questionnaire (as circulated)

### How the Bible is Taught in the Common Awards Institutions; An Initial Investigation

- Please note we are after **HEADLINES** rather than extensive detail on your institution's Bible teaching.
- All responses will be treated as confidential; the final report will not refer to institutions by name or specific identifying features.
- Feel free to type or print and write responses. They can be returned by email to [address] or posted to: *Dr Richard Briggs [address]*

Your Name and Role:

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Name of institution:

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Residential	Other (please specify)
Part-time course	
Mixed-Mode	

Type of **IME** training offered: (Please select)

Please answer the following 8 questions. The first 5 are specifically about **undergraduate** biblical teaching in an **average year** for those **undertaking IME**.

1. What are the main biblical texts covered in your institution's teaching of:
  - Old Testament?
  - New Testament?
  - Methods & Approaches to the Bible? (E.g. contextual readings of Scripture, biblical theology, hermeneutical approaches, etc.)

2. As far as you know what other texts do students have some experience of studying and in what contexts/modules?

- Old Testament?
  
- New Testament?
  
- Methods & Approaches to the Bible?

3. Please select which of the following approaches the average student has significant exposure to during the course of their biblical studies.

Historical critical approaches	Liberationist approaches
Literary approaches	Jewish approaches
Sociological approaches	Theological Interpretative approaches
Feminist approaches	Other (please specify)

4. How many credits worth of Greek and Hebrew does your institution offer undergraduates?

0	0 but some non-validated options	10	20	More than 20
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Roughly how many students per year take these courses? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How many members of staff are primarily teaching Biblical Studies in your institution?

\_\_\_\_\_

Of those how many are:

Core staff	Local clergy
PhD students	Staff from local universities/ institutions
Other (please specify)	

How many are Old Testament specialists? \_\_\_\_\_

How many are New Testament specialists? \_\_\_\_\_

The next 2 questions refer to some specific cases that may or may not apply to you:

6. To what extent (if any) would you say that your identity as an Anglican training institution has shaped your decisions about what you teach in Biblical Studies? Brief examples may be helpful here.

7. If you offer a Common Awards accredited Master's degree what biblical texts and/or interpretative approaches form a major element of that provision? (I.e. whole (or significant parts of) modules)

Finally:

8. One of the aims of this short project is to develop ideas for further research into the teaching of biblical studies within the CA institutions. What would you be interested in seeing explored?

Any Other Comments you wish to make:

## Appendix 3 – Data for the responses to Qns 1–4

# Findings from 26 CA Institutions

1. **Biblical books cited as being taught at some level.** It is not possible to distinguish major texts from minor ones and most of those responding were not fully aware of how the Bible was being used in other modules.

Genesis	13
Exodus	8
Leviticus	1
Numbers	0
Deuteronomy	6
<i>Pentateuch</i>	5
Joshua	3
Judges	3
Ruth	5
1 & 2 Samuel	5
1 & 2 Kings	5
1 & 2 Chron	1
<i>'Deutr History'</i>	5
Ezra	0
Nehemiah	1
Esther	1
Job	7
Psalms	22
Proverbs	4
Ecclesiastes	2
Song of Songs	6
Isaiah	16
Jeremiah	3
Lamentations	2
Ezekiel	3
Daniel	2
Hosea	2
Joel	1
Amos	7
Obadiah	0
Jonah	5
Micah	1
Nahum	0
Habakkuk	2
<i>'Pre-exilic pro'</i>	6
Zephaniah	0
Haggai	0
Zechariah	1
Malachi	0
<i>'Post-exilic pro'</i>	1

<i>'Synoptics'</i>	8
Matthew	9
Mark	17
Luke	11
John	20
Acts	8
<i>Paul</i>	8
Romans	14
1 Corinthians	14
2 Corinthians	2
Galatians	10
Ephesians	0
Philippians	2
Colossians	0
1 Thess	1
2 Thess	0
1 Timothy	2
2 Timothy	0
Titus	0
Philemon	0
<i>'Pastoral epist'</i>	1
Hebrews	4
James	1
1 Peter	1
2 Peter	0
1 John	2
2 John	0
3 John	0
Jude	0
Revelation	12

*Almost all do 'Introduction to OT' & 'Intro to NT' in varying forms*

*Genesis is usually cited as chapters 1–3 or 1–11 rather than the whole book.*

*Tracing themes e.g. 'Covenant in Bible Overview' occurs regularly.*

Wisdom of Solomon -1

Ecclesiasticus – 1

Apocrypha/  
Pseudepigrapha – 1

## 2. Bible use in other modules – as reported.

(NB Several stated they were unsure how colleagues used Scripture in their teaching or what books were covered)

Christian discipleship/ formation	3	Sermon on Mt/ 1 Cor 12/ Passion narratives
Preaching	8	Servant songs
Theological reflection/ Practical theology	6	Rev 2–3
Mission & Evangelism	5	Acts ii / (2 & 17 & trials of Paul)/ God's mission for Israel/ Sending of disciples/ Gospels & Paul
Worship/ Liturgy & Sacraments	7/ 4	Psalms OT & NT worship
Spirituality/ Multi-faith awareness	3/ 2	Scripture in prayer Prodigal son
Ethics / Theology & Gender/ Faith & environment	5/ 1/1	Homosexuality ii/ Wealth/ Divorce / Pastoral epistles Texts of Terror/ Genesis
Apologetics & Doctrine/ Systematics	10/ 1	Creation/ Atonement texts ii/ Trinity ii Christology ii/ Theology of Scripture Genesis 1
Leadership/ Pastoral Care	3/2	Nehemiah
Hebrew	2	Jonah ii/ 2 Sam 9-12
Greek	2	John ii
Church History	1	

## 3. Approaches to Biblical Study – as reported.

	Yes	minor	
Historical Critical	iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii	I	24/1
Literary	iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii	i	24/1
Sociological	iiiiiii ii	iiiiii	12/6
Feminist	iiiiiiiiiiiiii	iiiiii	14/5
Liberationist	iiiiiii iii	ii	13/2
Jewish	iiiiiii	iiiiii	9/6
Theo Interpretative	iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii		19
Other	Multiple, including approximate groupings of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 - Narrative</li> <li>• 4 - Canonical</li> <li>• 3 - Reception history</li> <li>• 3 - Christ in OT</li> <li>• 3 - Ricoeur (behind/within/before)</li> <li>• 3 - Meditative</li> </ul> At least another 10 categories x 1 or 2		

## 4. Hebrew and Greek teaching credits.

	0 teaching	Non-Validated	10 credits	20+ credits
Residential	1	4	3	6
Mixed mode		2	1	1
Courses	9	2		