

# **INTEGRATING ISLAM**

**Executive Summary of a report on the teaching of Islam  
within theological colleges in the British Isles**

by

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for

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## Executive Summary

- In 1989 Colin Chapman proposed that all Christian theological students should be required to study Islam and that colleges should “find ways of allowing Islam to impinge on almost every discipline of theology” (Chapman, 1989). More recently Ida Glaser has suggested that what is needed is “theological education with Islam in mind” (Glaser, 2010). This report seeks to discover what progress has been made towards these objectives.
- 46 theological institutions in the British Isles were included in the study from a wide range of mainly Protestant institutions across the theological spectrum. Data was collected by survey, interviews and published sources.

### The teaching of Islam

- The great majority of respondents to the survey feel that it is *very* important for theological colleges to provide teaching about Islam. No-one disagrees. The majority, however, also say that theological colleges should pay *more* attention to the teaching of Islam than they do.
- 23 institutions offer a total of 32 modules specifically on Islam, mainly at Level 6. At least 33 institutions in total include some general teaching about Islam. 36 modules include Islam in a general way in addition to 25 ‘interfaith’ modules.
- The great majority of these modules are accredited by external universities and almost all institutions report that they have reviewed the teaching of Islam within the last 5 years. This suggests that the teaching of Islam in theological colleges is conducted in a thoroughly professional manner at a good academic level.
- Despite such provision, nine institutions reported that it is still possible for a student to graduate having received no teaching on Islam whatsoever.
- It is also clear that an awareness of Islam is still not well integrated across the curriculum. A majority of teachers and deans report either that teachers are *not* encouraged to integrate Islam into their teaching or that they did not know whether they are. This suggests that the integration of Islam into the curriculum is not a commonly discussed issue in these institutions.

### Challenges facing the teaching of Islam

- The greatest challenge to such integration, and indeed the greatest obstacle to including any specialist teaching of Islam and other faiths, is overwhelmingly reported to be the existing pressure on overcrowded curricula. There is felt to be already too much to teach in the time available.
- Financial pressure and the related issue of small faculty size are other reasons why colleges do not employ specialist Islamicists. Finance has also contributed to the cutting of some external programmes and even mosque visits.

### Students and teachers

- Most students at British theological institutions are training for church-based, pastoral ministry in Britain. Over half of institutions reported that at least some of their students were preparing to work in specifically Muslim contexts, although surprisingly 10 institutions did *not* expect the majority of their students to have contact with Muslims in the future.

- The majority of respondents feel that Islam should be taught by a specialist. However, most of the specialist teachers do not have full-time posts in theological colleges and are employed only part-time or as occasional lecturers.
- Teachers of Islam in British theological colleges are overwhelmingly white males over the age of 40. There is a dearth of female teachers and particularly teachers from other ethnic backgrounds.
- Many of the teachers have experience of living in Muslim contexts overseas, a few in South Asia which is of particular relevance to the British context. A similar number live and work in multi-ethnic areas of Britain, sometimes after returning from overseas.
- A minority of respondents feel that Islam should be taught to Christian theological students by a Muslim and are uneasy about Christians teaching Islam.

### **Methodology and approaches**

- There is considerable variation in the pedagogical approaches adopted. Most teachers today are moving away from the didactic mode of presenting students with facts about Islam and are adopting both more reflexive approaches and an emphasis on equipping graduates to become ongoing students of Islam after the formal training ends.
- Teachers report using a variety of approaches including faith-sensitive, critical, comparative and missiological approaches. The Evangelical and Pentecostal colleges are in general more evangelistic whilst others favour a more faith-sensitive approach.
- Encounter is clearly believed to be an important part of theological education. The majority of institutions invite an occasional Muslim speaker, arrange a visit to a mosque or in some other way facilitate interaction with Muslims.
- Several respondents reported difficulty finding a Muslim speaker with the ability to address a Christian academic audience. They also reported a lack of female Muslim speakers and speakers from a conservative background who might be more typical of some segments of the Muslim communities than the progressive Muslims who are often willing to speak to Christian audiences.
- Outsourcing is a solution for some institutions which take advantage of specialist centres and courses such as those at Bradford and Leicester. These provide an opportunity for a residential experience in a multi-ethnic or Muslim context alongside excellent specialist teaching and exposure to Muslim speakers.
- ‘Themed weeks’ are increasingly popular although some feel that intensive courses are difficult to timetable in a traditional curriculum. ‘On-the-job training’ is also on the increase although outside the remit of this study.

### **Attitudes and motivation**

- Respondents were almost unanimous in eschewing polemics. Dialogue, evangelism and apologetics are the main priorities for most colleges with the greatest strength of feeling only slightly favouring dialogue.
- This was underlined by an almost unanimous response that Muslims do “need to hear the Gospel” and only a few are preparing their students to take part in “shared multifaith worship”.
- Despite the majority of respondents seeing Islam as a challenge to the church in this country, most do not think that Britain will become a Muslim country in the near future, and almost all see the Muslim presence as a positive opportunity for the church.