



Advancing teaching, learning and research in practical theology

Professor Eunice Simmons, Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Chester,  
Parkgate Road,  
CHESTER,  
CH1 4BJ.

20 April 2021

Dear Professor Simmons,

I am writing to you as Chair of the British and Irish Association of Practical Theology, on behalf of the BIAPT Committee and our membership (which consists of over 400 academics and practitioners, mainly in the UK and Ireland but extending to other parts of the world as well) to express our extreme concern about the threatened cuts to staffing in the Theology and Religious Studies department at the University of Chester through a process of compulsory redundancy. .

The University of Chester's department of Theology and Religious Studies enjoys an international reputation in teaching and research across the full range of TRS but, in particular, has a reputation as a major provider of world class provision in practical and public theology. We are dismayed that, under the pressure of the threatened cuts and in order to reduce the impact on other colleagues, Professor Elaine Graham has seen fit to accept voluntary severance from her post as Grosvenor Research Professor of Practical Theology. Professor Graham is one of the world's leading public and practical theologians who enjoys an international reputation for the high quality of her research, publications, teaching and service to both church and academia. She was one of the founding members of BIAPT in 1994 and its first Chair, and she is currently a member of our Committee. She was also President of the International Academy of Practical Theology from 2005 – 2007, and is a member of the sub-panel for Theology and Religious Studies for REF2021.

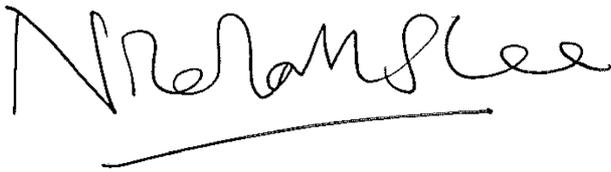
Professor Graham has worked tirelessly throughout her distinguished career to advance public and practical theology and, in particular over recent years, she is one of a number of British practical theologians who has been instrumental in developing the pioneering and innovative – and highly successful – Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology. This doctoral programme is equipping a whole new generation of professionals in healthcare, social services, education, media, religious leadership, as well as many other contexts, to operate at the highest level of academic and religious literacy and therefore to make a contribution to public culture, awareness and debate more broadly. Any further reduction of staffing in TRS at Chester will not only threaten this, and other programmes offered by the University of Chester, but it will have a detrimental impact on the professional doctorate in the UK more widely, where Professor Graham has played such an important leadership role.

My colleagues on the BIAPT Committee join me in expressing our deep concern for colleagues and students at Chester whom we count as good colleagues and friends. We urge you to reconsider the intended cuts and to find more creative ways to support the outstanding work of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies which continues to make a huge contribution to local, national and international faith communities and

academic excellence in theology, most particularly in practical theology. At the same time, safeguarding the work of Theology and Religious Studies will also honour the historic tradition of the Cathedral Universities which has played such a vital role in providing world class opportunities for theological study and fostering leading research and teaching informed broadly by the churches' vision of human community and the significance of education within such a vision.

I trust you will give due consideration to our expressed concern.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nicola Slee". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Professor Nicola Slee  
Chair of BIAPT  
Director of Research, Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education,  
Birmingham  
Professor of Feminist Practical Theology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam  
Visiting Professor, University of Chester