

UNITWIN UNESCO Chairs Programme

UNESCO Chair Annual Progress Report

UNESCO Chair:	Interfaith Studies
Institution:	University of Birmingham Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, United Kingdom www.bham.ac.uk/
Date Chair Established: (mm, yyyy)	1999
Period of Activity Under Report: (mm, yyyy - mm, yyyy)	1 st August 2008 – 31 st July 2009
Report Established By: (name, position)	Professor Jonathan Webber: UNESCO Chair-holder Email: J.Webber@bham.ac.uk ; Tel: +44 (0) 121 41 58375 www.ptr.bham.ac.uk/staff/webber.shtml ; http://www.unesco.org.uk/Birmingham_Chair.htm

1. Executive Summary:

*Major outcomes, results and impact of the Chair in relation to its objectives as stated in Article 2 of the Chair Agreement (between the Institution and UNESCO)
(Not exceeding 500 words)*

The academic study of religion is an interdisciplinary area, extending far beyond the confines of 'theology' in the narrow sense. It embraces the social sciences, politics, development studies, cultural studies, gender studies, international relations, history, and law—among many others. The UNESCO Chair in Interfaith Studies at the University of Birmingham, quite appropriately therefore, consists of a multidisciplinary group of specialists working both in the context of their own particular disciplines as well as in joint teaching and research projects with specific interfaith objectives—the better understanding of other faiths and of the relations between them, especially their interdependence. The Chair provides an important resource for interfaith education, nowadays considered a high priority both in the UK and internationally; its emphasis lies in a fairly even spread between research, teaching, and policy, with a special interest in international networking and exchange of expertise, as per its objectives stated in the Chair Agreement.

The five scholars who constitute the Chair are all highly respected individuals, well known nationally and internationally for their contributions to the field. During this reporting period Dr J. Boehle, who is deeply involved in the proactive work of the United Nations to foster intercultural and inter-religious understanding and cooperation, took part in a number of important meetings and international conferences. Dr D. Cheetham is a founding member and Secretary of a key professional association, the European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies, as well as being co-editor for *Studies in Inter-religious Dialogue* (Peeters) and *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (Taylor & Francis). This year Prof. M. Stringer has held two major administrative posts at the University of Birmingham: from August 2008 to April 2009 he was Head of School for the School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion; and in April 2009 he was appointed Director of Education of the College of Arts and Law. In addition to several major research projects Prof. D. Thomas continued as senior editor of the quarterly peer-reviewed journal *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (see <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09596410.asp>), a field in which the University of Birmingham is widely considered a world leader. The work of the Chairholder (Prof. J. Webber) in the field of Polish–Jewish relations was acknowledged this year by his being awarded the highest Honour Medal of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland for services to Polish culture. All five members of the Chair, each in their own way, thus continue to be involved in high-level interfaith work and are routinely involved as advisers and consultants, and as speakers at international seminars.

Good progress was also made this year with the Chair's objective to set up a UNESCO Museum of World Religions in Birmingham. This is a long-term project, probably for 5-7 years, but important steps were made towards achieving the establishing of a world-class institution.

2) **Activities:**

Overview of activities undertaken by the Chair in the reporting period

a) Education/Training/Research

(key education programmes and training delivered and research undertaken by the Chair in the reporting period)

i) Education	<p>The following full-length modules were taught by members of the Chair:</p> <p>(a) at undergraduate level: Christian Theology and Other Religions; History of Christian–Muslim Relations; Introduction to Buddhism; Introduction to Jewish Religion and Culture; Introduction to the Study of Religion; The Study of Liturgy.</p> <p>(b) at graduate level: Ethnographic Methods in the Study of Religion; History of Christian–Muslim Relations; Islamic Philosophy; Problems of Religious Diversity; Research Methods in Theology and the Study of Religion: Interdisciplinary Approaches and Objectives.</p>
ii) Training	n/a
iii) Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “Faith Communities and International Institutions”, a research project of Dr J. Boehle focusing on the Millennium Development Goals for a major DFID-sponsored Religions and Development research programme based at the University of Birmingham- “Ways of Meeting and the Theology of Religions”, a research project of Dr D. Cheetham (for a book, under contract).- “Rethinking the Origins of the Eucharist”, a research project of Prof. M. Stringer (for a book, under contract), on which he gave a lecture at the University of Utrecht as a guest of the Instituut voor Liturgische en Rituele Studies (20 March 2008).- “The Bibliographical History of Christian-Muslim Relations”, an AHRC-funded project that aims to compile a bibliographical history of the works written by Christians and Muslims against and about one another from the start of Islam in the seventh century to the establishment of Ottoman rule in the fifteenth century. Under the leadership of Prof. D. Thomas, the project is headed by an international team of six scholars, who commission entries and monitor submissions. Volume 1, covering the period 600-900, will be published in October 2009.- “The Encyclopaedia of the Bible and its Reception”, a project sponsored by Walter de Gruyter Verlag, Berlin, that traces the ‘reception’ and development of biblical themes and figures in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, literature, music, art, theatre and film. It is led by an international editorial board of 24, of which Prof. D. Thomas is Islam editor, and will compile a major thirty-volume work over twelve years (see http://www.degruyter.de/rs/5753_8634_ENU_h.htm). Vols 1 and 2, covering A–An, were published in summer 2009.- “The History of Christian–Muslim Relations”, a series of texts and translations, monograph studies and collected papers, published by E. J. Brill, Leiden, that seeks to make accessible the recorded history of relations between followers of the two faiths. Prof. D. Thomas heads a panel of four academic editors (see http://www.brill.nl/m_catalogue_sub6_id10817.htm). So far, ten volumes have been published.- “Traces of Memory: The Surviving Post-Holocaust Jewish Heritage in Southern Poland”, a research project of the Chairholder for a book (under contract) but linked also (a) to policy work of the Polish government regarding Polish–Jewish and Polish–Israeli relations, including museological policy at the Auschwitz site through personal membership of three of its advisory boards; and (b) to the activities and strategy of the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, through personal curatorship of its permanent exhibition (a detailed catalogue of

which he published this year), chairmanship of the board, and through giving training sessions for its staff.

b) Conferences/Meeting

(key conferences and meetings organised by the Chair or to which its Chairholder contributed)

(i) Key conferences/meetings:

- Launch of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission's "Faith and Civil Society" Network (held at Birkbeck College, London), where the UNESCO Chair was represented by Dr J. Boehle, who gave a presentation about his research (17 January 2009).
- Second International Conference on "Integrating Spirituality and Organisational Leadership" (held in Pondicherry, India), where the UNESCO Chair was represented by Dr J. Boehle, who (at the invitation of the Faculty of Management Studies, University of Delhi) was a lead speaker (February 2009).
- Launch of the UN Alliance of Civilizations Research Network (in the context of the Second Alliance of Civilizations Forum), held in Istanbul, Turkey, where the UNESCO Chair was represented by Dr J. Boehle (at the invitation of the Government of Turkey) (6 April 2009).
- Annual meeting of the UNESCO Chairs of the UNITWIN Network of Interreligious Dialogue for Intercultural Understanding (held at the University of Oregon, USA), where the UNESCO Chair was represented by Dr J. Boehle (8–11 May 2009).
- Annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (Chicago, 1–4 November 2008), where Prof. D. Thomas, a member of the UNESCO Chair, presented his work.
- Annual meeting of the UK UNESCO Chairs Group (Belfast, 22–3 January 2009), where the UNESCO Chair was represented by the Chairholder.
- Project meetings towards the establishment of a UNESCO Museum of World Religions, Birmingham: (a) a formal consultation, led by the Chairholder, with the leadership group of Birmingham's faith communities (6 May 2009), and (b) a formal presentation of the Museum of World Religions, Taipei, by its founder Dharma Master Hsin Tao at a meeting in Birmingham organised by the Chairholder together with Dr J. Boehle and the project's international Working Group held in the Sikh Gurdwara of Soho Road, Birmingham, followed by a formal luncheon with the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, together with the leader of the City Council (10 July 2009).

(ii) Additional conferences/meetings to which Chairholder contributed:

- "Forty Years On: The March 1968 'Anti-Zionist' Campaign and its Significance for Polish–Jewish Relations", an international conference coordinated and chaired by the Chairholder (Polish Embassy, London, 27 November 2008)
- Meetings of the International Auschwitz Council (Auschwitz State Museum, 15–16 June 2009) and of the International Consultation Group to oversee the complete revamp of the permanent exhibition at the Museum (Auschwitz State Museum, 6 October 2008).
- After several planning trips to Poland, the Chairholder completed a complex three-year project to fundraise, plan, and coordinate the restoration of the Jewish cemetery in the small town of Brzostek in southern Poland, erect a commemorative plaque in the main square in memory of the Jews of the town, compose and host an interfaith consecration ceremony, and award the first of ten annual scholarships in Jewish studies and Polish–Jewish relations to the local school (June 2009).

c) Interuniversity Exchanges/Partnerships

(principal exchanges/partnerships between the Chair and other institutions)

- "Religious and Interfaith Literacy Leadership Project": a radical and innovative policy-oriented partnership project approved for funding (£250k) in March 2009 from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). This is an 18-month inter-university, multidisciplinary partnership (to begin in September 2009) that will provide a two-tiered leadership development programme for Higher Education leaders and managers. Its primary aim is to facilitate a cultural change in HEIs that will enable them to play a leading role in society with regard to matters of religion and belief, including the goal of empowering HEI leaders to develop strategies to ensure that appropriate provision is made for the needs of staff and students from different religious backgrounds and that good campus relations are fostered through improved engagement with, and between, different faiths. The partners leading the project are the University of Birmingham (where the Chair is represented by Prof. M. Stringer); Bradford University; Cambridge University's Inter Faith Programme; Newman University College; Surrey University; Warwick University; University College London; and York St John University.

d) Publications/Multimedia Materials

(major publications and teaching/learning materials)

tick relevant fields of output and indicate volume of output:

	[tick]	[no.]
Books	✓	2
Books (edited)		
Books (chapters)	✓	10
Monographs		
Research Reports		
Journal Articles (refereed)	✓	3
Conference Proceedings & Occasional Papers		
Teaching/Learning Materials		
Multimedia Materials (CD-Rom)		
Multimedia Materials (Video)		
Multimedia Materials (Other)		

Give details of major publications and materials including full citations.

- Cheetham, David, 'Aesthetics and the Meeting of Religions' [translated into Chinese], *Bulletin of Theology and Aesthetics* (University of Xiangfan, China, 2008).
- Cheetham, David, 'Theology of Religions', in B.A. Gerrish and D. DeVries (eds.), *New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (2008).
- Cheetham, David, 'Pluralism', in B.A. Gerrish and D. DeVries (eds.), *New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (2008).
- Cheetham, David, 'Exclusivism' in B.A. Gerrish and D. DeVries (eds.), *New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (2008).
- Cheetham, David, 'Inclusivism', in B.A. Gerrish and D. DeVries (eds.), *New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (2008).
- Cheetham, David, 'Contextual Theology', in *Encyclopedia of Christian Civilisation* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2008).
- Cheetham, David, 'Comparative Theology', *Encyclopedia of Christian Civilisation* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2008).
- Stringer, Martin, 'Harvey Whitehouse, Memory and Liturgical Formation', *Anaphora: The Journal of the Society for Liturgical Study*, 2: 2 (2008), pp. 45–60.
- Stringer, Martin, 'Discourses, Institutions and Populations, Religion in an Urban Ecology.' *CrossCurrents*, 58: 3 (2008), pp. 495–510.
- Thomas, David, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 10)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 392 pp.
- Thomas, David, 'Abu Ḥāfa al-Warraḡ', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam 3* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).
- Webber, Jonathan, 'Responsibility', in Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Krystyna Oleksy (eds.), *Pamięć, świadomość, odpowiedzialność: Międzynarodowa konferencja z okazji 60. rocznicy utworzenia muzeum, Oświęcim, 2–4 lipca 2007 roku / Remembrance, Awareness, Responsibility: International Conference on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Museum's Founding, Oświęcim, July 2–4, 2007* (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2008), pp. 103–7, 306–9.
- Webber, Jonathan, 'Introduction', in Adam Bartosz, Natalia Garncarz, and Janusz Koziół (eds.), *Cmentarz Żydowski w Brzostku* (Tarnów: Muzeum Okręgowe w Tarnowie, 2009); pp. 11–14. Also in Polish (transl. Aneta Kwaśniak), *ibid.*, pp. 5–8.
- Webber, Jonathan, *Rediscovering Traces of Memory: The Jewish Heritage of Polish Galicia* (with photographs by Chris Schwarz), (Oxford and Bloomington: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization and Indiana University Press, 2009); 185pp.
- Webber, Jonathan, 'Auschwitz: Whose History, Whose Memory' in Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs (ed.), *The Holocaust: Voices of Scholars* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University, 2009), pp.135–47.

e) Other
(any other activities to report)

n/a

3. Available Resources

Overview of resources placed at the disposal of the Chair in the reporting period

a) Human Resources

The Chair consists of five full-time members of academic staff: the Chairholder (full professor) together with a Coordinator (Research Fellow), and three other members, two of whom are full professors and one a Senior Lecturer. The Chair is located within the School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion of the University of Birmingham and as such has access to the administrative staff of the School, but it has no dedicated administrative or secretarial staff nor any other human resources (e.g. students or consultants) working exclusively for the Chair as such. However, the editorial staff of the journal *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, which is headed by Prof. D. Thomas as Senior Editor and includes a team of two Associate Editors and two Book Review Editors, does have a paid editorial assistant. In addition, the day-to-day work of Prof. Thomas's AHRC-funded research project "The Bibliographical History of Christian-Muslim Relations" is overseen by a salaried Research Officer.

b) Other Resources

tick sources of financial contribution

	[tick]
Host Institution	<input type="checkbox"/>
Partner Institution	<input type="checkbox"/>
Government Body	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Public Institution/Body (incl. Research Councils)	<input type="checkbox"/>
UNESCO	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other UN Agency	<input type="checkbox"/>
IGO	<input type="checkbox"/>
NGO	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industry	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Private	<input type="checkbox"/>

Give details of financial contributions, material resources and space.

The Chair does not benefit from any other resources or financial contributions, except for normal support from the host institution for minor research expenses and facilitating attendance at conferences, and except for several project-specific grants (noted under 2a (iii) above).

4. Future Plans and Development Prospects:

Outline of action plan for the next biennium. And short/medium and long term development prospects. Please feel free to refer to difficulties that the Chair has experienced (Not exceeding 500 words)

Three main points:

(i) As noted in #2 above, members of the Chair have significant ongoing, long-term involvements in a fairly wide range of activities, including major research projects – many of them of quite high profile internationally -- relevant to the work of scholars in Interfaith Studies. These activities are expected to continue and expand, especially given the public importance, both in the UK and internationally, attached to the whole area of interfaith relations, which is clearly an expanding field of activity in the last few years. For example, the Chair is involved (through Prof. M. Stringer) in a significant inter-university, multidisciplinary partnership (to begin in September 2009), funded by HEFCE, that will provide a leadership development programme for Higher Education leaders and managers intended to facilitate a cultural change in HEIs that will enable them to play a leading role in society with regard to matters of religion and belief. The University of Birmingham as the host institution has shown itself fully supportive of these activities (including the long-term Museum of World Religions project), and this support is expected to continue—the Director of Education of the College in which the Chair is located is himself a member of the Chair (Prof. M. Stringer). He has also obtained funding for an additional project enabling him to employ a Research Fellow in Urban Theology. Other members of the Chair have also been active in developing new inter-university partnerships with a view to putting in an application for a major grant: for example, Dr D. Cheetham has been collaborating with colleagues in Oxford and in Holland and India in preparing an application which would support the investigation of the role of the arts in inter-religious and intercultural encounter. The teaching of Interfaith Studies is also expanding—for example, Dr J. Boehle is currently developing a MA module on Religion and Peacebuilding. In all these ways the outlook does look very promising for good work to be continued through the members of the Chair.

(ii) As noted in last year's report, a Centre for the Study of Inter-religious Relations was formally established as one of the School's four Research Centres. The purpose of the Centre is to integrate and strengthen the expertise that exists within the School into one coherent research and teaching initiative. It includes all the members of the UNESCO Chair as well as a number of colleagues who are not yet members of the Chair. The UNESCO Chairholder has recently been appointed director of this Centre, with Dr J. Boehle (also a member of the Chair, and Postgraduate Programme Leader in Inter-religious Relations) as deputy director. The founding of this Centre is a promising new development and offers the Chair an increased scope and wider immediate network in which to function, reflecting increasing interest in the field of interfaith studies and encouraging good development prospects, although obviously the intellectual and administrative relationship between the Chair and the Centre needs creative management.

(iii) UNESCO Museum of World Religions: this is the main project of the Chair. The initial phase (obtaining outline endorsements from its main institutional partners) was completed last year; during the current biennium the Chair's energies are going into the research and development phase.