



People training for the priesthood in the Church of England are to be
relationship between science and faith.

Theological colleges and courses will be encouraged to bid for funds to help integrate discussion on science-related subjects into existing theological studies in the latest phase of the *Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science* (ECLAS) project.

Organisers hope that up to half of all people training for ordained ministry will eventually benefit from sessions where they have an opportunity to discuss topics such as Artificial Intelligence and the questions it raises for society among other themes. This will be funded by the project, run by the Universities of Durham and York in partnership with the Church of England.

Under the plans, the project will also provide more conferences for senior church leaders and clergy on areas of scientific interest. This follows eight conferences for church leaders on subjects ranging from neuroscience to cosmology that have taken place over the past four years.

There will also be an expansion of the *Scientists in Congregations* scheme, awarding grants for local science and faith projects in churches and cathedrals including science festivals. The scheme will include a new emphasis on working with cathedrals and larger parish churches to pioneer projects that can be replicated by other churches

The funding will further build on policy advice and communication on science within the Church of England. There will also be research exploring attitudes to science and faith within the church and in wider society and public policy.

The planned work will be supported by both US and UK-based scientists and will be funded from a £3.4 million grant awarded by the Templeton Religion Trust.

The project will be led by Revd Professor David Wilkinson, Professor of Theology and Principal of St John's College, Durham University, and Professor Tom McLeish, of the University of York, along with the Bishop of Kingston, Richard Cheetham and Revd Dr Kathryn Pritchard, Project Director, in the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Division. They will be supported by Dr Amanda Rees (York University) and Revd Dr Malcolm Brown (Head of Mission and Public Affairs, Church of England).

The Bishop of Kingston, Richard Cheetham, said: "This project has transformative potential. I can see it contributing to the shaping of a future generation of church leaders who enjoy science and are unafraid of complexity, fully prepared to engage in conversation with the pressing questions raised by cutting edge research."

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby said: “I am delighted that this project is continuing to build on its considerable achievement in promoting the significance of healthy and informed engagement with science to church leaders of all levels, together with resourcing them in this increasingly demanding and important task.

“This new stage of the project with its combination of research and provision of resources will further deepen church-wide understanding of the challenges science and technology pose for society, and continue to contribute to the mission, ministry and theological reflection of senior church leaders as they respond.”

Professor Tom McLeish, Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of York, said: “This major grant will assist in realising and deepening the re-discovery that the Church and science are natural partners, as has been the case throughout most of their history.

“Bringing theology, science and engagement with the community together is the powerful combination of ECLAS.”

Professor David Wilkinson said: “The size of this project shows great confidence in the fruitfulness of the ECLAS approach and also great confidence in St John’s College and the international status of Durham University.”

Revd Dr Kathryn Pritchard said: “This is an ambitious, timely, and necessary project. We are looking forward to what emerges from this rich combination of research and educational initiatives. In some important areas, the public science-faith conversation seems to be undergoing a shift - we want to understand precisely how and why this is happening.”

Revd Dr Malcolm Brown, Director of the Mission and Public Affairs Division of the Church of England, said: “It is marvellous to know that the strong partnership between Durham and York Universities and the Mission and Public Affairs team in the Church of England is set to continue and grow. The nature of the encounter between religion and science is changing rapidly, as our work with ECLAS on Artificial Intelligence is showing.”

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Note to editors

Following a two-year pilot project funded by John Templeton Foundation, Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science was launched in 2015 with funding from the Templeton World Charity Foundation. A further grant awarded in 2019 by Allchurches Trust allowed the project to be extended. This major new three-year project will be funded by Templeton Religion Trust.

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