



Department
for Education

Religious studies

AS and A level subject content

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The content for religious studies AS and A level

Introduction

1. AS and A level subject content sets out the knowledge and understanding common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject.
2. It provides the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.

Aims and objectives

3. AS and A level specifications in religious studies must encourage students to:
 - develop their interest in a rigorous study of religion and belief and relate it to the wider world
 - develop knowledge and understanding appropriate to a specialist study of religion
 - develop an understanding and appreciation of religious thought and its contribution to individuals, communities and societies
 - adopt an enquiring, critical and reflective approach to the study of religion
 - reflect on and develop their own values, opinions and attitudes in the light of their study

Subject content

4. This section sets out the minimum range of content for AS and A level specifications in religious studies.
5. AS and A level specifications in religious studies should build on the requirements for religious studies in earlier key stages including the knowledge and understanding established at key stage 4 and GCSE qualifications.
6. Where different knowledge, understanding and/or skills are required to ensure students studying at A level go into greater depth and/or breadth than AS, this is specified.
7. Where the focus of this area of study is a particular group or denomination within a religion rather than the religion more generally, specifications must place this study in the context of the broader religious tradition to which it belongs.
8. Awarding organisations can develop, combine or cross reference the required content in any way appropriate to the specification, as long as the overall criteria are met.

Knowledge and understanding

9. Religious studies specifications at AS and A level must require students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills through three of the following four approaches that must require an equal amount of teaching, learning and assessment:

Systematic study of one religion

10. At AS and A level this includes the study of:

- religious beliefs, values and teachings, in their interconnections and as they vary historically and in the contemporary world, including those linked to the nature and existence of God, gods or ultimate reality, the role of the community of believers, key moral principles, beliefs about the self, death and afterlife, beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life
- sources of wisdom and authority including, where appropriate, scripture and/or sacred texts and how they are used and treated, key religious figures and/or teachers and their teachings
- practices that shape and express religious identity, including the diversity of practice within a tradition

11. In addition at A level this includes the study of:

- significant social and historical developments in theology or religious thought including the challenges of secularisation, science, responses to pluralism and diversity within traditions, migration, the changing roles of men and women, feminist and liberationist approaches
- a comparison of the significant ideas presented in works of at least two key scholars selected from the field of religion and belief
- two themes related to the relationship between religion and society, for example: the relationship between religious and other forms of identity; religion, equality and discrimination; religious freedom; the political and social influence of religious institutions; religious tolerance, respect and recognition and the ways that religious traditions view other religions and non-religious worldviews and their truth claims
- how developments in beliefs and practices have, over time, influenced and been influenced by developments in philosophical, ethical, studies of religion and/or by textual interpretation

Philosophy of religion

12. At AS and A level this includes the study of:

- philosophical issues and questions raised by religion and belief including at least three contrasting arguments about the existence or non-existence of God, gods or ultimate reality
- the nature and influence of religious experience
- challenges to religious belief such as the problems of evil and suffering
- philosophical language and thought through significant concepts and the works of key thinkers, illustrated in issues or debates in the philosophy of religion

13. In addition at A level this includes the study of:

- how views of religious language have changed over time; the challenges posed by the verification/falsification debate and language games theory over whether religious language should be viewed cognitively or non-cognitively; and a consideration of at least two different views about religious teachings being understood symbolically and analogically
- a comparison of the significant ideas presented in works of at least two key scholars selected from the field of the philosophy of religion and developments in the way these ideas are applied to issues in religion and belief
- how the philosophy of religion has, over time, influenced and been influenced by developments in religious beliefs and practices, ethics or textual interpretation

Religion and ethics

14. At AS and A level this includes the study of:

- ethical language and thought through significant concepts and the works of key thinkers, illustrated in issues or debates in religion and ethics.
- three normative ethical theories such as deontological, teleological or character based ethics (at least two of which must be religious approaches)
- the application of ethical theory to two personal, societal or global issues of importance, including religious ethical perspectives

15. In addition at A level this includes the study of:

- how ethical language in the modern era has changed over time; including a study of meta-ethical theories and significant ideas in religious and moral thought such as free will, conscience or authority
- a comparison of the significant ideas presented in the works of at least two key scholars selected from the field of religion and ethics, and developments in the way these ideas are applied to significant issues in religion and belief

- how the study of ethics has, over time, influenced and been influenced by developments in religious beliefs and practices, the philosophy of religion and/or textual interpretation

Textual studies

16. Specifications should prescribe the study of clearly referenced texts from one religion (not necessarily a religion studied for the approaches above). Whole texts or multiple passages from one or several texts may be specified but taken as a whole, the texts must be sufficient to enable the themes to be explored thoroughly and for both assessment objectives to be met.

17. Decisions about the quantity of text required for study must take account of the level of challenge posed by the comprehension of the text.

18. At AS and A level this includes the study of:

- selected text(s) or substantial passages in translation from a particular religious work, corpus of sacred text or scripture, examining the meaning of the material, its social and historical context, its literary features, authorship and audience and its relationship with other texts and/or sources of wisdom and authority from the religion
- legal/theological/ethical content and the role of a text or texts in religious law making and/or codes for living
- issues that arise from the formation, transmission, interpretation and translation of the text(s)
- the religious, cultural and other significance of the text(s) including its reception and influence beyond a religious community

19. In addition at A level this includes the study of:

- modern critical scholarship and commentary including different contemporary approaches, religious and non-religious, to the primary text or corpus, and the religious, cultural or intellectual assumptions that underpin them
- methods and methodology in interpretation
- the scientific and historical-critical challenges to the authority of texts and religious responses to these
- how textual interpretations have, over time, influenced and been influenced by developments in philosophy of religion, ethics or religious thought (as set out above for systematic study of religion)

Requirements within any chosen approach

20. Within the chosen approach, all AS and A level specifications in religious studies must require students to acquire and develop knowledge and a critical understanding of:

- religious thought, belief and practice and the different ways in which these are expressed in the lives of individuals, communities and societies
- how religious texts and/or other relevant sources of wisdom and authority are interpreted and applied
- major issues, challenges and questions within and about the study of religion (for example, the role of tolerance, respect and recognition and interreligious dialogue, methods of study, relevance to contemporary society) and responses to these
- the causes, meanings and significance of similarities and differences in religious thought, belief and practice within and/or between religion(s)

21. In addition, through the study of three of the four approaches described above, A level specifications in religious studies must also require students to demonstrate critical awareness of:

- questions, issues and arguments posed by scholars from within and outside religious traditions
- social, religious and historical factors that have influenced developments in the study of religions and beliefs
- connections between the various elements of the area(s) of study, as set out in content above

22. GCE AS and A level specifications in religious studies must require students to demonstrate their ability to:

- reflect on, select and apply specified knowledge
- construct well informed and reasoned arguments substantiated by relevant evidence
- understand, interpret and evaluate critically religious concepts, texts and other sources
- present responses to questions which are clear and coherent
- use specialist language and terminology appropriately
- identify, investigate and critically analyse questions, arguments, ideas and issues arising from the chosen approaches

- engage in debate in a way that recognises the right of others to hold a different view

23. In addition, A level specifications in religious studies will require students to demonstrate their ability to:

- critically analyse and evaluate the views and arguments of scholars/academics
- account for the influence of social, religious and historical factors on developments in the study of religions and beliefs
- analyse the nature of connections between the various elements of their course of study
- develop breadth and depth in their understanding of the connections between the knowledge, understanding and skills set out in the specification as a whole



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