



# GCE AS and A level subject content for religious studies

## 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 the individual, communities and society
  - 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.

## **Knowledge, understanding and skills**

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

### **Systematic Study of one Religion**

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

- religious beliefs, values and teaching in their diverse manifestations in history and in the contemporary world, including those linked to the nature and existence of God 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 authority and wisdom including, where appropriate; scripture and/or sacred texts and how they are used and treated by believers; key religious figures and/or teachers and how they are regarded in relation to other sources of wisdom and authority
- practices including prayer/meditation, ritual, festivals and celebration
- forms of expression inspired and influenced by religion and religious belief

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

- significant social and historical developments in theology or religious thought including the challenges of secularism, science, responses to pluralism and diversity within traditions, migration, the changing roles of men and women, feminist and liberationist approaches
- a comparison of the work of at least two theologians/thinkers
- two themes related to issues of identity and belonging for religious believers today such as dietary and dress codes, the compatibility of religious and other forms of identity, issues of equality in the freedom to practice a religion
- religious tolerance, respect and recognition, interfaith dialogue and the ways that religious traditions view other religious traditions and their truth-claims
- how developments in beliefs and practices have, over time, influenced and been influenced by developments in philosophical, ethical and social scientific studies of religion or by textual interpretation

### **Philosophical, Ethical and Social Scientific Studies of Religion**

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

- philosophical issues and questions raised by religion and belief including at least two contrasting arguments about: the existence and non-existence of God, gods or ultimate reality; the nature and impact of religious experience; the problems of evil and suffering

- two ethical theories such as utilitarianism and virtue ethics and their application to issues related and applied to religious belief such as matters of life and death, poverty and world development
- two contrasting approaches to religion and religious experience chosen from the fields of psychology, sociology and anthropology

12. 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; and a consideration of at least two different views about talk about God being understood symbolically and analogically.
- a comparison of the key ideas presented in works of at least two key scholars selected from the fields of the philosophy of religion, religious ethics and/or social scientific study of religion and developments in the way these ideas are applied to contemporary issues in religion and belief
- how philosophical, ethical and social scientific studies have, over time, influenced and been influenced by developments in religious beliefs and practices or textual interpretation

### **Textual Studies (one religion, not necessarily a religion studied for the other two approaches above)**

13. Specifications should prescribe the study of clearly referenced texts from one religion. 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 all three assessment objectives to be met.

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

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

- selected text(s) or substantial passages in translation from a particular religious work or corpus of scripture, examining the meaning of the material, its literary features, ideas, 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 codes for living
- issues that arise from the formation, transmission and translation of the text(s)
- the origin, social and historical context of the text(s)
- the ways in which the text(s) are interpreted and used by religious communities and how these have changed over time

- the religious, cultural and other significance of the text(s) including its reception and influence beyond a religious community

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

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

17. 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 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 cause, meaning and significance of similarities and differences in religious thought, belief and practice within and/or between religion(s)

18. In addition A level specifications in religious studies must 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

19. 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 is respectful of the right of others to hold a different view

20. 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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Reference: DFE-00643-2014