



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
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# GCSE subject criteria for religious studies

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## Introduction

1. GCSE subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in religious studies. They provide the framework within which an awarding body creates the detail of the specification.
2. Specifications must also meet the regulators' general requirements, including the common and GCSE qualification criteria as defined in *The statutory regulation of external qualifications* (QCA/04/1293).
3. Subject criteria are intended to:
  - help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
  - ensure that the rigour of GCSE is maintained
  - ensure that specifications build on the knowledge, understanding and skills established by the statutory curricula for Wales, England and Northern Ireland, and facilitate progression to higher level general or related sectors of employment and training
  - help higher education institutions, employers and other stakeholders such as students and parents/guardians know what has been studied and assessed.
4. Specifications must allow schools to meet the requirements for the statutory provision of religious education, as appropriate, in section 375(3) of the 1996 Education Act and section 28 of the 1944 Education Act for England and Wales; and article 13 of the Education Reform Order 1989 for Northern Ireland.
5. Specifications and examinations must emphasise the educational basis for a study of religion and must be accessible to students of any religious persuasion or of none.
6. Any GCSE specification that contains significant elements of religious studies must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

## Aims and learning outcomes

7. GCSE specifications in religious studies should encourage learners to be inspired, moved and changed by following a broad, satisfying and worthwhile course of study that challenges young people and equips them to lead constructive lives in the modern world.
8. GCSE specifications in religious studies must enable learners to:

- adopt an enquiring, critical and reflective approach to the study of religion
- explore religions and beliefs, reflect on fundamental questions, engage with them intellectually and respond personally
- enhance their spiritual and moral development, and contribute to their health and wellbeing
- enhance their personal, social and cultural development, their understanding of different cultures locally, nationally and in the wider world, and to contribute to social and community cohesion
- develop their interest in and enthusiasm for the study of religion, and relate it to the wider world
- reflect on and develop their own values, opinions and attitudes in light of their learning.

## **Subject content**

9. The content of GCSE specifications in religious studies must reflect the learning outcomes.
10. GCSE specifications in religious studies must be consistent with the requirements of the non-statutory national framework for religious education (England), the national exemplar framework for religious education (Wales) and the equivalent requirements for Northern Ireland.
11. GCSE specifications in religious studies must include a rationale for the selection of content. The rationale must indicate how the specification meets the criteria in paras 13–14 below.
12. GCSE specifications in religious studies must provide opportunities for learners to follow a course that is coherent and that balances the breadth of religion(s) and/or belief(s) studied with the depth of understanding.
13. GCSE specifications in religious studies must either:
  - reflect the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of other principal religions represented in Great Britain (in which case students must not be required to study more than two principal religions in addition to Christianity)

or

- support the study of Christianity and/or one or two other principal religions only.

Where only one religion is studied, specifications must, where concerned with a particular denomination, place the denomination in the context of the broader religious tradition to which it belongs.

14. GCSE specifications in religious studies must provide students with the opportunity to:

- develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of religion by exploring the significance and impact of beliefs, teachings, sources, practices, ways of life and forms of expressing meaning
- express their personal responses and informed insights on fundamental questions and issues about identity, belonging, meaning, purpose, truth, values and commitments.

## Assessment objectives

15. GCSE specifications in religious studies must require that all candidates demonstrate the following assessment objectives in the context of the content and skills prescribed.

16. All specifications must require candidates to demonstrate their ability to:

Assessment objectives		% weighting
AO1	Describe, explain and analyse, using knowledge and understanding	50
AO2	Use evidence and reasoned argument to express and evaluate personal responses, informed insights and differing viewpoints	50

AO1 and AO2 are interrelated and connections must be made.

## Scheme of assessment

17. GCSE specifications in religious studies must allocate 100% of the weighting to external assessment in the overall scheme of assessment.
18. Question papers must be targeted at the full range of GCSE grades.

## Grade descriptions

19. Grade descriptions are provided to give a general indication of the standards of achievement likely to have been shown by candidates awarded particular grades. The descriptions must be interpreted in relation to the content in the specification; they are not designed to define that content.
20. The grade awarded will depend in practice upon the extent to which the candidate has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of candidates' performance in the assessment may be balanced by better performances in others.

Grade	Description
A	<p>Candidates demonstrate detailed knowledge and thorough understanding of religion to describe, explain and analyse the significance and impact of beliefs, teachings, sources, practices, ways of life and forms of expressing meaning. They interpret, draw out and explain the meaning and importance of the beliefs and practices of the religion(s) and/or beliefs studied, and assess the impact of these on the lives of believers. They explain, where appropriate, how differences in belief lead to differences of religious response. They understand and use accurately and appropriately a range of specialist vocabulary.</p> <p>They use reasoned argument supported by a range of evidence to respond to religious beliefs, moral issues and ultimate questions, recognising the complexity of issues. They demonstrate informed insight in evaluating different points of view to reach evidenced judgements about these beliefs, issues and questions.</p>

C	<p>Candidates demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of religion to describe and explain the significance and impact of beliefs, teachings, sources, practices, ways of life and forms of expressing meaning. They show awareness of the meaning and importance of the beliefs and practices of the religion(s) and/or beliefs studied, and can describe the impact of these on the lives of believers. They recognise how differences in belief lead to differences of religious response. They communicate their ideas using specialist vocabulary appropriately.</p> <p>They use argument supported by relevant evidence to express and evaluate different responses to issues studied. They refer to different points of view in making judgements about these issues.</p>
F	<p>Candidates demonstrate basic knowledge and understanding of religion to describe, with some reasons, the significance and impact of beliefs, teachings, sources, practices, ways of life and forms of expressing meaning. They show some awareness of the meaning and importance of the religion(s) and/or beliefs studied, sometimes recognising and making simple connections between religion and people's lives. They communicate their ideas using everyday language.</p> <p>They present reasons in support of an opinion about the issues studied, and show some understanding of the complexity of the issues by describing different points of view.</p>