



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



*Rewarding Learning*

# **GCE AS and A level subject criteria for religious studies**

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# 1. Introduction

1.1 Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) level subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which the awarding body creates the detail of the specification.

Subject criteria are intended to:

- help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
- define the relationship between the AS and A level specifications, with the AS as a subset of the A level
- ensure that the rigour of A level is maintained
- help higher education institutions and employers know what has been studied and assessed.

Any specification which contains significant elements of the subject religious studies must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

## 2. Aims

Religion and religions (past and present) represent diverse forms of values, beliefs and practices as responses to questions of ultimate meaning and purpose. Religious studies therefore encompass a wide range of disciplines and can consist of different approaches to their study.

2.1 AS and A level specifications in religious studies should encourage students to:

- develop their interest in and enthusiasm for a rigorous study of religion and relate it to the wider world
- treat the subject as an academic discipline by developing knowledge, understanding and skills appropriate to a specialist study of religion
- 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 learning.

## 3. Subject content

3.1 Previous study of religious studies should not be a requirement.

### Knowledge, understanding and skills

3.2 AS specifications should offer candidates the opportunity to:

(i) study one or more of the following areas in relation to one or more religions:

- religious texts
- theological studies
- development of religious tradition(s)
- religious practice
- religion and ethics
- philosophy of religion
- anthropology, psychology and sociology of religion
- religion in contemporary society.

Candidates should be able to focus on a single area of study, a combination of two areas, or adopt an interdisciplinary approach which combines a variety of areas of study. Specifications should ensure that each approach is of comparable demand.

(ii) within the chosen area(s) of study, acquire knowledge and understanding of:

- the key concepts (eg religious beliefs, teachings, doctrines, principles, ideas and theories), including how these are expressed in texts, writings and/or other forms and practices
- major issues and questions (eg issues of commonality and diversity, the role of dialogue, methods of study, relevance to contemporary society)
- the contribution of significant people, traditions or movements
- religious language and terminology
- the relationship between the area(s) of study and other aspects of human experience.

(iii) through the chosen area(s) of study, develop the following skills::

- to reflect on, select and deploy specified knowledge
- to identify, investigate and analyse questions and issues arising from the course of study
- to interpret and evaluate religious concepts, issues, ideas, the relevance of arguments and the views of scholars
- to use appropriate language and terminology in context
- to communicate using reasoned arguments substantiated by evidence

- to make connections between the area(s) of study and other aspects of human experience.
- 3.3 In addition, A level specifications should require candidates, for their chosen area(s) of study, to:
- demonstrate a wider range and greater depth of knowledge, understanding and skills
  - show a greater maturity of thought and expression
  - explore the connections between elements of the area(s) of study, and with other aspects of human experience.

## 4. Key skills

- 4.1 AS and A level specifications in religious studies should provide opportunities for developing and generating evidence for assessing relevant key skills from the list below. Where appropriate, these opportunities should be directly cross-referenced, at specified level(s) to the key skills standards which may be found on the QCA website ([www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)).
- Application of number
  - Communication
  - Improving own learning and performance
  - Information and communication technology
  - Problem solving
  - Working with others.

## 5. Assessment objectives

- 5.1 All candidates must be required to meet the following assessment objectives. At A level, candidates are required to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills in greater depth and over a wider range of content than at AS level.

Knowledge, understanding and skills are closely linked. Specifications should require that candidates demonstrate the following assessment objectives in the context of the content prescribed.

Assessment objectives		Weighting		
		AS level	A2 level	A level
<b>AO1</b>	Select and demonstrate clearly relevant knowledge and understanding through the use of evidence, examples and correct language and terminology appropriate to the course of study. In addition, for synoptic assessment, A level candidates should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the connections between different elements of their course of study.	65–75%	55–65%	60–70%
<b>AO2</b>	Critically evaluate and justify a point of view through the use of evidence and reasoned argument. In addition, for synoptic assessment, A level candidates should relate elements of their course of study to their broader context and to aspects of human experience.	25–35%	35–45%	30–40%

The weighting for AO2 at A level must not be lower than that for AS. The assessment objectives apply to the whole specification as appropriate.

The most able candidates will also apply and communicate effectively their knowledge and understanding using the skills of critical analysis, evaluation creativity and synthesis.

## 6. Scheme of assessment

### Internal assessment

6.1 Assessment must be entirely through external assessment.

### Synoptic assessment

6.2 All A level specifications should include synoptic assessment at A2 to test the candidates' understanding of the connections between the different elements of the subject and their holistic understanding of the subject. Synoptic assessment should relate to both assessment objectives. The definition of synoptic assessment in the context of religious studies is as follows:

Synoptic assessment assesses the candidates' knowledge and understanding of different elements of the area(s) of study selected and connections between them. It draws together knowledge, understanding and skills learned in different elements of the A level course. It should also contribute to the assessment of the skill of relating such connections to aspects of human experience.

Examples of synoptic assessment might include the requirement of a candidate, across a specified area or areas of study, to:

- reflect on, select and deploy specified knowledge, and identify, investigate and analyse questions arising
- interpret and evaluate religious concepts, issues, ideas, the relevance of arguments and the views of scholars
- use appropriate language and terminology in context
- draw together knowledge, understanding and skills learned throughout the course to tackle an issue that is new to them
- communicate with reasoned arguments substantiated by evidence.

### **Quality of written communication**

6.3 AS and A level specifications will be required to assess the candidates' quality of written communication in accordance with the guidance document produced by QCA.