

Religious Studies

AQA GCSE Religious Studies offers a comprehensive and engaging exploration of major world religions, six contemporary ethical themes, and two textual studies, providing students with a diverse and thought-provoking curriculum.

Students will be challenged to consider profound questions about belief, values, meaning, purpose, and truth, enabling them to develop reasoned and informed attitudes towards religious, philosophical, and ethical issues. The course fosters an appreciation of how religion, philosophy, and ethics underpin culture and society, both historically and in the modern world.

Through their studies, learners will develop essential skills including analytical and critical thinking, the ability to work with abstract ideas, and competence in research and leadership. These transferable skills not only prepare students for further academic study but also equip students for future careers requiring strong reasoning, communication, and cultural awareness.

The course is divided into two main components, each designed to provide depth and breadth of understanding across religious beliefs and contemporary ethical issues.

Course Structure:

Paper 1: The Study of Religions – Beliefs, Teachings and Practices

Students will study **Christianity** and **Islam** in depth, exploring key beliefs, teachings, and practices.

Topics include:

- Nature of God, beliefs about creation, life after death, and the problem of evil
- Jesus Christ and salvation
- Worship, sacraments, prayer, and festivals
- Islamic beliefs about Allah, prophethood, angels, and life after death
- Practices including prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and festivals

Paper 2: Thematic Studies

Students will study **four ethical themes** from the following six options:

- **Relationships and Families** – marriage, divorce, sexuality, gender roles
- **Religion and Life** – origins of the universe, sanctity of life, abortion, euthanasia, animal rights
- **Peace and Conflict** – war, pacifism, terrorism, forgiveness, reconciliation
- **Crime and Punishment** – justice, punishment, forgiveness, death penalty
- **Human Rights and Social Justice** – equality, prejudice, wealth and poverty

Skills gained:

- **Secure knowledge and understanding:** Develop a precise understanding of beliefs, teachings, sources of wisdom and authority, and practices in **Christianity and Islam**, and how these shape identity and behaviour.
- **Analysis and evaluation:** Construct well-argued, balanced and evidence-based judgements on ethical and philosophical questions across Paper 2 themes (e.g., abortion, war, human rights), showing awareness of diverse viewpoints and their implications.
- **Use of specialist language and evidence:** Apply key terms accurately and support arguments with scriptural references, scholarly ideas, and contemporary case studies, mirroring the demands of long-form evaluation questions.

Critical Thinking Applied to Contemporary Issues

- **Ethics in real life:** Evaluate dilemmas around relationships and families, life and death, crime and punishment, peace and conflict, and social justice, linking religious reasoning to policy debates, law, medicine, and civic life.
- **Media and misinformation literacy:** Assess how beliefs and values are represented in media and public discourse; identify bias and apply ethical frameworks to current events.
- **Global citizenship:** Understand how faith and worldview shape responses to poverty, inequality, conflict, human rights, and environmental stewardship, building informed perspectives on international issues.

Communication, Debate & Leadership

- **Written communication:** Plan and produce coherent, structured, and comparative essays, using evidence to justify conclusions—skills prized in humanities and social sciences.
- **Respectful dialogue:** Lead and participate in reasoned debate, listening carefully, challenging ideas constructively, and demonstrating empathy for differing beliefs—vital for teamwork and leadership.

Personal Development & Responsible Citizenship

- **Values and character:** Reflect on identity, meaning, purpose, and moral responsibility, developing **resilience, empathy, and integrity**.
- **British Values & SMSC:** Engage with democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect/tolerance through structured exploration of rights, justice, equality and diversity—strengthening spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- **Intercultural competence:** Build confident understanding of **religious and non-religious** worldviews in a plural society, supporting inclusion and community cohesion

Assessment Format:

- **Paper 1:** 1 hour 45 minutes – *The Study of Religions* (Christianity and Islam)
- **Paper 2:** 1 hour 45 minutes – *Thematic Studies*

Each paper is worth **50% of the GCSE** and is assessed through written examination. Both papers include a range of short-answer and extended-response questions requiring explanation, analysis, and evaluation.

Post-16 opportunities:

Religious Studies is a highly respected academic qualification that develops critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and cultural awareness—skills that universities and employers value across a wide range of disciplines.

At A Level, students often progress to subjects such as Religious Studies, Philosophy, Ethics, Sociology, Psychology, Law, History, Politics, and English, where the ability to analyse, debate, and evaluate complex ideas is essential.

Beyond A Level, Religious Studies provides an excellent foundation for careers that require strong communication, empathy, and decision-making skills. These include:

- Law and Politics – applying ethical reasoning to justice and governance
- Medicine, Nursing, and Healthcare – understanding moral issues in patient care
- Education and Social Work – supporting diverse communities and promoting inclusion
- Journalism, Media, and Broadcasting – interpreting global events and cultural perspectives
- Public Policy, Charity, and Humanitarian Work – tackling issues of equality and human rights

In an increasingly interconnected world, employers seek individuals who can think critically, respect diversity, and make informed ethical decisions. Religious Studies doesn't just prepare students for exams—it prepares them for life, leadership, and global citizenship.