

GCSE Religious Studies Qualification Outline – Consultation Version



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Introduction

This document provides a high-level overview of the proposed WJEC GCSE Religious Studies Qualification.

It is based on Qualification Wales's Approval Criteria (key sections are included in Appendix 1). Our qualification **must** meet these requirements.

The qualification outline will provide a guide for the development of the Specification and Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs).

Qualification Overview

The GCSE Religious Studies qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales by:

- Supporting the statements of what matters¹, giving learners the opportunity to:
 - gain a deeper understanding of the concepts underpinning humanities, and their application in local, national and global contexts
 - understand human experiences better
 - learn how various worldviews and factors can influence their own and others' perceptions and interpretations
 - develop an appreciation of how contexts influence the constructions of narratives and representations
 - develop an understanding of the complex, pluralistic and diverse nature of societies
 - appreciate the interplay between a range of factors, including religious and non-religious beliefs and worldviews
 - develop a common understanding of the ethnic diversity, identities, experiences and perspectives of their local area, Wales and the wider world
 - explore and develop a tolerant and empathetic understanding of the varied beliefs, values, traditions and ethics that underpin and shape human society.
- Supporting the principles of progression² by encouraging learners to:
 - ask increasingly sophisticated enquiry questions
 - engage with an increasing breadth and depth of knowledge and underlying concepts
 - make supported judgements in more complex contexts
 - build an increasingly clear and coherent understanding of the world around them
 - move on to more focused awareness of the lives of others, in their own social context and elsewhere in the world
 - use evidence to construct and support an answer, and relating that to representation and interpretation of enquiry results.

The construct of GCSE Religious Studies qualification is based on the Welsh Government subject specific considerations for Religious Studies³. The qualification will:

¹ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/statements-of-what-matters/>

² <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/principles-of-progression/>

³ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/designing-your-curriculum/#specific-considerations-for-this-area>

- provide opportunities to understand religious and non-religious beliefs, teachings, practices, philosophical convictions, values and experiences from a local, national and international perspective
- provide opportunities to seek answers to ultimate philosophical questions, such as the purpose and meaning of life
- provide opportunities to explore the foundations of religious and non-religious viewpoints and the influence of religious and non-religious philosophical convictions on our pluralistic and diverse society over time
- equip learners with the skills to explore philosophical and moral issues, reflect on their own beliefs and values, and the beliefs and values of others
- provide opportunities to develop empathy, creativity, curiosity, resilience, tolerance, a sense of cynefin and human experiences within the natural world.

The GCSE Religious Studies qualification will also be based on the following broad underlying concepts, several of which run across units with different levels of breadth and depth:

- Beliefs
- Community
- Cynefin
- Philosophical convictions
- Practices
- Teachings
- Values
- Worldviews
- Ultimate questions
- Good and evil
- Ethics
- Human rights
- Life after death
- Stewardship
- Religious/non-religious views
- Diversity
- Identity and belonging
- Faith in action
- Pluralism

Proposed Qualification Structure⁴

Unit 1: Religious and non-religious beliefs, teachings and practices

Written examination

30% of qualification

Unit 2: Faith and belief in action

Non-examination assessment

20% of qualification

Marked by the centre and moderated by WJEC

Unit 3: Human experiences and the world
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Written examination

30% of qualification

Unit 4: Human rights

Non-examination assessment

20% of qualification

Marked by WJEC

This will be a unitised qualification.

Aside from Unit 1, which is an introductory unit, and Unit 4, which is a terminal unit, there is no hierarchy or teaching order implied for Units 2 and 3.

Unit Information

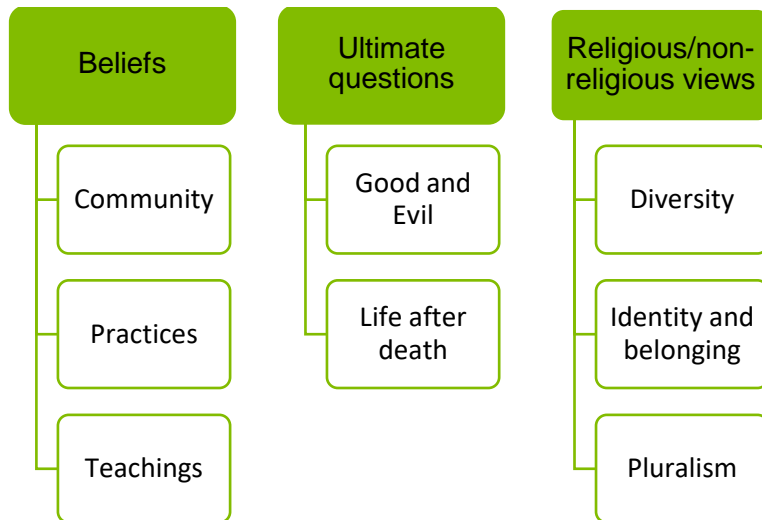
Unit 1 - Religious and non-religious beliefs, teachings and practices

The purpose of this unit is to:
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- explore religious and non-religious beliefs and worldviews
- develop understanding of varied beliefs, values, traditions and ethics
- learn how various worldviews and factors can influence their own and others' perceptions and interpretations.

This unit will be based on the following concepts and possible content:

⁴ Specification content will be driven by an emphasis of beliefs, teachings and practices of religious rather than non-religious content due to the nature of subject



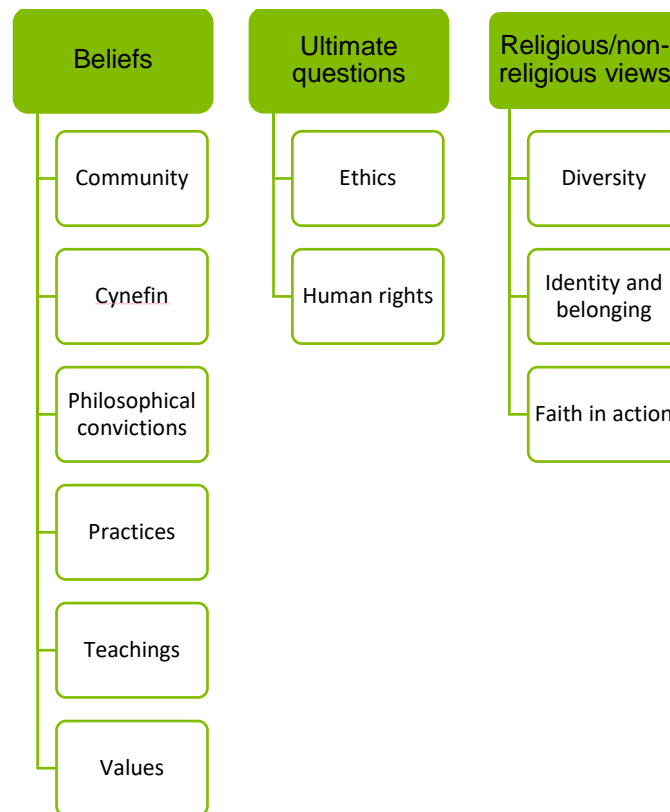
Unit 1 will be assessed via examination, available in the summer series. An examination will be made available for the first cohort in summer 2026. It will include a mix of question types that will target AO1, AO2 and AO3. It is likely, due to the introductory nature of this unit, that there would be an emphasis on knowledge and understanding and that AO1 is therefore likely to receive the highest weighting, with the rest of the assessment divided equally between AO2 and AO3. The duration of the examination is likely to be 1 hour and 30 minutes. There will be no optionality in this unit, however, centres can choose a religion that they would like the learners to study. Learners will answer questions on religious and non-religious beliefs as well as generic questions that can be applied to the centre's chosen religion.

Unit 2 - Faith and belief in action

The purpose of this unit is to:

- explore religious and non-religious beliefs, philosophies and worldviews
- critically reflect on their own and others' beliefs, values and attitudes in a local, national and/or global context
- develop an understanding of the complex, pluralistic and diverse nature of societies.

This unit will be based on the following concepts and possible content:



This unit will take the form of non-examination assessment. Tasks will be released in September for submission in the following summer series; tasks will first be available in September 2026 for submission in summer 2027. This unit will target AO2, AO3 and AO4. AO4 is likely to receive the highest weighting because of the application of skills element of the non-examination assessment.

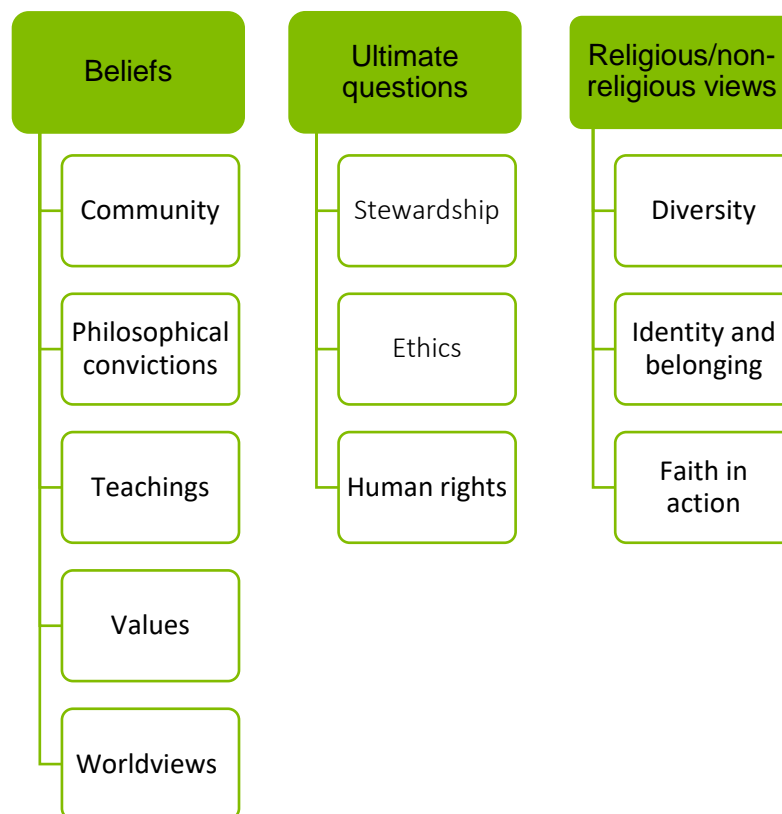
The non-examination assessment will follow an enquiry format. WJEC will set a theme for the non-examination assessment. Learners will explore the set theme and reflect on their own personal beliefs based on that theme. Learners will then investigate other people's beliefs on the set theme on a local and/or national and/or global scale. Finally, learners will reflect on their own beliefs after considering the beliefs of others. Themes will change annually. Non-examination assessments will be marked by the centre and moderated by WJEC. It is likely that there will be a low level of control at the research and investigation stage and a high level of control during the formal assessment stage. The time allowed for the assessment is yet to be determined. There will be no optionality in this unit, however, centres will choose a religious or non-religious belief that they would like the learners to study. Learners can approach the set theme through the religious and/or non-religious viewpoint they have studied. The non-examination assessment **must** be submitted digitally.

Unit 3 - Human experiences and the world

The purpose of this unit is to:

- understand human experiences and the natural world
- develop an understanding of factors that can influence their own and others' perceptions and interpretations
- learn how various worldviews and factors can influence their own and others' perceptions and interpretations
- explore how and why interpretations may differ
- develop an appreciation of how contexts influence interpretations
- develop a critical understanding of a range of interpretations and representations derived from a variety of evidence.

This unit will be based on the following concepts and possible content.



Unit 3 will be assessed via an examination, available in the summer series. An examination will be made available for the first cohort in summer 2026. It will include a mix of question types that will target AO1, AO2 and AO3. There will be an increased amount of AO3 in this unit compared to Unit 1 because of the emphasis on learners to analyse, evaluate and make judgements. Learners will explore questions in relation to human experience and the world. The duration of the examination is likely to be 1 hour and 30 minutes. There will be no optionality in this unit, however, learners can answer questions in the context of a religious or non-religious belief the centre has chosen to study.

Unit 4 - Human rights

The purpose of this unit is to:

- investigate an ethical and/or moral, human rights issues from religious and non-religious viewpoints
- develop an awareness of their own rights, the rights of others and develop a commitment to justice.

This unit will be based on the following concepts and possible content:



This unit will take the form of non-examination assessment. The non-examination assessment will target AO2, AO3 and AO4. The focus is likely to be on AO2 and AO4 receiving the highest weightings because of the application of knowledge/understanding and skills of the non-examination assessment. Learners will follow an enquiry process, using engaging stimulus materials, such as an article or extract from a news report, provided by WJEC. The stimulus materials will promote awareness of learners' rights and the rights of others, enabling them to explore and develop a tolerant and empathetic understanding of the varied beliefs, values, traditions and ethics that underpin and shape human society. Stimulus materials and tasks will be released in September for submission in the following summer series; they will first be available in September 2026 for submission in summer 2027. The non-examination assessment will be set and marked by WJEC. The time allowed for the non-examination assessment is yet to be determined. It is likely that there will be a low level of control at the research and investigation stage and a high level of control during the formal assessment stage. There will be no optionality in this unit, however, learners can view the stimulus materials and answer questions in the context of a religious or non-religious belief

the centre has chosen to study. The non-examination assessment **must** be submitted digitally.

Consideration of manageability, engagement, validity and reliability

In developing this proposed qualification outline, we have considered manageability, engagement, reliability and validity, and how to balance these considerations in the context of the requirements of the Approval Criteria.

The Approval Criteria require 40% of the qualification to be assessed by non-examination assessment; one non-examination assessment will be set by WJEC (Unit 2), internally marked by the centre, and externally moderated by WJEC, and the other (Unit 4) will be set and externally marked by WJEC. This poses some potential manageability challenges. We propose to minimise manageability challenges by releasing tasks for both non-examination assessments in the September of the academic year they are to be submitted, allowing centres the flexibility to spread the assessments and to undertake the non-examination assessment at a time that suits them.

One non-examination assessment (Unit 2) will feature a task where learners investigate other people's beliefs. We foresee some potential manageability issues as centres may have varying access to suitable people in their locality. To aid manageability, we will allow learners to investigate the beliefs of people in other settings i.e., on a local and/or national and/or global scale, for example, online. Furthermore, the other non-examination assessment (Unit 4) will feature stimulus materials and questions provided by WJEC, where all learners have equal access to the stimulus materials. This contrast in style of non-examination assessment, provides a clear balance overall, which is considered an appropriate approach in terms of manageability.

We have yet to determine the assessment time that we will allocate to both non-examination assessments, but this will be a key consideration as we aim to reduce the impact on teaching and learning. We foresee both non-examination assessments featuring a low level of control, at the investigation stage, to enable learners to undertake an authentic enquiry experience, and it is likely that a high level of control will be used at the formal assessment stage. However, to ensure reliability, we will provide guidance on what notes learners are able to use when responding to the assessment tasks. The non-examination assessments will fulfil the requirement of the Approval Criteria that learners can demonstrate a range of appropriate enquiry and investigation skills including the ability to reflect.

We believe that our proposed qualification should provide opportunities for centres to develop an engaging programme of study for its learners, in line with the expectations of the Curriculum for Wales. Unit 1 will cover a broad introduction to Religious Studies, allowing learners to study varied religious and non-religious beliefs, teachings and practices, supporting the statement of what matters 'giving Learners an opportunity to develop an understanding of the complex, pluralistic and diverse nature of societies'. Unit 2 will enable learners to engage with their own faith and beliefs and that of others on a local and/or national and/or global scale, providing learners with a real-world context to their learning, and supporting the statement of what matters 'giving learners an opportunity to develop a common understanding of the diverse perspectives of their local area, Wales and the wider world'. Unit 3 will explore questions in relation to human experience and the world from a religious and non-religious viewpoint, supporting the statement of what matters 'giving

learners opportunity to develop an appreciation of how contexts influence the constructions of narratives and representations'. Unit 4 will allow learners to investigate human rights issues, supporting the statement of what matters to 'engage learners and develop a tolerant and empathetic understanding of the varied beliefs, values, traditions and ethics that underpin and shape human society'.

We believe that the non-examination assessments we proposed for Units 2 and 4 are a valid approach to assessing the purpose and content because they allow learners to demonstrate their skills in appropriate contexts. To ensure the reliability of the non-examination assessments, we will ensure each unit will target the same assessment objective weightings over time. For both units, marking criteria will be developed and for Unit 2, teachers will be provided with a package of support to ensure consistent application of the marking criteria across centres and over time. We will moderate a sample of centre work to provide further assurance of reliability.

We believe that the purpose and content of Units 1 and 3 can be validly assessed by examination, and a mix of question types can help us maximise validity. When we develop assessments, we will ensure that all tasks target the relevant construct, that there is an appropriate balance of content covered over time and that there is alignment between assessment items and learning outcomes. Where appropriate, we will use data available to us on how an assessment has functioned. To ensure reliability, we will make sure that the examined units target the same assessment objective weightings and have a consistent level of demand each series, marking criteria will be developed and assessors will be trained on how to apply them consistently.

We will continue to consider the balance of manageability, engagement, reliability and validity, at each stage of qualification development.

Appendix 1

Key information from Approval Criteria

The following information has come directly from Qualifications Wales' [GCSE Religious Studies - Approval Criteria](#) - our qualification must meet these requirements.

Purpose

1. GCSE **Religious Studies** must:

- 1.1 be designed primarily for Learners between the ages of 14 and 16
- 1.2 build on the conceptual understanding Learners have developed through their learning from ages 3-14
- 1.3 support teaching and learning by providing appropriately broad, demanding, relevant and engaging content and assessment that relates to and supports the Curriculum for Wales, including its four purposes
- 1.4 allow Learners to develop a strong foundation of knowledge, skills and understanding which supports progression to post-16 study and prepares them for life, learning and work
- 1.5 provide meaningful, fair, and accurate information on Learner achievement within a subject that highlights what Learners know, understand, and can do

Aims

2. GCSE **Religious Studies** must:

- 2.1 allow Learners to explore a range of knowledge, skills and understanding in relation to religious studies
- 2.2 provide opportunities for Learners to be assessed in a variety of relevant and meaningful contexts

3. The GCSE Religious Studies qualification must support Learners to:

- 3.1 develop knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious beliefs, values, teachings, practices, and philosophical convictions
- 3.2 engage with contrasting lived religious and non-religious experiences
- 3.3 develop curiosity about the purpose of life and their contribution to it
- 3.4 explore ways in which religious and non-religious ethical and philosophical convictions have influenced human experience and society
- 3.5 explore evidence from a range of religious and non-religious sources that engage with philosophical, ethical, and moral issues
- 3.6 appreciate the complex, pluralistic and diverse nature of society by understanding the need for tolerance, resilience, and empathy
- 3.7 reflect on their own values, beliefs, and perspectives and those of others
- 3.8 align with aspects of the Religion, values and ethics statutory guidance to enable Learners to
 - 3.8.1 develop an awareness of self in relation to others

3.8.2 make connections to the wider and natural world

3.8.3 develop creativity and curiosity

3.8.4 explore ultimate questions and contemplate meaning and purpose

3.9 make sense of and interpret human experience, the natural world, and their own place within it, from a pluralistic perspective, understanding different religions and non-religious philosophical convictions in their own locality and in Wales, developing their sense of cynefin, as well as in the wider world

Assessment Objectives

The assessment of the knowledge, understanding and skills required in the qualification must target the following assessment objectives in line with the indicated weightings, within a tolerance of +/- 5 percentage points.

AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious beliefs, practices, and teachings	25%
AO2	Apply knowledge and understanding of religious and nonreligious beliefs, teachings, practices, values, and philosophical convictions	25%
AO3	Analyse, evaluate, or make judgements on a variety of ethical and moral issues, including a personal perspective, and exploration of values from religious and non-religious perspectives	25%
AO4	Select, use and apply skills and techniques in practice relevant to the study of Religious Studies	25%

Scheme of assessment

- The **GCSE Religious Studies** qualification must be unitised.

10. The GCSE Religious Studies must show the range in the proportion of marks allocated to each assessment objective and to each Unit.

11. The GCSE Religious Studies must include the following assessment arrangements:

11.1 There must be two examination assessments that:

11.1.1 are set and marked by the awarding body

11.1.2 account for 60% of the qualification

11.2 The timing of the examinations must be prescribed by the awarding body

11.3 There must be two non-examination assessments that must account for 40% of the qualification:

11.3.1 one non-examination assessment set by the awarding body, internally marked by the Centre and externally moderated by the awarding body

11.3.2 one non-examination assessment set and externally marked by the awarding body

11.3.3 both non-examination assessments must be able to be submitted digitally

12. One examination unit must be available in the summer of 2026 for the first cohort of Learners taking the qualification

13. The awarding body must specify its rules in regard to re-sits and re-submissions for GCSE Religious Studies in accordance with the GCSE Conditions of Recognition