

Religious New AS and A level for teaching from September 2016

Following discussions by the NATRE executive and network, this article takes an overview of the new specifications with a consideration of their possible strengths and weaknesses. There are four boards and their specifications available in England: AQA, OCR, Pearson/Edexcel and Eduqas. These tables aim to summarise the essential details.

ASSESSMENT	AS	A level
	Note variation in total examination time	Note variation in number of papers
AQA	1 x 2 hour paper & 1 x 1 hour paper = 3 hours	2 x 3 hour papers
Pearson/Edexcel	3 x 1 hour papers = 3 hours	3 x 2 hour papers
Eduqas	3 x 1½ hour papers = 4 ½ hours	3 x 2 hour papers
OCR	3 x 1½ hour papers = 4 ½ hours	3 x 2 hour papers

TOPICS AVAILABLE	
AQA	Philosophy of religion and ethics Study of religion: One of: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism
OCR	Philosophy of religion Religion and ethics Developments in religious thought: One of: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism
Pearson/Edexcel (Any three of the four components)	Philosophy of religion Religion and ethics New Testament Study of religion: One of: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism
Eduqas	Philosophy of religion Religion and ethics Study of religion: One of: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism

QUESTIONS –COMPULSORY OR NOT		
Question Papers	AS	A level
Pearson/Edexcel AS – No choice A2 – no choice	Each paper has: two compulsory questions: Section A 2 x 1 part, Section B 1 x 2 part question	Each paper has: three compulsory questions: Section A 2 x 1 part, Section B 1 x 2 part question (based on a text), Section C 1 x 1 part question
AQA AS - No choice A2 - 2 papers no choice - 2 papers 1 from 2	Paper 1 four compulsory two-part questions Paper 2 two compulsory two-part questions	Paper 1 four compulsory two-part questions Paper 2 Section A: two compulsory two-part questions Section B: one two-part question from a choice of two Section C: one two-part question from a choice of two
OCR – AS - 2 from 3 A2 - 3 from 4	Papers 1, 2 & 3 two compulsory one part questions from a choice of three	Papers 1, 2 & 3 three compulsory one part questions from a choice of four
Eduqas AS - 1 from 2 A2 - 2 from 3	Each paper has: Section A 1 x 2 part question out of a choice of two, Section B 1 x 2 part question out of a choice of three	Each paper has: Section A 1 x 2 part question out of a choice of two, Section B 1 x 2 part question out of a choice of three

QUESTIONS - STYLE	
OCR	One part questions at AS and A2 testing both AOs
AQA	Two part questions at AS and A2 1 tests knowledge and understanding (AO1) 2 tests analysis and evaluation (AO2)
Eduqas	Two part questions at AS and A2 1 tests knowledge and understanding (AO1) 2 tests analysis and evaluation (AO2)
Pearson/Edexcel	Some questions assess AO1 or AO2, some assess both AO and AO2 AS - Mix of 8 mark (AO1) and 9 & 20 mark (AO1&AO2) questions A2 - Mix of 8 & 10 mark (AO1) and 12, 20 & 30 (AO1&AO2) questions

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES	
AQA	- Philosophy & Ethics in one paper
OCR	- Developments in Religious Thought presents a theological approach to the study of religion
Pearson/Edexcel	- Free choice from four papers - New Testament paper - Sikhism
Eduqas	- Systematic studies contain considerable amounts of sacred texts which could be of interest to those who want a more textually based study - Sikhism

General points –made by members of the executive and the NATRE network	
1.	It remains to be seen whether the increase from two areas of study to three will result in candidates having a broader range of experience of types of religious study
2.	Concern was expressed about some teachers' reluctance to consider a different board from that which they had always done. The executive wanted to encourage decision makers to look at the offers from all awarding organisations and make a decision in the best interests of their students.
3.	There is very little difference in the Levels of Response used in the mark schemes.
4.	There was a general consensus that the new examinations would be of greater challenge to lower achieving students
5.	The amount of detail presented in the specifications varied considerably. It was accepted that much of this is simply included as guidance to teachers. Some found this helpful whilst others felt (for example in the Eduqas specification) it gave the false impression of more weighty content
6.	Likewise, mark schemes needed to be treated only as indicative content suggesting some of what examiners might find in answers. Teachers needed to recognise they are not check lists for examiners or teachers
7.	There appears to be a common approach between the awarding organisations on the ethical theories but some difference over the inclusion of Kant. There is considerable difference however in the applied ethics issues studied. This may influence teachers in their choice of specification.

Disappointments expressed by members of the exective and NATRE network:	
1.	The considerable dearth of female scholars either for study or as contextual references.
2.	Only one board offering a textual paper at all and none of the boards offering Jewish Scriptures / Old Testament
3.	The lack of published resources especially for religions papers for some specifications
4.	The loss of virtue ethics and environmental ethics from the OCR paper which felt to be a key issue in 21 st century