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# A guide to responding to the DfE consultation on the reform of GCSE in Religious Studies

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NATIONAL BOARD OF RELIGIOUS  
INSPECTORS AND ADVISERS



# Contents

Introduction .....	3
DfE consultation documents .....	3
Ofqual consultation document .....	3
Purpose of this document .....	3
DfE Consultation on <i>Religious Studies GCSE subject content</i> .....	4
Summary and Explanation.....	4
Introduction .....	4
Programme of Study .....	5
Subject Content.....	8
Part 2: Thematic Study Themes .....	10
Reading Guide and questions.....	12
Introduction .....	12
Subject aims and learning outcomes .....	12
Programme of Study .....	12
Subject Content.....	12
Part Two, first approach: Textual Studies .....	13
Part Two, second approach; Religious, philosophical and ethical studies in the modern world .....	13
Religious Studies Short Course.....	13

# Introduction

On 7 November the DfE and Ofqual published three documents for consultation. Both Ofqual and the DfE are inviting responses to their consultations and so there are two consultation response forms, one for Ofqual and one for the DfE.

## DfE consultation documents

The two DfE documents deal with the structure and content of the new GCSE, AS & A Level in Religious Studies. The documents are called:

- *Religious Studies GCSE subject content, November 2014*
- *GCE AS and A Level subject content for Religious Studies*

The full versions of each document can be downloaded here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-and-a-level-reform-religious-studies>

The DfE consultation closes on **29 December 2014**.

## Ofqual consultation document

The Ofqual document deals with how the new GCSE and A Levels in Religious Studies will be assessed. It is called:

- *Developing new GCSEs, A Levels and AS qualifications for first teaching in 2016 – part 3*

The full version of it can be downloaded here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/religious-studies-gcses-as-and-a-levels-new-qualifications-for-2016>

The Ofqual consultation closes on **5 January 2015**.

## Purpose of this document

This document has been produced jointly by NBRIA and CES to assist in responding to the DfE GCSE document. It contains a summary and explanation of the key contents of the document along with a reading guide and questions to help dioceses and schools focus on how they are going to respond to the consultation.

# DfE Consultation on

## *Religious Studies GCSE subject content*

### Summary and Explanation

#### Introduction

The draft Religious Studies Subject Content (RSSC) document from the DfE is not an examination specification. It is a criteria document which the awarding organisations (AOs), otherwise known as exam boards, will use to write courses and specifications.

Whilst the RSSC is very prescriptive in terms of its content and the proportions given to different divisions within this content, AOs will still have a lot of freedom to present structures and specifications which are faithful to the RSSC but which are creative in the interpretation of it. All the same, the structure and content of the new GCSE in Religious Studies are laid out in the consultation document so it is important that it is right and that it meets the needs of Catholic schools and fulfils the requirements of the Curriculum Directory.

The consultation document is divided into two sections:

- Programme of Study – which lays out the basic shape of the new GCSE in Religious Studies
- Subject Content – which populates this shape with content

## Programme of Study

The GCSE RSSC uses different terminology to describe different kinds of division within the content. The content is divided into:

- Parts
- Studies
- Approaches
- Topics
- Themes

The overall subject content is divided into two parts:

- **Part 1:** Study of Religions
- **Part 2:** Thematic studies

### [Part 1: Study of Religions](#)

This is divided into the **study** of two religions:

- **Study of Religion 1**
- **Study of Religion 2**

For each religion, students will study at least two topics:

- **Topic 1:** Beliefs and teachings
- **Topic 2:** Sources of authority

If one of these religions is studied for 50% of the course, students will study two further topics:

- **Topic 3:** Practices
- **Topic 4:** Forms of Expression and Ways of Life

More details on topics will be given below in the section on content.

### [Part 2: Thematic studies](#)

This is divided into two **approaches**:

- **Approach 1:** Textual studies
- **Approach 2:** Religious, philosophical and ethical studies (RPE) in the modern world

For each of these approaches, a list of themes is given. If an approach is studied for 25% of the GCSE, then two themes will be studied and for each theme two perspectives will need to be given from either one or two religions. If an approach is studied for 50% of the GCSE, then four themes will be studied and for each theme two perspectives will need to be given from either one or two religions. More detail on the themes will be given below in the section on content.

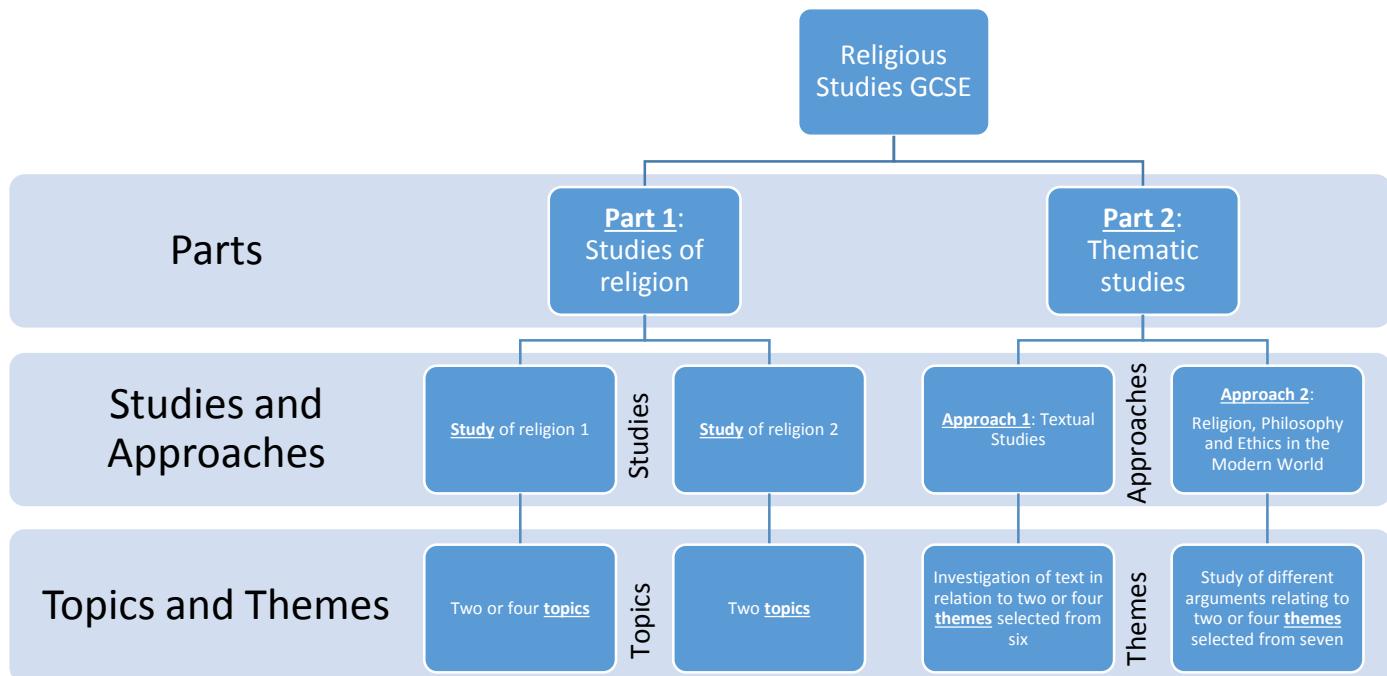


Figure 1: Overview of Programme of Study

There are two basic options for the arrangement of these different divisions of study, and within each of these options there are a number of variations. In the diagram on the following page, each column represents 25% of the GCSE.

With each of the variations taken into account there are five possible routes through the new GCSE in Religious Studies, each of which gives a different weight to different areas of study.

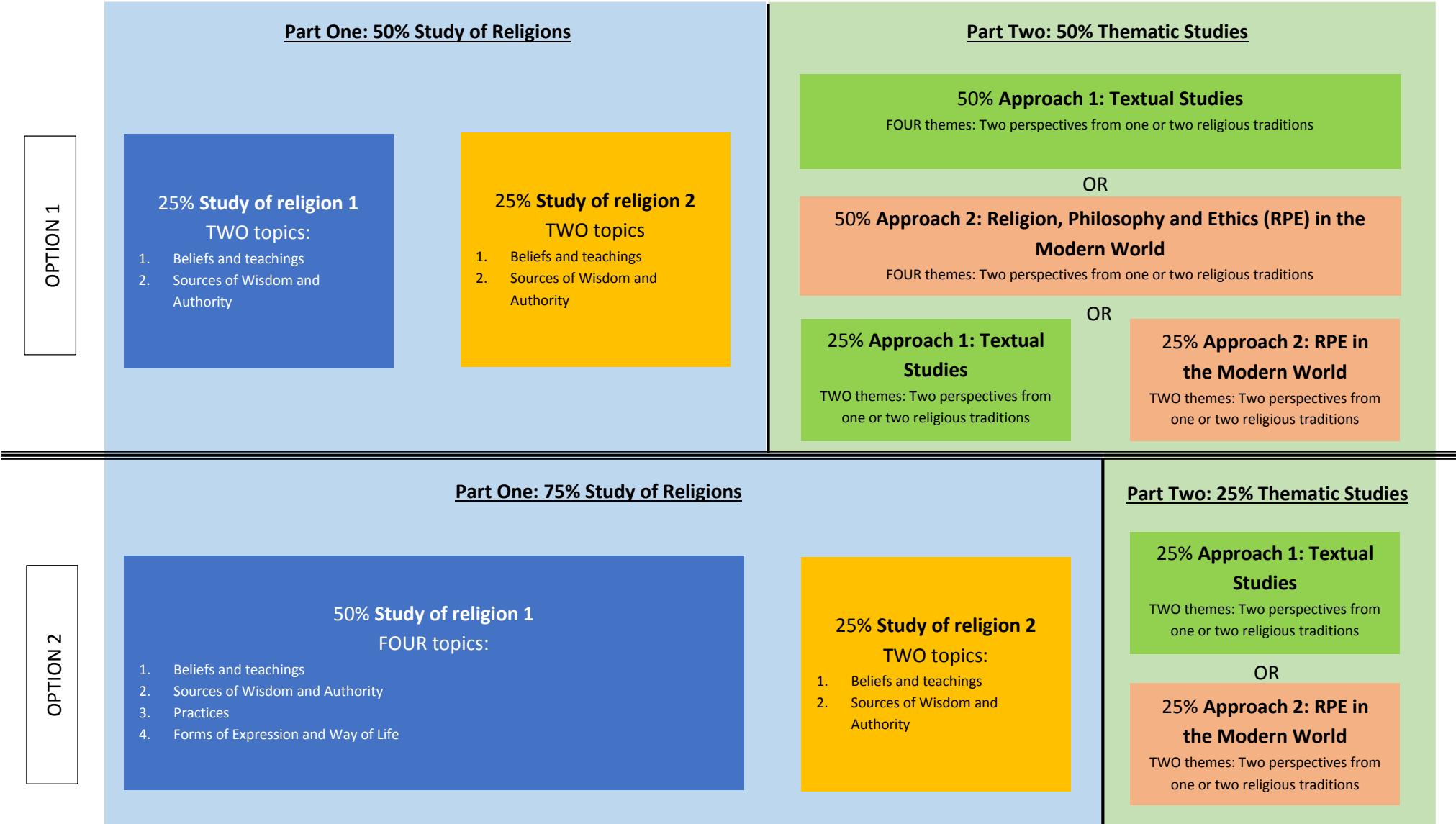


Figure 2: Proposed routes through Reformed GCSE in Religious Studies

## Subject Content

The subject content in Part 1: Study of Religions is divided into four topic areas and in Part 2: Thematic Studies, each approach has a number of themes.

### Part 1: Study of Religion Topics

There are four topic areas (p.5, paragraph 11):

#### 1. Beliefs and teachings

- Beliefs about God, gods or ultimate reality
- The role of communities of faith
- Key moral principles
- The meaning and purpose of human life

#### 2. Sources of wisdom and authority

- Nature, history and treatment of key religious texts or scriptures
- Where appropriate, key religious figures and/or teachers from early history of the tradition and/or the modern age

#### 3. Practices

- The application of beliefs and teachings to the lives of modern believers
- Places and forms of worship
- Rituals, prayer, meditation
- Festivals and celebrations
- Fasting, rites of passage
- Religious journeys and pilgrimage

#### 4. Forms of Expression and Ways of Life

- The impact of belief on individuals, communities and societies
- Ways of life and moral codes
- Art forms such as drama, dance, literature, architecture and music inspired by religions
- The role of these art forms in worship and ritual

Each of these topics is populated differently for each religion. The specific content for each religion is given in the religion specific annex (for Catholic Christianity, this can be found on p.13). Below is given the detail from the Catholic Christianity Annex.

### Annex: Christianity (Catholic Christianity)

#### *Beliefs and Teachings*

- The belief in one as God as a Trinity of persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The scriptural origins of this belief and its historical development and significance.
- The doctrine of Creation and its implications: a belief in the goodness of the created world and the dignity of each person made in the image and likeness of God.
- The interpretation of Genesis 1-3 within the Catholic interpretative tradition in contrast to creationism. The compatibility of the doctrine of creation and the theory of evolution.
- The doctrine of the Fall and original sin, its meaning and significance for Catholic beliefs about sin and freedom and its role in sacramental theology, especially Baptism.
- The belief in Jesus as incarnate Son, divine Word, both human and divine. The scriptural and historical origins of this belief and its historical development through the early councils of the Church.
- The significance of Jesus' Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension and the implications these have for Catholic beliefs about salvation and grace

- An understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the history of the Catholic Church and in the lives of people today.
- Catholic beliefs about life after death: heaven, hell and purgatory and the meanings and implications of each.

#### *Sources of Authority and Wisdom*

- The nature and importance of Scripture as a source of revelation, an understanding of the shape of the Bible and the historical origins of this shape, including an understanding of the Catholic method of biblical interpretation.
- An understanding of the authority of the Church's magisterium: both conciliar and pontifical and the weight given to different kinds of Church teaching.
- An understanding of the Church as "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" and the significance of each of these marks of the Church.
- The role and example of Mary as a model of the Church and perfect disciple.
- The Second Vatican council – its history and key documents.
- The role of individual reason and Catholic teaching on the relationship between conscience, freedom and authority.
- Sources of moral teaching: the Ten Commandments, Natural Law, the virtues and the Catholic Church's teaching on the primacy of conscience.

#### *Practices*

- The Catholic teaching on sacraments, including a knowledge of each of the seven sacraments, their form and matter.
- The central place of the Eucharist as source and summit of Catholic Christian worship and life.
- The daily office as an expression of the constant work of praise to which all Catholics are called as part of Vatican II's universal call to holiness.
- Popular piety as expressed in such devotions as the Rosary, Eucharistic adoration, Stations of the Cross.
- The Church's liturgical calendar, including an understanding of its fasts and feasts and the significance of each.
- The Church at each level: domestic, local, national and global, including Church structures, positions of authority and the papacy.
- An understanding of the different features of a Catholic Church and how these reflect Catholic beliefs and facilitate Catholic prayer and devotion.

#### *Forms of Expression and Ways of Life*

- A study of Church and monastic architecture, design and decoration as expressive of Catholic beliefs and worship.
- A study of one of the Church's great visual artists, for example Raphael, Michelangelo or other Catholic devotional artists.
- A study of a Catholic devotional poet, for example Gerard Manley Hopkins.
- Catholic iconography and statuary, for example different renderings of the Stations of the Cross or Medieval rood screens.
- Catholic Liturgical music, including plainchant and other liturgical music.
- Other non-liturgical religious music, for example Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*
- Catholic literature, for example the work of Graham Greene or Evelyn Waugh.
- Catholic beliefs and practices as explored in film, for example *The Mission*, *A Man for All Seasons* or *Of Gods and Men*.

## Part 2: Thematic Study Themes

In the thematic study part of the reformed GCSE, students will be able to study two approaches: Textual Studies and/or Religious, Philosophical and Ethical studies in the modern world. In each of these approaches there will be a number of themes which will have to be studied. Some themes can be studied as a feature of either approach and some are only available in one of the approaches. The available themes are summarised in the table below:

Available in <u>Approach 1: Textual studies (TS)</u>	Available in <u>Approach 2: Religious, Philosophical and Ethical studies in the modern world (RPE)</u>
	Relationships and families
	Religious and scientific views of the world
	The existence of God
The lives of founders	Peace and conflict
Religious law making	Crime and punishment
Stories and parables	Dialogue with and between religious and non-religious beliefs
	Human rights and social justice

Figure 3: Themes available in each approach

The detail of each of these themes is given on pp 8-9 and summarised below:

- a. The lives of founders (TS only)
  - Accounts in the text of key events in the lives of founders or important religious figures
  - The significance and impact of these events , including on life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
  - How varied interpretations of the meaning of such texts may give rise to diversity within traditions
- b. Religious law making (TS only)
  - The significance, importance and impact of religious texts as a source for religious law making and codes for living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
  - How varied interpretations of the meaning of these sources may give rise to diversity within traditions
- c. Stories and parables (TS only)
  - The significance, importance and impact of stories and/or parables that communicate religious, moral and spiritual truths.
  - How varied interpretations of the meaning of such texts may give rise to diversity within traditions
- d. Relationships and families (TS and RPE)
  - Religious teachings about the nature and purpose of families in the 21st century
  - Sex, marriage, cohabitation and divorce

- Issues related to the nature and purpose of families
  - Roles of men and women; equality; gender prejudice and discrimination
  - How varied interpretations of sources and/or of teachings may give rise to diversity within traditions
- e. Religious and scientific views of the world (TS and RPE)
- Religious views of the world, including their relationship to scientific views
  - Beliefs about death and afterlife
  - Explanations of the origin of the universe
  - How varied interpretations of sources and/or of teachings may give rise to diversity within traditions
- f. The existence of God (TS and RPE)
- The existence of God, gods and ultimate reality
  - Ways in which God, god or ultimate reality might be understood through revelation, visions, miracles or enlightenment
  - How varied interpretations of sources and/or of teachings may give rise to diversity within traditions
- g. Peace and conflict (RPE only)
- Religion, peace and conflict
  - Violence, war, pacifism, terrorism, just war theory, holy war
  - The role of religion and belief in 21<sup>st</sup> century conflict and peace making
  - The concepts of justice, forgiveness and reconciliation
- h. Crime and punishment (RPE only)
- Causes of crime
  - Aims of punishment
  - The concepts of forgiveness, retribution, deterrence, reformation
  - The death penalty, treatment of criminals
  - Good, evil and suffering
- i. Dialogue with and between religious and non-religious beliefs (RPE only)
- How those with religious and non-religious beliefs respond to critiques of their beliefs
  - Including the study of a range of attitudes towards those with different religious views – inclusivist, exclusivist and pluralist approaches
- j. Human rights and social justice (RPE only)
- Religion, human rights and social justice
  - Issues of equality and freedom of religion and belief
  - Prejudice and discrimination in religion and belief
  - Human rights
  - Wealth and poverty
  - Racial prejudice and discrimination

## Reading Guide and Questions

The numbers below refer to the paragraph numbers in the DfE GCSE RS consultation document.

### Introduction

1-2 Introduction is a largely generic statement common to all GCSE criteria.

### Subject aims and learning outcomes

3-4 Subject aims and learning outcomes is in effect a position statement outlining the principles that are developed in the rest of the criteria.

### Programme of Study

5-8 Outlines the proposed routes or options for combining the subject content (paras 9-18).

The routes or options are quite complex but it is hoped that the way they are set out on pages 7 above clarifies them.

6 You may wish to comment on the content of para 6.

#### To consider – Programme of Study:

- You may wish to comment on how the elements are combined but an increase in the number of routes is unlikely because of the need for Ofqual to be able to ensure equality of reliability and validity through all routes. Indeed the number of routes might be reduced after the Consultation so it might be helpful to identify and justify the, say, two most important routes and the two least important routes.
- With reference to **paragraph 5**, is it appropriate that the two compulsory topics of study in a study of religion should be “Beliefs and Teachings” and “Practices”, rather than “Beliefs and Teachings” and “Sources of Authority”? The current compulsory topics in a study of religion are purely theoretical and will not require students to study the lived experience of believers. For example, in the case of Catholic student, their study of Catholic Christianity would not include any reference to how Catholics live and worship today and nothing on the sacraments. Is this appropriate for the new GCSE Religious Studies that will be taught in Catholic schools?

### Subject Content

10 This paragraph may need clarification.

11 You may wish to comment upon the titles of the four topics and the exemplar given for each topic.

12 You may wish to comment on this para but it is unlikely to constitute a significant feature in examination specifications when they are published.

#### To consider – Subject Content:

- Does the definition of the topics in **paragraph 11**, reflect the contents of the **Annex** on pp.13-15. If not, where are the discrepancies?

## Part Two, first approach: Textual Studies

- 14 You may wish to comment upon the introductory statement and the wording of the three bullet points.
- 15-17 You may wish to comment on these paras; for example, is the wording sufficiently precise, too loose or too prescriptive? Para 17 raises the issue of number and length of extracts and the level of challenge.

## Part Two, second approach; Religious, philosophical and ethical studies in the modern world

- 18 You may wish to comment upon the criteria to be followed in this section

### Themes

It is hoped that the categories and content and how they relate to the two approaches in Part Two may be seen more clearly on pages 10-11 above.

You may wish to comment upon the ten themes and the exemplar given for each theme.

## Religious Studies Short Course

- 19 You may wish to comment upon the appropriateness of the criteria to constitute a short course.

### To consider – Subject Content and Annex A (p.13)

- You may wish to comment upon the content of Catholic Christianity and also consider that the content of Christianity with a view to ensuring that topics address broadly similar material and that the content and hence level of challenge is broadly similar.
- Given the requirement to teach a second religion, you may wish to comment upon the topics in one or more other religions, again having regard to ensuring that topics address broadly similar material and that the content and hence level of challenge is broadly similar.
- With reference either to the themes in **paragraph 18**, or in the **Annex** on **pp.13-15**, is the lack of any reference to issues of life and death an omission you are happy with?
- Is the **Annex** on **pp.13-14** accurate and complete (bearing in mind the time constraints of delivering a GCSE)? If not, what would you add? What would you remove? What would you move? What would you rephrase?
- In “Forms of Expression” in the **Annex** on **p.15** are there any artistic expressions of Catholicism which you would like to see included as exemplars? Any that you would like to see removed?
- In **paragraph 18**, are the **Themes** outlined on **pp.7-8** appropriate and will they engage students? Please feel free to make positive as well as negative comments.
- Will the content of the **Annex** on **pp.13-15** allow full access for the less able pupils? If not, how would you simplify it, without affecting its rigour for the most able?
- Some critics of the new GCSE have complained that the list of religions (see the contents page for the list of available annexes) which can be studied is too narrow and that it should include other minority religions and world-views, including humanism. Is this a view you would share? If not, it would be good to state that the list of the six world religions is an appropriate list for the study of religions.