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# A guide to Responding to the Ofqual consultation on GCE and GCSE reform of Religious Studies

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NATIONAL BOARD OF RELIGIOUS  
INSPECTORS AND ADVISERS



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# 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 Ofqual 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.

# Ofqual Consultation on *Developing new GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications for first teaching in 2016 – part 3*

## Summary and Explanation

### Introduction

The reformed A level, AS level and GCSE in Religious Studies will:

- be assessed entirely by externally set and externally marked exams. There will be no coursework or controlled assessments
- not be tiered

There will be new Assessment Objectives (AOs) for reformed GCSEs and reformed AS and A level, as follows.

### GCSE – Proposed new AOs

Assessment Objectives		Weighting
<b>AO1</b>	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religion, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• similarities and differences between and within religions and beliefs;</li><li>• the nature of religious beliefs and teachings and their impact on individuals, communities and societies.</li></ul>	50%
<b>AO2</b>	Analyse and evaluate questions and issues related to religious beliefs, values and teachings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• using and applying knowledge and understanding of religions;</li><li>• constructing well-informed and balanced arguments.</li></ul>	50%

This is in contrast to the current AOs for GCSE which are:

Assessment Objectives		Weighting
AO1	Describe, explain and analyse, using knowledge and understanding	50%
AO2	Use evidence and reasoned argument to express and evaluate personal responses, informed insights and differing viewpoints	50%

## AS and A Level – Proposed new AOs

Assessment objectives		Weighting	
		AS	A
<b>AO1</b>	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religion, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>religious belief, thought and relevant issues;</li> <li>explaining the nature of religious beliefs and teachings and their impact on individuals, communities and societies;</li> <li>making connections across different aspects of study of religion and belief</li> </ul>	50%	40%
<b>AO2</b>	Analyse and critically evaluate questions and issues related to religious beliefs, values and teachings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>applying knowledge and understanding of religion</li> <li>using evidence and reasoning</li> <li>constructing well-informed and balanced arguments</li> </ul>	50%	60%

This is in contrast to the current AOs for AS, A2 and A Level which are:

Assessment objectives		Weighting		
		AS	A2	A
AO1	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 learners should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the connections between different elements of their course of study.	65-75%	55-65%	60-70%
AO2	Critically evaluate and justify a point of view through the use of evidence and reasoned argument. In addition, for synoptic assessment, A level learners should relate elements of their course of study to their broader context and to aspects of human experience.	25-35%	35-45%	30-40%

## Reading guide and questions

Executive Summary on pages 3-5 provides a useful introduction but does not say anything that is not stated, usually more fully, in the substance of the Consultation starting on page 6.

Essentially, Ofqual are working to ensure that all new GCSE and GCE A Level qualifications are designed and operate to common standards so that the individual specifications which will be developed by Awarding Organisations on the basis of the final published criteria are strictly comparable. Thus there should be comparability between all GCSE and between all GCE A Level criteria, irrespective of subject and similar comparability between all papers and combinations of papers for each subject. It is for this reason that the number of combinations of papers that may be combined to form a GCSE RS specification will be fewer than currently exist.

### 1. Introduction, page 6

This section is essentially factual.

1.3 makes clear that this consultation is on the structure and assessment of RS. Once this consultation is completed and Ofqual have reflected on comments submitted, they will produce the definitive structure and assessment of RS. Ofqual will then launch a second consultation on the technical regulatory requirements that exam boards wishing to design, deliver and award that new RS qualifications must meet.

CES/NBRIA will alert dioceses and schools to this second consultation when it is launched in 2015.

1.4 sets out the planned timescale for the development and introduction of the new specifications. The language is slightly aspirational because this consultation has been launched about 7 weeks after the phase 2 subject consultation and many months after phase 1 subjects.

It is important that both GCSE and GCE A Level RS are introduced in September 2016 to ensure that they are introduced with the main body of subjects. Any delay is likely to diminish the standing of the subject because they would be the only 'unreformed' subject specifications being taught from September 2016. This is an important point that has been made to the Minister and *it would be helpful if the point was included in responses*.

### 2. Subject-specific proposals, page 8 - GCSE

This may be regarded as the key part of the consultation. Sections 2.2 – 2.4 deal with the GCSE reform.

2.2 States that exams in GCSE religious studies will all be externally set and marked. There will be no coursework or controlled assessment

2.3 States that there will be no tiered papers

2.4 Sets out the new AOs for GCSE (see above *GCSE – Proposed new AOs*)

## FOR COMPARISON: HISTORY GCSE

The published **Assessment Objectives for History** are:

AO1 – 35%: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key features and characteristics of the periods studied.

AO2 – 35%: Explain and analyse historical events and periods studied using second-order historical concepts.

AO3 – 15%: Analyse, evaluate and use sources (contemporary to the period) to make substantiated judgements, in the context of historical events studied

AO4 – 15%: Analyse, evaluate and make substantiated judgements about interpretations (including how and why interpretations may differ) in the context of historical events studied.

In each specification as a whole, 5% of the marks must be used to credit the accuracy of candidates' spelling, punctuation and grammar and their use of specialist terminology.

## FOR COMPARISON: CITIZENSHIP GCSE

The Assessment Objectives that are out for consultation for Citizenship are

AO1 – 30%: Demonstrate citizenship knowledge and understanding of key citizenship concepts, issues, themes and debates, using terminology accurately.

AO2 – 30%: Apply understanding of citizenship concepts and themes to issues, actions, debates and participation, demonstrating an ability to make connections and organize ideas.

AO3 – 20%: Analyse evidence about citizenship themes, issues, debates and actions in order to interpret different viewpoints and develop arguments.

AO4 – 20%: Evaluate different perspectives relating to citizenship issues, themes, debates and actions in order to make judgments and construct and sustain reasoned, coherent arguments.

This is the KEY feature. It is intended to retain the current two equally-weighted Assessment Objectives, ie AO1 50% and AO2 50%. The text states:

“we propose that the current permitted weighting ranges should be replaced with an absolute weighting to enhance comparability between different qualifications in the subject.”

This may be an error because page 9 correctly states the existing Assessment Objectives with equal 50% weighting. It may be a confusion with the existing GCE A Level Assessment Objectives.

Please consider the revised wording of the AOs carefully.

Regarding AO1, consider not only the generic statement but the two sub-statements introduced by bullet points.

- similarities and differences between and within religions
- the nature of religious beliefs and teachings and their impact on individuals, communities and societies

### Questions to consider – GCSE proposals

- Might the first bullet encourage the highlighting of differences within a religion (or within Catholic Christianity) and if so would that be detrimental to classroom teaching?
- Might the first bullet encourage a degree of ‘compare and contrast’ between religions, and if so is that good Religious Education, is it appropriate and should it be included?
- Might the second bullet be read as meaning their impact on ‘individuals, communities and societies’ both within and outside of the religious tradition, and if so does this enhance or detract from the objective of good Religious Education?
- Does AO2 succeed in requiring more substantial and substantiated answers than is currently the case for AO2 questions?
- Are there other points that need to be considered carefully?

## 2. Subject Specific Proposals, page 11 – AS and A Level

Sections 2.5 – 2.7 on pages 9-12 focus on GCE A Level and AS Level RS.

2.6 States that the exams will continue to be externally set and marked.

2.7 Draws attention to the new fixed weightings rather than the range currently in place to promote comparability (between different specifications). In addition a significant weighting is proposed for each AO, rather than one AO carrying the majority of the weight. The AOs for AS and A Level are given above in *AS and A Level – Proposed New AOs*

Please consider the revised wording of the AOs carefully.

### Questions to consider – AS and A Level proposals

- There is a clear link between the wording of the GCSE and the GCE A Level AOs. Does it show both continuity and development and the opportunity for greater challenge?
- Note that there are subtle differences, such as:
  - the addition of the word explaining at the start of AO1 bullet 2;
  - the addition of the word critically as the third word of AO2;
- Is anything of value in the current wording lost if the proposed wording is adopted?
- Do you welcome the fact that the weighting between AO1 and AO2 has been altered considerably?
- Is the balance of AO1 – 40%, AO2 – 60% appropriate?
- Is an equal balance of AO1 – 50%, AO2 – 50% for AS level appropriate?
- Are there other points that need to be considered carefully?

## 3. Equality analysis

This section is essentially factual. The 3 questions appear to give full scope to respond to the draft Equality analysis.

## 4. Responding to the consultation

The evaluation of public consultations places considerable weight on the number of responses, the nature of the respondents and the reasons and evidence for each reply.

Please encourage a good response to the consultation and take care to precisely identify the details of the respondent.

**When responding to the questions, please make clear what you support as much as make clear what you wish to see amended or deleted.**