A Level Religious Studies New to Edexcel Transcript

A Level Religious Studies, New to Edexcel pre-record training.

Hello and welcome to this Pearson New to Edexcel pre-recorded event.

My name's Susan Currey and I'm the Religious Studies subject advisor. If you have any questions relating to any of our Religious Studies qualifications, please do get in touch and I'll be happy to discuss these with you. In this event, we'll be discussing both the specification and the assessment for AS and A Level Religious Studies.

During this session, we provide you with the information you need to introduce you to Religious Studies, A Level with Edexcel, or simply to refresh your knowledge. It may be useful for you to have downloaded a copy of the specification and your delegate pack, which will include some example answers that we will look at as part of this session.

As we go through the slides, reference will be made to the organisation of the course, important features of the specification and the assessment expectations. You will consider the structure, content and assessment of the specifications and the support available, review the content in the specifications and exam techniques, explore the level-based mark schemes.

So why choose Edexcel for A Level Religious Studies?

We have engaging content and topics to suit the interests of your students.

We have a choice of different religions to study and different routes through the course that you can choose.

We have a clear and consistent structure with accessible assessment, which increases in demand as students move through the paper.

Our qualification supports progression from Key Stage four. The content builds on the understanding developed at key Stage four, while also ensuring the students new to the subject are appropriately supported.

AS and A Level qualifications are co-teachable. This provides flexibility for you and your students.

Centres who are co-teaching AS and A Level can deliver the first three topics in each component in the first year, allowing students to be entered for the AS at the end of the year.

The qualification provides a focus on scholarship, particularly in the second year of study, the specification content encourages students to compare the significant ideas presented in the work of scholars.

It develops understanding and appreciation. This qualification encourages students to develop an appreciation of religious thought and its contribution to individuals, communities, and societies.

It helps develop a holistic understanding of religion. The specification facilitates inquiry into and develops insightful evaluations of ultimate questions about the purposes and commitments of human life.

It develops a range of transferable skills for progression to higher education or other. Students will use a range of ideas and a range of approaches to the study of religions and beliefs in order to research and present a wide range of well-informed and reasonable arguments.

And we have a dedicated Religious Studies team which includes myself to help support you in delivering this course.

Edexcel is really proud of its team of experts and their willingness to support to you. Please contact me if you have any queries. To support you further, I have links with the dedicated team of assessment and religious content experts with years of experience who head up our senior examining team, who are also teachers in a variety of schools and universities around the country.

So, this is me. And as mentioned I'm here to support you with our qualifications. You can e-mail me at teachingreligiousstudies@pearson.com.

He can also call me join our Religious Studies community.

You can also book a Team's meeting to discuss something with me, one-on-one. I am here to help you.

I also send out a monthly Religious Studies subject update, so please do sign up to that to keep up to date with news, events and resources.

So, let's start by looking at our content. Our specification is the basis of the whole qualification and includes information about the content you should teach, as well as the assessment information.

We have one specification for AS and one specification for A Level with different papers and routes through each qualification. You can access these on the links on the screen, but I've also included them within your delegate pack. I will talk through how it how each is set out and the expectations of the course.

Candidates will study three areas of study or papers, out of a choice of four.

They can choose between Philosophy of Religion.

Religion and Ethics, New Testament studies, and a choice of six religions. The only prohibited combination is the study of New Testament and Christianity.

Each paper is split into six topics. The first three are consistent within AS and A Level, whereas the last three topics will only be in the A Level qualification. This means the two courses are fully co-teachable and this gives you the flexibility to enter students for AS or A Level or decide later on in the course.

Within paper one, Philosophy of Religion, you will cover philosophical issues, particularly looking at arguments for the existence of God before looking at the nature of religious experience and problems of evil and suffering, religious language, the work of scholars and influences of developments in religious belief, focusing particularly on life after death and religion and science.

As you can see, all papers follow the same structure with a total of six topics. The first three topics included in AS and A Level, and the last three topics only found in our A Level qualification.

Within paper two on Religion and Ethics, we look at environmental issues and equality as part of the ethical issues and debates, including the ethical theories of Utilitarianism, Situation Ethics and Natural Moral Law, and then apply in these to topical issues of war and peace and sexual ethics.

Students then study ethical language, the work of different scholars and medical ethics, and the issues within this.

Our New Testament paper looks first at the concept of prophecy and the messianic expectations, along with the social and political context of 1st century Palestine, before moving on to look at the gospel accounts about the person of Jesus.

Students will study the issues around texts looking at source analysis, purpose and authorship, as well as different interpretations of scripture. There will then study the significance of Jesus death, modern scholarship, and the impact for faith today.

For paper four there is a choice of six different religions.

Across all options, students will look at key beliefs within that faith, sources of authority, religious practices, development of the lived faith, the work of different scholars and religion and society.

So, let's have a look at the structure of the specification.

The specification structure is consistent across all papers. Each paper is split into six topics as previously discussed.

Each topic is then divided into sections. Each section is then divided into sub-topics which will form the basis of what is needed to be taught.

All exam questions and mark schemes are based on these subtopics. If it's not in the specification, it will not be examined.

As you can see from the example on the screen from our Philosophy of Religion paper, the philosophical issues and questions topic is split into three sections, one for each argument for the existence of God.

Each section then has sub-topics, for example, inductive reasoning, a posteriori types of arguments, and the interpretation of experience, when looking at the design argument.

Within our specification, there are a number of named scholars to reflect the fact that the qualification is grounded in scholarship. At the bottom of each subtopic, you will see phrases such as ‘with reference to the ideas of…’ and then a named individual. As you can see on the screen.

This indicates scholars that have contributed to this specific content but are not compulsory reading.

Any additional relevant contributors that you choose to refer to will be credited if used appropriately.

However, there are some scholars that are named within the subtopics of the specification and are therefore compulsory content and could be examined on directly. As you can see from this example, Rashi is named directly within the subtopic and within the sample question specifically asks about his commentary.

Additionally, texts and scholars from the anthology can be used within questions, for example, Copleston and Russell are named within the ‘Works of Scholars’ section, and therefore questions about their argument from contingency and religious experience could be examined directly.

Students can discuss the works of these scholars to support any answer, however, and are not limited to this area of the specification and all relevant content will be credited, but they will only be specifically asked about the scholars in relation to these areas.

Okay, let's have a look at our anthology. This is a unique part of our specification, and it is required as part of the A Level qualification rather than the AS qualification.

So within the anthology we provide you with a number of relevant scholarly texts to support the teaching of the content for each paper.

The qualification’s focus on scholarship allows candidates to really understand the diversity of views, the developing nature of the subject throughout time and to develop their skills in the critical evaluation of the scholar's work.

At Edexcel we use the anthology text to support candidate’s understanding, to develop their ability to comprehend scholarly writings and prepare them for their next steps in academic scholarship.

This anthology is unique to the Edexcel A Level qualification and enables teachers and candidates to have easy access to the key texts, ideas and thinkers that they need to study this course.

The anthology should be used as a starting point for candidates, and they should be encouraged to read and engage with additional contributors listed within the specification or other relevant scholars.

The use of the extract as part of the assessment helps candidates really ground their knowledge in scholarship, and the original works of scholars, and we'll look further at this when we get onto the assessment part of this.

As mentioned, the anthology provides access to key texts to support students understanding of the content. For example, the anthology for paper one includes a transcript of the famous radio debate between Frederick Copleston and Bertrand Russell. The section you can see supports the teaching of the section on religious experience and students can see how different thinkers argue their opposing positions.

The anthology is not meant to be learned by rote in time, does not need to be set aside to teach the anthology discreetly as all texts are there to support the content within the specification. As mentioned, one of the assessment questions within the A Level paper will include an extract of the anthology and it's there to help support students in explaining key ideas within a topic, acting as a prompt or a springboard.

And as mentioned, we'll look at this later on in the session.

So, let's start having a look at the assessment of the content.

All components of both AS and A Level are assessed through an externally examined paper, which follows the same question format.

In both AS and A Level, students will sit three papers in total, one for each area of study.

At AS level, this will be one-hour long paper with a total of 54 marks. At A Level, this would be a 2-hour paper with a total of 80 marks available.

Across both AS level and A Level qualifications, we have two assessment objectives which are consistent with GCSE Religious Studies also. These are the same across all exam boards and will focus on AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO2 analysis and evaluation.

At AS, each assessment objective is worth 50% of the marks, whereas at A Level AO2 is worth 60% of the marks available.

These are assessed differently in different question types which we will come onto later.

At AS level, all papers will follow the same format. There will be two 8-mark ‘Explore’ questions, two 9-mark ‘Assess’ questions and one 20-mark ‘Analyse’ question. We will look at how these are marked later in the session.

You will find that our command words are used consistently across all questions, so that you can fully prepare students for the question types that come up.

At A Level, we use some of the same question types as with AS which supports these qualifications being co-teachable.

All exam papers will follow the same structure, with questions increasing in demand as candidates work through the paper, making this really accessible for all abilities.

All paper start with an 8-mark ‘Explore’ question followed by a 12-mark ‘Assess’ question. Question three is split with a 10-mark ‘Clarify’ question which uses the extract and 20-mark ‘Analyse’ question and lastly with a 30-mark ‘Evaluate’ question to help pull the whole course together.

Again, these command words are used consistently across every paper, so students can really be prepared and understand the requirements of each question type.

As part of the delegate pack, there is a document entitled ‘recommended timings’ to help guide students as to how long to spend on each question type and the level of detail needed for each question.

Our papers include shorter and longer questions so students can show breadth of knowledge across their learning as well as the depth of their understanding on longer questions.

We're now going to move on to look at the formal assessment, looking at the level criteria and example answers so that you can really understand the assessment requirements.

All of our assessments use a level-based mark scheme rather than point marking. This means that examiners read the full answer before deciding which level the answer best fits into. They then look at how successfully the student achieves the level criteria and give a mark based on that.

So here is an example of a level-based marking criteria that is used for 8-mark ‘Explore’ questions.

There is clear progression from one level to the next, and the answer is marked holistically. Rather than looking for individual points. This means that candidates can approach the question in different ways to show their knowledge.

There are several bullet points within each level descriptor. As students progress through the levels, the expectation increases from a narrow range of knowledge, with superficial understanding to a wide range of knowledge, with comprehensively developed points to show a depth of understanding.

Examiners will read the whole answer and see which level the answer is closest to, before then deciding how well it meets these and where in the level the answer sits.

We'll start by looking at the 8-mark ‘Explore’ questions which are on both the AS and the A Level papers.

At AS, we would recommend that students spend 8 minutes on this question.

At A Level, we would recommend that students spend 10 minutes on this question as the paper as longer.

This question assesses ‘Assessment Objective 1’ only so it wants candidates to show their knowledge and understanding of a belief, argument or concept.

On the screen you can see there are three examples of ‘Explore questions’ from some of our different papers.

Here is the level criteria again for the 8-mark ‘Explore’ questions with Level 3, including a wide range of knowledge, specialist language used appropriately, addressing a broad range of ideas and beliefs that are comprehensively developed to show their understanding.

So, to achieve a level 3 candidates need to select relevant points. They need to be accurate and linked to the question.

They need to show their knowledge by using a range of points and relevant terminology.

They need to develop the points they make to show their understanding rather than just list simple points.

And they need to keep their answer focused on the question throughout.

This is the short question so examiners are looking for the detail that would be possible within this time expectation.

Here is an example question from our Philosophy of Religion paper and the associated indicative content from the mark scheme.

The mark scheme will always include some possible indicative content. This is indicative and not prescriptive. The candidate may refer to other credible information, and the mark scheme is not a checklist of what needs to be included. You may want to pause the video here to give yourself a moment to read through this.

Here is an example of an answer from the Philosophy of Religion paper.

You may want to pause to give yourself a moment to read through this, either in the delegate pack or on the screen.

This answer was awarded at the bottom of Level 2, gaining 3 marks.

The explanation of natural and moral evil is relevant, but the comments on how suffering is necessary is underdeveloped in a bit tangential, as it discusses solution to suffering rather than the problem of suffering, which is the focus of the question.

The candidate has missed the focus of this and hasn't really explained why suffering is a problem but has tried to evaluate Irenaeus’ theodicy instead, which doesn't gain marks because it's not what the question asks for.

As you can see from the level descriptors, it does just enough to get into the level 2 band, including some specialist language in a narrow range of key ideas. To improve the candidate needed to focus on the question and explain why suffering that they had identified was a problem for belief in God.

This question was taken from our Islam paper. Again, I'd recommend pausing here to give yourself a moment to read through this and the indicative content.

And here is the associated answer for this question. Again, I would recommend pausing here to allow you to read through the answer.

This is a strong answer, and the candidate deservedly achieved full marks. The answer relates closely to the question. It remains focused throughout. It shows a real understanding of the material. It uses the wide range of specialist vocabulary appropriately and knowledge of some of the key ideas.

Okay, we're now going to look at the 12-mark ‘Assess’ question, which is actually worth 9 marks at AS level.

It's recommended that candidates spend 10 minutes on this at AS and 20 minutes on this question at A Level.

This question type assesses both assessment objectives and is looking for reasoned arguments and a judgement.

Here are some different examples of ‘Assess’ questions across our different papers.

These are the level descriptors for ‘Assess’ questions. Candidates are expected to show knowledge and use specialist language, explain points to achieve logical chains of reasoning, and construct reasoned judgements.

You can see that the first point refers to AO1 knowledge and the other two bullet points within the level assess assessment objective two.

Within these questions, students need to unpick the question and select the relevant knowledge using specialist language. The need to discuss different perspectives and draw on their knowledge or support arguments. They need to develop their point, including more than one simple explanation to build up arguments.

It's worth noting that they do not need to approach this in a ‘for and against’ manner.

Here is an example of a question from our Ethics paper.

It might be worth pausing here to give yourself time to read through the indicative content within the mark scheme. Remember that this is indicative and not prescriptive, and any relevant points and arguments will be credited.

Here is an example answer for this question. Again, it may be worth pausing the video here to give yourself time to read through the answer and consider which level would be a best fit for this.

This candidate achieved level 2, 7 marks.

The candidate shows clear understanding of three characteristic Christian approaches to same-sex relationships. But reference to social and cultural change, which has demanded by the question is limited and they only use the phrase ‘they are more all open and accepting’.

They draw the very simple conclusion that liberal Christians are typically more influenced by this change.

This response could move up the levels with reference to particular examples of how society is more open and accepting to support their argument, and whether there is specific evidence of religious approaches to responding to these changes.

Okay, the second question we're looking at is taken from our Buddhism paper. Again, I would recommend pausing here to give yourself a moment to read through the indicative mark scheme.

And here is an example answer to that question. Again, I would recommend pausing here to give yourself an opportunity to read through it and consider it against the level descriptors.

So, this answer is worth level 3, 12 marks. It shows a really wide range of knowledge. They use specialist language and terminology that are carefully selected and used appropriately.

Each of the three paragraphs critically deconstructs the religious information it includes, and they lead to coherent and logical chains of reasoning. You can see that development within the answers.

The conclusion, and throughout, you're able to see those constructions of reasoned judgments referring to the full range of elements within the question.

Okay. We're now going to look at question type that is on the A Level paper but not on the AS paper.

For question 3a, candidates are given an extract of a text from the anthology and then asked to clarify an idea within it.

The extract is there to act as a prompt to support students.

Students are recommended to spend 15 minutes on this question type in total.

In these question types, we'd recommend that you get students to read both the extract and the question fully, and then identify any key points of the text that they can use. They should then answer the question using that identified piece of the extract as a springboard from which to explain and clarify the concept. They need to explain and expand on ideas or concepts to demonstrate their knowledge of the topic.

The example on the screen is from the Ethics paper and students need to explain an idea relating to euthanasia. They can then use the text to prompt them and help them to explain the concept.

Here is the level criteria for 10-mark ‘Clarify’ questions, which as you can see focuses on AO1 knowledge which is relevant and fully explained.

Students need to show their knowledge by selecting relevant points and key terminology which the extract can support with. They need to fully and explain and develop the points that they make and ensure that they refer to the extract within their answer.

Here is an example question from the New Testament paper. It may be worth pausing here to give yourself a moment to read through the extract and the question.

And here is the indicative content which again I would recommend pausing to give yourself a moment to read through.

And here is an example answer associated with this question.

Again, it may be worth pausing here to give yourself an opportunity to read through this and consider what level you would award here.

Okay this was awarded level 1, 3 marks.

The candidate offers a very brief response that does contain some relevant material drawn from the passage.

The answer could have been stronger had the candidate made more use of the text. This extract actually had quite a lot in it that they could have used as a springboard.

Overall, a short answer can confine themselves to an a ‘narrow range’ as the knowledge they're expected to show is limited for 15 minutes.

OK, moving on to our next question. So, this one, this question was taken from our A Level Islam paper. Again, I would recommend pausing here to give yourself a moment to read through the extract and the question.

And here is the indicative mark scheme associated with this question. Again, I would recommend pausing here to give yourself a moment to read through this.

And here is an example answer to that question. Remember that all answers are within your delicate pack, if you are finding it difficult to see this on the screen.

It may be worth taking a moment to read through this before we go through the answer.

Okay this was awarded Level 3, 10 Marks and this is a high-level answer where the candidate demonstrates very good knowledge and understanding of the passage and addresses a broad range of key ideas and beliefs. There are explained and expanded on, so it's very clear that the candidate understands the material they’re clarifying.

Okay, so for the next two question types, I'm just going to look at top level answers.

Our website includes a range of example answers at different levels which can really help you understand the expectations for each question type.

The 20-mark ‘Analyse’ question is found on both our AS paper and our A Level papers. At AS, this is the final question, and we'd expect candidates to spend 20 minutes on this question type.

At A Level, it follows the ‘Clarify’ question and we would recommend that candidates spend 30 minutes on this question type.

On the screen, you can see some example answers from some of our different papers.

And here is the level criteria associated with this question. As you can see, there are four bullet points within each level. The first relates to ‘Assessment Objective 1’ and the other three relate to ‘Assessment Objective 2’.

These questions are often quite broad, so that candidates can bring in different areas of the course. So, students should start by unpicking the question so they can decide on what relevant knowledge to include.

They need to show a range of knowledge and specialist language and draw on different points to support arguments with relevant reasons.

They need to discuss different perspectives and appraise the success of their views or arguments.

They need to fully explain the points and reasons they give and keep their answers focused on the question throughout.

Here is an example of a question and the indicative content from our New Testament paper, which I would recommend pausing to give yourself a moment to read through.

OK, here is an example answer. Again, I would recommend pausing here to give yourself a moment to read through, considering the level descriptors and what is required for a top-level answer.

So, this answer achieved level 5, 20 marks.

It is clearly structured.

It covers a wide range of knowledge and uses specialist concepts very well.

It makes connections between a range of ideas, and it deconstructs and unpicks those issues.

It also presents coherent and recent judgments with a full appraisal of the evidence.

A well-deserved full marks.

OK, moving on to our 30-mark ‘Evaluate’ questions. These are only found in our A Level paper, and we recommend that students spend 40 minutes on these.

They are designed to be broad questions, allowing students to synthesise knowledge from across the course, and makes synoptic links across different papers.

Here are examples of questions from different papers.

As you can see, they are very open which allows candidates to answer these in a range of different ways. Any will be creditable as long as they meet the level criteria.

Here is the level criteria for the 30-mark ‘Evaluate’ questions.

As you can see, there are six bullet points of criteria. The first focuses on ‘Assessment Objective 1’, but the others focus on ‘Assessment Objective 2’.

Much of the criteria is similar to the 20-mark ‘Analyse’ criteria, but with an expectation to draw the answer together with the conclusion.

To achieve a level 5, students need to unpick the question and include relevant points and specialist language. Students may benefit from creating a plan before beginning although this is not essential.

They need to discuss different arguments and perspectives, fully explaining and appraising the strength of these arguments.

They need to include synoptic links to another area of the course and bring their argument together in a conclusion.

Here is an example of a question and the indicative content from an ‘Evaluate’ question within our Paper 2 Religion and Ethics paper. I would recommend pausing here to give yourself a moment to read through this indicative content.

And here is an example of a 30-mark ‘Evaluate’ question. Again, I would recommend pausing here to give yourself a moment to read through this and consider what is expected from the level criteria.

Okay so this answer achieved level 5 with 28 marks.

The candidate has shown a clear understanding of the content, explaining arguments well, and appraised these throughout.

They made very interesting connections with New Testament, made inappropriate places in the essay, and it's really strong on evaluation throughout. To improve, to get this up to 30 marks, that would need to make connections with examples in today's world. The question focuses on it continuing to offer useful solutions. The answer does this very well in terms of theoretical approaches and an example of an abortion or further real-world examples on either side of the argument would have added to this response.

Okay, so let's summarise the key points.

Use the specification to inform your teaching. This is the basis of the course, and all exam questions are based on this.

Use scholars and the anthology to support your teaching.

Remember that AO2 is worth 60% of the teaching at A Level, so this skill needs to be taught within each topic area.

Examiners will mark using a best-fit approach, using the level-based mark schemes.

We have a range of past papers, mark schemes, examiners reports, and exemplar answers to help you get a feel of the marking expectations.

Alongside that, we have a range of resources available within our website and all new materials are highlighted with new and emailed out as part of my religious Studies monthly newsletter.

And of course, please do get in contact with me. If I don't know the answer, I will be able to find out from our team of experts.