

Introductory note

Part One of the draft GCSE Religious Studies subject content¹ specifies that:

9. *The content outlined below sets out the requirements for the study of religions, which is described for specific religions in annex A.*
10. *Where a religion is studied from the perspective of one group or denomination the second option chosen must be from another principal religion (e.g Christianity and Catholic Christianity could not be combined). Where a group or denomination is studied it must be studied in the context of the wider religion to which it belongs.*
11. *The four (study of religion) topics from which specifications may draw, in line with the programme of study set out above, are:*
 - a. *beliefs and teachings of religion: beliefs about God, gods or ultimate reality; the role of communities of faith, key moral principles and the meanings and purposes of human life*
 - b. *sources of wisdom and authority: the nature, history and treatment of key religious texts or scriptures; and where appropriate, of key religious figures and/or teachers from the early history of the tradition and/or the modern age*
 - c. *practices: the application of beliefs and teachings to the lives of modern believers including the study of places and forms of worship (as appropriate to each religion) rituals, prayer, meditation, festivals and celebrations, fasting, rites of passage, religious journeys and pilgrimage*
 - d. *forms of expression and ways of life: the impact of beliefs on individuals, communities and societies through ways of life and moral codes, through art forms such as drama, dance, literature, architecture and music inspired by religions and belief, and the role of these art forms in worship or ritual*
12. *In addition, all specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding that:*
 - *religious traditions in Great Britain are diverse and include the following religions: Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, as well as other religions and non-religious beliefs*
 - *the fact that religious traditions of Great Britain are, in the main, Christian*

The following annex is intending to fit in with this and the style and content of the other seven annexes that can be found in the draft document. However we are also proposing various changes to the above in order for it to be inclusive of non-religious worldviews.

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Humanism

All specifications must cover the following core knowledge and understanding, which represents 100% of the content for Part One.

Beliefs and teachings

- definitions of 'Humanism' including that it is a recent label for a type of non-religious worldview often found in history but not necessarily a self-identity
- reason, evidence, and scientific investigation as the way to discover truth about reality, including the origins of human life, evolution and the big bang
- Humanists' belief that there is no evidence for the existence of gods or the supernatural and are atheists or agnostics; Epicurus and the problem of evil
- the belief that death is the end of personal existence
- the special value of human life as the only life and approaches to death
- how humanists find meaning and purpose in life (the idea of meaning in life as 'created, not discovered') and how these ideas differ to any concept of 'ultimate meaning' in the universe
- the belief that morality originates naturally from living in communities
- the principle of the 'Golden Rule'

Sources of wisdom and authority

- beliefs about the bases of morality and how moral judgments are made more by reason, empathy, and consideration of consequences than by rules
- individual autonomy and social responsibility as an alternative to religious or other authority
- use of the scientific method to assess truth claims; the source of its authority, and the provisional nature of the knowledge it produces; sources of moral wisdom in humanist and allied ethical thinking, in stories and diverse cultural traditions
- the idea that all texts and literature are human creations and potential sources of wisdom
- humanist ideas as global and perennial from the ancient world to today
- key individuals and their contributions (drawing three examples from Mencius, Epicurus, Aphra Behn, David Hume, J S Mill, Marie Curie, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Bertrand Russell)

Practices

- distinctive motivations for specific altruistic work; non-religious pastoral support including end of life care, celebrancy

- perspectives on social values: openness, cooperation, free inquiry, discussion and participation
- beliefs about the need to challenge tradition and review all personal and social practices as circumstances and knowledge change
- festivals as natural and cultural rather than religious; humanists and Christmas
- approaches to significant rites of passage, including humanist ceremonies – baby namings, weddings, funerals
- the organised humanist movement in Britain and globally

Forms of expression and ways of life

- the pursuit of ‘the good life’; acceptance that different individuals’ preferences give rise to diversity of ways of living
- advocacy of the secular state as equally welcoming to all religions and beliefs; implications of this idea; what makes some kinds of space special
- the high value placed on individual expression; the lack of any compulsion to participate in organised Humanism
- approaches to health and wellbeing, including ‘whole person’ ideas of personal development through integrated selves and connections with other people and the natural world
- international expressions of Humanism including use of the ‘Happy Human’ logo
- perspectives on the treatment of other animals e.g. in food production, medical testing and domestically
- humanist influences in art in depictions of the human person: in Greek Classical Age sculpture, in Dutch Golden Age realist painting, in contemporary portrait photography
- relevant themes in literature by humanists or with humanist inspiration: the poetry of Thomas Hardy and Matthew Arnold, and novels and essays of E M Forster, George Eliot and Philip Pullman
- scientists, their humanist influences and perspectives – historical figures including Marie Curie and T. H. Huxley, twentieth century scientists including Albert Einstein, and contemporaries including Jim Al-Khalili and Alice Roberts

Common and divergent views between humanists in the way beliefs are understood and expressed should be included throughout.