

**Written Ministerial Statement
Department for Education**

RS GCSE and A Level Consultation

The Minister of State for School Reform (Nick Gibb): In April this year, the Government announced that GCSEs and A levels in religious studies, design & technology, drama, dance, music and physical education – and GCSEs in art & design, computer science and citizenship – would be reformed for first teaching in September 2016.

The Department has already consulted on proposed subject content for art and design, computer science, dance, music and physical education, and is currently consulting on proposed subject content for drama, design and technology and cooking and nutrition. Today, we are publishing for consultation new subject content for religious studies. At the same time, Ofqual, the independent regulator of qualifications and examinations for England, will consult on the proposed assessment objectives for this subject.

These new qualifications are intended to provide students with the knowledge and understanding that will prepare them for further and higher education and future employment. In common with all our reformed GCSEs and A levels, they will be high-quality, demanding and academically rigorous qualifications.

The revised content for religious studies GCSE and A level is designed to provide students with a broader and deeper understanding of religion than previous specifications. For the first time, students studying the religious studies GCSE will be required to study two religions. As well as studying key scripture and religious texts, students will have the opportunity to learn about critiques of religion and other non-religious beliefs through the study of philosophy and ethics. In addition, it will be a requirement for students to be aware of the diverse range of religious and non-religious beliefs represented in in this country and the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are, in the main, Christian.

For the thousands of Church and faith schools in this country these reforms will enable them to build on their strong academic performance and the important role they play in their communities and wider society.

In future, all RS GCSE students will spend at least half their time engaging in an academically rigorous study of two religions. In all, students will have the option to spend up to three-quarters of their time studying one religion. These changes are an important part of ensuring the new GCSE is as broad and rigorously demanding as other GCSE subjects. In the same way that a well-educated GCSE history student would be expected to learn about more than just British history, we expect well-educated religious studies GCSE students to know about more than one religion. It will also help to prepare students for life in modern Britain, foster an awareness of other faiths and beliefs, and encourage tolerance and mutual respect – key British values that are non-negotiable and a vital part of a secure future for Britain.

At A level, students will study at least one religion in depth through two of the following three areas of study: the systematic study of religion; textual studies; and philosophy, ethics and social scientific studies. These broadly reflect the main areas of study at higher education and will ensure that students have sufficient breadth and depth of understanding to support progression to higher education.

This consultation is an important part of the reform process enabling all those with an interest in this subject to provide their views. We will consider carefully all responses received in determining the final content. The consultation on reformed subject content for religious studies GCSE and A level will be available today at <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/>. Ofqual's consultation on assessment arrangements will be available on its website at <http://ofqual.gov.uk>.