

Pearson response to the Ofqual Consultation
Developing new GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications
for first teaching in 2016 – Part 3
5 January 2015

Organisation details

Name

Lesley Davies

Position

Vice President, Quality, Standards and Research

Organisation name (if applicable)

Pearson

Address

190 High Holborn
London WC1V 7BH

Email

lesley.davies@pearson.com

Telephone

020 7190 4292

Would you like us to treat your response as confidential?*

If you answer yes, we will not include your details in any list of people or organisations that responded to the consultation.

Yes No

Is this a personal response or an official response on behalf of your organisation?*

Personal response
 Official response

If you ticked 'Personal views' which of the following are you?

Student
 Parent or carer
 Teacher (but responding in a personal capacity)
 Other, including general public (Please state below)

If you ticked "Official response from an organisation/group", please respond accordingly:

Type of responding organisation*

- Awarding organisation
- Local authority
- School or college (please answer the question below)
- Academy chain
- Private training provider
- University or other higher education institution
- Employer
- Other representative or interest group (please answer the question below)

School or college type

- Comprehensive or non-selective academy
- State selective or selective academy
- Independent
- Special school
- Further education college
- Sixth form college
- Other (please state below)

Type of representative group or interest group

- Group of awarding organizations
- Union
- Employer or business representative group
- Subject association or learned society
- Equality organisation or group
- School, college or teacher representative group
- Other (please state below)

Nation*

- England
- Wales
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- Other EU country
- Non-EU country

How did you find out about this consultation?

- Our newsletter or another one of our communications
- Our website
- Internet search
- Other

May we contact you for further information?

- Yes No

Questions

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that GCSEs in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

We believe that all aspects of the proposed knowledge, understanding and skills could be validly assessed by examination and we therefore agree that GCSE qualifications in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that GCSEs in religious studies should not be tiered?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

We agree that GCSEs in religious studies should not be tiered. The existing GCSEs in religious studies have a single tier of entry and the current GCSE RS assessments target the full ability range appropriately.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in religious studies?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

We support the skills targeted in each assessment objective as these align with the knowledge, understanding and skills in the GCSE subject content. We suggest however that AO2 should also assess students' ability to demonstrate their own values, beliefs and attitudes. This important skill is expressed in the subject aims and learning outcomes and therefore should also be reflected in the assessment objectives.

We think the strands in both assessment objectives focus exclusively on Part One of the subject content at the expense of Part Two - the study religion, philosophy and ethics and textual studies. We therefore suggest that the assessment objectives are reworded so that the strands reflect all parts of the subject content and that the technical interpretation takes account of the optional routes through the qualification.

Strand 1 in AO2 targets the ability to use and apply knowledge and understanding of religions. If we are to assess knowledge and understanding in both AO1 and AO2, then the overall weighting of knowledge and understanding in the assessment will be significantly more than 50%. We therefore suggest that this strand is removed and that knowledge and understanding is assessed in AO1 only.

Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in religious studies?

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

We agree in principal to the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives. However, we think that the Department for Education document, Religious Studies, GCSE Subject Content, Annex A contains only limited opportunities to develop the skills required for AO2. This is due to the amount of core content to be covered in the time given, the way the content is worded and the detailed knowledge and understanding requirements. These concerns are detailed in our response to the DfE's consultation on the GCSE RS subject content. We think the current wording of Annex A will make it difficult for awarding organisations to achieve the assessment objective weightings in relation to Part One of the GCSE. We made several recommendations in relation to Annex A within our response to the DfE's consultation.

Question 5: Do you have any further comments relating to the assessment of this subject?

- Yes No

Question 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that AS qualifications in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

We believe that all aspects of the proposed knowledge, understanding and skills could be validly assessed by examination and we therefore agree that AS level qualifications in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam.

Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that A levels in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

We believe that all aspects of the proposed knowledge, understanding and skills could be validly assessed by examination and we therefore agree that A level qualifications in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam.

Question 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate for A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

We support the skills targeted in each assessment objective as these align with the knowledge, understanding and skills in the GCE Religious Studies subject content. We suggest however that AO2 should include 'justifying a point of view through the use of evidence and reasoned argument.' It is important that students demonstrate their ability to expressing their own beliefs and values in Religious Studies.

We think that the strands in both assessment objectives focus too heavily on approach 1 at the expense of the other two approaches. We therefore recommend the assessment objectives are reworded to reflect all three approaches and that the technical interpretation takes account of the optional routes through the qualification.

We recommend that the phrase 'explaining the nature of religious beliefs and teachings' in strand 2 of AO1 is reworded to 'explaining religious beliefs and teachings'. Knowledge and understanding of the nature of religious beliefs and teachings would only be met by those students covering the psychological approach to religion and religious experience in approach 2.

We suggest that strand 3 in AO1 should be moved to AO2 as 'making connections' seems to fit better in AO2.

Question 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for AS qualifications in religious studies?

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

We agree with the increased emphasis on assessing AO2 skills in AS level Religious Studies. We think however the proposed weightings should permit a small degree of variation in weighting to allow for minor differences of emphasis in the skills being assessed, whilst also being narrow enough to promote comparability. We recommend the weighting range should be no more than 10% for AO1 and AO2.

Question 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for A levels in religious studies?

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

We agree with the increased emphasis on assessing AO2 skills in A level Religious Studies. We think however the proposed weightings should permit a small degree of variation in weighting to allow for minor differences of emphasis in the skills being assessed, whilst also being narrow enough to promote comparability. We recommend the weighting range should be no more than 10% for AO1 and AO2.

Question 11: Do you have any further comments relating to the assessment of this subject?

- Yes No

Equality impact

Question 12: We have not identified any ways in which the proposed requirements for reformed GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies would impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic. Are there any potential impacts we have not identified? If so, what are they?

Yes No

Question 13: Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic? If so, please comment on the additional steps we could take to mitigate negative impacts.

Yes No

Question 14: Have you any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?

Yes No

Accessibility of our consultations

Do you have any special requirements to enable you to read our consultations? (For example screen reader, large text, and so on)

Yes No

Which of the following do you currently use to access our consultation documents? (Select all that apply)

- Screen reader / text-to-speech software
- Braille reader
- Screen magnifier
- Speech to text software
- Motor assistance (blow-suck tube, mouth stick, etc.)
- Other

Which of the following document formats would meet your needs for accessing our consultations? (Select all that apply)

- A standard PDF
- Accessible web pages
- Large type PDF (16 point text)
- Large-type word document (16 point text)
- eBook (Kindle, iBooks or similar format)
- Braille document
- Spoken document
- Other

How many of our consultations have you read in the last 12 months?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- more than 5