

# Religious Studies (Philosophy / Ethics)

Examination board: OCR

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## Why study Religious Studies at A Level?

To think more deeply about the meaning and purpose of life.

To discuss the 'big questions' with like-minded peers.

To gain a deeper understanding of Western and Eastern philosophical ideas and their history.

To learn to think more clearly and independently: crucial skills in an age of AI and the rise of algorithms!

## What's on the course?

### Philosophy of religion (33.3%)

- Ancient philosophical influences (Plato / Aristotle)
- The nature of the soul, mind and body
- Arguments about the existence or non-existence of God (teleological, cosmological, ontological)
- The nature and impact of religious experience
- The challenge for religious belief of the problem of evil
- Ideas about the nature of God
- Issues in the philosophy of language.

### Ethics (33.3%)

- Normative ethical theories (utilitarianism, Kantian Ethics, Natural Moral Law, Situation Ethics)
- The application of ethical theory to two contemporary issues of importance (euthanasia and Business Ethics)
- Ethical language and thought
- Debates surrounding the significant idea of conscience
- Sexual ethics and the influence on ethical thought of developments in religious beliefs.

### Developments in religious thought: Buddhism (33.3%)

- Buddhist beliefs, values and teachings and how they have changed over time
- Key Buddhist philosophical ideas ('not self', 'emptiness', 'Nirvana', rebirth)
- Sources of Buddhist wisdom and authority
- Significant social and historical developments in Buddhist thought (e.g. Zen, Pure Land Buddhism)
- Key themes related to the relationship between Buddhism and society (e.g. gender, 'Engaged Buddhism', the 'mindfulness movement').

### How is it assessed?

In **three two-hour exams**, one for each component of the course.

You choose three questions from a choice of four.

Questions are **40-mark** essays, which give more marks for analysis and **evaluation (60%)** than **knowledge and understanding (40%)**, suiting independently-minded, philosophically inquiring pupils.

### What do RS / Philosophy pupils go on to do?

Many wonderful things! A Level Religious Studies is highly respected by universities and employers for philosophical and religious literacy it provides, and for the training it gives in constructing arguments and justifying your point of view. Such highly valuable transferable skills are required in many workplaces and professions, including Law and Medicine. Universities are well aware that two thirds of the RS A Level is Philosophy.

RS / Philosophy pupils at KES often go on to study the subject at degree level. Several former KES Philosophy pupils have gone on to study Philosophy / Philosophy with other subjects at the following universities:

- Oxford
- UCL
- KC
- Exeter
- St Andrews
- Edinburgh
- Warwick.

## Further reading

### Philosophy

*'What does it all mean?'* By Thomas Nagel

*'Think'* by Simon Blackburn

### Ethics

*'Being Good'* by Simon Blackburn

*'The puzzle of ethics'* by Peter Vardy and Paul Grosch

### Buddhism

*'A very short introduction to Buddhism'* by Damien Keown

*'What the Buddha taught'* by Walpola Rahula

*'The unexamined life is not worth living.'* - Socrates

*'Philosophy begins in wonder.'* - Plato



*'Philosopher Reading' by Rembrandt (1631)*

