



Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies

Course code:	C864 76
Course assessment code:	X864 76
SCQF:	level 6 (24 SCQF credit points)
Valid from:	session 2025–26

This document provides detailed information about the course and course assessment to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year. It describes the structure of the course and the course assessment in terms of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are assessed.

This document is for teachers and lecturers and contains all the mandatory information you need to deliver the course.

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This edition: September 2025 (version 4.0)

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Course overview

The course consists of 24 SCQF credit points which includes time for preparation for course assessment. The notional length of time for candidates to complete the course is 160 hours.

The course assessment has three components.

Component	Marks	Duration
Component 1: question paper 1 — world religion and morality and belief	60	2 hours and 15 minutes
Component 2: question paper 2 — religious and philosophical questions	20	45 minutes
Component 3: assignment	30	see 'Course assessment' section

Recommended entry	Progression
Entry to this course is at the discretion of the centre. Candidates should have achieved the National 5 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies course or equivalent qualifications and/or experience prior to starting this course.	◆ Advanced Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies ◆ further study, employment and/or training

Conditions of award

The grade awarded is based on the total marks achieved across all course assessment components.

Course rationale

National Courses reflect Curriculum for Excellence values, purposes and principles. They offer flexibility, provide time for learning, focus on skills and applying learning, and provide scope for personalisation and choice.

Every course provides opportunities for candidates to develop breadth, challenge and application. The focus and balance of assessment is tailored to each subject area.

This course helps candidates to understand society. They learn about, and from, religious beliefs, non-religious viewpoints, and personal experience. By exploring how religion, morality and philosophy can help people find meaning and purpose in life, candidates develop their understanding of human beliefs, values and behaviour.

Throughout the course, there are opportunities for candidates to develop literacy, personal learning and thinking skills, and a sense of responsible citizenship.

The course allows candidates to:

- ◆ develop an understanding and respect for different beliefs, values and viewpoints
- ◆ learn how to express their values and beliefs
- ◆ put their values or beliefs into action in ways which benefit others
- ◆ make informed moral decisions

Purpose and aims

Candidates develop knowledge and understanding of religious, moral and philosophical issues that affect the world today by:

- ◆ studying a world religion in detail
- ◆ developing an understanding of contemporary moral issues and responses
- ◆ studying key aspects of religious and philosophical questions
- ◆ exploring questions raised and solutions offered by religious and non-religious perspectives
- ◆ reflecting on these, and on their own experience and views

Candidates develop skills which are transferable to other areas of study and useful in everyday life, such as analysis, evaluation, research skills and critical-thinking skills.

In addition, candidates develop:

- ◆ the ability to analyse, reflect on and express detailed, reasoned and well-structured views about religious, moral and philosophical questions and their impact
- ◆ the ability to investigate, analyse and evaluate religious, moral and philosophical questions and responses
- ◆ in-depth knowledge and understanding of beliefs and practices related to world religions
- ◆ in-depth knowledge and understanding of religious, moral and philosophical questions and responses to them

Who is this course for?

The course is appropriate for a wide range of candidates, including those who wish to:

- ◆ achieve a greater understanding of religion and its place in society
- ◆ learn more about the traditions, beliefs and values of their own religion
- ◆ progress to more specialised study, further education, training or employment

Course content

The course encourages active learning in the process of investigating religious, moral and philosophical topics or issues. Through the course as a whole, candidates take a broad overview of the beliefs, values or viewpoints of more than one religion.

Candidates develop and apply a range of cognitive skills over a range of religious, moral and philosophical contexts in three areas of study: world religion, morality and belief, and religious and philosophical questions. Each area offers opportunities for candidates to focus on particular skills, and has flexibility in the topics which candidates can study.

Candidates study one of the world's six major religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism or Sikhism.

World religion

Candidates develop in-depth knowledge and understanding of the impact and significance of religion today. They study key beliefs and practices of one of the world's six major religions and the contribution these make to the lives of followers.

Morality and belief

Candidates develop skills to evaluate and express detailed, reasoned and well-structured views about contemporary moral questions and responses. They develop in-depth knowledge and understanding of contemporary moral questions, and religious and non-religious responses to these. Candidates study religious viewpoints from one of the world's six major religions.

Religious and philosophical questions

Candidates develop skills to critically analyse religious and philosophical questions and responses. They study religious viewpoints from one of the world's six major religions.

Skills, knowledge and understanding

Skills, knowledge and understanding for the course

The following provides a broad overview of the subject skills, knowledge and understanding developed in the course:

- ◆ researching, analysing, evaluating and synthesising information to draw detailed, reasoned and well-structured conclusions and present findings about factual and theoretical elements of religious, moral and philosophical topics or issues
- ◆ identifying and responding to different ideas and viewpoints
- ◆ interpreting the meaning and context of sources related to world religions, and explaining relevant abstract ideas
- ◆ evaluating and expressing reasoned and well-structured views about contemporary moral and religious and philosophical questions and responses, and explaining relevant theoretical ideas
- ◆ critically analysing and explaining contemporary moral and religious and philosophical questions, and explaining relevant theoretical ideas

- ◆ demonstrating in-depth factual and abstract knowledge and understanding of the significance and impact of religion today by explaining some key beliefs, practices and sources found within one of the world's six major religions, and the contribution these make to the lives of followers

Skills, knowledge and understanding for the course assessment

The following provides details of skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment. Each area of study has options to allow opportunities for personalisation and choice.

World religion

In each of the six major world religions, the beliefs and practices are closely related and interconnected. Candidates:

- ◆ show in-depth knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs and practices
- ◆ analyse the relationship between different religious beliefs; the relationship between religious beliefs and practices; and the purpose of living according to religious beliefs and practices
- ◆ evaluate the significance, relevance and impact of religious beliefs and practices

Candidates do not need to learn specific sources for each religious belief and practice. However, they can use examples of sources that inform beliefs and practices where appropriate.

Candidates answer questions in the context of a denomination or tradition within the religion chosen for study. This includes knowledge and understanding of differences in practices and related beliefs within the religion or tradition studied.

Candidates study one of the following world religions:

Buddhism

Beliefs

- ◆ Three Marks of Existence: anicca; anatta; dukkha
- ◆ nature of human beings: tanha; Three Root Poisons; kamma
- ◆ beliefs about the Buddha
- ◆ samsara; nibbana

Practices

- ◆ living according to the Eightfold Path
- ◆ Five Precepts; sangha
- ◆ meditation; devotion

Christianity

Beliefs

- ◆ beliefs about God
- ◆ nature of human beings: free will; sin; stewards
- ◆ beliefs about Jesus
- ◆ judgement; Heaven and Hell

Practices

- ◆ living according to the Gospels
- ◆ Christian action; the Christian community
- ◆ worship: prayer; Eucharist

Hinduism

Beliefs

- ◆ beliefs about God
- ◆ nature of human beings: atman; jiva; dukkha; avidya; karma
- ◆ beliefs about Isvara
- ◆ samsara; moksha

Practices

- ◆ living according to Dharma
- ◆ the Three Margas
- ◆ worship: puja; meditation

Islam

Beliefs

- ◆ beliefs about God
- ◆ nature of human beings: free will; suffering; khalifas
- ◆ beliefs about Muhammad
- ◆ Akhira: Day of Judgement; Al-Jannah; Jahannam

Practices

- ◆ living according to the Five Pillars
- ◆ submission
- ◆ worship: prayer; mosque

Judaism

Beliefs

- ◆ beliefs about God
- ◆ nature of human beings: yetzer tov; yetzer harah; free will; suffering
- ◆ beliefs about Covenant
- ◆ judgement; the Messiah; the Messianic Age; Olam Ha'ba

Practices

- ◆ living according to the Commandments
- ◆ Rosh Hashanah; Yom Kippur
- ◆ worship: Shabbat; synagogue

Sikhism

Beliefs

- ◆ beliefs about God
- ◆ nature of human beings: atma; free will; karma; equality
- ◆ beliefs about maya and haumai; the Five Evils
- ◆ Gurmukh; Jivan Mukti

Practices

- ◆ living according to the Gurus
- ◆ Khalsa
- ◆ worship: sewa and simran; kirt karna; vand chakkana

Morality and belief

Candidates:

- ◆ show in-depth knowledge and understanding of moral issues
- ◆ analyse religious and non-religious responses to moral issues
- ◆ evaluate religious and non-religious responses to moral issues

Candidates answer questions in the context of a denomination or tradition within the religious responses. They apply the skills of analysing and evaluating as described in the 'Course assessment' section of this document. Candidates study **one** of the following five topics:

Morality and justice

Causes of crime

- ◆ environmental influences
- ◆ psychological factors

Purposes of punishment

- ◆ reformation
- ◆ retribution
- ◆ protection
- ◆ deterrence

Responses to crime

- ◆ custodial sentences
- ◆ non-custodial sentences
- ◆ capital punishment

Morality and relationships

Relationships

- ◆ sexual relationships
- ◆ the purpose of sex

Marriage

- ◆ arranged marriage
- ◆ forced marriage
- ◆ same-sex marriage
- ◆ divorce

Gender inequality and exploitation

- ◆ in the media
- ◆ in society
- ◆ in religion

Morality, environment and global issues

Economic issues

- ◆ resource management
- ◆ trading inequalities
- ◆ global trading agreements

Environmental issues

- ◆ climate change
- ◆ depletion of resources
- ◆ biodiversity

Social issues

- ◆ poverty
- ◆ charity
- ◆ migrants

Morality, medicine and the human body

Use of embryos

- ◆ reproductive
- ◆ therapeutic
- ◆ research

Organ donation

- ◆ consent: informed; presumed
- ◆ beating heart donation
- ◆ living donors

End of life

- ◆ assisted dying
- ◆ voluntary and non-voluntary euthanasia
- ◆ end-of-life care

Morality and conflict

Conflict

- ◆ types of war
- ◆ justifications for war
- ◆ alternatives to war

Consequences of war

- ◆ for humans
- ◆ for the environment
- ◆ for the economy

Modern armaments

- ◆ weapons of mass destruction
- ◆ conventional weapons
- ◆ smart weapons

Religious and philosophical questions

Candidates:

- ◆ show in-depth knowledge and understanding of the question and responses, including religious and non-religious responses
- ◆ apply the skills of analysis and evaluation to the question and responses
- ◆ present a reasoned conclusion to the question

Each topic contains ideas and arguments which may feature in both religious and non-religious responses. Candidates apply the skills of analysis and evaluation described in the 'Course assessment' section of this document.

Candidates study **one** of the following topics:

Origins

Was the universe and life created?

- ◆ How does religion explain the origins of the universe and of life?
- ◆ What evidence does religion use to support these explanations?
- ◆ What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence/explanations?
- ◆ How does science explain the origins of the universe and of life?
- ◆ What evidence does science use to support these explanations?
- ◆ What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence/explanations?
- ◆ Can religious and scientific views on origins be compatible?

Existence of God

Does God exist?

- ◆ What arguments/theories do religious people use to prove the existence of God?
- ◆ What evidence do religious people use to support these arguments/theories?
- ◆ What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence/arguments/theories?
- ◆ What arguments/theories do non-religious people use to challenge the existence of God?
- ◆ What evidence do non-religious people use to support these arguments/theories?
- ◆ What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence/arguments/theories?
- ◆ Can either religious or non-religious arguments/theories provide conclusive proof about the existence of God?

The problem of suffering and evil

Who is responsible for suffering and evil?

- ◆ Is God responsible for suffering and evil?
- ◆ What arguments are used to support God's responsibility for suffering and evil?
- ◆ What are the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments?
- ◆ Are humans responsible for suffering and evil?
- ◆ What arguments are used to support human responsibility for suffering and evil?
- ◆ What are the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments?
- ◆ Can responsibility for suffering and evil lie with both God and humans?

Miracles

Are miracles real?

- ◆ How do religious people explain miracles?
- ◆ What evidence do religious people use to support these explanations?
- ◆ What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence/explanations?

- ◆ How do non-religious people explain miracles?
- ◆ What evidence do non-religious people use to support these explanations?
- ◆ What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence/explanations?
- ◆ Can religious and non-religious views on miracles be compatible?

Skills, knowledge and understanding included in the course are appropriate to the SCQF level of the course. The SCQF level descriptors give further information on characteristics and expected performance at each SCQF level, and can be found on the SCQF website.

Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work

This course helps candidates to develop broad, generic skills. These skills are based on [SQA's Skills Framework: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work](#) and draw from the following main skills areas:

1 Literacy

- 1.1 Reading
- 1.2 Writing

3 Health and wellbeing

- 3.1 Personal learning

4 Employability

- 4.6 Citizenship

5 Thinking skills

- 5.3 Applying
- 5.4 Analysing and evaluating

Teachers and lecturers must build these skills into the course at an appropriate level, where there are suitable opportunities.

Course assessment

Course assessment is based on the information provided in this document.

The course assessment meets the key purposes and aims of the course by addressing:

- ◆ breadth — drawing on knowledge and skills from across the course
- ◆ challenge — requiring greater depth or extension of knowledge and/or skills
- ◆ application — requiring application of knowledge and/or skills in practical or theoretical contexts as appropriate

This enables candidates to:

- ◆ draw on, extend and apply the skills, knowledge and understanding acquired during the course
- ◆ demonstrate breadth of skills, knowledge and understanding from across all areas of the course
- ◆ demonstrate challenge and application related to an appropriate religious, moral or philosophical topic or issue

Candidates are assessed by two question papers and an assignment. There is broad parity between the assessment of skills and the assessment of knowledge and understanding in the course.

The question papers sample knowledge and understanding from across all three areas of study, and require candidates to apply skills. The question papers have a greater emphasis on the assessment of knowledge and understanding than the assignment. The assignment allows candidates to focus on a chosen religious, moral or philosophical topic or issue.

Course assessment structure: question paper

Question paper 1

60 marks

This question paper assesses the skills of applying in-depth knowledge and understanding, analysing and evaluating religious, moral and philosophical questions and presenting reasoned and well-structured views.

This question paper has 60 marks out of a total of 110 marks for the course assessment.

This question paper has two sections.

Section 1: world religion has 30 marks.

This section has six parts:

- ◆ Part A — Buddhism
- ◆ Part B — Christianity
- ◆ Part C — Hinduism

- ◆ Part D — Islam
- ◆ Part E — Judaism
- ◆ Part F — Sikhism

Candidates answer questions in one part.

Candidates must answer both questions in the chosen part. The first question assesses the skills of applying in-depth knowledge, understanding and analysis and is worth 10 marks. The second question assesses the skills of knowledge, understanding, analysis and evaluation, and is worth 20 marks. Questions are drawn from the content described in the 'Course content' section of this document.

Section 2: morality and belief has 30 marks.

This section has five parts:

- ◆ Part A — morality and justice
- ◆ Part B — morality and relationships
- ◆ Part C — morality, environment and global issues
- ◆ Part D — morality, medicine and the human body
- ◆ Part E — morality and conflict

Candidates answer questions in one part.

Candidates must answer both questions in the chosen part. The first question assesses the skills of applying in-depth knowledge, understanding and analysis and is worth 10 marks. The second question assesses the skills of applying in-depth knowledge, understanding, analysis and evaluation, and is worth 20 marks. Questions are drawn from the content described in the 'Course content' section of this document.

Setting, conducting and marking question paper 1

This question paper is set and marked by SQA, and conducted in centres under conditions specified for external examinations by SQA.

Candidates have 2 hours and 15 minutes to complete this question paper.

Question paper 2

20 marks

This question paper assesses the skills of applying in-depth knowledge and understanding, analysing and evaluating religious, moral and philosophical questions and presenting reasoned and well-structured views.

This question paper has 20 marks out of a total of 110 marks for the course assessment.

Religious and philosophical questions

This section has four parts:

- ◆ Part A — origins
- ◆ Part B — the existence of God
- ◆ Part C — the problem of suffering and evil
- ◆ Part D — miracles

Candidates answer the question in one part. It is worth 20 marks. The question requires candidates to draw on the knowledge and skills acquired during the course to present a reasoned and well-structured view. Questions are drawn from the content described in the 'Course content' section of this document.

Setting, conducting and marking question paper 2

This question paper is set and marked by SQA, and conducted in centres under conditions specified for external examinations by SQA.

Candidates have 45 minutes to complete this question paper.

Specimen question papers for Higher courses are published on SQA's website. These illustrate the standard, structure and requirements of the question papers candidates sit. The specimen papers also include marking instructions.

Course assessment structure: assignment

Assignment

30 marks

The assignment has 30 marks out of a total of 110 marks for the course assessment.

Assignment overview

Candidates identify an issue of religious, moral or philosophical significance on which there are a range of viewpoints. They choose a question based on this issue, research the issue and gather sources relevant to their question. Candidates then draw upon the skills of knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation to produce an extended piece of writing in response to their question.

Candidates work on their research with minimal support from their teacher or lecturer.

Setting, conducting and marking the assignment

The assignment is set by centres within SQA guidelines and is conducted under some supervision and control. SQA provides a brief for the generation of evidence to be assessed. Candidates have an open choice of topic/issue to research. The assignment is submitted to SQA for marking. All marking is quality assured by SQA.

The write-up of the assignment is completed:

- ◆ within 1 hour and 30 minutes
- ◆ using the RMPS resource sheet
- ◆ in time to meet a submission date set by SQA
- ◆ independently by the candidate
- ◆ when the candidate is ready

Assessment conditions

The assignment has two stages:

- ◆ research
- ◆ write-up

Time

Candidates undertake the research stage at any appropriate point in the course. This will normally be when they have developed the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding. The research stage is designed to be completed over a notional period of 8 hours.

Candidates undertake the write-up in time to meet the submission date set by SQA. The write-up must be completed within 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Supervision, control and authentication

Teachers and lecturers must ensure that evidence submitted by a candidate is the candidate's own work.

The assignment is carried out under two different levels of supervision and control.

The **research stage** is conducted under some supervision and control. This means that, although candidates may complete part of the work outwith the learning and teaching setting, teachers and lecturers must put in place processes for monitoring progress and ensuring that the work is the candidate's own and that plagiarism has not taken place.

For example:

- ◆ interim progress meetings with the candidate
- ◆ questioning
- ◆ candidate's record of activity/progress
- ◆ teacher or lecturer observation

Group work approaches are acceptable as part of the research stage. However, there must be clear evidence for each candidate to show that the candidate has met the evidence requirements.

The **write-up stage** is conducted under a high degree of supervision and control. This means that:

- ◆ candidates must be in direct sight of the teacher or lecturer (or other responsible person) during the period of the assessment
- ◆ candidates must not communicate with each other
- ◆ candidates must only have access to the RMPS resource sheet

Resources

During the research stage there are no restrictions on the resources to which candidates may have access.

During the final write-up stage candidates must only have access to the RMPS resource sheet. The resource sheet is not assessed. However, it must be included with the assignment from the candidate.

Reasonable assistance

Candidates must complete the production of evidence independently — with minimal support from teachers or lecturers. However, reasonable assistance may be provided prior to the production of evidence taking place. The term 'reasonable assistance' is used to try to balance the need for support with the need to avoid giving too much assistance. If candidates require more than what is thought to be 'reasonable assistance', they may not be ready for assessment, or they may have been entered for the wrong level of qualification.

Reasonable assistance may be given on a generic basis to a class or group of candidates, for example, advice on how to develop a project plan. It may also be given to candidates on

an individual basis. When reasonable assistance is given on a one-to-one basis in the context of something that a candidate has already produced or demonstrated, there is a danger that it becomes support for assessment. Teachers and lecturers need to be aware that this may be going beyond reasonable assistance.

In the research stage, reasonable assistance may include:

- ◆ directing candidates to the instructions for candidates
- ◆ clarifying instructions/requirements of the task
- ◆ advising candidates on the choice of a question/topic/issue
- ◆ advising candidates on possible sources of information
- ◆ arranging visits to enable gathering of evidence
- ◆ interim progress checks

In preparing for the write-up stage, reasonable assistance may include advising candidates of the nature and volume of specified resources which may be used to support the production of evidence.

At any stage, reasonable assistance does not include:

- ◆ providing the question, topic or issue
- ◆ directing candidates to specific resources to be used
- ◆ providing model answers or writing frames specific to the task (such as outlines, paragraph headings or section headings)
- ◆ providing detailed feedback on drafts, including marking

Teachers and lecturers must exercise their professional responsibility to ensure that evidence submitted by a candidate is the candidate's own work.

Evidence to be gathered

The following candidate evidence is required for this assessment:

- ◆ candidate assignment evidence produced under a high degree of supervision
- ◆ RMPS resource sheet which must not exceed 250 words

Candidates must specify the question, topic or issue they are addressing. No marks will be awarded if the question, topic or issue has not been stated.

If a candidate does not submit a resource sheet, a penalty of 6 marks out of the total 30 marks is applied.

Volume

There is no word count for the assignment; however the RMPS resource sheet must have no more than 250 words on it.

Grading

Candidates' overall grades are determined by their performance across the course assessment. The course assessment is graded A–D on the basis of the total mark for all course assessment components.

Grade description for C

For the award of grade C, candidates will typically have demonstrated successful performance in relation to the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course.

Grade description for A

For the award of grade A, candidates will typically have demonstrated a consistently high level of performance in relation to the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course.

Equality and inclusion

This course is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

For guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs, please follow the link to the assessment arrangements web page: www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements.

Further information

The following reference documents provide useful information and background.

- ◆ [Assessment arrangements](#)
- ◆ [Building the Curriculum 3–5](#)
- ◆ [Guidance on conditions of assessment for coursework](#)
- ◆ [Guide to Assessment](#)
- ◆ [Recent SQA research](#)
- ◆ [Remote assessment](#)
- ◆ [SCQF Handbook](#)
- ◆ [Know Your SCQF Level - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#)
- ◆ [SQA's Skills Framework: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work](#)

The SCQF framework, level descriptors and handbook are available on the SCQF website.

Appendix: course support notes

Introduction

These support notes are not mandatory. They provide advice and guidance to teachers and lecturers on approaches to delivering the course. You should read these in conjunction with this course specification and the specimen question paper and/or coursework.

Developing skills, knowledge and understanding

This section provides further advice and guidance about skills, knowledge and understanding that you could include in the course. You have considerable flexibility to select contexts that will stimulate and challenge candidates, offering both breadth and depth.

The mandatory skills, knowledge and understanding assessed in the course include:

Knowledge and understanding

- ◆ in-depth knowledge and understanding of the significance and impact of key beliefs and practices found within one of the world's six major religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism or Sikhism)
- ◆ in-depth knowledge and understanding of contemporary moral issues and responses
- ◆ in-depth knowledge and understanding of religious and philosophical questions and responses

Skills

- ◆ interpreting the meaning and context of sources, beliefs and viewpoints related to religious, moral and philosophical issues
- ◆ analysing and evaluating religious, moral and philosophical issues and responses
- ◆ expressing views about religious, moral and philosophical issues and responses
- ◆ researching sources to present analysis and evaluation of viewpoints on religious, moral or philosophical issues
- ◆ presenting findings about elements of religious, moral and philosophical issues
- ◆ identifying and responding to different ideas and viewpoints and drawing detailed, reasoned and well-structured conclusions

Approaches to learning, teaching and assessment

The Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies course is a coherent study of religion, morality and philosophy. There are opportunities throughout the course to reinforce and deepen learning by making links between aspects of knowledge and understanding across sections, depending on the particular topics and issues studied.

Coverage of religious views

In each of the sections, religious viewpoints studied must come from one of the world's six major religions. Within this, centres and candidates are free to focus on a particular denomination or tradition within that religion. It is common practice for centres to offer study of more than one tradition or denomination.

Sequence of delivery

There is no recommended teaching order for the sections in this course.

Different combinations or orderings of delivery will be appropriate in different contexts. This is for centres to manage. Much will depend on the timetable and staffing demands of centres.

Preparing for course assessment

Candidates draw on, extend and apply the skills, knowledge and understanding developed during the course.

Knowledge and understanding

Knowledge and understanding is 'what' information: 'What do Buddhists believe about...?' 'What are the moral issues arising from...?'

Candidates provide factual information (knowledge), gathered from a range of sources, supported by a brief explanation (understanding).

Sources include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ quotations from individuals or texts
- ◆ references to individuals, organisations, theories, beliefs or texts
- ◆ video clips and/or documentaries
- ◆ case studies
- ◆ class resources

Candidates can also provide knowledge about issues, arguments, theories, beliefs and viewpoints.

Analysing

Analysis is a pivotal skill in the Higher. The focus in analysis is on breaking down factual information — often concentrating on explaining 'why'. Analysis can follow knowledge and understanding and, similarly, analysis often precedes evaluation.

Analysis includes, but is not limited to:

- ◆ interpreting and explaining sources, beliefs, practices and viewpoints
- ◆ making connections between beliefs and viewpoints
- ◆ making connections between beliefs and practices
- ◆ explaining supporting evidence for a viewpoint, belief or theory
- ◆ explaining the impact and/or implications of viewpoints, beliefs and practices

Evaluating

Evaluation is probably the most challenging skill at Higher. Over the years, evaluation has been misunderstood as simply listing two sides of an argument. The skill demands much more than this and expects candidates to make a reasoned or supported judgement on beliefs, viewpoints, stances and arguments. This involves:

- ◆ making a supported judgement on a belief, viewpoint, stance or argument
- ◆ making a supported judgement on the effect, impact or significance of a belief, viewpoint, stance or argument
- ◆ presenting a case for or against a stance
- ◆ commenting on the quality of stances taken on issues

There is a specific focus for evaluation in each of the three sections:

World religion		Morality and belief		Religious and philosophical questions	
Relevance	of beliefs and practices	Religious responses	to a moral issue	Religious responses	to a religious and philosophical question
Significance		Non-religious responses		Non-religious responses	
Impact		Personal response		Personal response	

World religions context

Evaluation in this context focuses on relevance, significance and impact. Candidates study a range of religious beliefs and practices and make judgements on the relevance, significance and impact of these beliefs and practices, often in relation to other beliefs or other practices.

Morality and belief context

Evaluation in this context focuses on different beliefs, viewpoints and stances on moral issues. Candidates study a range of beliefs, viewpoints and stances, both religious and non-religious, and make judgements on the strengths and weaknesses, benefits and drawbacks, validity and invalidity, and rightness and wrongness of these.

Religious and philosophical questions context

Evaluation in this context is similar to that in the morality and belief context. Candidates engage in a debate, offering responses to religious and philosophical questions and expressing well-reasoned and supported judgements on these responses.

Assignment

Candidates can develop their literacy skills as they set and research an assignment question and carry out a write-up under controlled conditions.

Candidates can base their assignment on:

- ◆ content covered in the course
- ◆ a religious, moral or philosophical issue of their choice

Teachers and lecturers can give candidates reasonable assistance:

- ◆ on the validity of the question
- ◆ on appropriate sources
- ◆ on issues related to the question
- ◆ when they encounter difficulties
- ◆ with the assignment structure

Candidates perform well in the assignment when they:

- ◆ answer open-ended questions
- ◆ choose familiar issues within the course
- ◆ have a clear structure
- ◆ use a range of sources
- ◆ avoid obscure issues or topics

Course content and coverage

The following table provides additional guidance on recommended approaches to learning and teaching for each area of the mandatory content within the course. It supplements the mandatory content in the course specification.

This guidance is just one approach to the delivery; centres are free to take other approaches.

- ◆ Centres can look at one or more than one branch, tradition or denomination in the world religion section.
- ◆ While practices can also be classed as 'beliefs', centres should recognise the distinction between beliefs and practices and use this distinction throughout delivery of the world religion section.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to use relevant sources.
- ◆ Centres can look at more than one religious response (for example, different denominations within one religion) and/or more than one non-religious response (for example, utilitarianism and Kantian ethics) in the morality and belief section.
- ◆ The questions used to identify mandatory content in the religious and philosophical questions section are there to encourage debate within each topic and will not mirror exam questions.

World religion	
For the world religion area of study the recommended approaches to learning and teaching of the six major religions are the same: Beliefs: ◆ knowledge and understanding of the key beliefs within the religion, including sources relating to key beliefs ◆ relationship between different beliefs within the religion ◆ relative importance of different beliefs within the religion ◆ challenges relating to different beliefs within the religion ◆ benefits relating to different beliefs within the religion ◆ impact on the lives of followers of different beliefs within the religion Practices: ◆ knowledge and understanding of the key practices within the religion, including sources relating to key practices ◆ relationship between different practices within the religion ◆ relative importance of different practices within the religion ◆ purpose of different practices within the religion ◆ challenges relating to different practices within the religion ◆ benefits relating to different practices within the religion ◆ impact on the lives of followers of different practices within the religion Beliefs and practices: ◆ relationship between beliefs and practices	
Buddhism	
Mandatory content: beliefs	Mandatory content: practices
◆ Three Marks of Existence: anicca; anatta; dukkha ◆ nature of human beings: tanha; Three Root Poisons; kamma ◆ beliefs about the Buddha ◆ samsara; nibbana	◆ living according to the Eightfold Path ◆ Five Precepts; sangha ◆ meditation; devotion
Christianity	
Mandatory content: beliefs	Mandatory content: practices
◆ beliefs about God ◆ nature of human beings: free will; sin; stewards ◆ beliefs about Jesus ◆ judgement; Heaven and Hell	◆ living according to the Gospels ◆ Christian action; the Christian community ◆ worship: prayer; Eucharist

World religion	
Hinduism	
Mandatory content: beliefs	Mandatory content: practices
♦ beliefs about God ♦ nature of human beings: atman; jiva; dukkha; avidya; karma ♦ beliefs about Isvara ♦ samsara; moksha	♦ living according to Dharma ♦ the Three Margas ♦ worship: puja; meditation
Islam	
Mandatory content: beliefs	Mandatory content: practices
♦ beliefs about God ♦ nature of human beings: free will; suffering; khalifas ♦ beliefs about Muhammad ♦ Akhira: Day of Judgement; Al-Jannah; Jahannam	♦ living according to the Five Pillars ♦ submission ♦ worship: prayer; mosque
Judaism	
Mandatory content: beliefs	Mandatory content: practices
♦ beliefs about God ♦ nature of human beings: yetzer tov; yetzer harah; free will; suffering ♦ beliefs about Covenant ♦ judgement; the Messiah; the Messianic Age; Olam Ha'ba	♦ living according to the Commandments ♦ Rosh Hashanah; Yom Kippur ♦ worship: Shabbat; synagogue
Sikhism	
Mandatory content: beliefs	Mandatory content: practices
♦ beliefs about God ♦ nature of human beings: atma; free will; karma; equality ♦ beliefs about maya and haumai; the Five Evils ♦ Gurmukh; Jivan Mukti	♦ living according to the Gurus ♦ Khalsa ♦ worship: sewa and simran; kirt karna; vand chakkana

Morality and belief		
For the morality and belief area of study the recommended approaches to learning and teaching of the five topics are the same: Knowledge and understanding of: ♦ the topic content ♦ moral issues arising from the topic content ♦ religious and non-religious beliefs and viewpoints relating to the topic content Analysis of: ♦ moral issues arising from the topic ♦ religious responses to the topic ♦ non-religious responses to the topic Evaluation of: ♦ religious responses to the topic ♦ non-religious responses to the topic		
Morality and justice: mandatory content		
Causes of crime ♦ environmental influences ♦ psychological factors	Purposes of punishment ♦ reformation ♦ retribution ♦ protection ♦ deterrence	Responses to crime ♦ custodial sentences ♦ non-custodial sentences ♦ capital punishment
Morality and relationships: mandatory content		
Relationships ♦ sexual relationships ♦ the purpose of sex	Marriage ♦ arranged marriage ♦ forced marriage ♦ same-sex marriage ♦ divorce	Gender inequality and exploitation ♦ in the media ♦ in society ♦ in religion

Morality and belief		
Morality, environment and global issues: mandatory content		
Economic issues ♦ resource management ♦ trading inequalities ♦ global trading agreements	Environmental issues ♦ climate change ♦ depletion of resources ♦ biodiversity	Social issues ♦ poverty ♦ charity ♦ migrants
Morality, medicine and the human body: mandatory content		
Use of embryos ♦ reproductive ♦ therapeutic ♦ research	Organ donation ♦ consent: informed; presumed ♦ beating heart donation ♦ living donors	End of life ♦ assisted dying ♦ voluntary and non-voluntary euthanasia ♦ end-of-life care
Morality and conflict: mandatory content		
Conflict ♦ types of war ♦ justifications for war ♦ alternatives to war	Consequences of war ♦ for humans ♦ for the environment ♦ for the economy	Modern armaments ♦ weapons of mass destruction ♦ conventional weapons ♦ smart weapons

Religious and philosophical questions			
Origins			
Mandatory content	Recommended approaches to learning and teaching		
Was the universe and life created? - How does religion explain the origins of the universe and of life? - What evidence does religion use to support these explanations? - What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence and/or explanations? - How does science explain the origins of the universe and of life? - What evidence does science use to support these explanations? - What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence and/or explanations? - Can religious and scientific views on origins be compatible?	Knowledge and understanding of: - religious explanations for the origins of the universe and life - scientific explanations for the origins of the universe and life - sources relating to religious and/or scientific explanations for the origins of the universe and life	Analysis of: - evidence used by religion to support explanations for the origins of the universe and life - evidence used by science to support explanations for the origins of the universe and life - sources relating to religious and/or scientific explanations for the origins of the universe and life	Evaluation of: - religious explanations and/or evidence and/or sources relating to the origins of the universe and life - scientific explanations and/or evidence and/or sources relating to the origins of the universe and life Reasoned judgement on: - the compatibility of religious and scientific explanations for the origins of the universe and life
Suggested sources: - Big Bang theory - Darwin's theory of evolution - Genesis 1 and 2			

Existence of God			
Mandatory content	Recommended approaches to learning and teaching		
Does God exist? - What arguments and/or theories do religious people use to prove the existence of God? - What evidence do religious people use to support these arguments and/or theories? - What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence and/or arguments and/or theories? - What arguments and/or theories do non-religious people use to challenge the existence of God? - What evidence do non-religious people use to support these arguments and/or theories? - What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence and/or arguments and/or theories? - Can either religious or non-religious arguments and/or theories provide conclusive proof about the existence of God?	Knowledge and understanding of: - arguments and/or theories religious people use to prove the existence of God - arguments and/or theories non-religious people use to prove the existence of God - sources relating to arguments and/or theories used by religious and/or non-religious people to support and/or challenge the existence of God	Analysis of: - evidence used by religious people to support arguments/theories supporting the existence of God - evidence used by non-religious people to support arguments/theories challenging the existence of God - sources relating to arguments and/or theories used by religious and/or non-religious people to support and/or challenge the existence of God	Evaluation of: - arguments and/or theories religious people use to prove the existence of God - arguments and/or theories non-religious people use to prove the existence of God Reasoned judgement on: - whether either religious or non-religious arguments and/or theories provide conclusive proof about the existence of God
Suggested sources: - Aquinas' cosmological argument - Kalam cosmological argument - Paley's teleological argument			

Existence of God			
The problem of suffering and evil			
Mandatory content	Recommended approaches to learning and teaching		
Who is responsible for suffering and evil? ♦ Is God responsible for suffering and evil? ♦ What arguments are used to support God's responsibility for suffering and evil? ♦ What are the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments? ♦ Are humans responsible for suffering and evil? ♦ What arguments are used to support human responsibility for suffering and evil? ♦ What are the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments? ♦ Can responsibility for suffering and evil lie with both God and humans?	Knowledge and understanding of: ♦ arguments used to support God's responsibility for suffering and evil ♦ arguments used to support human responsibility for suffering and evil ♦ sources relating to the responsibility for suffering and evil	Analysis of: ♦ evidence used to support God's responsibility for suffering and evil ♦ evidence used to support human responsibility for suffering and evil ♦ sources relating to the responsibility for suffering and evil	Evaluation of: ♦ arguments used to support God's responsibility for suffering and evil ♦ arguments used to support human responsibility for suffering and evil Reasoned judgement on: ♦ whether responsibility for suffering and evil lie with both God and humans
Suggested sources: ♦ Augustinian theodicy ♦ Irenaean theodicy ♦ Process theodicy			

Miracles			
Mandatory content	Recommended approaches to learning and teaching		
Are miracles real? ♦ How do religious people explain miracles? ♦ What evidence do religious people use to support these explanations? ♦ What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence and/or explanations? ♦ How do non-religious people explain miracles? ♦ What evidence do non-religious people use to support these explanations? ♦ What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence and/or explanations? ♦ Can religious and non-religious views on miracles be compatible?	Knowledge and understanding of: ♦ religious explanations for miracles ♦ non-religious explanations for miracles ♦ sources relating to religious and/or scientific explanations for miracles	Analysis of: ♦ evidence used by religion to support explanations for miracles ♦ evidence used by science to support explanations for miracles ♦ sources relating to religious and/or scientific explanations for miracles	Evaluation of: ♦ religious explanations for and/or sources relating to miracles ♦ scientific explanations for/sources relating to miracles Reasoned judgement on: ♦ the compatibility of religious and scientific explanations for miracles
Suggested sources: ♦ David Hume ♦ Richard Swinburne ♦ CS Lewis			

Developing skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work

You should identify opportunities throughout the course for candidates to develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work.

Candidates should be aware of the skills they are developing and you can provide advice on opportunities to practise and improve them.

SQA does not formally assess skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work.

There may also be opportunities to develop additional skills depending on approaches being used to deliver the course in each centre. This is for individual teachers and lecturers to manage.

Throughout the course and during the assignment, candidates develop the following skills:

Reading

Candidates may read a variety of texts, including sacred religious texts, newspaper reports, online articles, creative literature, magazines, primary and secondary historical accounts (for example when learning about methods of warfare in the morality and belief context). They learn to express reasoned views about the viewpoints they study, developing the ability to read critically and evaluate the ideas contained in written sources.

Writing

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to undertake extended writing where appropriate in order to facilitate progression to the Advanced Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies course and the world of work. For example, the requirement to express detailed, reasoned and well-structured views about moral issues or philosophical questions provides an ideal opportunity for candidates to develop the skill of extended writing.

Personal learning

There are extensive opportunities for candidates to undertake individually-led work, including researching and investigating, producing written work, reflecting on what they have learned, and revising.

Citizenship

Candidates develop in-depth knowledge and understanding of the impact and significance both of religious practices and of the underlying beliefs and values on which they depend. They learn to appreciate the centrality of religious and philosophical beliefs to people's lives. Studying beliefs, values and viewpoints which may challenge their own helps candidates to appreciate the religious, cultural and social diversity of society.

Administrative information

Published: September 2025 (version 4.0)

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	Course support notes added as appendix.	September 2018
3.0	Penalty for non-submission of resource sheet added to 'Evidence to be gathered' section. 'Reasonable assistance' section updated.	July 2019
4.0	One addition made to 'Evidence to be gathered' section for the assignment: 'Candidates must specify the question, topic or issue they are addressing. No marks will be awarded if the question, topic or issue has not been stated.' Hyperlinks in Further information section have been updated. Some formatting and layout changes have been made to tables to improve accessibility. What you need to do differently ◆ Ensure candidates state their question, topic or issue on their assignment. No marks will be awarded if this is not stated. ◆ Make sure you use the most-up-to-date version of this course specification and the coursework assessment task with candidates.	September 2025

Note: you are advised to check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.