



Philosophy and Ethics KS4 Curriculum

The aims and rationale of the curriculum in Y10-11 are:

Rationale and Ethos

The Hitchin Girls' School Philosophy and Ethics department holds that its purpose is to introduce students to two fundamental questions. Firstly: what kind of thing (in the broadest possible sense) is it reasonable to believe? Secondly: what kind of thing (in the broadest possible sense) is it good to do? These questions are, respectively, the foundational questions of Philosophy and Ethics as academic disciplines.

We hold that this ought to be our purpose for two reasons: firstly, simply because these existential issues are an inescapable part of the Human Condition, and the search for deep wisdom that studying them involves is a source of inherent value. Secondly, we believe that the process of exploring these questions will aid students in becoming confident; intellectually mature and compassionate people, as well as informed; tolerant and engaged citizens.

We hold that properly introducing these questions requires teaching students at all Key Stages the skills of Explanation and Evaluation. That is: to see a philosophical or ethical issue with clarity; to understand a sufficient range of existing approaches and answers to it, and then to come to an informed personal judgement upon it.

We hold that students will require substantive knowledge; curriculum knowledge and personal knowledge to do this. The substantive knowledge of our subject is the intellectual tradition that has been produced by aeons of philosophers, theologians and other thinkers considering the questions outlined above. The curriculum knowledge of our subject is the ability to engage with and think critically about that intellectual tradition. The personal knowledge of our subject is produced by the student as we facilitate them reflecting upon what they themselves value, and how what they have learned coheres with those personal values.

We hold that the study of the world's religions is an invaluable part of developing these skills and knowledges. The world's religions are repositories of deep wisdom that are relevant to the issues we explore, but they are also examples of value-systems that students might be unfamiliar with, and hence examining them acts as a spur for students to reflect on what they themselves consider to be important. Hence the department will approach religion very broadly: as a set of philosophical claims; and as a sociological phenomenon, and as a lived psychological reality.

We hold that in order to achieve any of the above, our classrooms must be inclusive and open spaces where students feel welcomed into a common community of inquiry and exploration. Our approach is therefore never confessional; dogmatic or polemical. Whilst restraints of decency and reasonableness apply, fundamentally we exist not to teach students *what* to think, but *how* to think.

Curriculum Design

The GCSE follows AQA Religious Studies, specification A. There are two areas for content choice within this specification: firstly, which two religions should be studied, and secondly, which four of the six possible themes should be studied.

On the former, we elected to teach Christianity and Buddhism. Christianity was somewhat *de rigueur* given the following considerations: our students' much higher cultural familiarity with the religion; that it is the religion of choice at A-Level and that it is very much where the department's expertise lies. Buddhism was selected for the following reasons: its deeply contrasting nature with Christianity, making it very suitable for the "contrasting views" requirement of the AO2 questions; students' interest in it as a more philosophically-minded religion and the contemporary applicability of many of its core teachings.

When deciding on which themes to include, we eliminated the Crime and Punishment topic because much of the content is already taught in the P+E core curriculum, and we wanted to keep this topic in core given we judged it to be in keeping with the focus on citizenship that the core curriculum is designed to have. Similarly, we eliminated the "Existence of God and Revelations" topic because this content is repeated in the A-Level: given historically high rates of students continuing into the A-Level from the GCSE at HGS, it was decided that this was a poor option. The four remaining themes give a broad-ranging set of issues for philosophical and ethical inquiry, whilst remaining distinct from all other parts of the P+E curriculum.

The focus on explaining and evaluating as core skills is continued seamlessly into the GCSE, as they are the command words for AO1 and AO2 questions respectively. Hence students already find themselves well-equipped for the requirements of the exam, and minimal curriculum time needs to be spent specifically on exam skills, allowing more philosophical discussion to take place.

Curriculum sequencing.

The sequence of lessons that we have come to is largely a result of applying the following principles:

1. For the religious topics, the "Beliefs and Teachings" topics should be taught before the "Practices" ones, as the practices topics are more accessible if students are already aware of the core beliefs of the religion. It is much harder for students to understand why members of a religion might act in a particular way without a pre-existing understanding of the theology of that religion.

2. The curriculum is designed so that two topics are taught simultaneously by two different teachers. At all times, one teacher ought to be teaching a religions topic, whilst the other is teaching a themes topic. This is because a core focus of exam questions looks at the application of religious teachings to the philosophical themes, so running one of each in parallel seemed to facilitate this process.

These being in place, all that remained was to pair themes with particular religions. The Christian Beliefs topic and Religion, Peace and Conflict topic were paired as the latter contains a large section on the Christian pacifist tradition, which provides fertile ground for a case study in the application of Christian teachings. This pair is taught first because it is the religion with which students are most familiar, and provides the best transition to GCSE-level study. Given principle (1) this meant teaching the Buddhist beliefs topic next – given this is perhaps the most demanding topic in the course in terms of the sheer volume of material that must be studied, it was paired with Family and Relationships, perhaps the least demanding topic in the same terms, creating space in these lessons to address the links between the religion and the theme. This leaves the two Practices topics: Christian practices was paired with Religion

and Life, as the latter has a strong focus on the application of Christian ethical principles, and Buddhist practices with Human Rights and Social Justice.

The course material is also arranged asymmetrically between years, with six of the eight topics being taught in Year 10. This is intentional: given the need to pause for mocks around Christmas of Year 11, we stretch the final two topics out over a much longer timescale to allow them to be combined with exam skills and mocks preparation. Front-loading the content in this manner also allows time for a long revision period in class before students embark on study-leave. Structuring the course in this way is required by the synoptic nature of the content – to achieve the highest grades in the exam, students have to be able to relate the content of every topic to every other topic, and naturally this cannot be fully practiced until all content is covered. This means that a lengthy period of reflection is required at the end of the course as a whole.

Philosophy and Ethics KS4 Curriculum Map

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Year 11	Autumn 1 + 2; Spring 1 + 2 Teacher A	Autumn 1 + 2; Spring 1 + 2 Teacher B	Summer 1 Teacher A + B	Summer 2 Teacher A + B
Topic	Buddhist Practices	Religion, Human Rights and Social Justice	Revision and consolidation	Study Leave and exams
Content: what will students know?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Basic Buddhist Ethics 2) The Six Perfections 3) Buddhist places of Worship 4) Acts of worship 5) Festivals and ceremonies 6) Buddhist funerals 7) Meditation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Social justice 2) Human Rights 3) The UNDHR 4) The UK Human Rights Act 5) Freedom of Religion and belief 6) Religious expression 7) Prejudice and discrimination 8) Affirmative action 9) Religious teachings on prejudice and discrimination 10) UK anti-discrimination law 11) Wealth inequality 12) Causes of poverty 13) People trafficking and exploitation 	Revisiting the content taught in the course, making links between the material in each.	
Skills: What will students be able to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Explain key Buddhist religious practices. 2) Evaluate the foundations and motivations for these practices. 3) Evaluate inter-denominational differences on these core practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Explain a range of different issues around Human Rights and Social Justice. 2) Explain key Christian and Buddhist attitudes towards these. 3) Evaluate the ethical and philosophical issues that arise in the topic. 	Solidifying exam technique towards synoptic and comparative exam questions.	
Other: Literacy, numeracy, ethos etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Debate and discussion skills. 2) Accepting diversity; cultural capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Debate and discussion skills. 2) Ethical reasoning 3) Personal reflection 4) Knowledge of current affairs and politics. 		
Assessment	End of topic test in exam format	End of topic test in exam format		