

Ethics and Religious Studies

Introduction

1. As an elective PSHE subject in the senior secondary curriculum, Ethics and Religious Studies (ERS) helps students explore questions of meaning, value and purpose in life. It seeks to help students to develop insights, a capacity for moral and spiritual life and personal autonomy. These qualities make life meaningful in the social, cultural and political contexts of pluralistic Hong Kong.

Rationale

2. The ERS curriculum makes a major contribution to the social, moral and spiritual development of students. At all stages of life, students are frequently challenged by certain religious and moral issues. These include the origin and purpose of life, identity, sex and marriage, suffering, life after death etc. The ERS curriculum helps students respond to such religious and moral questions through a process of inquiry. Students are expected to reflect critically upon their own life experiences, develop confidence in their religious understanding, and to be able to defend their position.

3. The ERS curriculum has a particularly important contribution to make in helping students to develop an appreciative attitude towards diversity in pluralistic Hong Kong. The richness in religious traditions of our society provides students with opportunities to compare and study religions and their significances.

4. The ERS curriculum empowers students to examine ways in which religious and moral questions have been formulated and reflected on throughout history and across the globe. Students are enabled to articulate their own beliefs and engage in dialogue with others. This provides a good foundation for continued exploration in Cultural Studies, History, Theology, Philosophy, Public Administration, Human Resources Management, Social Work and Criminal Justice. The self-understanding and knowledge gained from the ERS curriculum benefit the community through preparing future social workers, counsellors, teachers, clergy and journalists.

5. Building on the previous learning acquired in Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 3 through the study of Religious Education, Biblical Knowledge, Buddhist Studies, Integrated Humanities and History, students are already equipped with a basic understanding of various religious traditions. ERS at Key Stage 4 emphasizes the concepts, beliefs and values of religions in relation to students' daily life within specific contexts. Teachers are encouraged to refer to and reinforce students' previous learning where appropriate.

6. Two major approaches to religious education, namely a systems approach (learning about religions) and a life themes approach (learning from religion), are given balanced emphasis in the ERS curriculum. The first involves developing knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs, teachings, practices and lifestyles, while the second promotes the skills of asking and responding to questions of identity and experience, meaning and purpose, values and commitments. Adopting both, this curriculum enables students to develop understanding and to reflect on ethical and religious issues and on their own beliefs and values. It also helps students to evaluate the influence of religion on their life, as well as providing them with a means to search for meaning of life.

Curriculum Aims

7. The aims of the ERS curriculum are to enable students to:
- (a) acquire knowledge of the religion they study and other major religions in Hong Kong;
 - (b) make reasoned and informed judgments about religious and moral issues;
 - (c) enhance their spiritual, moral, and social development; and
 - (d) develop a positive attitude towards other people and respect other people's right to hold beliefs different from their own.

Curriculum Objectives

8. Students are expected to develop **knowledge** and **understanding** about:
- (a) the significance of morality to both individuals and society;
 - (b) the historical value of the major ethical systems and why their tenets have survived the ages;
 - (c) the origin, literature, precepts, forms and practices of the religions they study;
 - (d) the founders of the religions they study and why their influence continues to the present day; and
 - (e) contemporary views about religious and ethical issues.
9. Students are expected to develop **skills** to:
- (a) reflect on their own beliefs, values and experiences;
 - (b) discuss objectively with people holding beliefs and values different from theirs;
 - (c) understand with empathy why people believe and behave as they do;
 - (d) debate issues of religious significance on the basis of evidence and rational argument; and

- (e) apply the results of their religious exploration to the betterment of themselves and their communities.
10. Students are expected to develop **values** and **attitudes** about:
- (a) respect for others;
 - (b) willingness to acknowledge the needs, feelings and aspirations of others and learn from their insights;
 - (c) tolerance of ambiguities and paradoxical situations;
 - (d) appreciation of diversity in religion and culture;
 - (e) respect for life; and
 - (f) eagerness to search for meaning and truth.

Curriculum Framework

(This part should be read in conjunction with the section “Curriculum Framework” of the Main Document. It should be noted that the curriculum framework suggested below is for initial consultation only. Feedback from the public will be taken into account and further details will be provided in the next stage of consultation.)

11. The curriculum content includes the following Parts:

PART I ETHICS STUDIES

This is an introductory study on normative ethics. The emphasis is on value formation and judgment based on rational thinking.

Suggested lesson time: 102 hrs (40%)

PART II RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS (Choose ONE only):

- Module 1 Buddhism
- Module 2 Christianity
- Module 3 Confucianism*
- Module 4 Islam*
- Module 5 Taoism*

* To be ready for implementation at a later phase

Suggested lesson time: 102 hrs (40%)

PART III FAITHS IN ACTION (Choose ONE only)

Experiential learning activities are organized and structured around religious teachings and the way that these relate to shared human experience. Teachers may help students to reflect on and give meaning to these learning experiences.

Module 1 Learning to serve and serving to learn

Module 2 Learning from different religious practices

Suggested lesson time: 51 hrs (20%)

Learning and Teaching

12. Two different approaches to religious education are outlined in ERS: a systems approach and a life themes approach. Although each approach has its distinctive purpose, emphasis and content, the pedagogy adopted by the teacher is crucial to the quality of learning and teaching in this curriculum.

13. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a reflective-enquiry approach in learning and teaching, which is consistent with the subject aims and appropriate to the needs and interests of different groups of students.

14. The five phases of the reflective-enquiry approach are as follows:

(a) Exploring

The basic criteria for the choice of a topic should be its worthiness as an area of exploration, and the fact that it has good potential for achieving curriculum objectives and furthering students' understanding.

(b) Knowing

Students are strongly encouraged to discover an important body of knowledge arising out of the subject's extensive and complex field of enquiry. This helps students assimilate new knowledge or reinforce previously acquired knowledge.

(c) Understanding

Through various learning experiences, for example data collection, discussion, case study and interview, students understand ideas and concepts and the complex relationship between them and related items of knowledge.

(d) Expressing

ERS treasures students' present patterns of belief, feelings, thoughts and experiences. All these are a potential source of learning content, which can only become available for exploration and evaluation when ample time and opportunity are given to students to express themselves. Teachers are encouraged to design activities which provide maximum opportunity and freedom for students to express their own ideas and their responses to the range of beliefs being explored.

(e) Reflecting

At the heart of ERS is the human need to formulate or acquire a set of beliefs and values. Reflection in this context involves evaluating in an honest and informed way the worth and relevance of particular beliefs and the values which are likely to accompany them.

Assessment

(This part should be read in conjunction with the section “Assessment” of the Main Document.)

15. Assessment is the practice of collecting evidence of student learning. The aims of assessment are to improve learning and teaching as well as to recognize the achievement of students. Assessment design should be aligned with the curriculum aims, design and the processes of learning and teaching.

Internal Assessment

16. Internal assessment refers to the assessment practices that schools employ as part of the learning and teaching process during the three-year senior secondary studies in ERS. It serves the purpose of providing feedback to improve learning and teaching as well as to report student progress at appropriate times.

17. Students should be assessed through a range of different assessment modes according to the purpose and process of learning. Assessment should not be restricted to academic outcomes. For instance, observation is used to assess participation in discussion, written assessment to assess the expression of personal views, and project work to assess a student’s thought processes and how they develop.

18. The ERS curriculum aims to develop the intellectual capacity of students, with a particular focus on both ethical and religious matters. It also aims to enrich the moral and spiritual dimensions of students’ lives, to help them to be sensitive to the feelings and the experience of others, and to enable them to engage in self-reflection and self-improvement. Teachers are strongly encouraged to design assessment which can provide effective feedback that motivates and improves reflective thinking. This might include activities such as case analysis, debate, writing reflective journals, quizzes and project learning.

Public Assessment

19. Standards-referenced Assessment (SRA)

Public assessment of Ethics and Religious Studies leads to a qualification in the subject to be offered by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority. In the public assessment of Ethics and Religious Studies, a standards-referenced approach will be adopted for grading and reporting student performance. The purpose of this approach is to recognize what each student can do in each subject at the end of the 3-year senior secondary education stage. Each student’s performance will be matched against a set of performance standards, rather than compared to the performance of other students. It makes the implicit standards explicit by providing specific indication of individual student performance. Descriptors will be provided for the set of standards at a later stage.

20. Modes of public assessment

1st component: The Written Examination

	Duration (hours)	Weighting	Mode of Assessment
Paper One: Ethics Studies	1.25 hrs	30%	Essay Questions
Paper Two: Religious Traditions	1.75 hrs	40%	Essay Questions

2nd component: School-based Assessment (SBA)

Public assessment will include an SBA component that will take up 30% of the total weighting. The merits of adopting SBA are as follows:

- (i) SBA provides a more valid assessment than an external written examination, since it covers a more extensive range of learning outcomes through employing a wider range of assessment modes that are not all possible in written examinations.
- (ii) SBA enables the sustained work of students to be assessed. It provides a more comprehensive picture of student performance throughout the period of study rather than their performance in a one-off examination alone.

21. The breakdown of the % weighting of SBA components is as follows:

Year	Weighting	Mode of Assessment
SS1	0%	-
SS2	10%	Continuous assessment of course work
SS3	5%	Continuous assessment of course work
	15%	Faiths in Action: Student Visit Report / Service Portfolio

22. It should be noted that SBA is not an “add-on” element in the curriculum. Assessing student performance through practices such as class discussion and class observation is a normal in-class and out-of-class activity. The modes of SBA that will be selected in ERS will be those most appropriate to the learning objectives and processes that are to be assessed. The design and implementation of SBA should avoid unduly increasing the workload of both teachers and students.

Supporting Measures

23. The Curriculum Development Institute (CDI) will provide the following measures to support the implementation of the New Senior Secondary Ethics and Religious Studies Curriculum:

Development of Curriculum Resources

24. The Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority will jointly issue a Curriculum and Assessment Guide for the subject. Supporting materials will also be developed to facilitate the school-based implementation of the curriculum. These materials will include exemplary learning activities, learning and teaching materials, a glossary, a reference list, etc. They will also be made available when ready on the CDI’s website for Personal, Social and Humanities Education (<http://www.emb.gov.hk/cd>).

Professional Development Programmes

25. The Curriculum Development Institute and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority will organize a series of professional development programmes for teachers of the subject. Listed below are the major areas likely to be included in the professional development programmes to be provided.

- ✧ Understanding the curriculum design
- ✧ Sharing of learning and teaching strategies and good practices
- ✧ Curriculum updating programmes
- ✧ Curriculum management and leadership (curriculum leadership courses)
- ✧ Internal assessment, School-based Assessment and Standards-referenced Assessment

26. Seminars and workshops on special topics will also be organized regularly in response to the needs of teachers.

27. More details of the above support measures will be announced through the CDI's website for Personal, Social and Humanities Education (<http://www.emb.gov.hk/cd>). Teachers are also invited to check the EMB Training Calendar regularly for information on professional development programmes.

Suggested Content of the Curriculum

PART I ETHICS STUDIES

This is an introductory study on normative ethics. The emphasis is on value formation and judgment based on rational thinking. Students have to study some personal and social issues in which their ethical stance for making judgment and choices are developed.

Module	Units	Related phenomena /concepts
Introduction to Normative Ethics	The Nature of Morality	Moral principles Moral reasoning Pluralism
	Theory of Conduct	Consequences Duties
	Theory of value and virtue	Intrinsic value Instrumental value Quality Priority Conflicts
Personal and Social Issues	Human Rights	Civil and Political rights Economic, Social and Cultural rights Discrimination Inherent dignity Nature of rights Self-determination Responsibilities / Obligation
	Life and Death	Abortion Ageing Birth control Capital punishment Euthanasia Surrogacy Suffering Suicide
	Love, Sex and Marriage	Commitment Divorce Heterosexual and homosexual relationships Pornography Premarital and extramarital sex Prostitution Single life

Module	Units	Related phenomena /concepts
	Bioethics	Animal testing Cloning Medical ethics Gender selection Genetic engineering Genetic intervention
	Environmental Ethics	Biodiversity Conservation Consumerism Global village Pollution Stewardship Sustainable development
	Business Ethics	Advertising Corruption Exploitation Globalization Industrial action Justice/fairness/equality Poverty
	Media Ethics	Censorship Code of ethics Communication Editorial independence Entertainment Freedom of speech Information Professionalism Stereotype

PART II RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS (Choose ONE only)

Module 1	Units	Topics
Buddhism	History of Buddhism	History of Indian Buddhism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical background of Buddhism • Life of the Buddha • Development of Buddhism in India Buddhism in the modern world <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theravada Buddhism • Chinese Buddhism • Tibetan Buddhism • Western Buddhism Pluralistic development of Buddhism in Hong Kong
	Doctrines of Buddhism	Fundamental Doctrines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle of Dependent Arising: Core teachings of Buddhism • Karma and reincarnation: The reality of sufferings • Twelve Links of Dependent Origination: The cause of liberation from sufferings • Five aggregates and Non-self: The nature of life • The Four Noble Truths: The foundations of Buddhism Buddhist Practice: Conversion, Cultivation and Fruit Realization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four Mindfulness: Self and Other-enlightenment • Foundations of Path to Enlightenment • Liberating Path to Enlightenment • Path of Perfection to Enlightenment

Module 2	Units	Topics
Christianity	Background	Textual background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The faith of the Old Testament Political and social background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palestine in the First Century A.D.
	Jesus' Life	Birth and childhood Ministry Passion Resurrection and Ascension
	Jesus' Teaching	God Kingdom of God Will of God Other teachings
	The continuation of Jesus' ministry	Apostles St. Paul Other disciples

PART III FAITHS IN ACTION (Choose ONE only)

Experiential learning activities are organized and structured around religious teachings and the way they relate to shared human experience. Students can either engage in a service programme or visit a place where religious activities are held. Teachers may help students to reflect on and give meaning to these learning experiences.

Module 1	Units	Remarks
Learning to serve and serving to learn	Concrete experience and observation: Plan and do service with others	
	Reflection: Reflect on the service experiences	
	Synthesis and conceptualisation: Synthesize information and feelings from the service experiences and generalize them to broader issues	
	Testing of concepts in new situations: Apply new understandings to life experiences and other service experiences	
	Personal service portfolio: Writing reflective journals and service reports to build a portfolio	

Module 2	Units	Remarks
Learning from different religious practices (e.g. visit a religious building or observe a religious ceremony)	Concrete experience and observation: Experience how a faith community feels its beliefs are expressed through symbolism/ worship/festival/rituals	Students are encouraged to engage in some religious experiences different from the religious traditions they study in Part II.
	Reflection: Reflect on the visit experiences	
	Synthesis and conceptualisation: Synthesize information and feelings from the visit experiences and compare them to other religious experiences	
	Evaluate beliefs and values with reference to experiences	
	Personal visit portfolio: Writing reflective journals and visit reports to build a portfolio	