

## **Optional course: Religious studies**

### **1. General principles**

#### **1.1. Learning and Educational Objectives**

The elective subject of religious studies at the upper secondary school level strives to direct pupils to:

- 1) be capable of respectful communication with people of different world views and discussions of attitudes towards different world view issues, recognise in their own behaviour and that of others prejudiced attitudes and know how to oppose them when their own or friends' rights are violated;
- 2) provide examples of how the principles of freedom of religion function in practice, what boundaries exist in society and how they are breached, and how religion and politics are connected;
- 3) characterise the historical factors that influenced the distribution of different religions across Estonia, know the religious movements that are widespread in Estonia and name their doctrines and rituals;
- 4) discuss how different world views influence us on individual and social levels, both positively and problematically, and know the simpler scientific methods of religious research; and
- 5) be aware of their main value judgments and analyse the role of values in their own actions and those of others, phrase the primary features of their own world view, and analyse their worldview convictions in the context of the studied religions.

#### **1.2. Description of the Optional Course**

The syllabus of the optional course of religious studies consists of two 35-hour courses – “People and Religion” and “The Religious Landscape of Estonia”.with the option of a more comprehensive course, which compilation must rely on the general goals of the optional course, the principles of teaching and the learning activities and outcomes that the upper secondary school wishes to achieve.

The optional course includes two courses: Course I is entitled

The optional course of religious studies is based on the principles of freedom of religion and thought and:

- 1) covers different religions and religious movements;
- 2) teaches pupils to understand how religion is expressed in culture, in our individual lives and in society; and
- 3) discusses existential issues.

The optional course of religious studies originates from the principle of recognition of freedom of religion and thought in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Religious education is one of the preconditions for ensuring freedom of religion in society. These religious studies do not advertise any particular church, congregation or other religious association. The optional course of religious studies is not meant to influence pupils to accept a particular world view as the norm. The task of religious studies at the upper secondary school level is not to guide pupils towards acceptance of a particular religion. The goal is to prepare the pupils for life in a pluralistic society and in a world where they will come into contact with people of different religions and world views. That is why the stress in these religious studies is on shaping skills and attitudes that form the basis of mutual understanding, respect, openness and readiness for dialogue and cooperation.

The process of learning about different religions and world views must rely on a balanced scientific approach. The pupils who attend lessons of religious studies will gradually understand the diverse religious heritage and modern-day positive and negative manifestations of religions. Religion in all societies has always been one of the forces shaping our lives and culture, and a source of inspiration for writers, artists and musicians. Religious education facilitates understanding of global cultural heritage.

The pupils' empathy and mutual respect are supported by examining various ways of comprehending the world around us. Religious studies must be organised and conducted so as to take into account and respect the convictions that the pupils are exposed to at home. An important component of religious studies is the support of the pupils' moral development through the fostering of responsible and ethical life skills.

Learning about different religions and world views develops critical thinking, creates opportunities for tackling existential issues and supports each pupil in shaping their own world view. The optional course of religious studies enriches the outlook of the pupils as they become familiarised with various ways of comprehending the world we live in. The teaching materials used in religious studies are connected with the previous knowledge and experience of the pupils. It is important to become familiarised with the cultural values of the home area and the local religion and to create connections with the problems and questions posed by the pupils. It is recommended to involve the pupils in the process of compilation of the religious studies work schedule.

### **1.3. Planning and Organisation of Learning Activities**

Learning activities are planned and conducted in the following manner:

- 1) the basis consists of the fundamental values and general competences stipulated in the curriculum, the general goals of the optional course, the content of studies and the expected learning outcomes, with support given to integration with other subjects and cross-curricular topics;
- 2) the pupils' workload (including home assignments) should be moderate and evenly distributed throughout the school year, leaving them sufficient time to rest and pursue their hobbies;
- 3) the pupils can study alone or with others (independent and pair or group work) as this supports their development as active and independent learners;
- 4) differentiated learning tasks are given and their content and difficulty levels support the individual approach and enhance motivation to learn;
- 5) modern teaching materials and means are used which are based on modern information and communication technologies;

- 6) the learning environment is expanded: the pupils attend shrines of different religions, museums, exhibitions and the computer classroom;
- 7) different methods of teaching are used, including active learning: role play; conversations; discussions; argumentation; debates; defining and solving problems; formulation of questions and personal viewpoints and their justification; project work; compilation of learning portfolios and research papers; creative methods: drama; artistic and musical self-expression; educational excursions, meetings with prominent (preferably local) personalities; familiarisation with symbol systems; learning about the primary features of the teachings of local religious denominations, their spheres of activity and institutions (e.g. monasteries and convents, children and youth work forms, social work and protection of heritage); analysis of religious texts; and the implementation of scientific methods of religious research. Preparation and oral delivery of synopses supports the acquisition of initial research work experience and develops public speaking skills. Essay-writing facilitates the development of written expression skills;
- 8) central significance is the development of critical thinking and skills of analysing world view issues and formulating arguments concerning these issues. All pupils should become used to the idea that discussing a problem will often not result in its solution but will at least allow the participants to better understand it. It is important to acquire the fundamental concepts, classify religions, obtain a general overview of the characteristic features of religious life in different eras and comprehend the religious diversity in Estonia.

#### **1.4. Physical Learning Environment**

The school will organise the predominant part of learning in a classroom where the furniture can be rearranged for group work and round-table conversations.

The school will:

- 1) organise work that requires computer use and Internet access in such a classroom that has at least one computer for every two pupils.
- 2) provide the resources for demonstration of information in support of syllabus goals (including CDs and DVDs, pictures, videos and films, additional popular science literature and fiction on the subject).
- 3) organise at least two educational excursions outside the classroom per stage of study.

#### **1.5. Basis for Assessment**

The learning outcomes of religious studies are assessed in accordance with the general part of the national curriculum and other legislation that regulates such assessment. Assessed are the pupils' knowledge, their skills in implementing this knowledge and their acquisition of general competences on the basis of oral answers (presentations), written and/or practical work and practical activities, taking into account how the knowledge and skills of the pupils comply with the learning outcomes stipulated in the optional course syllabus. Neither the attitudes nor the values of the pupils are assessed. Feedback is provided to each pupil regarding their attitudes and values. Attitudes and values can be analysed via role play, case studies and group work. In this case assessment covers not only the outcome, but also the reasoning and process. The pupil must actively participate in the assessment process and their explanations, justifications and self-analysis play an important part. Assessment must take into account solution variations and the individuality of each pupil. Assessment also supports the pupils' development. Assessment methods are selected with

consideration given to the age of the pupils, their individual abilities and readiness to cope with a particular activity. The learning outcomes are assessed with oral appraisal and number grades.

The pupils must know what is assessed and when, what means are used for assessment and what the assessment criteria are.

## **2. Course plans**

### **2.1. Course: “People and Religion”**

#### **2.1.1. Learning Outcomes at the Upper Secondary School Level**

The pupils who graduate from upper secondary school can:

- 1) perceive the role of religion in the lives of individuals and social life:
  - a. understand that religion is a multi-faceted phenomenon, analyse examples, explain how different world views can either positively or negatively influence the lives of individuals and social life and name the most important aspects of the individual and social dimensions of religion;
  - b. reveal the linguistic peculiarities of religion, compare religious and scientific thinking, point out differences and similarities therein and recognise hidden religiosity;
  - c. analyse how the mass media influences the shaping of our views on religion; and
  - d. discuss the influence of science and religion on ethical choices;
- 2) analyse feasible religious texts;
- 3) understand that religiosity has different meanings, is expressed in different ways by different people at different stages of life, and is connected to historical factors;
- 4) analyse the reasons behind religious conflicts, recognise prejudiced and labelling attitudes and offer opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between people with different religious world views;
- 5) recognise connections between religion, values and moral convictions in the lives of individuals and social life, and participate in argument-supported discussions about current ethical issues;
- 6) discuss religious and world view problems;
- 7) discuss the influences on their own world view, seeking answers to existential questions raised and making their own ethical decisions; and
- 8) name the simpler forms and methods of scientific study of religion and be able to implement some of them.

#### **2.1.2. Learning Outcomes and Learning Content**

##### **Fundamental concepts of religion**

##### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the course the pupils can:

- 1) name different dimensions of religion and compare different approaches on religion by different disciplines of religious studies;

- 2) name the largest religions in the world and compare the reasons why different statistical data has been obtained; and
- 3) know the types of classification of religions and analyse the value judgements associated with this classification.

**Learning Content** Concept of religion. Possibilities for the scientific research on religion. Religious map of the world.

## **Philosophy of Religion**

### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the course the pupils can:

- 1) reveal the linguistic peculiarities of religion, compare religious and scientific thinking and point out their differences and similarities;
- 2) differentiate between world views, and compare religious and non-religious worldviews;
- 3) discuss the influence of science and religion on ethical choices; and
- 4) recognise connections between religion, values and moral convictions in the lives of individuals and social life, participate in argument-supported discussions about current ethical issues and justify some of their ethical viewpoints.

### **Learning Content**

Plurality of opinions and the truth. Religious language.

World views. How worldviews change over time. Religious and non-religious worldviews.

Points of contact between ethics and religion (for example: People and nature. Limits of technology. Euthanasia. Abortion. Homosexuality). Relations between science and religion (for example: Creation vs evolution).

## **Comparative History of Religions**

### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the course the pupils can:

- 1) analyse feasible religious texts;
- 2) compare different notions about holy (god) and human and point out connections between them;
- 3) list the important answers given by different religions to questions about the purpose of human life and the problems of evil;
- 4) explain the simpler methods of research used by the history of religions and can implement some of these methods; and
- 5) discuss the influences on their own world view, seeking answers to existential questions raised.

### **Learning Content**

Concept of the holy. Different conceptions about god. Sacral time and space.

Natural and supernatural. Destiny and chance.

Different approaches to humanity. Purpose of human life. Issues of evil and suffering.

## **Psychology of Religion**

### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the course the pupils can:

- 1) recognise the role played by religion in a person's life and recognise hidden religiosity;
- 2) explain the simpler methods of research used in the psychology of religion and can implement them;
- 3) analyse examples and explain how different world views can either positively or negatively influence the lives of individuals and name the most important aspects of the individual religiosity; and
- 4) understand that religiosity may have different meanings: it is expressed in different ways by different people at different stages of life and is connected to historical factors.

### **Learning Content**

Why do people have religious belief? How do we define religiosity?

Religious experiences and their diversity. Different spiritualities. Human religious development.

## **Sociology of Religion**

### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the course the pupils can:

- 1) explain the simpler methods of research used in the sociology of religion and implement some of these methods;
- 2) recognise connections between religion and culture and the role of religion in social life;
- 3) analyse examples and explain how different world views can either positively or negatively influence social life and name the most important social aspects of religion;
- 4) analyse how the mass media influences and shapes views on religion;
- 5) analyse the reasons of religious conflicts, recognise prejudiced and labelling attitudes and offer opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between people with different religious views; and
- 6) discuss religious and world view problems.

### **Learning Content**

Freedom of religion and conscience. Religion and politics.

Relations between various religions: cooperation opportunities, religious conflicts.

Religion and culture.

Religion today. Secularisation. Fundamentalism. Privatisation of religion.

## **2.2. Course: "The Religious Landscape of Estonia"**

### **2.2.1. Learning Outcomes at the Upper Secondary School Level**

The pupils who graduate from upper secondary school can:

- 1) characterise the religious situation in Estonia during the periods studied;

- 2) name the largest religious movements in Estonia and identify the largest denominations and religious groups;
- 3) knowing the symbols of the religions and churches in Estonia;
- 4) naming their main doctrines, comparing the religions and Christian denominations studied and highlighting their differences and similarities; and
- 5) comparing the expression of different religions in everyday life;
- 6) perceive the role of religion in social life and human relationships;
- 7) understanding how religion influences society;
- 8) knowing how to take into account the religious convictions of other people in their activities;
- 9) treating different religious convictions with respect and tolerance, but also with criticism where necessary, and reflecting on their own viewpoints and attitudes regarding world views (religious or secular) that are different from their own; and
- 10) phrase the basic features of their world view and compare their corresponding personal convictions with those typical to the religions and denominations studied.

## **2.2.2. Learning Outcomes and Learning Content**

### **Course Introduction**

#### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the course the pupils can:

- 1) name the different dimensions of religion and compare notions about religion by different disciplines of religious studies;
- 2) name the largest religions and denominations in Estonia and compare the reasons why different statistical data has been obtained; and
- 3) explain the types of classification of religions and analyse the value judgements associated with this classification.

#### **Learning Content**

Concept of religion. Possibilities of religious research. Religious map of Estonia. Issues of classification of religions and denominations.

### **Evolution of Religious Background in Estonia**

#### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the course the pupils can characterise the religious background in Estonia during the eras studied, naming the basic features and highlighting the differences.

#### **Course Content**

Ancient times, Christianisation, Reformation, Pietism and Rationalism, Russification, Republic of Estonia, Soviet occupation, today.

### **Religions, Denominations and Religious Movements**

## Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course the pupils can:

- 1) identify the largest denominations and religious groups in Estonia;
- 2) knowing the symbols of the religions and churches in Estonia;
- 3) naming their main doctrines, comparing the religions and Christian denominations studied and pointing out their differences and similarities; and
- 4) comparing the manners of the daily expression of different religions (including in the lives of young people);
- 5) explain the bases for non-religious world views;
- 6) identify important sacred places in their home area;
- 7) analyse simpler religious texts;
- 8) perceive the role of religion in social life and human relationships;
- 9) understanding how religion influences society;
- 10) knowing how to take into account religious convictions of other people in their activities; and
- 11) treating different religious convictions with respect and tolerance, but also with criticism where necessary, and reflecting on their own viewpoints and attitudes regarding world views (religious or secular) that are different from their own; and
- 12) phrase the basic features of their world view and compare their corresponding personal convictions with those typical of the religions and denominations studied.

## Learning Content

Traditional Christian religious associations in Estonia:

- 1) the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the Ukrainian Greek Catholic congregation, the Orthodox Church, the Old Believers and monasteries and convents;
- 2) Lutheranism and the Moravian Brethren; and
- 3) Baptism, Methodism, Adventism and Pentecostalism.

Other religious associations and movements in Estonia:

- 1) indigenous traditions;
- 2) Judaism;
- 3) Islam;
- 4) Buddhism;
- 5) Hinduism (Krishnaism);
- 6) Baha'i congregations;
- 7) Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the New Apostolic Church;
- 8) the Armenian Church;
- 9) Word of Life congregations and charismatic churches;
- 10) New Age; and
- 11) others.

Non-religious world views in Estonia:

- 1) Atheism;
- 2) Agnosticism; and



3) non-religiousness.

## **Course Summary**

### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the course the pupils can:

- 1) explain the primary legislation that regulates religious life in Estonia; and
- 2) write a research paper about an important Estonian religious thinker or cultural figure.

### **Learning Content**

Organisation of religious life in Estonia, religiousness in Estonia today, secularisation.

Important Estonian religious thinkers and cultural figures (for instance: Prophet Maltsvet, Jakob Hurt, Johan Köpp, Barefoot Tõnisson, Bishop Platon, Uku Masing, Arthur Võõbus, Toomas Paul, Ain Kalmus (Evald Mänd), Hugo Lepnurm, Jüri Arrak, Urmas Sisask, Arvo Pärt etc.).