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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCSE  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES – ROUTE A –  
COMPONENTS 1, 2 AND 3 – FULL AND  
SHORT COURSE**

**SUMMER 2023**

Grade boundary information for this subject is available on the WJEC public website at:  
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# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

## GCSE

Summer 2023

### COMPONENT 1

#### RELIGIOUS, PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL STUDIES IN THE MODERN WORLD

##### General Comments

The report should be read in conjunction with the mark scheme which contains the assessment criteria and indicative content for each question.

This year, again, it was pleasing to see how many candidates engaged with the examination paper with few missed responses and very few papers where candidates failed to attempt any questions. The paper differentiated well with all questions accessible.

Many candidates showed an engaged understanding of contemporary global, ethical and philosophical issues, and were confident in relating these to their answers. It was pleasing to see how candidates' responses demonstrated the importance of their studies in understanding and engaging with world issues. There was an increased awareness of contemporary ethical issues and being able to appropriately refer to these in support of descriptions, explanations and judgements.

It was pleasing to note that, despite the paper being one of the first papers sat, and a lengthy paper, that many candidates were able to give quality answers to the final questions. In previous years there was evidence of candidates not having the stamina or concentration to complete the whole paper, whereas this year there was increased evidence of candidates engaging with the paper as a whole. This included underlining key words and writing brief plans/mind maps as a support for structuring 'd' questions.

It was also pleasing to see the improvement in responses to 'b' type questions. As the data evidences, the 'b' questions which asked for 'two reasons' resulted in candidates focusing on the demands of the rubric rather than writing superfluous general descriptions which can often result in dedicating more time to a response than is warranted.

The use of appropriate religious/specialist language is a key criterion in this component. Some candidates confidently used key religious, philosophical and ethical terms to express their arguments. It remains disappointing to see that in a minority of responses, candidates used specialist terms in 'a', 'b', and 'c' questions but failed to apply their knowledge and understanding of key language to 'd' type questions. This has been an area of concern in previous reports and remains one from this year's review of responses. Candidates, generally, appear to be able to define a key word but do not have such specialist language embedded in their working memory to be able to use it in their own writing when appropriate. This limits candidate's ability to reach the highest bands. The lack of specialist language was particularly noticeable in the 1d question.

Many candidates refer, where appropriate, to sources of authority in their answers. Relevant references were made to sacred texts, faith leaders, figures of authority, conscience etc. References to sacred texts are often relevant to 'b', 'c' and 'd' type questions. There is no requirement, however, to quote any specific text. Effective reference might be a brief paraphrase. No credit is given for merely reiterating a quote without reference to how the quote supports the candidate's explanation or analysis. It was disappointing to see how some candidates had learned quotes from sacred texts but were unaware of their context and failed to use the quote in support of, or to counter, an argument. Some candidates framed a 'd' response by linking quotes from sacred texts without any contextualisation or analysis.

This year, again, there appeared a greater confidence in candidates' writing structured responses for 'd' type questions which included pertinent analysis. Many responses indicated a concept-led approach which allowed candidates to address the actual analytical demands of the question rather than offer explanations of the different views of religious traditions. There were fewer responses which merely detailed the attitude of two religious traditions and would have been more appropriate for a response to a 'c' question. The majority of responses indicated whether arguments were strong or weak. Sometimes this was formulaic and judgements were not supported by relevant evidence and not a result of the evidence leading up to the evaluation e.g. 'This is a strong argument because many Christians think it is important.' Candidates are not required to write a summative conclusion to achieve the highest marks and evaluation can be throughout the response. Many candidates are now using 'hinges' ('connectives') throughout their writing to give a greater depth of ongoing analysis e.g. 'therefore....', 'however...' 'consequently....' etc.

The paper requires candidates to answer from two religious traditions. Most candidates expressed an awareness that there is diversity within each tradition as might be exemplified in different Christian denominations. However, at times the understanding expressed is polarised with little recognition that there will be diversity even within each denomination. This weakness is illustrated in the consideration of specific questions on the following pages.

As was reported last year, responses, generally, demonstrated candidate's ability to retrieve and recall a significant number of facts. However, how the facts connected and the implications of such connections were sometimes based on misconceptions. Such schemas had often become embedded into a working memory and, as such, were applied to responses throughout the paper. Even in very high scoring responses, there were examples of basic misconceptions and candidates unable to refer to axiomatic or 'finger tip' knowledge that in previous years might have been embedded from primary or Key Stage 3 learning. Specific examples of this were erroneous connections between religious traditions, places of worship, festivals, and sacred texts and a lack of knowledge of case studies e.g. Martin Luther King, Christian Aid etc. There were significant misconceptions regarding the beliefs and practices of the Catholic tradition.

## Comments on individual questions/sections

The demands of each type of question are distinct and, reflecting previous reports, it is appropriate to consider candidate performance in each type of question before scrutinising responses to individual questions.

- (a) Questions. These questions are always based on the key concepts for each unit. Candidates are required to give a definition of one of the key concepts for the unit. For this paper definitions do not need to be placed within a religion specific content. Generally, these were answered well. Many candidates appeared to have learned a set definition, while some wrote from their own understanding in their own words. Either is acceptable. Often candidates supported their definition with an example which, as indicated in the mark scheme, can gain some credit. However, for full credit there must be an accurate definition.

It is important to remember that, in addition to answering 'a' questions, the use of key concepts can be credited, where used appropriately, as part of the criteria for 'b', 'c' and 'd' questions which require the use of 'religious/specialist terms'. This cross transference of key concepts was not always evident in candidates' responses.

- (b) Questions. These questions require candidates to select and then describe relevant information using specific religious/ethical/philosophical language to respond to the question. No explanation is required. Where a question relates to a very general area, e.g. causes of crime, candidates might be asked to describe two reasons rather than give a general account. This type of questioning focuses candidates so that they avoid writing a very general description which can prevent some candidates from completing the paper. Candidates are only required to describe. Where relevant, and appropriate, candidates are expected to refer to a source of authority. Some questions, e.g., 1b, a reference to a sacred text might be more relevant than other 'b' types responses. References to sources of authority do not need to be confined to sacred texts. Relevant sources of authority could include references to God, Jesus, the prophets, sacred scriptures, conscience, family, law, religious leaders, Laws of a country, etc.

A small minority of responses adopted an approach used in 'd' questions and referred to reasons for and against the question. Such responses do not meet the rubric of the question i.e. to describe.

- (c) Questions. These questions require candidates to explain an understanding of an area of specification content from two religions or two religious traditions. Candidates answered these questions in a variety of ways. Some candidates lost marks as they failed to write about the second tradition. Some inserted the heading of the two traditions they had studied and wrote relevant details under each heading. This approach usually resulted in focussed answers which met the rubric demands. Some candidates tried to answer from the two traditions simultaneously, pointing out similarities and differences. Sometimes this produced a highly convoluted response which appeared to take an excessive amount of time. In a few responses, the two traditions were not identified and it was difficult, from the generic details given, to ascertain which traditions were being referred to. It was apparent that some candidates believed they had to compare the two traditions and therefore sought to make them polar opposites. It is recognised with the marking criteria that there will sometimes be overlap between particular traditions' beliefs regarding a certain issue.

Credit can still be given and the response will be judged upon the evidence, including the specific religious language and interpretation of sources of authority. A wide range of religions/traditions and denominations are accepted for credit. However, no credit is awarded for references to Humanism and other non-religious traditions in responses for 'c' questions (as the rubric very clearly asks for **religious** traditions).

- (d) Questions. This question requires an extended piece of writing and carries half the marks for each of the unit. It was pleasing to see that many candidates were aware of the demands and prepared themselves before embarking on their response. Sometimes this was evident by highlighting key words, use of planning tools such as mind-maps and indications of timings. It was apparent that the vast majority of candidates were aware the response requires a quality of argument which incorporates selection of relevant evidence rather than an opportunity to 'describe all you know'. It is the argument and evaluative discussion which makes this question different to the demands of a 'b' or 'c' question. Candidates are expected to select evidence to reinforce and exemplify their arguments. This is a very different skill to describing or explaining. Sometimes it appeared that responses contained too much information with little of it being developed or contextualised into an evaluative discussion. Many different structures were being used to support candidate's answers and there was evidence of planning, including, as previously cited, the use of mind-maps, in preparation for the responses. Some candidates' ability to **use** a mind-map to create a lengthy response was under-developed. It is important that if a formulaic structure is used that candidates don't write to the formula but ignore the demands of the questions. Some candidates explained the views of three different religions in successive paragraphs. Such a format often limited responses to an explanation rather than an analysis of arguments. Many responses included analysis and judgement although some were underdeveloped. Some candidates began each paragraph with a connection to the preceding argument e.g. 'Further evidence for this argument would be' or 'On the other hand some Christians would consider this contradictory because...'. Some candidates made reference to each point in terms of it being a strong or weak argument. For this to be creditworthy an explanation must be given as to **why** it would be considered a weak or strong argument, rather than a reiteration of the point made. It is important to remember that for this particular paper, evidence is not limited to religious and non-religious beliefs it can come from philosophical, ethical and social contexts. Some responses reflected the criteria for a lengthy 'c' question. In such, candidates would write a significant amount of detail regarding the issue but with no analysis or judgements. There were some excellent responses in which candidates had selected three or four areas for discussion and used those as a foundation for their argument and analysis.

The mark scheme indicated that candidates should show the impact of belief on society. There is no need for candidates to introduce this as a separate thread. Indeed, in doing so the coherence of the analysis can often be lost. The impact of belief and practice should be evident within the justifications given.

## Specific Question Analysis

### Q.1 (a) What is meant by 'commitment'? (2)

Generally, very well answered with candidates often also giving an appropriate example to reinforce their definition e.g. wedding vows. As a philosophical and ethical issues paper the example can be secular or within a religious context.

**(b) Describe two reasons religious believers might have for disagreeing with the use of contraception (5)**

This question was generally answered very well. The demands of the question focused candidates on stating two reasons. This requirement supported candidates to give two succinct but different reasons, rather than giving a lengthy general description. Some candidates referred to reasons from specific religious traditions, while others referred to reasons found across many religious traditions. Either format was acceptable. To achieve full marks candidates needed to include a range of specialist /religious language.

**(c) Explain, from either two religions or two religious traditions, attitudes to divorce (8)**

There were many good examples of in-depth explanations which reflected the integrity of two different religions or religious traditions. The religions could be those studied for component 2 and 3, or different religions. However, as with all the 'c' type questions it was apparent that some candidates did not realise they needed to write about two different traditions. In such cases, candidates tended to write a generic answer with no religious language or references to sacred texts. Some candidates referred to non-religious traditions in their responses. Credit can only be given to explanations from religious traditions (as per the directive of the question)

**(d) 'Men and women will never have equal roles in worship' (15)**

The question appeared very accessible, with the vast majority of candidates offering some form of evaluative judgement. Engagement with this question is especially important as it carries the extra spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) mark. The question differentiated well with some candidates giving well- argued judgements supported by insightful and contemporary references. It was pleasing to see many candidates referring to relevant, contemporary situations regarding women taking a more active role in worship. There were a small minority of responses which argued that women shouldn't take an equal role in worship and expressed some viewpoints that could be considered as misogynistic. These viewpoints were supported with references to views sometimes expressed in some contemporary social media. They were often supported with references to 1 Timothy which was interpreted as Christianity requiring women 'to be quiet' in places of worship. A significant minority of candidates contextualised such misconceptions within the Catholic tradition with no understanding or recognition of the role of women within worship within Catholicism.

Some candidates failed to make any reference to the role of women in worship and instead wrote generally about gender issues and inequality

This question attracted the spelling, punctuation and grammar marks. Responses to this particular 'd' question often used a more limited and less sophisticated range of religious language and terms. Most frequently misspelt words were 'Catholic', 'belief', 'vow', and 'priest'. It was evident that many candidates were taking particular care with spellings. However lack of punctuation often impacted on marks awarded and coherence of arguments.

**Q.2 (a) What is meant by ‘soul’? (2)**

This was usually well answered with candidates often referring to the spiritual part of a being.

**(b) Describe the beliefs of Charles Darwin about evolution. (5)**

Responses were generally informed with relevant references to a gradual evolution process, survival of the fittest and the emergence of new species over time. There were a significant number of candidates who included views of creationists and arguments for and against evolution. Such descriptions did not meet the rubric of the question. Although this area is clearly stated in the specification, a significant number of candidates failed to answer the question and there were a surprising number of candidates who referred to Charles Dickens and specific literary works.

**(c) Explain, from either two religions or two religious traditions, beliefs about being responsible for the environment. (8)**

The question asked for an explanation regarding ‘being responsible for the environment’. A number of responses focussed on why the environment is important without an explanation regarding beliefs about being responsible for it. It was disappointing to see a significant number of responses failed to reach Band 4 due to lack of specialist language e.g. steward, khalifah, Vrindavan, right action, bal taschit, Cycle of Creation. There were, however, some excellent and informed explanations which included relevant contemporary references such as Laudato Si, eco places of worship, Green Christians etc.

**(d) ‘Abortion should only be allowed when the mother’s life is at risk.’ (8)**

There were very few non-attempts for this question and very few responses which did not include reference to views from non-religious traditions. Many candidates gave detailed arguments regarding ethical considerations about abortion. Unfortunately, a significant number of responses were quite generic and failed to actually address the issue of the ‘mother’s life at risk’.

**Q.3 (a) What is meant by ‘sin’? (2)**

Generally well answered with definitions often supported with a relevant example. This is an example of a key concept that could have been used in many responses across the paper and would have been an example of relevant religious language required in b, c and d questions. It was pleasing to see that the vast majority of candidates were aware of the difference in definition between a rule/law and a sin.

**(b) Describe two causes of crime (5).**

This was extremely well answered with the majority of candidates describing two relevant and specific causes. There were many pleasing responses with candidates showing an informed knowledge and incorporating the use of relevant language e.g. absolute poverty.



- (c) **Explain from either two religions or two religious traditions, attitudes to the death penalty.**

There were some very good responses to this question with direct reference to appropriate sources of wisdom and authority. However, there were a significant number of responses which were very general and limited the response to ethical considerations, rather than religious.

- (d) **'If God exists then there should be no suffering.' (15)**

There were some excellent responses to this question with candidates using a range of evidence from the specification to justify their arguments. Many candidates had planned the key areas they were going to include in their response. This did help the flow of the argument and avoided repetition of evidence and justifications. Candidates used a range of contemporary events as part of their justifications.

- Q.4 (a) What is meant by 'discrimination.'? (2)**

Generally, this was well answered although some candidates gave definitions for 'prejudice' and failed to refer to discrimination being prejudice in action.

- (b) **Describe reasons that religious believers might have for disagreeing with religious extremism. (5)**

The rubric asked candidates to describe reasons why religious believers might disagree with religious extremism. Although there were some answers which did not focus on the focus of the question, there were some excellent informed descriptions with reference to harming inter-faith relationships, resulting in violence and portraying an extreme perception of a religious tradition.

- (c) **Explain, from either two religions or two religious traditions, how human rights are promoted. (8)**

The unit is entitled 'Issues of Human Rights' but it appeared some candidates were unsure what was meant by 'human rights'. There was less evidence than pre-Covid of candidates having a knowledge of, and an understanding of the impact of, relevant case studies such as Martin Luther King, Dali Lama, Ghandi etc., or of religious agencies that promote human rights e.g., Christian Aid, CARJ, Network of Engaged Buddhists etc. Responses, therefore, tended to be under-developed.

- (d) **'All religious believers should give money to charity'. (15)**

It was extremely pleasing to note the numbers of candidates who were able to complete this question. It was evident that the majority of candidates had been mindful of timing and were able to give this question consideration. Many responses concluded that the ethics and practices of religious traditions led naturally to all religious believers giving money to charity. Some responses included a considered response that giving time to volunteer can be as important as giving money.

## Summary of key points

- Responses reflected candidates' engagement with issues in the specification and commitment to the subject in general. There were few 'spoilt' questions or papers. Many candidates skilfully responded to the different demands of each type of questions and managed their time to ensure all questions were answered. Centres must be commended for preparing their candidates so well.
- Candidates are more aware of the demands of the 'd' questions, including the need to evaluate rather than explain. The majority of responses evaluated different viewpoints rather than describing or explaining what each religion thought about the issue. Sometimes, though, judgements do not arise naturally from the preceding evidence.
- There are a significant number of misconceptions of basic knowledge and understanding which appear to be embedded in some candidates' scaffold of understanding of a religious tradition.
- There are many examples of a polarisation of beliefs and practices within specific denominations. Although many candidates refer to a range of views within a distinctive tradition e.g. 'In Christianity there are many different views....' This is not reflected in the presentation of specific denominations where beliefs and practices are sometimes represented as a western mono-culture.
- The use of direct quotations remains a concern. Some candidates are framing their understanding of a religious tradition from a distinctive interpretation of a source of authority This was especially evident in 1d and 3c. Some responses included quotes with little contextualisation or links with preceding or succeeding arguments.

# GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES

## GCSE

Summer 2023

### COMPONENT 2: STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY

#### General Comments

The paper was accessible, covering a variety of areas of the specification. Candidates attempted all questions across the examination paper with the exception of (2b) which was widely left unattempted, despite being a clearly defined topic on the specification. It was pleasing to see that many candidates displayed solid knowledge and understanding of Christianity, with the best candidates evidencing an understanding of the diversity of beliefs and practices which exist within the religion.

Within their responses to (d) questions, many candidates were able to analyse and evaluate, meeting the demands of this AO2 question and evidencing their understanding of the impact Christianity has on believers and, where relevant, society.

The use of sources of wisdom and authority and religious language across the paper was pleasing, with the best candidates adding weight to their answers by using, or paraphrasing, relevant biblical quotes and other sources.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Q.1 (a) What do Christians mean by the 'Trinity'?

This was extremely well answered with the vast majority of responses referring to the Trinity as the three persons or parts of God. Many candidates went on to detail the three parts as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and, while this was not needed to access the full two marks, it was pleasing to see widespread solid knowledge of this concept.

##### (b) Describe Christian beliefs about hell.

This question was well answered. The majority of candidates were able to give accurate, detailed descriptions of Christian beliefs about hell. The best candidates made reference to specific biblical teachings about hell. Unfortunately, some candidates gave descriptions of heaven, which were not credit worthy.

##### (c) Explain Christian beliefs about the nature and purpose of humans.

Many candidates answered this well, explaining in detail Christian beliefs about the role and nature of humans. It was pleasing to see many candidates linking in concepts from across the Route A specification, such as stewardship and dominion. The best answers used sources of wisdom and authority to evidence their explanations and it was pleasing to see so many biblical quotes unpacked in this question. There were some candidates who mis-read the question, instead writing answers which focussed on the purpose of nature as opposed to the nature and purpose **of humans**, which meant that they were not meeting the demands of the question.

**(d) For Christians, the Incarnation of Jesus is more important than the Ascension.**

Many candidates analysed and evaluated this question well, discussing the importance of both of these events with very few simply describing them, which was pleasing. The best answers linked Jesus' Incarnation and his Ascension to Christian practices today, evaluating the impact the events have on the lives of Christians. Many candidates were able to use appropriate sources of wisdom and authority to add weight to their arguments. Use of religious language was often very strong, with candidates being able to use it appropriately throughout their answers. Unfortunately, some candidates were unclear of the meaning of Incarnation and confused it with other aspects of Jesus' life, most commonly his Resurrection, meaning they were not able to meet the demands of this particular question. Some candidates included the views of non-religious believers, such as Humanists and Atheists, which were not relevant to this question.

This question required the spelling, punctuation, and grammar mark (SPaG). While many candidates displayed a sound grasp of SPaG, some made simple errors, such as omitting basic punctuation and failing to capitalise proper nouns e.g. Jesus and God.

**Q.2 (a) What do Christians mean by 'Sacraments'?**

Many candidates used the official Eduqas definition to answer this question. However, a number of candidates clearly did not recognise the term and gave a wide variety of incorrect answers. Some candidates gave confused, incorrect definitions but were able to give correct examples of sacraments which, although not a requirement of (a) questions, were credit worthy for one mark.

**(b) Describe how the World Council of Churches works for reconciliation.**

This question was poorly answered. Many candidates did not attempt it, while the majority of those who did, displayed weak or incorrect knowledge, indicating that although the World Council of Churches is named on the specification, many candidates appeared to not have studied it. Many candidates confused the World Council of Churches with other organisations such as Tearfund and Open Doors. Where candidates did understand the subject matter, they gave detailed descriptions of the work of the World Council of Churches and referenced specific initiatives.

**(c) Explain the role and meaning of the Eucharist for Christians.**

This question was well answered. It was pleasing to see that many candidates were able to explain the diversity in the role and meaning of Eucharist amongst different Christians. Many candidates were able to explain beliefs such as transubstantiation and consubstantiation, displaying excellent subject knowledge. Many candidates referred to biblical teachings to explain the meaning of the Eucharist and it was pleasing to see a number of candidates using or paraphrasing Bible quotes to unpack their answers.

**(d) Census results prove Britain is no longer a Christian country.**

Candidates gave a wide variety of responses to this question. Although not a requirement of the current specification, it was pleasing to see many candidates reference the most recent Census results which were published last year. Many candidates displayed sound knowledge of the Census results. The best answers were able to analyse these results and give detailed evaluations of the decline of Christianity in Britain. Many were also able to provide a variety of counter arguments for the statement, showing excellent knowledge of the changing religious landscape of Britain. Unfortunately, some candidates failed to read the question properly and made no reference to the Census results, meaning they could not fully evaluate the statement.

**Summary of key points**

- Centres must ensure that, through their teaching, all aspects of the specification are covered.
- Candidates should ensure they read all questions carefully, ensuring they are meeting the demands of the questions being asked.
- Candidates should be encouraged to take extra care with the quality of the writing for the 1(d) question that offers a further six marks for SPaG (3 for Short Course).
- The use of sources of wisdom and authority and religious language across the paper was pleasing and should be further encouraged.
- Centres should be praised for their work undertaken to prepare candidates for the AO2 aspect of the paper, with answers to (d) questions showing a greater depth of analysis and evaluation.

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

## GCSE

Summer 2023

### COMPONENT 3 BUDDHISM - C120U30-1

#### General Comments

The exam was accessible, with appropriate coverage from the Specification. The demand was comparable to previous papers, with the full range of marks being awarded across all questions. Overall, candidates demonstrated sound knowledge and understanding of the areas examined, as well as other aspects of Buddhism. Some candidates gained marks through utilising their general knowledge and understanding, despite not having the depth of study to attain the higher bands. The better candidates made effective use of knowledge and understanding across the Buddhism course to support their arguments in (d) questions.

It was also noticeable that a significant number of candidates had a thorough understanding of Buddhist concepts which we well used their responses. Again, this year, it was pleasing to note the effective use of quotes and other sources of wisdom and authority by many candidates, and the frequent use of appropriate religious language.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Q.1 (a) What do Buddhists mean by 'anatta'?

Most answers showed a thorough understanding of anatta as the belief in no permanent self or soul, with some candidates also referring to anatta being one of the Three Marks of Existence. Other answers were partially correct in referring to no soul or self but failed to mention the idea of its impermanent nature. Some candidates confused anatta with anicca.

##### (b) Describe Buddhist beliefs about the Five Aggregates ((s)kandhas).

The better descriptions focused on **what** Buddhists believe about the (s)kandhas, rather than explaining why they are important; a number of candidates seemed unaware of the skill of description demanded in this question. Most candidates were aware that Buddhists believe that humans are made up of the (s)kandhas and many were able to list the Five Aggregates. More thorough answers were able to make the link with anicca/sunya/sunyata, with many candidates using these terms correctly when referring to Theravada or Mahayana beliefs. It was pleasing to see so many answers using the story of Nagasena and the Chariot to help describe the beliefs. A small minority of candidates were unaware of the Five Aggregates, stating that they were the steps to enlightenment or that the (s)kandhas were meant to be followed.

**(c) Explain Buddhist teachings about karma and rebirth.**

Many candidates were able to satisfactorily explain teachings about karma, although numerous answers tended to be repetitive as some struggled to move beyond showing that actions lead to positive or negative karma. Many answers made a link to dukkha by explaining that the effects of karma could lead to physical or mental suffering. Better answers referred to 'skilful' and 'non-skilful' actions as well as the idea that intentions also have consequences. Making effective use of quotes, such as Dhammapada 1:1, enabled many candidates to move into the higher bands. Overall, explanations about Buddhist teachings about rebirth were limited. Many candidates referred to rebirth only as the result of karma, whereas more detailed answers explained samsara, and some included the various realms of existence as depicted in the Wheel of Life. It was pleasing to note answers identifying Mahayana teachings about bardo and the Tibetan belief in the 49-day period between death and rebirth. Generally, the clearer answers explained karma and rebirth separately, but candidates were not hindered by dealing with them together.

**(d) "The Buddha's teaching about dukkha is too difficult to accept."**

This question was attempted by most candidates, with many being able to show some very thorough knowledge and understanding of the Buddha's teaching about dukkha. It was pleasing to note the accurate and appropriate use of specialist terms by most candidates. To attain the highest bands candidates needed to engage with the statement and keep their focus on whether dukkha is a difficult concept or not. The better answers used evaluative language to move their discussion on, with many making and justifying judgements about the relative strengths and weaknesses of their arguments. The weaker answers frequently described and/or explained the Four Noble Truths, and what dukkha means, whereas the stronger answers used the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path as sources of wisdom, making the point that Buddha had given these teachings to help people understand and accept dukkha. Some candidates misread the question and seemed to assume they were being asked whether dukkha is the most important Buddhist teaching. Answers that made the point that dukkha or another teaching was most complex were credited as it was deemed that they had shown some engagement with the statement. In a few instances, candidates misunderstood the question and argued that dukkha is difficult to overcome; in most cases these answers were unable to move beyond the lower bands. It was pleasing to see very few answers referred to irrelevancies, such as whether Christians and non-religious people think that dukkha is too difficult to accept.

**Q.2 (a) What do Buddhists mean by 'vipassana'?**

Many candidates were able to answer using the glossary definition, gaining full marks for identifying vipassana as insight meditation. Many partial answers recognised it as a form of meditation.

**(b) Describe how Buddhists use mantras.**

There was some misunderstanding of the skill required for this question, with many candidates explaining the reasons for using mantras rather than describing what Buddhists **do** when chanting. Clear, coherent answers were able to describe mantras being chanted privately or in public, by monks or the laity, as well as actions that might accompany them i.e., making offerings, bowing etc. Most candidates were aware of specific chants (e.g., the Triratna, nembutsu) and were able to use them effectively as sources of wisdom. Many answers were able to identify which school of Buddhism might use which specific mantra. Unfortunately, some candidates confused mantras with mandalas or mudras and, despite writing some very good descriptions of them, were unable to achieve anything other than the lowest band at best.

**(c) Explain the significance of death and mourning rituals for Buddhists.**

Candidates need to read the question carefully as many seemed to miss out the reference to ‘rituals’, and so just explained the significance of death in Buddhism. In most cases these answers were unable to move out of the lowest bands. Many candidates wrote about death and mourning together rather than separately, this was acceptable and enabled answers to achieve the top bands. The better answers confidently identified the differences between Theravada and Mahayana rituals, although many concentrated specifically on Tibetan and Japanese practices and their meanings. Most candidates referred to sky burials: weaker answers described what might happen while stronger responses referred to the links with Buddhist teachings about anicca, anatta and pratitya. A number of candidates were able to make general observations of the significance of rituals without having a thorough knowledge or understanding of specific practices. Many responses showed evidence of effective use of specialist terms. Some answers overlapped with information offered for Q1(c) – i.e., karma and rebirth, but detailed explanations of these concepts were not required. A few responses referred to practices followed at Wesak and/or Parinirvana Day; although there was a tenuous link to the death of the Buddha, these were not pertinent to this question.

**(d) “Places of worship are essential for Buddhists.”**

This was a straightforward question that most candidates were able to answer.

To achieve the higher bands, candidates needed to maintain their focus on the question and discuss whether or not places of worship are **essential**, rather than just ‘important’. The better answers used their knowledge and understanding of the various types of places of worship, and the activities held within them, to evaluate whether this made them essential. The use of evaluative language, along with reference to sources of wisdom and authority, and effective use of religious language helped many answers move into the higher bands. It was pleasing to see more candidates weigh up the relative strengths and weaknesses of the arguments they put forward; this was often done in a more natural, mature way. This question led to several different opinions which made for some interesting responses. Weaker answers were overly descriptive, with candidates going into some detail about what happens during puja rather than analysing whether this made a place of worship or a home setting essential. Other answers in Band 1 or 2 offered one or two opinions, without getting to grips with the possible essential nature of a place of worship. However, it was promising to see many responses in all bands recognise the different attitudes that Western Buddhists might have to places of worship.



## Summary of key points

- Schools are to be commended for work undertaken to prepare candidates for this exam, particularly regarding their understanding of Buddhist concepts and suitable sources of wisdom and authority.
- Candidates need to be aware of (and adhere to) the skills required for each question: defining in (a) questions, describing in (b) questions, explaining in (c) questions and analysing and evaluating in (d) questions.
- Focused evaluations and the ability to formulate judgements are visible strengths of many candidates.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### GCSE

Summer 2023

#### COMPONENT 3 OPTION 2 HINDUISM

##### General Comments

For a very small number of candidates, there was still some evidence of impact to learning due to the pandemic. There appeared to be gaps in the knowledge required to answer some questions, and certain questions were not attempted or were weaker. For many candidates, however, the responses indicated that all questions were accessible, and candidates could access the highest bands. The responses indicated that the paper differentiated well with a wide range of outcomes. The vast majority of candidates attempted all questions, but it was disappointing to see that some questions were not attempted. The 1(b) and 1(c) seemed unfamiliar to some candidates and this resulted in a number of non-responses and weaker answers.

Generally, the (a) or key concepts were well defined. Often, candidates expressed their definitions with a developed statement or an appropriate example, though these are not requirements.

Generally, the (b) question lacked depth of knowledge and description even though the content is in the specification. For example, most candidates lacked specific knowledge of Nirguna Brahman (1b) and demonstrated a high level of understanding of the meaning and stories behind Holi (2b), but without describing how Holi is celebrated.

The (c) questions showed some good knowledge and understanding of ahimsa (1c), and referred to key practices and beliefs, but many did not reach the top band. However, some candidates clearly did not understand what the specific word meant and therefore, wrote a variety of different answers which were inaccurate.

Some candidates seemed to struggle with the evaluative aspect of the (d) questions, and this led to many candidates being placed in bands 1-3. Those candidates who did well on the paper benefited from providing clear well-developed juxtapositions and judgements. They were able to demonstrate the extent of their knowledge and understanding, but in a discursive, rather than an explanatory, way. Candidates were often able to refer to sources of wisdom or referenced specific stories in scripture and some offered very interesting and relevant interpretations of sacred texts. There were some very successful answers that demonstrated sophisticated critical analysis and evaluation, including detailed technical language. There were some candidates who included Christian and atheistic viewpoints, which were irrelevant to the questions (which had a specific Hindu focus) and not credit-worthy.

##### Comments on individual questions/sections

###### Q.1 (a) Full course – What do Hindus mean by ‘dharma’?

The term dharma was well-defined by the majority of candidates, showcasing their knowledge of the term. A substantial number of candidates successfully identified dharma as a moral or religious duty, which contributed to their attainment of full marks. Others referred to dharma as duty and provided a clear example e.g. caste duty, householder duty etc (though to do so is not a requirement). Weaker candidates referred to dharma as doing your job, responsibilities or following rules. Some candidates confused dharma with karma.

**Q.1 (a) Short course – What do Hindus mean by ‘karma.’?**

Many candidates defined karma very well. Many explained the idea of good karma causing good effects and bad karma causing negative effects for the next life. Some just referred to one side of karma either bad or good, which only highlighted one element of karma.

**(b) Describe what Hindus believe about Brahman as nirguna.**

There were a number of candidates who did not attempt this question.

There were many candidates who confused Nirguna Brahman with Saguna Brahman. There were references to the Trimurti, Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. Some candidates described both nirguna and saguna, and therefore were only credited for the nirguna aspect. Good candidates described the spiritual aspect of Brahman, beyond time and space, within all living beings. There were also some excellent references to sources, such as the Upanishads Parable of the Salt in the Water and reference to Monism/Advaita Vedanta.

**(c) Explain the importance of ahimsa for Hindus.**

Most candidates explained this question well. Covering both depth and breadth of knowledge. However, there were a number of candidates who did not attempt this question. Other candidates attributed ahimsa to a God or reincarnation, showing confusion in the language. A number of good references were made to sources of authority such as Gandhi and the Upanishads which moved candidates into the higher bands. Candidates achieving the higher bands were able to make links to examples from Hindu practices such as ISKCON Food for Life and Goshalas. Weaker candidates gave brief explanations of ahimsa without any reference to its importance and without using much religious language.

**(d) ‘Krishna is the most important deity (god) in Hinduism.’**

There were a few candidates who did not attempt this question. Lots of candidates were able to answer this question by posing alternative viewpoints, however in some cases these were underdeveloped. Many candidates made comparisons to the Trimurti in their answers, showing a clear understanding of Hindu deities and those who achieved the highest marks were able to make the connection to Krishna being one of Vishnu’s avatars. However, there was a clear misunderstanding with some candidates stating that Krishna is part of the Trimurti, confusing Krishna as Vishnu and not Vishnu’s avatar. Weaker responses tended to only present one point of view, or provide very generic responses without specific references to the qualities/life of Krishna himself. Also, there were candidates that confused Krishna or other god/goddesses with other deities. Additionally, weaker candidates just described who Krishna was without considering whether or not he is the most important deity. Higher responses made references to stories related to Krishna’s life and his teachings. In strong answers there was appropriate reference to teachings on Dharma, Bhakti yoga and the ISKCON movement. There were still a few candidates referencing Christianity and Atheism or Humanism in responses to this question, which was irrelevant and not credit-worthy.

**Q.2 (a) What do Hindus mean by 'moksha'?**

Generally, this was answered well by most candidates with clear links made to the atman reuniting with Brahman after samsara. Weaker responses often just referenced the end of samsara and added nothing extra to the response. There were some candidates who confused moksha with samsara.

**(b) Describe how Holi might be celebrated by Hindus.**

Most candidates answered this question, though a significant number did not meet the demands of the question. Many candidates responded by explaining the origins of Holi as opposed to how it might be celebrated. Where references to how it might be celebrated were made, they occasionally were just stated as opposed to described as per the demand of the question. Some candidates confused Holi with Diwali and responded by describing Holi as the festival of light and describing practices related to Diwali and not Holi. Candidates who achieved highly on this question described multiple practices relating to Holi, including Havan, Puja to Krishna, Radha and Vishnu, throwing paint, removal of Varna restrictions and burning of the Holika effigy. Most candidates resorted to discussing generic activities that one might associate with any festival, such as singing, dancing, or feasting, which did not attain the higher marks.

**(c) Explain the importance for Hindus of pilgrimage to the Ganges at Varanasi.**

Many candidates answered this question and provided a clear explanation of the importance. However, there were some candidates who did not attempt this question at all. Higher achieving candidates included subject specific terminology such as moksha, Goddess Ganga, Shiva, arti and ghat. There were many references to stories from sources of authority explaining the importance of the Ganges and the connection of Varanasi to Brahma and Shiva, which helped candidates achieve high marks. Additionally, they discussed how the Ganges is believed to possess the power to lead individuals towards moksha, the ultimate liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Higher achieving candidates also explored the concept of the river's ability to cleanse sins (papa) and its potential healing properties. Candidates who received a band two demonstrated some understanding of why Hindus undertake pilgrimage to the River Ganges. They often touched upon concepts such as the eradication of sins (papa) or the healing properties of the river. However, their explanations did not go beyond these reasons. Candidates awarded a band one typically provided only one to two sentences stating a reason why a Hindu might visit Varanasi, with minimal explanation.

**(d) 'It is more important for Hindus to worship in the mandir than at home.'**

Most candidates attempted this question. Strong candidates demonstrated exceptional focus on the set question, analysing and evaluating the reasons why or why not it is more important for Hindus to worship in the mandir or in the home. Those who achieved highly in this question made specific mention of forms of worship such as havan, bhajan and arti, and were able to incorporate these into their analysis. Candidates often delved deeply into the concept of Brahman and supported their judgements with references to passages from the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, which focused on Bhakti and Brahman being innate within us. Their work exhibited excellent critical skills, rooted in robust evaluations. Within the middle band, candidates juxtaposed but lacked the subject specific vocabulary and depth needed. Some struggled to develop their evaluations, leading to a lack of critical depth necessary for this style of question. Candidates achieving the lower bands in this question often made a very basic comparison with the mandir and home with little or no use of subject specific terminology. Unfortunately, some candidates used this question to describe the layout of a mandir or to describe the worship that happens in a mandir, but did not link these to the demands of the question. Unfortunately, there were still a few candidates referencing Christianity and Atheism or Humanism in this question, which was irrelevant and not credit worthy.

### **Summary of key points**

- Candidates must understand the skills requirements of each question type. For example, how is describing different to explaining? In what ways in 'how' different to 'why'?
- In the (d) questions, it is important to refer to the religion that is the focus of the question, e.g. Hinduism, and not refer to other faiths (Christianity) or ideologies (Atheism/Humanism).
- Candidates should use subject specific vocabulary across all questions.
- All specification content must be covered.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**GCSE**  
**Summer 2023**  
**COMPONENT 3 OPTION 3 ISLAM**

**General Comments**

This paper had a very good level of engagement, demonstrated by the vast majority of candidates attempting to respond to every question. Even in weaker responses, there was evidence that candidates were trying to apply knowledge and awareness of the religion of Islam. There was a wide range of approaches to the questions which showed a clear awareness of the requirements of the paper. Most candidates carefully read the questions to ensure their answers were relevant to the demands of the question, with only a small number applying the incorrect skill and, for example, explaining, rather than discussing, the importance of either prophets or angels for question 1d, or explaining why Muslims pray at home, rather than describing how they pray, for 2b.

Some candidates demonstrated awareness of diversity in beliefs and practices in Islam where relevant, and most candidates showed they understood the impact of belief on communities and individuals. Most candidates rightly focused only on the religion of Islam, but some weaker responses to evaluative questions did discuss atheist or Christian views which are not required and usually irrelevant.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Q1. (a) What do Muslims mean by 'ummah'?**

For this question, most candidates recognised the term and gave an accurate definition. Some did not, and a variety of inaccurate definitions were given.

**(b) Describe the five roots in Usul ad-Din.**

Some candidates were aware of the demands of this question and well prepared to describe the five roots in Usul ad-Din. These candidates could name and describe the meaning of the roots and were aware of the significance in Shi'a Islam. However, many candidates confused the five roots with the five pillars of Sunni Islam, and some candidates described a mixture of the two. This question had the highest level of not attempted responses, probably because of its specific demand.

**(c) Explain Muslim teaching about the nature of Allah.**

This question allowed a wide range of responses. Candidates were aware of the wide range of beliefs about Allah's nature and could explain the impact of this on Islamic beliefs. It was clear from this question, that centres had emphasised to candidates the importance of key language, and many demonstrated this by using both English and Arabic. Some weaker responses simply listed beliefs or key words rather than explaining them. Explaining is the key skill of c. questions and the use of the word 'because' is often a good indicator of explanatory responses e.g. '....because the Qur'an teaches that Allah is merciful.'

**(d) “For Muslims, belief in angels is more important than belief in the prophets.”**

Candidates responded to this question in many ways. The question allowed for a high level of evaluation and it is pleasing to see that centres had highlighted this as a necessity for d. questions. The question offered the opportunity for a discussion of diversity in beliefs, and some candidates discussed the differing Sunni and Shi’a views on angels in particular. Some candidate responses offered a comparative discussion of beliefs about angels and prophets in Islam, and they evaluated their connections with each other. Other candidate responses focussed on one belief and then the other with comparative evaluations. Weaker responses described beliefs about prophets and angels rather than contrasting their importance and, thereby, missed the opportunity to show skills of evaluation (which are the key skills of d. questions).

**Q2. (a) What do Muslims mean by ‘haram’?**

There was a very high level of engagement with this question. Candidates were generally confident in the definition, with very few falling into the misconception that haram only relates to dietary laws.

**(b) Describe how Muslims might pray at home.**

This question had the lowest number of non-attempts. It was clear that centres had again stressed the importance of the use of key language to achieve marks in the higher bands. For example, “wudu” or “ritual washing”. Some candidates strayed into explaining reasons why Muslims would pray at home, or a more general explanation of why praying is important. This missed the focus of the question where a description was needed. However, most candidates had a clear idea of the actions involved with praying at home.

**(c) Explain the importance of the Night of Power for Muslims.**

Many candidates did not demonstrate awareness of the Night of Power as a significant celebration and part of a tradition, but rather explained the importance of the associated beliefs. Many candidates did this well, and some excellent responses explained how celebrations and practices today reflect the revelation of the Quran. Some candidates strayed into an explanation of the significance of the Prophet Mohammad or the Quran which was not required in a focused question like this.

**(d) “It is difficult to live as a Muslim in Britain today.”**

For this question, candidates took a wide range of approaches to consider what it meant to live as a Muslim in Britain and whether or not it is difficult. Centres can be commended for encouraging candidates to refer to wisdom and/or authority from different sources, such as census data or the Equality Act in order to show change in attitudes and population. Candidates also made links to British society in the past and changes over time. Candidates could then describe the differences in impact this could have on individuals and communities. Some candidates compared life in Britain today to Muslims living in different times and evaluated the similarities and differences. However, weaker responses simply described the issues faced, such as discrimination and prejudice, and failed to evaluate the impact these could have and whether or not this made life difficult for Muslims living in Britain. Some candidates focussed on only one response to the question, rather than giving an evaluative discussion.

## Summary of key points

- B questions require description in order to achieve higher bands.
- Candidates must be aware of the different skills demands of each question type: define (a.), describe (b), explain (c), discuss (d).
- Centres can be commended for encouraging the exploration of diversity in belief and practice, where relevant to the question, especially in C and D questions. Done well, this will elevate answers into higher bands.
- Candidates must ensure their response answers the whole question asked (e.g. if asked about two specific beliefs, both must be discussed).
- “Listing” should be avoided, in particular for C and D questions and candidates should explore a few aspects in detail rather than adopting an ‘all you know about....’ approach and briefly mentioning many aspects.
- Centres can be commended for encouraging candidates to use subject-specific religious language and sources of wisdom and authority in their responses.



# GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Summer 2023

## COMPONENT 3 OPTION 4 JUDAISM

### General Comments

The report should be read in conjunction with the mark scheme which contains the assessment criteria and indicative content for each question.

It was pleasing to see the engagement of the majority of candidates with all questions. As shown in the data analysis, all questions were accessible and the paper differentiated well. There were very few 'spoilt' papers, although a very small minority attempted no questions at all.

Reflecting previous years' observations, the vast majority of candidates recognise that within Judaism there will be a diversity of beliefs and practices. There were occasions however, as noted below, where differences in practices or viewpoints are not related to a particular branch of the tradition. In some questions, as noted below, candidates assumed that Orthodox and Reform Jews would have different views on specific issues, rather than recognising that views are often not polarised, as such. As a part of this polarisation, sometimes negative attitudes were expressed regarding Orthodox Judaism with reference to the tradition being 'old-fashioned' 'strict' 'inflexible' and lacking in gender equality.

The 'a' type questions were well answered and candidates were able to confidently give accurate definitions of the two key concepts. In 'b', 'c' and 'd' questions there was an increased practice of candidates' responses including references to Christianity. There were many instances of candidates describing, explaining and analysing the questions through a distinctive Christian lens. Specific details are given later in the report, but there was an increased use of Christian specialist language. This was apparent even in well-developed and high level 'd' type questions. Nowhere in the paper are candidates required to make any reference to, or comparisons with, any religious or non-religious traditions other than Judaism.

There were a number of misconceptions apparent that reflected in a faulty scaffolding of Judaism. These were often basic misconceptions and inaccuracies reflected some patchy prior learning.

It is pleasing to see the continued development of 'd' type responses. Many candidates are including informed different viewpoints which are often supported by relevant understanding and references to sources of authority. Many candidates are now briefly planning their responses which often helps to give a clear line of argument and focus. Candidates need to ensure they are answering the question asked. There were occasions when candidates are reiterating pre-rehearsed responses which did not meet the actual demands of the question.

## Comments on individual questions/sections

### General Comments

#### Demands of Questions

As reflected in previous years' reports, it is appropriate to consider candidate performance in each type of question before scrutinising responses to individual questions.

- (a) Questions. These questions are always based on the key concepts for each unit. Candidates are required to give a definition of one of the key concepts for the unit. Generally, these were answered well. Many candidates appeared to have learned a set definition, while some wrote from their own understanding in their own words. Either is acceptable. Often candidates supported their definition with an example, though this was not a requirement. It is important to remember that in addition to answering 'a' questions, the use of key concepts can be credited wherever used appropriately, as part of the criteria for 'b', 'c' and 'd' questions which require the use of 'religious/specialist terms'. This cross transference of knowledge was not always evident in candidates' responses.
- (b) Questions. These questions require candidates to select and then describe relevant and accurate information using specific religious language to respond to the question. Relevant sources of authority could include references to God; the Torah; beth din; rabbis; Talmud; Maimonides, the prophets; conscience; family; the Haggadah etc.
- (c) Questions. These questions require an explanation of a particular issue or concept important in Judaism. Within the explanation candidates are expected to use a range of appropriate specialist language, including relevant key concepts and appropriate sources of authority. Candidates are not expected to make any judgements or evaluations but are expected to be able to explain rather than just describe. Some candidates unnecessarily incorporated into their explanations the differences between Christianity and Judaism. In such cases the explanation often lost clarity and focus.
- (d) Questions. These questions require an extended piece of writing and carry half the marks for each of the unit. It was pleasing to see that many of the candidates were aware that the response requires a quality of argument which incorporates selection of relevant evidence, rather than an opportunity to 'describe all you know'. Many different structures were being used to support candidates' answers and there was evidence of planning, including the use of mind-maps, in preparation for the responses. It is important that if a formulaic structure is used that candidates don't write to the formula and ignore the demands of the questions. Candidates are not expected to make reference to any other religious or non-religious traditions, except Judaism.

As in previous years, there were some candidates who focussed on breadth of content rather than depth of argument. This practice sometimes resulted in unsubstantiated judgements. To achieve the highest bands the evidence must be apparent as to **why** it is important and not just a factual description. There were some excellent responses in which candidates had selected three or four areas for discussion and used those as a foundation for their argument and analysis.

## Specific Question Analysis

### Q.1 (a) What do Jews mean by 'Covenant'? (2)

This was very well answered with most candidates being able to define Covenant as an agreement between two parties. Some candidates gave relevant examples to support their response.

### (b) Describe Jewish beliefs about resurrection? (5)

Many candidates gave a detailed answer reflecting a variety of beliefs found in Judaism about resurrection. It was unfortunate that some candidates lost focus in their response by consistently referring to Catholic beliefs about resurrection and then adding in that these aren't beliefs in Judaism. Unfortunately, a significant number of candidates misread the question and wrote a detailed description of the resurrection of Jesus. Again, it must be stressed that content relating to Christianity is not relevant for this Judaism paper.

### (c) Explain Jewish beliefs about the nature of God (8)

Most candidates were able to explain Jewish beliefs about the nature of God. There were references to the central belief in monotheism and the beliefs about God as law giver, creator and judge. There was some good use of appropriate religious language and reference to relevant sources of authority.

### (d) 'The most important belief in Judaism is pikuach nefesh (sanctity of life)' (15)

The question required an evaluative discussion regarding the importance of belief in pikuach nefesh. There would not be a clear division between Orthodox and Reform Jews to this belief as, for many Jews, it would be a personal decision.

Many candidates showed a very good knowledge of pikuach nefesh and an informed understanding of its role in daily life and practice for many Jews. The demands of the question required candidates to discuss if pikuach nefesh was 'the most important belief'. Some responses were limited to just discussing the importance of pikuach nefesh without addressing if it was 'the most important belief'. Some responses lacked focus and gave comparisons of importance between the sanctity of life and quality of life.

Many candidates referred to the importance of other appropriate beliefs such as belief in monotheism or in the Messiah. Some candidates referred to practices such as keeping Shabbat or the celebration of festivals but did not make reference to the importance of any beliefs associated with these practices (the focus of the question was 'beliefs')

### Q.2 (a) What do Jews mean by 'kosher'? (2)

This was well answered with many candidates referring to a wider meaning of Kashrut to include practices as well as dietary codes.

**(b) Describe two features of the Brit Milah ceremony? (5)**

There were some disappointing responses to this question. Some candidates responded with descriptions of Bat Mitzvah, Bar Mitzvah or Christian baptism. Responses often contained confused details such as the baby now being able to read the Torah, the father breaking a glass, the role of the chevra kadisha and the family only eating unleavened bread. Only two features were required to be described. Most popular references were made to the role of the mohel, the actual circumcision, Elijah's chair, the naming of the baby.

**(c) Explain how Jews show the importance of Shabbat (8)**

The majority of candidates engaged with this question which differentiated very well. Many candidates were able to explain how specific practices reflected the belief in the **importance** of Shabbat. It was disappointing that some candidates merely described how Shabbat is kept without any explanation regarding how these practices show the **importance**. Some of such descriptions included lengthy descriptions of the differences in practice between Orthodox and Reform Jews and items worn in everyday worship. Such details were not relevant to the demands of the question.

**(d) 'The most important role of the synagogue is as a place of worship' (15)**

Many candidates gave detailed and informed analysis regarding the wider roles of the synagogue, such as a place for learning and community. Some responses made profound judgements regarding the unique role of the synagogue for worship with reference to the ner tamid, sefer Torah and minyan. Informed references were also made regarding the role of the synagogue for specific festivals such as Yom Kippur. There were some very perceptive judgements made regarding the importance of the synagogue for learning and identity affirming which would potentially have a long-term impact.

Some responses did not meet the demands of the question and instead gave evaluations regarding the synagogue being the best place to worship. It was disappointing to read a significant number of responses that confused the role of the synagogue with the role of the church. This resulted in factual inaccuracies which were used to then justify an evaluation. There was also a number of examples of confusion regarding specialist language, with many references to priest, mass, baptism, holy communion. Such inaccuracies occurred in some very detailed and analytical responses as well as lower-level responses. Candidates must avoid this 'Christianising' of the Judaism specification; it results in sometimes high performing candidates underperforming on this paper.

### **Summary of key points**

1. There is an understanding of the diversity of practice and beliefs within the religious tradition. However, sometimes the diversity is portrayed as too polarised and sets traditions (e.g. Orthodox and Reform) in rigid opposition to each other.
2. There is an increase in completely irrelevant references to Christianity or unnecessary comparisons of beliefs and practices between Judaism and Christianity. This must be avoided.

3. Many candidates demonstrated a mature understanding of the impact of key beliefs e.g. monotheism and pikuach nefesh, on daily life and worship.
4. Some responses are showing an excellent and informed use of appropriate language. There were, however, a significant number of examples where a knowledge of basic key events and basic religious language was confused.

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES GCSE

Summer 2023

## COMPONENT 3: OPTION 5: SIKHISM

### General Comments

The examination paper was accessible with a full range of marks awarded for all questions. Some candidates made use of the extra space available in the printed booklet. A few candidates ran out of time, having spent too long on 'a', 'b' and 'c' questions as they appeared to have tried to fill the space available, though there is no requirement to do so. Most responses showed that candidates had engaged with the specification content, and many referred to specific knowledge and understanding that is specification related. There was an overall strong use of subject specific terminology throughout. Centres should be commended for encouraging the use of religious language.

The a. questions require a definition of a key concept. Generally, these were very well answered with most candidates able to give a clear definition and many able to expand on their definition with an example or developed definition (though this is not required for the 2 marks). There were occasions, however, where candidates seemed unaware of the key concepts or their importance in the specification. This often resulted in confused or unclear definitions.

The b. questions require a description of a belief, teaching, practice or concept. Generally, this proved a challenge for some candidates who appear to have been taught to explain key concepts through a specific format and, as a result, it took some pupils away from the focus of the question and they did not engage directly with the requirements. Some candidates explained rather than described the concepts concerned. It was evident that some candidates were taught to include a minimum of five points to gain five marks, but there is no requirement for this, and it caused several to struggle to think of five points and so led to repetition. This also caused some to fail to meet the top band ('excellent, coherent answer') as they were unable to elaborate on their points where necessary. Some answers were also unable to reach top band due to one-word bullet pointing, again failing to meet the requirements of the top band ('coherent answer').

The c. questions require an explanation and this was accessible to most. However, this highlighted an issue, as there were some candidates who lacked the specific, factual knowledge required to access the questions, such as the understanding of diverse attitudes towards the Khalsa and the Five Ks.

The d. questions require an evaluation that incorporates different religious and moral viewpoints. Some candidates are using a framework to support their writing structure. Sometimes, these can assist a candidate to include key features in their response, but there are also occasions where the framework inhibits candidates' responses as they try to fit their answer into the framework, thus diminishing a cohesive argument. Some candidates were able to engage directly with the foci of the questions, whereas some were only able to talk about the topic in a general sense and refer to a standard: 'focus on God, gain good Karma, break samsara, gain mukti', chain of argument.

## Comments on individual questions/sections

**Q.1 (a) What do Sikhs mean by ‘Amrit Sanskar’? [2]**

Most candidates were able to give a fully accurate definition of the ‘Amrit Sanskar’ referring to the specific initiation ceremony. However, it was also evident that some did not understand the term and so were providing either partially correct or inaccurate definitions. Several candidates either defined amrit or left this response blank.

**(b) Describe the role of the sangat for Sikhs. [5]**

This question was generally well answered. Most candidates were referring to the specific Sikh beliefs about the role of the sangat in practice and in relation to supporting the gaining of good karma. Higher performing candidates focused on the ‘role’ rather than explaining why or how the sangat are important. Some candidates felt it necessary to define the sangat which was unnecessary to meet the demands of the question. However, there was again a surprising number of candidates who did not attempt the question and this highlights the importance of knowing the language of the specification.

**(c) Explain beliefs about equality in Sikhism. [8]**

Most candidates were able to access this question and were awarded marks accordingly. Several candidates were able to refer to appropriate sources of wisdom to justify beliefs regarding equality, often referring to the examples set by the living Gurus and key events of their lives. Some candidates were also able to refer to practices which demonstrate equality, building upon the teachings and beliefs shared throughout. Answers that did not gain the higher bands focused on practice without an explanation of why these beliefs were held. Some candidates were unable to provide enough detail in their responses, falling short of the ‘excellent’ detail required of the top band. However, some candidates confused the achievements of each of the Gurus or reverted to ‘we are all created by God’ rather than explaining the impact of their teachings and actions in promoting equality. [L]  
[SEP]

- (d) **‘Becoming God-centred (gurmukh) is too difficult for Sikhs to achieve’.**

**Discuss this statement, showing that you have considered more than one point of view.**

**(You must refer to religion and belief in your answer.) [15]**

This question was answered well by the majority. Candidates were able to explain and evaluate the importance of being gurmukh and how difficult it might be in modern times. Most responses referred to the overall spiritual goal of mukti and candidates were able to explain the benefit of being God-centred in order to break the cycle of samsara. Some candidates provided detailed descriptions of how one may gain negative and positive karma, whereas top band answers were able to explain the concept of rebirth, samsara and mukti in relation to how difficult it might be. Some top band answers also referred to the impact that ethical action and religious duty has on one’s focus on God. Some excellent answers referred to the Five Virtues and Five Thieves as helping or hindering liberation from the cycle of rebirth and distracting one from the focus on God and being God-centred. Some candidates were using a writing frame to support them with their responses, and while it enabled them to structure their response it also encouraged some candidates to refer to arguments that were not relevant to the question, e.g. those of atheists. The question specifically refers to a Sikh source of authority and atheist views were not relevant.

- Q.2 (a) What do Sikhs mean by ‘Mool Mantra’? [2]**

Most candidates were awarded full marks for their response to this question as they were able to accurately define the mool mantra as the ‘basic teaching’ of Sikhism and referring to the nature of God. Weaker candidates gave basic responses by referring to mool mantra as a ‘words in the GGS’ or ‘first lines of the GGS’.

- (b) Describe how Sikhs might celebrate Guru Nanak’s birthday. [5]**

This question was well answered by those who focused on the trigger term ‘how’. However, some were unable to reach the highest bands due to a focus on ‘why’ they celebrate the birthday of Guru Nanak. Some candidates were able to identify this as a Gurburb and were able to give generic practices undertaken as part of a festival. Higher scoring responses referred to specific actions, and key terms, such as the sharing of prashad and parading the Guru Granth Sahib through the streets.



**(c) Explain different Sikh views about the Khalsa and the Five K's. [8]**

This question proved the most challenging for candidates who overlooked the trigger term 'different Sikh views'. This was also the question that had the most 'not attempted' responses across the cohort. Candidates who scored highly in their response referred to khalsa and non-khalsa Sikhs and presented their opinions of the necessity in joining the khalsa. Candidates who scored highly were also able to make connections with this topic and the greater aims of the Sikh faith, avoiding the vices, following the virtues and practising the faith, whether a khalsa Sikh or not. Some were able to use specific language such as sahadhari and amritdhari to support the diverse views. Some weaker responses referred to the symbolism associated with wearing each of the five Ks. However, some candidates became confused with the formation of the first khalsa and detailed the story of the original Amrit Sanskar which took place under Guru Gobind Singh's leadership. Low performing responses focused on either the Khalsa or the five Ks or failed to refer to different views regarding them. However, there is also evidence that some candidates were unclear of the terms and so were not able to attempt the question.

**(d) 'Meditating on the name of God is the most important practice in Sikhism'.**

**Discuss this statement, showing that you have considered more than one point of view.**

**(You must refer to religion and belief in your answer.) [15]**

This question was answered generally well, however, some candidates gave underdeveloped responses, perhaps due to time constraints. Candidates were able to explain and evaluate the importance of meditating on the name of God in relation to the various alternative practices available, with many opting for 'Sewa' as their main evaluative comparison. Again, despite a writing frame supporting their structure, some candidates who were using one were also guided to refer to arguments that were not relevant to the question, e.g. non-religious views. The question specifically refers to a Sikh practice and atheist views are not relevant. There were some excellent answers which evaluated both the topic and the arguments presented to create the coherent evaluative and analytical discussion required of Band 5. Those who scored top band for this response directly engaged with the significance of each practice from the perspectives of Sikhs. Excellent responses also included reference to nam japna, hukam, daswandh or the benefits of kirat karni and vand chakna as being practices that help gain spiritual rewards. Some excellent answers were also able to make connections across the areas of study and connected the concept of being Gurmukh, and avoiding haumi, as a result of meditating on God's name. This highlighted the importance in the understanding of subject matter, and the overarching connections and specification concepts, where some candidates were unable to access the question due to a lack of wider knowledge.

## Summary of key points

Candidates should respond to the particular demands of the question; in 'b' questions candidates are required to give only a description whereas in 'c' questions candidates are required to give an explanation. Candidates will not be able to access the higher bands if, in their response to 'c', they write descriptively without any attempt at explanation. Often the inclusion of the word 'because' in a sentence, will allow candidates to develop a description into an explanation.

Candidates should be mindful of the language used in the specification as this will enable them to attempt to answer more fully. Candidates need to know the language of the specification in order to access the questions set. Higher performing candidates used a range of language, demonstrating their wider knowledge and greater understanding.

Candidates should be mindful of the relevance of atheist views when discussing issues pertinent to the religious tradition. If the focus of the question is of a religious nature, specific to Sikhism, atheist views are unlikely to be relevant or worthy of credit.

Candidates should use the language of the question; especially when discussing evaluative statements where '**most**' or '**should**' appear. Trigger terms such as these support candidates in reaching the top band and creating a thorough analysis and evaluation.



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