GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE A
GCSE

SUMMER 2019

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 1: RELIGIOUS, PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL STUDIES IN THE MODERN WORLD

General Comments

This was the second year of this specification. The report should be read in conjunction with the mark scheme which contains the assessment criteria and indicative content for each question.

Again, it was pleasing to see how many candidates engaged with the exam paper with few missed responses. In many cases non-attempted questions were the result of running out of time as detailed below. The paper differentiated well with all questions accessible. Generally, candidates were aware of the structure of the paper, the demands of the questions and the specification content. Many showed an understanding of contemporary global, ethical and philosophical issues and were confident in relating these to their answers.

This year there appeared a greater confidence in candidates formulating judgements in the 'd' questions although the need to substantiate these judgements with religious and ethical evidence is still an area for development. Some candidates consistently used stems stating 'this a strong /weak argument' but their justification was underdeveloped or did not apply to the content cited.

Many exam papers showed that candidates were aware of the demands of the new assessment criteria and were able to apply relevant skills to the demands of each question. There were many examples of candidates highlighting relevant key words in questions to help them focus on the demands of the question. There was an increase in planning tools, such as mind maps, used to support 'd' questions.

The use of appropriate religious/specialist language is a key criterium in this component. Some candidates confidently used key religious, philosophical, and ethical terms to express their arguments. It was disappointing to see that in a minority of responses candidates used specialist terms in 'a', 'b', and 'c' questions but failed to apply this knowledge and understanding of key language to 'd' questions. This was an area of concern in last year's report and remains one from this year's review of responses. Although candidates might have used some of the key terms from the GCSE in their responses there was often a lack of reference and use of key words of the religious tradition that might have been expected from studies at previous Key Stages e.g. church, Bible, Old Testament; priest etc. Similarly, there were an increasing number of candidates referring to 'Islamics' and 'Reformed Jews' in their responses.

Candidates are expected to refer to sacred texts where appropriate. The form of reference is not dictated. What is important is that the sacred text is contextualised to show clearly the rationale for its inclusion. There were instances were a candidate referred to, for example, 'Love thy neighbour' but failed to explore the meaning of the reference in connection with the question. Selecting a few appropriate references to reinforce judgements would gain more credit than a 'scatter-gun' approach of listing five or six references with no further unpacking or contextualisation.

Reflecting comments from last year's report, direct references are not needed. However, some candidates seemed to think that by placing quotation marks around a statement that credit would be gained. There were some very spurious quotes alleged to be Biblical sources including lyrics from songs sung by the Spice Girls. For some candidates it appeared they were unaware if the reference was from a sacred text, proverb or song lyric. It was, however, pleasing to see that some candidates were aware of different interpretations by members of the same religion of specific sacred texts. This was particularly apparent in 'd' questions when candidates discussed validity of interpretations of different sources of authority.

It was particularly pleasing to note the understanding shown in the majority of responses of different opinions and beliefs within a religious tradition. Many candidates were able to correctly identify different denominations of Christianity and specify differences in beliefs and practices. However, as indicated later in the report some stereotypes and misconceptions were prevalent this year in responses to 1d, 2b, 3d and 4c. Of particular concern was where candidates expressed understanding of Humanism and Atheism. Although candidates are only required to refer to include Humanism in responses to Unit 2 many select to do so in all the 'd' questions. Where relevant such views can gain credit. There was a common understanding that Humanists were not theists but for some candidates that resulted in a view that as they don't believe in a deity then Humanists can do what they like and live hedonistic life-styles. This was particularly apparent in 1d when many responses failed to recognise any moral or ethical decisions Humanists might make regarding divorce.

Comments on individual questions/sections

The demands of each type of question are distinct and, reflecting last year's report, 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 had appeared to have learnt a set definition while some wrote from their own understanding in their own words. Either are acceptable. Often candidates supported their definition with an example which, as indicated in the mark scheme, gains some credit. However, for full credit there must be some form of 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 language to respond to the question. For some candidates the length of their responses was in excess of the amount of marks awarded and this occasionally impacted on candidates being able to give 'd' questions the amount of time warranted and the ability to finish the paper. Candidates are only required to describe or 'give facts about'. There is no necessity for any form of explanation or evaluation. Candidates are expected to refer to a source of authority, but only where relevant. For some questions, e.g. 1b, a reference to a sacred text might be more relevant than others. 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; religious leaders; religious founders etc.

(c) Questions – These questions usually require candidates to demonstrate an understanding of an area of specification content from religion(s) or religious tradition(s). Candidates structured these answers in a variety of ways. Some candidates lost marks as they failed/forgot 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 in responses and therefore sought to make them polar opposites. A comparison of the two traditions is not relevant to the demands of the question. It is recognised with the marking criteria that there will sometimes be overlap between beliefs regarding a certain issue and that a 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.

(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 most candidates were aware the response requires a quality of argument which incorporates the 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 'c' question. Candidates are expected to select evidence to reinforce and exemplify their arguments. This is a very different skill to explaining about a teaching. Sometimes it appeared responses contained too much information but little was 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. In some cases, candidates had used relevant key terms and sources of authority in their mind-maps but had failed to use such in their response. Some candidate's ability to use a mind-map to create a lengthy response was under-developed.

It is important that, if a formulaic structure is used, candidates don't write to the formula and ignore the demands of the questions. Some candidates explained the views of three different religions in successive paragraphs which 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 referred 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 paper, evidence is not limited to religious and non-religious beliefs arguments 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 details regarding the issue with no analysis or judgements. There were, however, 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.

There was an increased number of candidates using bullet points in the 'd' questions. It appeared that this was the result of lack of time as their response began in full detailed form. Some candidates were attempting all 'd' questions first, recognising that their style of writing for 'a' and 'b' questions could be briefer. The mark scheme indicated that candidates should show the **impact** of belief on society. There is no need, however, 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 within the response.

Q.1 **(a)** Generally very well answered with candidates often giving an appropriate example to reinforce their definition e.g. wedding vows or care of the family. As a philosophical and ethical issues paper, the example can be secular or within a religious context.

(b) A significant number of candidates failed to address the question which was asking about the *purpose* of sex. Some candidates wrote very informed answers discussing attitudes to contraception but failed to describe the actual purpose of sex for religious believers.

(c) There were some 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 from two different traditions. In such cases candidates tended to write a generic answer with no religious language or references to sacred texts.

(d) The question appeared very accessible with most candidates offering some form of evaluative judgement. This is especially important in this question as it carries the spelling, punctuation and grammar mark (SPaG). The question differentiated well with some candidates giving well-argued judgements supported by insightful references to religious and non-religious traditions. It was pleasing to see the number of candidates who had planned the key elements of their response before writing their judgements. Some candidates wrote a paragraph on views from two different religious traditions, a non-religious tradition and their own view. Often these answers became explanations rather than evaluative discussions. There was a good use, in many responses, to specific sources of wisdom such as particular wedding vows. Most candidates referred to different practices amongst Christian denominations and were able to unpack the importance of marriage as a 'sacrament' and the process of annulment. A significant minority of responses referred to an inaccurate view of Humanist and Muslim attitudes to divorce. References were made to Humanists having as many partners as they wanted so they could be happy and that there is no concern about divorce amongst Humanists. There were also a significant number of references to Muslim men having as many wives as they want.

This question attracted the spelling, punctuation and grammar marks. Reponses to this 'd' question often used a more limited and less sophisticated range of religious language and terms. Most frequently misspelt words were 'belief', 'religion', 'vow', 'divorce' and 'testament'. 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. A significant number of responses failed to use any full stops or commas in lengthy passages.

Q.2 **(a)** This was usually well answered with candidates referring to the spiritual part of a being.

(b) There were often polarised responses to this question with some candidates scoring very highly and some not attempting the question. It was evident that many candidates had engaged with this aspect of the specification and wrote lengthy descriptions including insightful (although not often relevant for a 'b' type question) evaluations of the views of Stephen Hawking. A minority of responses described conflict between religious and Humanist views on the Big Bang with no recognition that many religious believers recognise the role of the Big Bang in creation.

(c) Although most candidates showed an understanding of the issues surrounding abortion it was disappointing to observe the significant number of generic answers which did not reflect the integrity of two different religions or religious traditions. There were few references to specific teachings or sources of authority. Some candidates produced an evaluative type answer stating arguments 'for' and 'against' abortion but containing little specific explanation concerning the beliefs of two different traditions on the subject. Such findings reflect those on last year's papers regarding the 'c' type questions.

(d) There were some well-argued responses to this question which discussed whether belief in life after death was the **most important** belief. It was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates made reference to religious and non-religious belief, as required in the rubric for 2d. Many candidates made insightful references to non-religious traditions not holding this belief and proposed other beliefs that were more important. Caring for humanity and the planet were frequently cited. Some candidates limited their answer to a discussion regarding evidence about life after death. Such responses were often explanations of key beliefs rather than evaluative. Some candidates referred to atheists in their answers but seemed to have a lack of understanding of atheism. Because the stem of the question refers to 'You must refer to religious and non-religious beliefs, such as those held by Humanists and Atheists, in your answer' some candidates though they had to write about atheists. Knowing that Humanists don't believe in a God some concluded that Atheists were Christians. There is no requirement for candidates to refer to more than one non-religious tradition.

Q.3 **(a)** Generally this question was well answered with a definition often being supported with an appropriate example such as experiencing pain or loss.

(b) Candidates could refer to one religion or religions in general. There were some excellent answers here which allowed candidates to refer to a range of different religions and relevant sources of authority. Many candidates referred to the Ten Commandments and Five Pillars of Islam. There were some sophisticated descriptions of absolute morality and the role of the conscience for many religious believers.

(c) There were some very good responses to this question with direct reference to sources of wisdom and authority. However, a significant number of candidates described case studies of forgiveness that they had read or watched with no reference to actual religious teachings about forgiveness.

(d) The majority of responses gave detailed justifications regarding the virtues of reform in relation to other forms of punishment such as retribution. Some responses included reference to the work of prison chaplains. It was noticeable that for a significant minority of candidates, they did not perceive reform as an aim of punishment and wrote about whether people should reform or be punished. Some candidates wrote lengthy evaluations regarding capital punishment with little or no focus on the demands of the question. Some candidates wrote an entire secular response with no reference to any religious teachings or use of religious language. There was a significant minority of responses that incorrectly concluded that Judaism taught revenge is preferable to reform as an aim of punishment. This view was frequently justified by reference to 'an eye for an eye'.

Q.4 **(a)** Generally, this was well answered with most candidates giving a supporting example.

(b) This was generally well answered with many responses describing actions of a religious charity. For some candidates, charities were referred to that weren't religious e.g. Comic Relief and Oxfam.

(c) As with the other 'c' questions there was a diverse range of approaches to answer this question. Some responses explained attitudes to wealth in the first paragraph and then went on to explain a different tradition in a second paragraph. This allowed candidates to fully explain with reference to the distinctive religious teachings. Some candidates compared and contrasted the two traditions. This is not a requirement of this question. The majority of candidates expressed insightful understanding of attitudes to wealth in Christianity and Islam with references to sources of authority. A significant minority of candidates referenced stereotypes regarding the importance of gaining wealth through business deals in Judaism. Few candidates referenced relevant teachings from the Torah or Maimonides.

(d) There were some excellent responses in which candidates used their understanding of different parts of the specification. Although this was the last question some candidates wrote extensive insightful evaluative discussions referring to contemporary situations such as same-sex relationships; wearing of the hijab; euthanasia; abortion; and environmental concerns. References were made to people who didn't obey the laws in the past such as Martin Luther King, Malala; Gandhi and conscientious objectors. Although the last question in a lengthy paper many of the responses showed significant engagement of candidates with issues in the specification.

Summary of key points

- Responses reflected candidates' engagement with issues in the specification and commitment to the subject in general.

- Candidates are more aware of the demands of the 'd' questions including the need to evaluate rather than explain.

- Most candidates plan their time to complete the whole paper.

- There is more evidence of candidates applying relevant knowledge and understanding from their study of Components 2 and 3.

- The structure for responding to 'c' type questions still needs further consideration for candidates to express all they know and understand.

- Candidates should ensure their response meets the demands of the question e.g. 'most important', 'religious charity', 'purpose of sex'.

- In 'd' questions it is important to select some pertinent information as central to each argument rather than a scatter gun of facts with no further development or analysis. Sometimes less (but well analysed) is more effective than more.

- A more developed understanding of Humanism (and Atheism) would support judgements made by candidates in 'd' question.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 2: CHRISTIANITY

General Comments

The paper proved accessible for candidates and there was a wide range of responses to the questions. There was evidence of some detailed and excellent responses where candidates fully engaged with the demands of the questions. A significant number of candidates gave quite brief responses. The majority of candidates attempted all questions and the standard of work completed by candidates was very similar to the work completed in the previous year.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 **(a)** Many of the candidates used the wording of the definition provided in the Guidance for Teaching document. A significant number of candidates gave an incorrect response referring to rebirth, re-incarnation or resurrection and responses of this nature achieved no marks. It is important candidates offer a correct, full definition of the term in order to achieve marks for this question.

(b) Candidates gave wide-ranging responses to this question. Most answers focused on describing the roles of dominion and stewardship of the Earth and correctly referred to the Biblical teaching of the Earth as a gift from God. A significant number of candidates responded with references to Christian lifestyle and what was expected of a Christian living a life of service, evangelism, love of neighbour and worship of God. Many candidates used a blend of these ideas to give a full response. It was very pleasing to see in the higher band answers references to teachings found in the book of Genesis but this was very much the exception.

(c) Some excellent responses demonstrated a thorough understanding of the significance of the Resurrection of Jesus for both the Christian religion and Christians today. Where candidates responded with a focus on the resurrection which related only to the resurrection generally, without reference to Jesus, some credit was given. Some candidates responded by offering a description of the crucifixion of Jesus and incorrectly discussing the significance of the crucifixion of Jesus rather than the resurrection. There was very little reference to sources of authority in most responses.

(d) Candidates engaged with this question in a number of diverse ways. Some candidates did not correctly respond to the statement; many answers were more of a generic discussion of the importance of the Bible rather than including reference to the Bible as a source of authority. Some candidates disadvantaged themselves by simply writing all they knew about the Bible and did not engage with demands of an analysis and evaluation answer. It is essential candidates focus responses on the demand of the whole question. In this question, there was no requirement for candidates to discuss atheist, humanist or other faith tradition perspectives on the authenticity or authority of the Bible and no credit was given for these perspectives.

Some candidates used generic responses to the approach of different types of Christians. A significant number of candidates wrote incorrectly about the approach of different types of Christians to the authority of the Bible. A significant number of candidates did not appear to know the Ten Commandments originated from the Bible.

Q.2 (a) A significant number of candidates did not appear to recognise this term and many answers appeared to be simple guesswork. Some candidates disappointingly did not write anything at all in response to this question.

(b) Credit was given for celebration of either form of baptism, either infant or adult. The trigger of this question only demanded a detailed description of baptism and required no explanation; many candidates were unable to give even the briefest description of the main events of a Christian baptism and rather chose to respond with an explanation of the importance of baptism; this approach did not answer the question. Many candidates confused the types of baptism used by different Christian traditions, and also mixed up the different practices of infant and adult baptism ceremonies. In a question of this nature it is important candidates focus on the demands of a describe question and offer some detail in their responses in order to achieve the higher band marks.

(c) Many candidates gave a generic response without focus on the importance of Taize as a place of pilgrimage. A very large number of candidates, who made no reference to Taize in their responses, disadvantaged themselves and were unable to access the highest band of marks although some marks were awarded for the generic explanations of the importance of pilgrimage for Christians. A significant number of responses confused Taize with Lourdes and Walsingham. It is of concern some candidates appeared to believe Jesus visited Taize. This proved to be the most challenging question on the paper and suggested perhaps a lack of specification coverage in some centres. It is important that all specification content is covered in preparation for the GCSE examination.

(d) Candidates engaged with this question in a number of ways. Many candidates used statistical evidence from the census to correctly support their point of view and the overwhelming majority of candidates perceived the decline in Christianity in Britain to be part of the increase of secularisation in Britain and the result of an increasingly pluralist society. The best responses demonstrated relevant discussion of this topic with arguments for and against the decline of Christianity in Britain in modern society.

Summary of key points

- To enhance the standard of work candidates should use a range of key and specialist terms throughout answers in order to demonstrate knowledge of the specification and the religion of Christianity.

- Candidates should respond to the specific 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. In (c) responses where candidates write descriptively without any attempt at explanation they will not be able to access the higher band marks. Often the inclusion of the word 'because' in a sentence, will allow candidates to develop a description into an explanation.

- Reference to sources of authority should be made when appropriate.

- In (d) questions candidates must engage with an evaluative discussion of the statement in order to access the higher band marks. It is important candidates focus on the full statement and offer an analysis and evaluation of the issue raised by the statement. Candidates should be made aware of how to access the range of marks described in the band descriptors in the mark scheme.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 3: OPTION 1 BUDDHISM

General Comments

The exam was challenging - questions in both sections covered a fairly narrow aspect of the specification. Despite this, many candidates did attempt to answer the questions. Those candidates who had not revised struggled to answer questions, and they often reverted to guesswork. Candidates who had prepared thoroughly were able to use their knowledge and understanding across questions, so many showed a solid, synoptic understanding of Buddhism. Many candidates demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding and it was pleasing to see many well-written, mature responses throughout the paper, but particularly for the 'd' answers.

Most candidates were able to use religious language effectively, and many candidates used quotations or referred to appropriate sources of wisdom. It was pleasing to see so many candidates get to grips with Buddhist concepts.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1   **(a)**   Most candidates found this to be an accessible question which was attempted by nearly all. Candidates who had revised the key terms were able to give an accurate definition, although some candidates did confuse it with anatta. Candidates were awarded one mark if they just stated that anicca was one of the Three Marks of Existence.

   (b)   This question was difficult for many candidates as they struggled to work out what the Three-Fold Way referred to. Many saw the word 'three' and wrote about the Three Marks of Existence, Three Poisons etc. Some candidates seem to find the skill required in this question challenging and they tended to slip into explanation when they needed to focus on a description of the three parts of the Eightfold Path. Many candidates did show good understanding of the Three-Fold Way but lacked a coherent description, although credit was given to good descriptions that had elements of explanation. There were candidates who did produce very good answers that included detail about the three elements of the Eightfold Path.

   (c)   There were different ways to answer this question and many candidates responded well to this freedom as they were able to showcase what they knew. Various explanations included Buddha being a role model, the role of Four Noble Truths/Eightfold Path in achieving nirvana, ending dukkha and tanha, reference to overcoming the Three Poisons and ending the cycle of samsara, the fruition of karma, buddha-nature (tathagatagarbha). Candidates were able to show off a good synoptic knowledge and understanding. Quotes and specialist language were well chosen and well used. Although there were some outstanding, detailed answers that required extra pages, candidates do need to remember that this is an eight-mark question and they should think about the amount of time they are dedicating to it. Weaker responses to the question tended to be a description of the Buddha reaching enlightenment.

Candidates should try to use the language of the question in their answers. Many wrote about Buddhist beliefs when 'Buddhist teachings' would have been better.

(d) This question saw a number of different responses. There were some excellent answers, although very few candidates discussed the idea of Enlightenment being ineffable, nor did they use specific quotes from Buddhist scriptures. Stronger answers engaged with the statement and used the language of the statement throughout their answers - do all Buddhists have the same understanding of Enlightenment? Better answers saw candidates using their knowledge effectively whilst making an analysis. Stronger answers saw candidates weigh up different teachings about, experiences of, and attitudes towards Enlightenment and come to a considered judgement on the various viewpoints. Weaker answers tended to have a lot of information (e.g. karma, Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, three poisons, samsara) but lacked any evaluation about whether this meant that Enlightenment was the same for all Buddhists. These answers were often formulaic and were often more explanation than analysis. These systematic answers rarely led to a critical discussion. Weaker answers tended to have limited specialist language. Some answers ended up being descriptions of the contents of the Eightfold Path. Some candidates seemed to mis-read or expect a different question and argued why the Mahayanist view of enlightenment was more important than the Theravadin view.

Examiners noted some common misunderstandings e.g. the use of the term 'arhat' to mean 'monk', and the assertion that there can only be one enlightened being per age and, as Buddha is enlightened, no else can achieve enlightenment.

Q.2 (a) Many candidates did not attempt this question, indicating a lack of revision. When attempted, this question was generally well answered. Candidates achieved one mark if they just referred to meditation without going into the specifics of vipassana. Some candidates wrote very detailed definitions that were more than necessary for a two-mark answer.

(b) Where candidates had learned this topic, they tended to do well describing a range of mourning customs. However, there was a lot of guesswork on show and many candidates wrote detailed descriptions of Tibetan sky burials. As this was incorrect, candidates often failed to score any marks for this question. Some candidates either misread the question and described Theravadin communities, completely ignoring the word 'mourning' - this showed a lack of preparation or a lack of understanding of what the question was asking. Some candidates struggled to write a description but were able to explain.

(c) Many candidates answered this question well, writing detailed explanations that often included Wesak/Parinirvana Day, Buddha as founder and a role model, making a link to anicca and the Marks of Existence, and that the celebration is a chance to reflect on death. Some candidates referred to pilgrimage at Kushingar - this was credited if it was linked to the reason for celebrating his death.

Some candidates used evaluative language in their answer; other candidates described, often at the expense of a good explanation.

(d) Most candidates found this to be a fairly straightforward statement and many were able to answer well, keeping a focus on the statement throughout their answer. There were some excellent, highly detailed answers which included mature explanation of Buddhist concepts e.g. anatta, skandhas. Most candidates referred to the Tibetan practice of sky burials, which was relevant; however, they mistakenly credited them to Theravada Buddhism (probably due to how they had answered 2b). Weaker candidates - or those who had not revised - often generalised or gave a more Christian/British idea of what a funeral should be. Some candidates appeared to follow a structure when answering; sadly, this approach can hinder some capable candidates as they try to 'shoehorn' their ideas into a particular formula which sometimes limits them to the lower bands.

Summary of key points

- Candidates need to use the language of the question.

- Be aware of the demands of the different questions – describe, explain, discuss. Some candidates are explaining in a 'b' question, evaluating in a 'c' question and explaining in a 'd' question.

- Very good use made of relevant quotes and/or sources of wisdom and authority, along with specialist language.

- Whilst most candidates showed thorough knowledge and understanding of Buddhist concepts there were some misunderstandings, possibly due to lack of revision on the part of the student.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 3: OPTION 2 HINDUISM

General Comments

The examination paper was accessible with a full range of marks awarded for all questions. Several candidates made use of the extra space available in the printed booklet with some using the space to effectively plan 'd' questions.

A few candidates ran out of time having spent too long on 'a', 'b' and 'c' questions as they tried to fill the space available, through there is no requirement to do so.

Most responses showed that candidates had engaged with the course and many referred to specific knowledge and understanding that is course related. It was evident that the course had played a role in candidates' understanding of the nature and impact of religious beliefs, teachings and practices, where necessary. Some candidates reverted to the generic - 'karma-dharma-moksha' low-level reasoning to support their explanations.

The first question in each section requires a definition of a key concept. Generally, these are 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. 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 second question in each section requires a description of a belief, teaching, practice or concept. Generally, this proved a challenge for some pupils who 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 of the trigger terms. Some candidates were using a framework which caused a lack of focus in their responses. It was evident that some candidates were taught to include a minimum of five points to gain five marks; however, this 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.

The third question in each section requires 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 the nature and role of Krishna. However, it seems that candidates that have been well prepared for the 'd' questions have been so at the detriment of how best to approach 'c' style questions.

The final question in each unit requires an evaluation which 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. 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 but some were only able to talk about the topic in a general sense. Further to this, the structure that some candidates were using encouraged them to include arguments from a non-religious perspective and were irrelevant to the statement.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 **(a)** Most candidates were able to give an accurate definition of the term and were also able to provide examples of practices which demonstrate non-violence to others. However, there were a surprising number of candidates who could not define murti as being an 'image or representation' and instead referred to the trimurti.

(b) This question seemed accessible for many candidates and proves the accessibility of the course content for all abilities. Most candidates referred to the atman as the soul with many referring to the concept of Brahman within and the 'true self'. Some candidates were able to express the beliefs of dualist and non-dualist concepts of the atman in relation to Brahman. The highest performing candidates referred to the correct terms such as 'antaryami' or Advaita Vedanta and Dvaita Vedanta as the two philosophical schools of thought.

(c) Most candidates were able to access this question and were awarded marks accordingly. Many of the responses referred to the overall beliefs regarding Krishna and candidates were able to explain the beliefs in relation to specific teachings such as Krishna's time on Earth as an avatar of Vishnu. Some candidates provided overly detailed descriptions of Krishna's life story which did not support their 'explanation' of Krishna's importance despite being somewhat relevant. Higher performing candidates were able to elaborate on the stories relating to Krishna and explain what each of these teach a Hindu about the nature or importance of Krishna. Some candidates confused Vishnu with other members of the trimurti, which then led to a repetition of errors. Unfortunately, a surprising number did not attempt this question.

(d) This question was attempted by the majority, however, proved challenging for some candidates who did not know which gods form the trimurti. Several candidates defined and explained the trimurti in relation to the role each member has within the creation story and developed arguments based on those roles. Some candidates were able to explain and evaluate the importance of members in relation to one another and as representations of the ultimate reality. 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 or to make a struggled attempt at an alternative view. Some stronger answers were able to draw on knowledge and understanding beyond the creation story and were able to refer to the characteristics of each member of the trimurti along with their relationship with human life such as Vishnu's avatars appearing on Earth. There were also some excellent answers which evaluated both the topic and individual arguments presented to create the coherent discussion required of Band 5.

Q.2 **(a)** Most candidates were awarded full marks for their response to this question where they were able to identify Brahman as the 'ultimate reality' or words to that effect. Some candidates were able to provide expansion and refer to Brahman as the being represented by gods and goddesses. However, some candidates referred to Brahman as a member of the trimurti.

(b) This question was well answered by those who focussed on the trigger term 'how' but some were unable to reach the highest bands due to a focus on 'why' a Hindu might honour a guru. Again, this highlights the use of "rote" learning and the use of writing frames and structures as a limiting tool for some candidates. Several candidates began by defining who or what a guru is without stating how they are honoured. Some candidates simply stated that they are honoured with respect, simply redefining the term 'honour'. Those candidates who were awarded full marks were able to provide examples of actions with an excellent level of detail and coherency.

(c) This question was well answered with the many candidates being able to explain the importance of environmental projects at Vrindaban with some candidates referring to specific projects to support their explanation. Some candidates were able to explain the ethical and practical benefits of environmental projects as well as the religious and spiritual reasoning. Some candidates were able to refer to the importance of Vrindaban as a place of pilgrimage and were able to explain the practical reasoning for preserving the sacred land as a result. However, there is evidence that some candidates were unclear of the projects at Vrindaban and were providing generic responses which stated why someone may be environmentally friendly.

(d) This question was answered generally well. Candidates were able to explain and evaluate the importance of the mandir as a place of worship in relation to the various alternatives available, with many opting for 'puja in the home' as their main evaluative comparison. Some excellent answers referred to the symbolic meaning of mandirs as places of pilgrimage which symbolise the spiritual ascent toward Brahman/the heavens. Some excellent answers also referred to various forms of worship such as pilgrimage, dana and sewa as ways to earn punya; spiritual merit. Some candidates provided generic responses in relation to public and private worship e.g. distractions, Brahmins leading the ceremony, community cohesion. 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, especially the views of non-religious people. The question specifically refers to a Hindu's place of worship and it is felt, that with this specific question, atheist or Christian views were not fitting for the response. 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 'should' as opposed to others who responded as if the statement referred to 'must'.

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. In 'c' responses where candidates write descriptively without any attempt at explanation they will not be able to access the higher band marks. 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, along with the various gods and goddesses, as this will enable them to attempt an answer. Candidates will be less likely to confuse the terms through continual and careful revision.

- Candidates should be mindful of the relevance of atheist views when discussing issues pertinent to the religious tradition.

- 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 evaluation.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 3: OPTION 3: ISLAM

General Comments

The paper proved accessible for candidates and there was a wide range of responses to the range of questions based on the religion of Islam. There was evidence of some detailed and excellent responses where candidates fully engaged with the demands of the questions. A significant number of candidates gave quite brief responses and disadvantaged themselves from accessing the higher band marks. Most candidates attempted all questions and the standard of work completed by candidates was very similar to the work completed in the previous year.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 **(a)** Many of the candidates used the wording of the definition provided in the Guidance for Teaching document. Some candidates appeared confused about beliefs concerning the prophets and angels. Single word responses should be discouraged. To support the definition many candidates gave the names of a number of prophets and the prophet Muhammad was the most popular choice.

(b) The focus of the best responses was to describe the significance of Mika'il for Muslims. Some candidates ignored the specific demand of the question and gave only a general account of angels. Weak responses confused Mika'il with other angels such as Jibril and Israfil or incorrectly identified the term Mika'il as a general term used for angels. Where responses were detailed, a full description of Mika'il's significance was presented, which was both comprehensive and detailed in nature. A significant number of candidates failed to attempt this question.

(c) The best explanations explored the reasons why the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad was such a significant event in Islam. Candidates responded to the question in two ways. Some candidates focused on the significance of the revelation of the Qur'an, while others placed a more specific focus on the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad. Either approach was judged creditworthy and each type of response elicited marks for any credit-worthy material. Some candidates disadvantaged themselves by writing in a simple, descriptive way without offering any explanation. Some candidates offered a very confused narrative about the events of the revelation.

(d) Candidates engaged with this question in a number of ways. This is the opportunity for candidates to write in an extended way and a disappointingly large number of candidates gave very brief responses or no response at all. The most common response was to consider the importance of the prophet Ibrahim in relation to Adam, Isa, Musa and Muhammad. Where answers were detailed there was evidence of some excellent responses.

Q.2 **(a)** Many of the candidates used the wording of the definition provided in the Guidance for Teaching document. Answers frequently contained an explanation of the term, supported with an example; the most common was not eating halal meat or drinking alcohol.

(b) The focus of the best responses was description of how Shi'a Muslims celebrate the festival of Ashura. High quality responses were very much the exception on this question. Descriptions were often very limited with very little knowledge of this religious tradition demonstrated in the answers. Generic answers about how Muslims celebrate any festival were common. A significant number of candidates failed to attempt this question at all. It appeared that some candidates were not able to answer this question because of a possible lack of specification coverage; it is important candidates study the complete specification during their course of study.

(c) This question required an explanation of the practices which take place during pilgrimage to Makkah and not simply a description of the practices. There was no requirement for candidates to give a full description of all practices. The higher band responses used a number of the practices and correctly focused on giving an explanation of them. Any candidate giving a description of practices without any explanation at all disadvantaged themselves. In order to access the high band marks candidates must respond to the specific demands of the question. There was a wide range of responses in terms of content. Many candidates were able to give a complete overview of the significant practices with a full explanation. A significant number of candidates gave confused accounts with incorrect information.

(d) Candidates engaged with this question in a number of diverse and interesting ways. It is always encouraging to read mature responses which look at the discussion statement with a variety of perspectives. The higher band responses contained analysis and evaluation offering a number of perspectives. The focus of the statement was fasting and a minority of candidates ignored this part of the statement and responded by describing some of the difficulties of living as a devout Muslim in Britain; it is possible these candidates did not recognise the term 'Ramadan'. Many responses identified issues for Muslims in school studying for examinations in the summer and the difficulties of combining this with the requirements of fasting.

Summary of key points

- To enhance the standard of work candidates should use a range of key and specialist terms throughout answers in order to demonstrate full knowledge of the complete specification and the religion of Islam.

- Candidates should respond to the specific 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. In 'c' responses where candidates write descriptively without any explanation, they will not be able to access the higher band marks.

- Reference to sources of authority, such as the Qur'an, should be made when appropriate.

- In 'd' questions candidates must engage with an evaluative discussion of the statement in order to access the higher band marks. It is important candidates focus on the religion of Islam in responses and do not include inappropriate and irrelevant reference to other religions.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 3: OPTION 4: JUDAISM

General Comments

This was the second year of this specification. 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 candidate's engagement with the paper and the skilful way that many candidates are using their knowledge and understanding to answer the questions. There was an increased evidence of candidates responding to the 'd' questions with greater confidence and certainty. It was particularly pleasing to see fewer references to Christianity and attempts to compare and contrast beliefs between Christianity and Judaism in 'd' 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.
Reflecting last year's observations, most candidates recognise the diversity of Jewish beliefs and practices. This year there was evidence of more informed references to main differences between Orthodox and Reform traditions. There was also more evidence this year of candidates recognising that there are differences within the Orthodox and Reform tradition and of other branches of Judaism, such as secular Judaism.

It was pleasing to note that most responses demonstrated an engagement and genuine interest with many of the issues of the specification. Many candidates expressed a sophisticated understanding of key beliefs of Judaism, especially pikuach nefesh and mitzvot. It was evident from the responses to 'd' questions that candidates had a good understanding of the specification and many readily and insightfully used a range of evidence to justify their evaluative discussions as identified later in the report.

Many responses incorporated effective use of sources of authority. References were made to Maimonides; the beth din; role of rabbis; the Torah and Talmud with many candidates able to qualify their responses with references to different interpretations of the Torah and Talmud.

Demands of Questions
As a reflection of last year's report, 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 had appeared to have learnt a set definition while some wrote from their own understanding in their own words. Either are acceptable. Often candidates supported their definition with an example. 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 knowledge was not always evident in candidates' responses.

(b) Questions – These questions require candidates to select and then describe relevant information using specific religious language to respond to the question. For some candidates the length of their responses was in excess of the amount of marks awarded and this occasionally impacted on candidates being able to give 'd' questions the amount of time warranted and the ability to finish the paper. Candidates are expected to refer to a source of authority, where relevant. References to sources of authority do not need to be confined to sacred texts. 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 specific 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.

(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 refer to any other religious or non-religious traditions in their response in addition to Judaism.

Many responses included analysis and judgement although they were often underdeveloped. This was particularly the case when candidates had focussed on breadth of content rather than depth of argument and analysis. There is no set formula for the demonstration of these skills. 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 Orthodox Jews would consider this contradictory because…'. Some candidates referred to each point in terms of it being perceived as 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. 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.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 **(a)** This was very well answered with most candidates being able to define 'Messiah', often with reference to 'the anointed one.' A minority of candidates referred to definitions of the Messiah as perceived in Christianity which were not creditworthy e.g. 'when Jesus returns'.

(b) Most candidates engaged with the question but sometimes the responses were limited to a definition of a covenant or a short biography of Abraham. Some candidates confused the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant. It was pleasing to see how many candidates had an understanding of the life of Abraham from which to contextualise their description.

(c) Most responses referred to a diversity of views within Judaism and to correctly contextualise them within Reform or Orthodox traditions.

There was often a good use of religious language and references to sources of authority, such as the teachings of Maimonides and rabbinic teachings regarding Gan Eden. A minority of candidates included references to Christian beliefs about life after death, with references to Hell and Purgatory which were not awarded credit.

(d) The question required an evaluative discussion regarding whether *all* Jews should keep the 613 mitzvot. It was pleasing to note that most candidates discussed why some Jews would not (or indeed could not) keep all the mitzvot. Many responses made relevant and insightful references to the mitzvot appertaining to the Temple and the over-riding of most mitzvot in cases of pikuach nefesh. It was pleasing to see the confidence that candidates were drawing upon relevant areas of the specification to justify their arguments.

Q.2 **(a)** This was well answered with many candidates giving examples of kosher foods. Some candidates also referred to a wider meaning of 'kosher' to include practices as detailed in the Torah.

(b) There were some disappointing responses to this question with a significant number of candidates unaware of the festival. The specification refers to the 'origin, meaning and celebration of sukkot' but many responses were unable to make any reference at all to the 'origin' or 'meaning' but focussed on how the festival is celebrated.

(c) Most candidates engaged with this question which differentiated very well. Many candidates referred to a range of indicators of importance including a place of prayer, celebration, community activities, identity and study. Some responses focussed on the main features of the synagogue which was outside the remit of the question unless the response referred to how these features were of specific importance to Judaism.

(d) Although this was the final question it was pleasing to see the quality of response from many candidates. Within their responses many candidates insightfully referred to different celebrations from the specification which could be considered more important. It was pleasing to note how candidates referred to a range of relevant content specification within their justifications including Brit Milah; Bar Mitzvah; weddings; Pesach; Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Many candidates referred to how judgements of importance would depend on individual views. It was pleasing to note how candidates used sources of authority, such as the Ten Commandments in their justification. It was also pleasing to note how many candidates understood the underlying concepts of specific festivals such as Pesach (freedom) and Yom Kippur (atonement) in order to reinforce their justifications. Again, there was evidence of a sophisticated understanding of the specification which was often expressed in insightful use of religious language e.g. 'the ten commandments which are part of the 613 mitzvot.'

Summary of key points

- Most responses demonstrated an insightful understanding of key Jewish beliefs and concepts which reflected an engagement with the specification.

- Some candidates made reference to other religions or non-religious traditions and this is **not** a requirement for this paper and will not be credited.

- Many responses incorporated a sophisticated use of relevant religious language.

- There was an increasing reference to topical debates and events within Judaism e.g. Mitzvah Day; secular Jews; Limmud; and Orthodox female rabbis.

- There was an understanding of diversity between and within different branches of Judaism.

- 'D' questions require analysis and formulaic responses in which each paragraph describes a different Jewish perspective e.g. Orthodox would say/Reform would say - can sometimes restrict evaluative discussion.

- In a minority of responses there appeared to be little understanding of the context of Abraham and Moses and how that context relates to other parts of the specification e.g. Brit Milah; Pesach; giving of the Ten Commandments; Sukkot; nature of God.

- It is important for candidates to fully understand the demands of the question e.g. 'most important', 'origin and meaning' and 'all Jews'.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 3: OPTION 5: SIKHISM

General Comments

The examination paper was accessible with a full range of marks awarded for all questions. Many candidates made use of the extra space available in the printed booklet with some using the space to effectively plan 'd' questions.

A few candidates ran out of time having spent too long on 'a', 'b' and 'c' questions as they tried to fill the space available, through there is no requirement to do so.

Most responses showed that candidates had engaged with the course and many referred to specific knowledge and understanding that is course related. It was evident that the course had played a role in candidates' understanding of the nature and impact of religious beliefs, teachings and practices, where necessary.

The first question in each section requires a definition of a key concept. Generally, these are 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. 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 second question in each section requires a description of a belief, teaching, practice or concept. Generally, this proved a challenge for some candidates who 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, however, were using a framework for their responses which caused a lack of focus in their responses. It was evident that some candidates were taught to include a minimum of five points to gain five marks but this 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.

The third question in each section requires 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 the symbolic features of the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

The final question in each unit requires an evaluation which 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. 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.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 **(a)** Most candidates were able to give a fully accurate definition of the term and were also able to provide examples of when the sangat might gather. However, it was also evident that some did not understand the term and so were providing either partially correct or inaccurate definitions.

(b) This question was generally well answered. Most candidates were referring to the specific Sikh beliefs about God as expressed in the Mool Mantra; especially God being creator of humanity and without hate. Some candidates were able to express the beliefs in the 'divine spark' as a part of God within all humans while some candidates gave responses which focused more on the attributes of God rather than those which demonstrate God's relationship with human life, e.g. neither male nor female and Ik Onkar. Some weaker responses focused on how a human can develop a relationship through action.

(c) Most candidates were able to access this question and were awarded marks accordingly. 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 excellent answers were able to explain the concept of rebirth, samsara and mukti in relation to accurate sources of wisdom and the impact that ethical action and religious duty has on one's rebirth. Some excellent answers also referred to the Five Virtues and Five Thieves as helping or hindering liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

(d) This question was answered well by the majority. Candidates were able to explain and evaluate the importance of Guru Nanak in relation to the various Gurus of Sikhism, with many opting for the 'Guru Gobind Singh' or 'Guru Granth Sahib' as their main opposing argument. 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 it is felt, that with this specific question, atheist views were not fitting for the response. There were some excellent answers which evaluated both the topic and the arguments presented to create the coherent discussion required of Band 5. However, some candidates confused the achievements of each of the Gurus or reverted to 'without Guru Nanak there would be no Sikhism' rather than explaining the impact of his teachings and actions in promoting equality.

Q.2 **(a)** Most candidates were awarded full marks for their response to this question where they were able to identify a gurdwara as either a Sikh place of worship or the 'Gateway to the Guru'. Some weaker candidates gave basic responses by referring to the gurdwara as a 'Sikh temple' or 'Sikh church'.

(b) This question was well answered by those who focussed on the trigger term 'how', however, some were unable to reach the highest bands due to a focus on 'why' they may pray at home or the belief in God being everywhere. Some were also unable to reach the highest band as they gave overly detailed descriptions about how a Guru Granth Sahib would be treated if one was kept at home rather than how it is used in prayer.

Again, this highlights the use of "rote" learning and the use of writing frames and structures as a limiting tool for some candidates. This also highlighted the importance in the understanding of subject matter where some candidates were unable to access the question due to a lack of knowledge. Some candidates also referred to general acts which could be deemed worship (e.g. sewa) rather than prayer routines and rituals. However, there were some excellent answers which included reference to nam japna, hukam or the evening sohila.

(c) This question was well answered with the most candidates being able to explain some features of the Amrit Sanskar ceremony. However, some candidates became confused with Amritsar and explained the importance of pilgrimage. Some candidates were also able to explain the importance of the ceremony in relation to its symbolic features, e.g. 'the amrit', or the recitation of prayers. Excellent answers also referred to the original Amrit Sanskar which took place under Guru Gobind Singh's leadership. Several responses also included reference to the significance of joining the khalsa. However, there is also evidence that some candidates were unclear of the term and so were not able to attempt the question.

(d) 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 Diwali in relation to the various alternatives available, with many opting for 'Vaisakhi' as their main evaluative comparison. Again, despite a writing frame supporting their structure, some candidates who were using them were also guided to refer to arguments that were not relevant to the question, e.g. non-religious views. The question specifically refers to Sikhs and it is felt, that with this specific question, atheist views were not fitting for the response. 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 festival from the perspectives of amritdhari and sahajdhari Sikhs. Excellent responses also included reference to 'Prisoner Release Day' and used a high level of religious language such as 'Bandi Chhor Divas' along with reference to what each festival teaches Sikhs about the spiritual element to the festivals; especially Vaisakhi for Amritdhari.

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. In 'c' responses where candidates write descriptively without any attempt at explanation, they will not be able to access the higher band marks. 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 an answer. Candidates will be less likely to confuse the terms through continual and careful revision. Higher performing candidates used a range of language beyond that found in the specification; 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.

- 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 evaluation.