



GCSE Examiners' Report

Religious Studies (Route A)

GCSE

Summer 2024

Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	<p>Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade.</p> <p>For unitted specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and component level.</p> <p>For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.</p>	<p>For unitted specifications click here:</p> <p>Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.co.uk)</p>

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	<u>Portal by WJEC</u>
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	<u>https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/</u>
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	<u>Portal by WJEC</u> or on the Eduqas subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	<u>Become an Examiner Eduqas</u>

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Executive Summary

Despite the very large entry for Route A Component 1 (over 26,000), very few papers were spoiled and most questions were answered by most candidates. Although this is a lengthy paper of two hours, with a large number of questions (16), candidates used the allocated time well. A range of marks was awarded, demonstrating that the questions were accessible to most but also challenging for many. The ethical, philosophical and religious language was used in a targeted and relevant way by many, and reference was made to contemporary events to support responses. However, some candidates included a non-religious view in the 'c' questions, despite the requirement for two religious views, or they gave only one religious perspective. Some responses appeared to be rehearsed, generic answers that did not meet the specifics of the questions. The over-generalisation of religious traditions should be avoided in favour of a recognition of the diversity of views and beliefs within religions.

In Component 2 there was generally good knowledge of Christianity, including of the diversity within it. Analysis and evaluation were often strong and included an understanding of the impact of belief on Christians and Christian communities. Lower scoring candidates often accessed the 'd' questions and were able to give limited judgements. Higher scoring candidates used a very good range of religious language and supported their answers with appropriate sources of wisdom and authority that included not only the Bible, but other sources as well. However, candidates sometimes forgot to use key concepts to support answers other than 'a' and they forgot the specific skills demands of each question. Consequently, they described when they should have explained, and vice-versa.

The Component 3 religions papers sometimes showed a high level of synopticity where specification content from other areas was used to support responses. Sources of wisdom and authority were often included, and relevant religious language was often used. Many candidates demonstrated solid AO2 skills and were able to analyse the validity of the 'd' statements in a sophisticated way. However, as with the other components, the focus of questions was often ignored, or questions were mis-read. The views of other religions (or Humanists) sometimes crept in to responses where they were irrelevant and not worthy of credit. This was especially the case in the Judaism paper, where far too many answers were from a Catholic or Islamic perspective. There was sometimes a lack of very basic knowledge, as with the question on the Prophet Isa in the Islam paper. Analysis in the 'd' questions was sometimes spoiled by too much explanation of different views without enough engagement in evaluating the validity of the statement.

Areas For Improvement	Classroom Resources	Brief Description Of Resource
Understanding The Skills Requirements Of Each Question Type	https://Resources.Eduqas.Co.Uk/Pages/ResourceSingle.aspx?Riid=1603	Skills Builders
	https://Resources.Eduqas.Co.Uk/Pages/ResourceSingle.aspx?Riid=2090	Examples Of High Achieving Responses
	https://Resources.Eduqas.Co.Uk/Pages/ResourceSingle.aspx?Riid=1914	
	https://Resources.Eduqas.Co.Uk/Pages/ResourceSingle.aspx?Riid=1499	Exam Walk Through

Using Key Language	https://resources.educas.co.uk/pages/resourcesingle.aspx?riid=1611	'Because' And Using Religious Language
Building Evaluative Responses	https://resources.educas.co.uk/pages/resourcesingle.aspx?riid=1125 https://resources.educas.co.uk/pages/resourcesingle.aspx?riid=1613 https://resources.educas.co.uk/pages/resourcesingle.aspx?riid=790	Skills Builders Analysis And Evaluation

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE A

GCSE

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 1 – PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL STUDIES IN THE MODERN WORLD

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are assessed?

- Questions (a), (b), and (c) test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.
- Questions (d) test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were assessed in this examination?

Q.1 Issues of Relationships

- (a) Key Concept: 'Contraception'.
- (b) Area of Study: Relationships; Description of teachings about divorce.
- (c) Area of Study: Sexual Relationships; Explanation of beliefs about the nature and purpose of sex.
- (d) Area of Study: Relationships; Evaluation of marriage outside the religious tradition.

Q.2 Issues of Life and Death

- (a) Key Concept: 'Euthanasia'.
- (b) Area of Study: The World; Description of actions of sustainability.
- (c) Area of Study: Origin and Value of Human Life; Explanation of the sanctity and value of human life.
- (d) Area of Study: Beliefs about Death and the Afterlife; Evaluation regarding the importance of beliefs in life after death.

Q.3 Issues of Good and Evil

- (a) Key Concept: 'Punishment'.
- (b) Area of Study: Crime and Punishment; Description of activities of prison chaplains.
- (c) Area of Study: Forgiveness; Explanation of beliefs about forgiveness.
- (d) Area of Study: Good, Evil and Suffering; Evaluation regarding existence of evil.

Q.4 Issues of Human Rights

- (a) Key Concept: 'Censorship'.
- (b) Area of Study: Human Rights and Social Justice; Description of a conflict between personal conviction and the laws of a country.
- (c) Area of Study: Prejudice and Discrimination; Explanation of attitudes to racial prejudice and discrimination.
- (d) Area of Study: Human Rights and Social Justice; Evaluation of freedom of expression about beliefs.

Overview of general performance across the component.

There were a significant number of entries for this paper (26,100) and it was pleasing to see very few spoilt papers or questions unanswered. There was evidence of candidates using a range of strategies to support their focus on the actual demands of the questions and to make good use of the allotted time. As this is one of their first examinations, it was pleasing to note how few ran out of time or were only able to give brief notes to questions in Theme 4 (the final question). A range of marks across the band descriptors were awarded, demonstrating that the questions were accessible but also provided opportunities for stretch and challenge. Many responses were aided by an effective use of relevant terminology. There were fewer instances of philosophical, ethical and religious terms being used in an arbitrary or irrelevant way. It was pleasing to note the references made to contemporary situations in Question 4. The introduction of contemporary issues had obviously engaged the candidates and helped their comprehension of the demands of the specification. However, there were a significant minority of responses which failed to meet the rubric or demands of the actual question.

Issues for centres to consider:

- References to non-religious traditions cannot be credited in c type questions.
- Two traditions are required in 'c' questions.
- Candidates should ensure that they understand the actual demands of the questions. Underlining key words can often help this focus.
- Although 'a' questions require a definition of key concepts, candidates should also include these concepts in responses to other questions, linking to sources of wisdom and authority where relevant, in order to develop knowledge and understanding.
- Sometimes candidates appeared to be presenting a rehearsed generic response with no reference to the particular nuance of the question. This should be avoided.
- Candidates' pre-existing attitudes and beliefs regarding certain areas of specification content should be challenged with a balanced range of views.
- Avoid presenting pre-existing attitudes, opinions or examples as truisms. For example, in 1d a significant minority referred to Muslim women being physically harmed by family members if they entered into mixed marriages. It is possible that such beliefs have been embedded by films and other forms of popular media, but care should be taken to avoid over-generalising.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The 'a' questions require a straightforward definition of a key concept. The majority of candidates engaged well with these questions. An example helped candidates who struggled in giving a definition. This was seen in 3a which asked for a definition of 'punishment'. It was clear the vast majority of candidates were aware of the term but found difficulty in actually defining it. Providing examples served to strengthen weaker definitions.

AO1 'b' Questions

The 'b' questions require a description of a belief, teaching or practice. 'b' type questions will sometimes ask for a description of **two** particular aspects or beliefs or practices. This structure can help candidates focus their answer rather than repeat their description. In such instances, full credit will only be given for responses that consider the required two.

Generally, the b questions were answered well although some responses in 4b focussed on the work of prison reformers rather than that of prison chaplains.

As this paper is a religious, ethical and philosophical study, relevant terminology will be credited from any of those categories.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require an explanation of a belief, teaching or practice from two different religions or traditions. These may come from two denominations/traditions within the same religion e.g. Roman Catholic and Society of Friends, or from two distinct religions e.g. Christianity and Islam. Some responses failed to achieve high marks as they were descriptions rather than explanations. It is expected that within the explanation there will be relevant references to specific sources of authority. As a religious, philosophical and ethical study, sources of authority might include reference to specific sacred texts but also to teachings and practices of religious leaders and founders and other sources of authority such as parents/carers, the law of the land and individual conscience. It is important that candidates refer to a source of authority that is relevant to the demands of the question and is not contrived.

AO1 'd' Questions

The 'd' questions require a statement to be analysed and evaluated. There were some excellent examples of insight and engagement with the issues of the specification. Although some candidates found difficulty in expressing their thoughts clearly, there were many examples of sophisticated philosophical thinking. Generally, performance across these types of questions had further improved from 2023. There were fewer examples of formulaic responses which can inhibit the flow of arguments within the discussed response. Some candidates had used such a framework of describing how one religion would respond to the statement and then a description of how another religion might. It is rare for such frameworks to be successful, as often the responses are contrived and do not allow for a justified argument. The vast majority of responses made judgements throughout with many having given a summative viewpoint. It is important that accurate and detailed knowledge and understanding is used to form the specific judgement. A significant minority of candidates declared an aspect as 'important' but gave no valid reason or evidence to support their judgement.

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE A

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COMPONENT 2 – STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are assessed?

- Questions (a), (b), and (c) test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.
- Questions (d) test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were assessed in this examination?

Q.1 Beliefs and teachings

- (a) Key Concept: 'omnibenevolent'.
- (b) Area of Study: Jesus Christ; Description of Jesus' resurrection.
- (c) Area of Study: The Nature of God; Explanation of Christian beliefs about the oneness of God.
- (d) Area of Study: The Afterlife; Evaluation + SPaG – Beliefs about heaven are the most important Christian belief.

Q.2 Practices

- (a) Key Concept: 'sacraments'.
- (b) Area of Study: Sacraments; Description of two features of a Christian Baptism.
- (c) Area of Study: Pilgrimage and Celebrations; Explanation of the importance of pilgrimage for some Christians.
- (d) Area of Study: Forms of Worship; Evaluation – Using set prayer is the best way for Christians to pray.

Overview of general performance across the component

The paper covered a variety of areas of the specification, and most candidates attempted all questions with no question left widely un-attempted. 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 of Christian beliefs and practices on the lives of believers. The best candidates were able to formulate their response as a highly evaluative argument. Weaker candidates were able to access these questions and, while their responses were often less sophisticated, they were able to give reasons for the importance of the respective belief and practice and formulate a judgement at the end of their response.

The use of religious language across the paper was encouraging. Candidates were able to use it to strengthen their answers and show off their detailed knowledge. Sources of wisdom and authority were used well, with the best candidates adding weight to their answers by using, or paraphrasing, relevant Biblical quotes and other sources of wisdom and authority.

Issues for Centres to consider:

- Candidates should ensure they read all questions carefully, ensuring they are meeting the demands of the questions being asked. In particular, they need to ensure they understand the difference between a description and an explanation.
- Centres should ensure key concepts are well-learned, focussing on and practising those that candidates find more difficult to define.

Candidates should be encouraged to proof-read answers to 1d to avoid making simple SPaG errors.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The 'a' questions require a straightforward definition of one of the eight key concepts. These questions generally performed well. 1a in particular, was very well answered. Candidates had either learned the Eduqas definition or gave a valid definition in their own words. Many candidates supported their definition with an example, and, while this is not necessary, did help to demonstrate their understanding of the key concept where their definition was quite weak, particularly in responses to 2a. 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.

AO1 'b' Questions

The 'b' questions require a description of a belief, teaching or practice. These were commonly less successfully answered, with many candidates over complicating 1b, the description of Jesus' resurrection. Many candidates instead focussed on explaining the importance of Jesus' resurrection rather than simply describing the account of Jesus' resurrection. 2b was more successfully answered with many candidates being able to describe two features of a Christian Baptism. It is important that candidates read questions carefully as the question specifically asked for a description of **two features** of a baptism, as opposed to a general description of a baptism. Some candidates described features from an infant baptism, some from a Believer's baptism and some described a feature from each. All these approaches were acceptable and worthy of credit.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require an explanation of beliefs, teachings and practices. On the whole, these were well answered and it is clear that centres are preparing pupils for this question type very well. Many candidates were able to explain in detail Christian beliefs about the oneness of God (1c) and why pilgrimage is important to some Christians (2c). It was pleasing to see a wide range of sources of wisdom and authority used to support explanations, particularly for 1c. It is important that centres focus in with candidates on the importance of reading questions carefully. For example, within responses to 2c, some candidates gave detailed descriptions of pilgrimage to Taizé or Walsingham, rather than explaining the importance of pilgrimage. It is also important that candidates are aware that the 'c' questions on Component 2 are very different to those on Component 1 (where explanations are required from two different religions or religious traditions).

AO1 'd' Questions

The 'd' questions require candidates to analyse and evaluate a statement. This question type was generally well answered, and it was pleasing to see an improved performance compared to 2023. Many responses to 'd' questions were sophisticated and within responses to 1d, many candidates used insightful knowledge to compare Christian beliefs about heaven to other Christian beliefs they had studied, effectively analysing the importance of each belief. It is important that centres do not teach pupils to learn model answers to specific elements of the specification that they can rehearse and re-write during the exam. For 2d, it was clear that some centres had prepared pupils to write a response evaluating different forms of Christian worship. This greatly limited some candidates as the statement focussed specifically on prayer, requiring pupils to analyse which form of prayer is best, not which form of worship. Generally, SPaG within 1d, responses was good, however centres would benefit from stressing to candidates the importance of capitalising proper nouns and the correct use of punctuation.

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COMPONENT 3 – STUDY OF A WORLD FAITH - BUDDHISM

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are assessed?

- Questions (a), (b), and (c) test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.
- Questions (d) test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were assessed in this examination?

Q.1 Beliefs and teachings

- (a) Key Concept: 'dukkha'.
- (b) Area of Study: The Buddha; The Enlightenment of the Buddha.
- (c) Area of Study: The Dhamma/Dharma; Three Marks of Existence.
- (d) Area of Study: Human Destiny and Ethical Teaching; Bodhisattva ideals.

Q.2 Practices

- (a) Key Concept: 'samatha'.
- (b) Area of Study: Buddhist Places of Worship in Britain and Elsewhere; The importance of features of Buddhist temples.
- (c) Area of Study: Devotional Practices; The role and significance of chanting.
- (d) Area of Study: Festivals and Retreats; The origin and meaning of festivals.

Overview of general performance across the paper

Most questions were attempted by most candidates on Full Course. A range of marks across the band descriptors were awarded, demonstrating that the questions were accessible but also provided opportunities for challenging able candidates. Many candidates included relevant sources of wisdom across their responses. Religious language was used well by many, including the use of the key concepts across questions. The AO2 skills of analysis and evaluation were demonstrated very well by many candidates and even weaker candidates were often able to give more than one viewpoint. However, there were some anomalies on the Short Course paper, where, out of a cohort of 427, approximately 10% of candidates were awarded a mark of 0 and approximately 25% were awarded marks between 0 and 2. Many of these candidates made no attempt to answer any of the four questions, while those who did answer had almost no knowledge or understanding of Buddhism, writing very general responses which were often based in Christianity.

Issues for centres to consider:

- Some candidates wrote in more general terms, and some failed to focus on the question. For example, some misunderstood the focus of 2d, arguing about the relative importance of Wesak rather than whether **'all'** Buddhists should celebrate it.
- Some candidates misread the questions. For example, many responses to 1b included all the events in the Buddha's early life rather than concentrating on what happened in the immediate run-up to his enlightenment.
- A minority of candidates included Christian or Humanist views in their answers. For example, reference to reasons why Christians or Humanists would not celebrate Wesak was entirely irrelevant as the question asked whether all **'Buddhists'** should celebrate the festival.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The 'a' questions require a straightforward definition of a key concept. Generally, the 'a' questions performed well. Candidates had either learned the Eduqas definition or gave a valid definition in their own words. A great many supported their definition with an example, which was not necessary, but did serve to demonstrate their understanding of the key concept where their actual definition was quite weak. Very few repeated the key concept or gave the opposite of what it meant. 1a was the most successfully answered, although some candidates did confuse 'dukkha' with 'dharma'. 2a was not attempted by some candidates. The majority of correct answers identified 'samatha' as calmness or breathing meditation, however, some candidates confused it with insight or loving kindness meditation.

AO1 'b' Questions

The 'b' questions require description of a belief, practice, teaching or view. Generally, the 'b' questions performed quite well and many candidates understood the requirement to describe rather than explain. In particular, 2b was answered well, where candidates showed good knowledge of a number of features of Buddhist temples, although some candidates seemed to miss the instruction to limit their answer to only two features. However, 1b was sometimes less successfully answered because candidates included unnecessary information about the Buddha's early life and the Four Sights. There were many well-written answers for 1b which gained low or no marks as the content was irrelevant to the demands of the question. It is important that questions are read carefully in order to produce focused answers that do what the question asks.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require explanation of a belief, practice, teaching, or view. Generally, responses to both 'c' questions were good. Answers for 1c either explained the Marks of Existence individually or gave an overview of the teachings. The better answers identified links between dukkha and the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, or the Three Poisons; some candidates linked pratitya with anicca. Sources of authority (e.g., Nagasena and the Chariot) were well chosen. Question 2c was also answered well, with many candidates referencing different chants to exemplify their explanations. Religious language was well used in both answers. Most candidates appeared to understand the requirement to explain rather than just describe.

AO1 'd' Questions

The 'd' questions require a statement to be analysed and evaluated. Generally, performance across these types of questions had further improved from 2023. Knowledge and understanding were not just included but also used effectively to form a discussion that gave different lines of argument. In particular, responses to 1d often demonstrated a mature, sophisticated approach that engaged in a discussion about the validity of the statement rather than just giving a few different views about it. Better answers were able to correctly identify the diverse views of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, while many candidates discussed Pure Land Buddhism. Good synoptic links were made, with reference to tathagatagarbha and pratitya. Question 2d was also well done, with some focused, thoughtful responses to the statement. Some candidates engaged in a discussion of different festivals when considering whether 'all' Buddhists should celebrate Wesak, whilst others offered practices such as meditation in their counterargument. Worryingly, a minority of candidates didn't seem to know what Wesak - or any other Buddhist festivals - celebrates. There was effective use of religious language and reference to sources of authority across both 'd' answers.

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE A

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COMPONENT 3 – STUDY OF A WORLD FAITH - HINDUISM

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are assessed?

- Questions (a), (b), and (c) test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.
- Questions (d) test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were assessed in this examination?

Q.1 Beliefs and teachings

- (a) Key Concept: FC 'puja', SC 'karma'.
- (b) Area of Study: Cosmology; the universe (prakriti).
- (c) Area of Study: The Eternal Self; views about the atman.
- (d) Area of Study: Human Life; moksha.

Q.2 Practices

- (a) Key Concept 'Diwali'.
- (b) Area of Study: Places of Worship in Britain and Elsewhere; worship in the mandir.
- (c) Area of Study: Festivals: Practices in Britain and Elsewhere; Holi.
- (d) Area of Study: Sacred Sites; Pilgrimage.

Overview of general performance across the paper

Most questions were attempted by the majority of candidates, although 1c had quite a high number of non-attempts. A range of marks across the band descriptors were awarded, demonstrating that the questions were accessible but also provided opportunities for stretch and challenge to more able candidates. Many candidates quoted relevant sources of wisdom in their responses. Religious language was used well by many, including the use of the key concepts across the questions. The AO2 skills of analysis and evaluation were demonstrated very well by many candidates and even weaker candidates were often able to give more than one viewpoint.

Issues for centres to consider:

- Candidates who showed a deeper understanding of the topics and could reference specific philosophical concepts or scriptures, generally scored higher.
- Candidates would perform better if they were prepared for the types of questions using trigger words, i.e. a definition for part a, description for part b, an explanation for part c, evaluation and analysis for part d.
- Candidates must read the whole question – too often the key component of a question was ignored; this was particularly the case with questions 1b and 1c. Both Full and Short course candidates struggled with these questions.
- The ability to evaluate and critically analyse information was a key differentiator in awarding marks, particularly in question 1d. The frequently seen use of FARM does not always allow candidates to write analytically.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The majority of candidates excelled in explaining the key terms for both questions and often provided detailed examples in support, which, whilst not necessary, did serve to strengthen some weaker definitions. Candidates who scored lower gave very weak or inaccurate definitions.

AO1 'b' Questions

Many candidates struggled with 1b, often missing the specific focus on prakriti in the question. Those who did correctly identify prakriti were able to demonstrate comprehensive understanding and displayed a high level of knowledge. 2b seemed to confuse many candidates who simply listed multiple types of worship without relevant detail. Higher scoring candidates offered detailed descriptions of different types of worship, clearly distinguishing between them.

AO1 'c' Questions

Candidates showed varying levels of understanding of the two Vedantic schools of thought regarding the concept of atman in 1c. Short Course candidates in particular, struggled with this question and a significant number were unanswered. Responses varied from simple definitions of the atman to more thorough discussions of both Vedantic schools and included relevant quotations from the Upanishads. The 2c question showed some confusion about which narratives and rituals are associated with specific Hindu festivals. Higher scoring candidates demonstrated an awareness of Holi's multifaceted nature, balancing description with meaningful explanations. They clearly articulated why specific practices were significant, maintaining a strong alignment with the question's requirements.

AO1 'd' Questions

Responses to 1d varied in quality, from simple definitions to detailed evaluations but many failed to realise that the evaluation should have been in relation to Hinduism's Four Aims. Many used structures like FARM which often led to more descriptive rather than evaluative answers. High-achieving candidates offered sophisticated arguments and used quotations effectively to support their points. They demonstrated consistent critical thinking throughout their responses. Responses to 2d varied significantly, from simple statements of what a pilgrimage is, to sophisticated analyses comparing pilgrimage with other forms of worship. The higher scoring candidates showed good evaluative skills, recognising limitations such as economic or health factors that might affect the importance of pilgrimage and used these arguments to demonstrate a critical understanding of the topic. They employed sources of wisdom, used key terminology, and maintained continuous evaluation throughout their answers.

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE A

GCSE

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 3 - STUDY OF A WORLD FAITH - ISLAM

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are assessed?

- Questions (a), (b), and (c) test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.
- Questions (d) test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were assessed in this examination?

Q.1 Beliefs and teachings

- (a) Key Concept: 'prophethood'.
- (b) Area of Study: Prophethood (Risalah); Isa.
- (c) Area of Study: Foundations of faith; Kutub.
- (d) Area of Study: Akhirah (Afterlife); Day of Judgement.

Q.2 Practices

- (a) Key Concept: 'ummah'.
- (b) Area of Study: Pilgrimage; Hajj.
- (c) Area of Study: Shahadah.
- (d) Area of Study: The Five Pillars of Sunni Islam AND Ten Obligatory Acts of Shi'a Islam: practices in Britain and elsewhere; Charity.

Overview of general performance across the paper

A significant number of centres select Islam as their world religion (18,475 for Full Course), and the vast majority of candidates attempted all or at least most of the questions. Questions 1b and 2c had the highest number of responses not attempted. Many candidates approached the questions with confidence, and generally had a clear awareness of the specific requirements of the question types.

Issues for centres to consider:

- It is essential for centres to teach all specification content. Some candidates demonstrated a lack of knowledge of Isa and Kutub, both of which are key points on the specification for Islam. These questions had the highest number of responses that were not attempted - over 2000 each. This was particularly disappointing for very strong responses to 1c where candidates focused exclusively on the Qur'an rather than Kutub. Noting the use of Arabic where appropriate is also important as not all specification points give the English translation (for example, the names of the prophets).
- Reading and comprehending the requirements of the question is vital for higher candidate performance. On question 2b where **two** practices on Hajj were specified, candidates lost marks for giving a list of Hajj practices where only two could be credited.
- As in previous years, it was disappointing to see that some candidates had included Christian beliefs in their responses. This was particularly demonstrated in 1b where candidates gave specifically Christian beliefs about Isa, and also in 1d where the statement was sometimes analysed from a Christian perspective.
- Higher scoring candidates used the full requirements of the question to perform well on AO2 questions. While some weaker candidates simply explained the Islamic beliefs and practices and then analysed the value of each individually, there were many outstanding responses that used the trigger word "discuss" to write a mature and critical analysis of the subject, judging the merits of each belief or practice in light of the others.

Comments on individual questions/sections

The 'a' questions require a straightforward definition of a key concept. Candidates generally performed very well on 'a' questions and could succinctly define the key terms required. 1a had a very high attempt level but proved slightly more difficult for candidates who were confused by the "-hood" of "prophethood." However, some candidates gave examples of the line of prophets which strengthened otherwise quite weak definitions. 2a had a much higher number of non-attempted responses (nearly by 4 times) and a small number of candidates who attempted the question were clearly not aware of the concept of 'ummah'.

The 'b' questions require a description of belief, practice, teaching or view. Candidates were most confident on the 'b' question on the practices section of the paper, whereas the 'b' question for beliefs (Isa) had nearly double the amount of non-attempted responses. 1b clearly differentiated candidates who knew who Isa was from those who did not. Many exhibited excellent subject specific knowledge, but some described a Christian Jesus and/or some gave brief, inaccurate description. For 2b, many candidates demonstrated excellent subject knowledge of Hajj and excellent use of key subject vocabulary. However, some responses ignored the demand of the question for just **two** practices and others explained **why** the practices were carried out, rather than offer detailed description of how.

The 'c' questions require explanation of a belief, practice, teaching or view. Similarly to 1b, 'c' questions divided candidates into those who knew what the subject was and those who did not. A few candidates were not clear on what the Shahadah was, although many performed very well on this question and clearly explained both significance and impact of belief. 1c was more divisive; weaker candidates who attempted the question often offered very good explanations of attitudes towards the Qur'an without mentioning the rest of the Kutub. Higher scoring candidates were particularly fluent with their use of key subject vocabulary on the 'c' questions.

The 'd' questions require a statement to be analysed and evaluated. This year, performance on the 'd' questions was strong. Perhaps due to the accessibility of the questions, even lower scoring candidates gave differing views on the statements with only a very small minority focusing exclusively on the one concept mentioned in the statement. Skills of moral reasoning were very well used, and many candidates considered impact of belief and sources of authority when judging the strength of arguments they presented. Candidates demonstrated knowledge of differences in belief particularly well in both 'd' questions, specifying differences between Sunni and Shi'a traditions. However, some candidates who had excellent knowledge failed to reach the higher bands as their analysis was limited. This was more commonly seen on the Short Course paper, although also noticeable on Full Course. For example, on the 1d, candidates presented individual arguments for a range of beliefs and analysed them as standalone concepts rather than in the fuller context of the statement. For e.g. they formulated judgements as to why the Day of Judgement is an important belief, and why Tawhid is an important belief, but they did not grasp the full demands of the question and discuss why belief in Tawhid may be **more** important than the Day of Judgement.

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE A

GCSE

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 3 - STUDY OF A WORLD FAITH - JUDAISM

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are assessed?

- Questions (a), (b), and (c) test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.
- Questions (d) test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were assessed in this examination?

Q.1 Beliefs and teachings

- (a) Key Concept: 'Torah'.
- (b) Area of Study: The Nature of God; Jewish beliefs about God as Law-Giver.
- (c) Area of Study: The Afterlife; Jewish beliefs about resurrection.
- (d) Area of Study: Messiah (Mashiach); Evaluation of Jewish beliefs about the Messiah (Mashiach).

Q.2 Practices

- (a) Key Concept: 'synagogue'.
- (b) Area of Study: Daily Life; Practices involved in keeping kosher dietary laws.
- (c) Area of Study: Festivals, Practices in Britain and Elsewhere; The importance of Yom Kippur.
- (d) Area of Study: Rituals; Evaluation of the importance of Bar and Bat Mitzvah Ceremonies.

Overview of general performance across the paper

There were a significant number of entries for this paper (27,725 for Full Course) and most candidates attempted all questions. A range of marks across the band descriptors were awarded, demonstrating that the questions were accessible but also challenging for the more able. Many candidates indicated their understanding of the key commands in the questions which often helped a focus on the actual demands of the question. Many candidates used a wide range of religious language in their responses. However, it was very concerning that some candidates explained specific Jewish beliefs, practices and teachings through a Catholic or Muslim lens. This paper focused on Judaism and credit could not be given for references to other religious traditions. The AO2 skills of analysis and evaluation were demonstrated well by many candidates. Some responses did not meet the actual demands of the question and instead appeared to be pre-prepared responses. This was especially the case in 2d. The vast majority of candidates made good use of time with few incomplete scripts.

Issues for centres to consider:

- References to other religious traditions cannot usually be credited.
- Candidates should have an understanding of the concepts associated with specification content. For example, the meaning behind specific rituals and festivals. In 'c' questions there is often an over-reliance on description.
- Candidates should ensure that they understand the actual demands of the questions. Underlining key words can often help this focus.
- Although 'a' questions require a definition of key concepts, candidates should also include these concepts in responses to other questions, linking to sources of wisdom and authority where relevant, in order to develop knowledge and understanding.
- If candidates use the continuation pages, they need to label the questions they are continuing to answer.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The 'a' questions require a straightforward definition of a key concept. The majority of candidates engaged well with these questions and gave accurate definitions.

AO1 'b' Questions

Generally, the b questions were answered well. Many candidates were able to give coherent description of Jewish beliefs about God as law-giver. Responses often included good use of religious language. In 2b, there were many references to certain meals that would be prohibited e.g. lasagne, but a minority of responses disregarded the question and instead focussed on the symbolic foods that might be found on the Seder Plate.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require an explanation of a belief, practice, teaching or view. There was a wide range of marks awarded for these responses. However, some candidates failed to gain any credit in 1c when they focussed all of their response on Christian teachings about Jesus' Resurrection. It was disappointing that many candidates had some understanding of practices at Yom Kippur, but not why it is seen as such an important day. There were a significant number of responses which confused Yom Kippur with Pesach or Shabbat.

AO1 'd' Questions

The 'd' questions require a statement to be analysed and evaluated. Generally, performance across these types of questions had further improved from 2023. This was especially the case in 1d when responses focussed on a discussion regarding whether all Jews should believe in the Messiah. There were also some excellent responses to 2d which gave an informed analysis and evaluation. A significant minority of responses misinterpreted the question and focused their responses on whether Bar/Bat Mitzvah is the most important ritual and wrote lengthy descriptions of other rituals/festivals that might be more important. There appears to be an increasing awareness that these questions require evaluation and judgement, but sometimes judgements are made with no reference to evidence that has informed those judgements.

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE A

GCSE

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 3 - STUDY OF A WORLD FAITH - SIKHISM

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are assessed?

- Questions (a), (b), and (c) test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.
- Questions (d) test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were assessed in this examination?

Q.1 Beliefs and teachings

- (a) Key Concept: FC 'Gurdwara', SC 'Gurmukh'.
- (b) Area of Study: The Oneness of Humanity; examples of how Gurus promoted equality.
- (c) Area of Study: The Nature of God.
- (d) Area of Study: The Afterlife; Mukti.

Q.2 Practices

- (a) Key Concept: 'Vaisakhi.
- (b) Area of Study: Festivals; Diwali.
- (c) Area of Study: Ceremonies; Singh and Kaur.
- (d) Area of Study: The Gurdwara: worship.

Overview of general performance across the paper

Most questions were attempted by most candidates, although 2a., 2b., and 2c. had the highest number of non-attempts. A range of marks across the band descriptors were awarded, demonstrating that the questions were accessible but also gave opportunities for high level responses. Many candidates quoted relevant sources of wisdom in their responses, including reference to scripture and the lives and actions of the human gurus. Religious language was used well by many, including the use of the key concepts across the questions. The AO2 skills of analysis and evaluation were demonstrated very well by many, with some higher scoring candidates discussing to the validity of arguments, while lower scoring candidates were often able to give more than one viewpoint.

Issues for centres to consider:

- Candidates who showed a deeper understanding, by making links between teaching and belief and/or practice of the topics and/or being able to reference specific philosophical concepts or scriptures, generally scored higher.
- Candidates would perform better if they were prepared for the types of questions using trigger words, i.e. a definition for part a, description for part b, an explanation for part c, evaluation and analysis for part d.
- Candidates must read the whole question – too often the key component of a question was ignored; this was particularly the case with questions 2b and 2c.
- The ability to evaluate and critically analyse information was a key differentiator in awarding marks, particularly in question 1d. The frequently seen use of writing frames does not always allow candidates to write analytically. Those who scored highly in evaluation and analysis were able to comment on the validity and credibility of arguments presented before arriving at a reasoned conclusion.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The 'a' questions require a definition of a key concept. The majority of candidates excelled in defining the key terms for both questions and often provided detailed examples in support, which, whilst not necessary, did serve to strengthen some weaker definitions. Candidates who scored lower gave very weak or inaccurate definitions. A high proportion of candidates did not attempt 2a. showing a clear lack of knowledge of Vaisakhi.

AO1 'b' Questions

The 'b' questions require a description of a belief, teaching or practice. Many candidates struggled with b, often missing the specific focus on 'describe' in the question. Those who did correctly identify examples of how Diwali is celebrated in 2b. were able to demonstrate comprehensive understanding and displayed a high level of knowledge. It was also evident that students would include generic festival practices if they were unable to remember distinct Diwali celebratory practices. This helped lower scoring candidates gain some marks. 1b seemed to confuse many candidates where accurate examples were given but attributed to the wrong guru. Students did not need to name the guru to gain full marks as the question focused on the 'examples of equality'. Higher scoring candidates offered detailed descriptions of examples of equality, clearly distinguishing between the gurus.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require an explanation of a belief, teaching or practice. Candidates showed varying levels of understanding of the two concepts examined through the 'c' questions. Responses for 1c. varied from simple definitions of characteristics of God to more thorough discussions of both the Mool Mantra, God's role in judgement and the connection of God with humans. Higher scoring candidates demonstrated an awareness of God's multifaceted nature, balancing description with meaningful explanations. Several attempts at 2c. showed a lack of overall knowledge of the variety of reasons for the adoption of the names 'Singh' and 'Kaur', so those who struggled invariably gave overly descriptive information regarding when the names may be adopted. Higher ability students were able to give a range of reasons for adopting the names referring to the symbolic nature of the names and the characteristics a Sikh might aspire to when adopting the names.

AO1 'd' Questions

Responses to 1d varied in quality, from simple statements of a point of view to detailed evaluations. Many used formal writing structures which often led to more descriptive rather than evaluative answers. High achieving candidates offered sophisticated arguments and used quotations effectively to support their points. Many were able to refer to aims in this lifetime being an appropriate comparison to the eschatological aim of Mukti post-mortem. They demonstrated consistent critical thinking throughout their responses. Responses to 2d varied significantly, from simple statements of how someone might prefer private worship to more detailed evaluations looking at the benefits of private or public worship. The higher scoring candidates showed good evaluative skills, recognising limitations such as those that might affect worship at a gurdwara and used these arguments to demonstrate a critical understanding of the topic. Higher performing candidates were able to make the link between worship at the gurdwara and the social and community aspects that might also be classed as forms of worship and dedication. They used sources of wisdom, key terminology, and maintained continuous evaluation throughout their answers.

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