



GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

40552 Religion and Life Issues

Report on the Examination

4055

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40552 Religion and Life Issues

General Comments

Once again this unit proved to be very popular. It is pleasing to report that most students were very well prepared and found the paper very accessible. Some of the answers were outstanding, and included teachings from two or more religions. Christianity, Islam and Buddhism proved to be the most popular religions this year but there were also examples of good teachings and beliefs from Judaism, Hinduism and Sikhism. However, a minority mixed up the religions and consequently gave inaccurate teachings and beliefs for the religion(s) they had named.

Of fundamental importance is the necessity to read the questions carefully before answering them rather than just connecting with a word from a question and getting started immediately. It appeared that some students lost marks needlessly because they had not realised the required focus of the question. Overall most students are alert to the idea of the two criteria type questions of AO1 and AO2.

Some students attempted to answer all six questions or parts from six topics but there were few rubric infringements. Where this occurred most of the answers lacked depth and many may well have scored higher marks if they had concentrated on four questions as required by the examination.

Those who named the specific religions they were writing about in the longer answers invariably provided better responses than those who just generalised by saying 'religious believers'. Often students said that Christians believe or Muslims believe, implying that all members of those faiths believe a certain thing. It would have been much more accurate in many instances to have said that some Christians believe or some Muslims believe etc. Even if it is a view of a small number of believers, it can then be credited.

A minority of students attempted to use the same religious teachings whilst answering most questions. This is creditworthy if the teachings are relevant and applied but often, where students did this, they were not. Just blanket inclusion of quotes that are not applied to the ethical issue that is the focus of the question does not add to the answers. For example, using 'Love your neighbour' is not really helpful when writing about testing on animals, eating meat, or discussing when life begins. Several also referred to religious people believing in karma without applying it to the issue of the question.

There are still some incorrect teachings which are often repeated, such as Buddhists do things because of God and believe that people and animals have a soul. A minority still mix up Islamic and Hindu beliefs and teachings although this was not quite so evident this year. Muslims do not believe that pigs or cows are sacred or believe in reincarnation. Hindus do not worship Allah. However, many students were able to effectively use correct teachings and explain them and this helped in achieving the higher levels.

There is still a problem of some students not being able to distinguish between a 'why' and a 'how' type question. Understanding this is extremely important or the focus of the answer will not be correct.

The majority of students are now developing their AO1 answers and including examples to support the points they are making. This is enabling them to gain higher levels. There were fewer one-sided answers for the six-mark AO2 questions this year and most included religious beliefs or teachings. Some though were listed rather than used in an evaluative way. In some instances, the

beliefs and / or teachings were included as supporting or opposing a viewpoint but no real reasoning was given and little informed insight was demonstrated by many students. Many of those who scored the highest marks for the six-mark AO2 questions are now including a concluding paragraph with an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments for and against the statement.

Question 1 – Religion and Animal Rights

This was again the most popular question on the paper and there were some very good answers. Many, however, when writing about Christian views, included quotes which apply only to humans to justify their ideas concerning animals eg 'Love thy neighbour' and 'Do not kill' and belief in the sanctity of life.

01 This proved to be a very accessible opening question to the paper and most students obtained the two marks which were on offer.

02 This question was quite well answered with most students gaining the two marks. Some did not get further than saying that the fur trade involves cruelty and did not give a second reason.

03 Most answers agreed with the statement that religious believers should not buy animal products that have been factory farmed. Their answers generally focused on the overcrowding conditions associated with this type of farming and a contrast was made with animals which are able to roam freely outdoors. Those who argued against pointed out that free range products are more expensive and not all people can afford them.

04 There were some excellent answers as to why some religious believers are vegetarians and others eat meat. Many drew contrasts between different faiths eg Christianity and Buddhism. Many referred to Noah receiving permission from God to eat animals after the flood and the idea of dominion. Others included references to the first precept, ahimsa, the langar or food laws eg halal or kosher laws. The most common incorrect responses stated that Christians are forbidden to eat meat because of the teachings 'love thy neighbour', 'do not kill' and 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.'

05 This was one of the best answered of the six mark AO2 questions. Many distinguished between experimentation for medical research and testing for cosmetics. Several students writing from a Christian perspective still incorrectly attempted to apply the sanctity of life argument to animals.

Question 2 – Religion and Planet Earth

This was not such a popular question this year and brought a mixture of answers.

06 The majority of students obtained the marks on offer but some misread the question and gave two causes of climate change instead of two problems caused by climate change.

07 Only just over half the students managed to get the two marks for this question. Most knew that Earth Summits discuss the problem of climate change but many were unaware of the actions which have resulted from their discussions. Some only wrote about what individuals might do rather than focusing on Earth Summits.

08 Most agreed with this statement but the reasoning was often superficial eg just mentioning that pesticides damage insects and the environment. Often the best answers argued against the

statement, explaining that it is necessary to protect crops from pests and diseases in order to feed people.

09 The idea of stewardship was used extensively in answering this question but some did not develop the problem of the abuse of the Earth's natural resources by giving accurate examples. However, deforestation was often mentioned and sometimes the limited supply of oil. Most realised the need for sustainable development or future generations would be left without natural resources. Some developed this to suggest that it is important to recycle and reuse.

10 The answers to this question were very mixed in standard. Often students just concentrated on either the pros and cons of living a modern lifestyle or the problem of pollution. Several gave a one-sided response saying why it is important to avoid pollution. Those who did focus on the whole statement were able to obtain good marks. For example, some answers used the Buddhist idea of interdependence effectively.

Question 3 – Religion and Prejudice

This was the third most popular question on the paper but overall it brought a mixed response.

11 It wasn't always clear from the answers that students knew the meaning of tolerance but most picked up some marks as they wrote about religions believing in equality and 'love your neighbour.'

12 This question was very well answered with most students saying that prejudice is pre-judging someone or a group, usually negatively, whereas discrimination is the action taken as a result of prejudice.

13 This question was also very well answered by most students but some misread the question. Instead of giving reasons why some people become prejudiced they gave types of prejudice such as racism or sexism.

14 This was a 'how' question but several answered it giving reasons 'why' religious believers have fought against prejudice. Many gave a great deal of unnecessary background concerning individual believers or they explained in detail the problems they faced. There were some good answers about the work of Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi but some just listed the actions or stated that they fought against prejudice without saying how they did this.

15 It was pleasing to see that most knew about positive and negative discrimination and so could give a two-sided response to this statement. Those who did not know about positive discrimination struggled to produce a two-sided argument and some did not refer to religion. Most ended up obtaining three or four marks.

Question 4 – Religion and Early Life

This was the second most popular question and was well answered.

16 This was the best answered question on the paper although a few students did think that an abortion could be given on demand. The most frequent responses included if there is a risk to the mother's life or if the baby is likely to be born with a severe disability.

17 Although most were able to say what is meant by the sanctity of life a minority confused it with the quality of life.

18 Most were able to score at least two marks for this AO2 question. Many disagreed with the statement arguing that the mother has to go through the pregnancy and so should have most, if not all, the rights. Those who argued in favour of religious believers supporting the father having rights usually did so using equality arguments and the father having to financially support the child.

19 This question brought a full range of responses. Many were able to state beliefs from different faiths about when life begins. In many instances it would have been prudent to have said ‘some Christians believe ...’ rather than imply that all Christians believe the same thing. The same applied to other faiths. Confusion between the beliefs of different religions was very much in evidence in many answers.

20 This question was well answered with many obtaining the top levels. There were a variety of interpretations of what makes a poor quality of life but many were able to use well-rehearsed arguments for and against abortion. A minority focused entirely on these arguments and forgot to say much about ‘a poor quality of life.’

Question 5 – Religion, War and Peace

This was the fourth most popular choice this year and was well answered by most students.

21 This question was well answered with the vast majority gaining the two marks which were available. A few did not read the question correctly and gave two examples of wars instead of two examples of the ‘effects of war.’

22 Some struggled to precisely define what is meant by terrorism but many got the marks on offer by using good examples such 9/11.

23 Some of the answers to this question were rather superficial or missed the words ‘religious beliefs.’ In the case of the latter they simply argued whether or not there is ever a good reason to go to war. Those who obtained the maximum marks usually focused on the religious teachings about peace and non-harming although some did include the ideas of jihad and Holy War.

24 There were many good answers to this question. The Just War criteria were well known. However, some failed to obtain the higher marks because they just listed the criteria and missed the command word of ‘explain’.

25 There were some good responses to this question with most realising the devastation a nuclear war would cause. The idea of deterrent was also well explained. Some did focus on the use of nuclear weapons rather than on countries possessing them. It showed again the importance of carefully reading the statement.

Question 6 – Religion and Young People

This was the least most popular choice of question although it was often attempted by students who answered more than the required number of questions.

26 Most were able to give reasons why some parents choose to send their children to a faith school.

27 Nearly all the students explained what is meant by putting pressure on people but a sizeable number ignored the ‘peer’ part of the question and so failed to obtain the second mark.

28 This three mark AO2 question brought some good responses with most agreeing that religion shouldn't just be taught in the home as parents might not have sufficient knowledge to give their children a balanced and in-depth understanding of religions. It was suggested that school is a better place for an unbiased approach to religion and places of worship are able to provide additional teaching.

29 This question brought a full range of responses. Where students were able to give examples of special activities provided for young people by faith groups they usually scored high marks. Some, however, gave superficial and general answers with little explanation of why the activities are provided other than to create interest or give opportunities for fun.

30 This question brought a variety of responses. Some did not read the statement carefully and missed the word 'rules'. In these cases their answer focused on whether religion is relevant for young people today. That is a different question. Those who obtained the highest marks gave examples such as the Ten Commandments and discussed their importance and relevance to young people in today's society.

Spelling Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG)

An extra four marks were available for SPaG. Up to four marks were awarded for each of the six mark AO2 questions and the best mark given was then counted. More students are now writing in paragraphs and the standard for SPaG was generally good this year. As last year, several students were unable to correctly spell important technical terms including the different faiths and in particular Buddhism or Buddhists. 'Believe' was often spelt as 'belive' and there were numerous variations on the spelling of dominion and stewardship. A few are still confusing conception with contraception. Some wrote incredibly long sentences. Commas and capital letters were sometimes left out and/or put in the wrong places.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)