



GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

40553 Religion and Morality
Report on the Examination

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40553 Religion and Morality

General comments

Standards in the 2016 examination were in line with those of 2015. There was plenty of evidence that many students had been well prepared for the examination both in content and examination technique. However, problems persist in six-mark AO2 questions and in providing sufficient development in AO1. The paper was accessible to students although there was some evidence of a few questions being misread or misinterpreted, especially Question 30.

Once again, there was a slight increase in numbers of students taking this examination based on the previous year. Indeed the entries have increased year on year since this specification was introduced.

Each student was given additional marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG). Each six-mark AO2 question was awarded a SPaG mark and the highest one of the four awarded became the SPaG mark for the whole paper. Some who scored lower SPaG marks was as a result of the length of their answers. Answers which are very short and not in the context of the demands of the question cannot achieve the higher levels. Around two thirds of students scored either three or four marks for SPaG.

Higher levels of attainment are achieved by developing ideas sufficiently. A list of simple points or quotes/paraphrases will not earn high marks, even if they are correct. Development must be more than repetition. An answer such as: "The death penalty is not allowed in Christianity because of 'do not kill' which means that people should not kill" is worth a mark for a simple reason but the meaning of the quote provides insufficient extra information to count as development.

Many students made reference to Jehovah's Witnesses and Rastafarianism, even though no question provided an obvious opportunity for them to do so. Although these two faiths are permitted in the examination, many references were incorrect. Rastafarianism was used in Question 3 but answers generally made reference to Rastafarians permitting the use of illegal drugs and tobacco, both of which are incorrect apart from the use of cannabis.

Many questions required reference to beliefs and teachings in both AO1 and AO2. There was a lack of clarity in many beliefs and teachings with overuse of such beliefs as stewardship, 'love your neighbour', ahimsa and 'the body is a temple' which were often poorly applied and interpreted. There is no thought in mainstream religion that damaging or destroying the temple damages or destroys God and Muslims do not refer to the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The concept of freewill was again badly misunderstood, being used to justify religious believers taking part in such practices as taking illegal drugs with God's blessing through freewill. It was allowed for such things as smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol and gambling because they are legal and permissible in at least some religions although some consideration of consequences attached to the belief in freewill would have developed students' responses.

Forgiveness was often misunderstood. Some students wrote that you can do what you want because God will forgive anyway. Forgiveness was widely used in relation to crime and punishment but students must realise that it is not an alternative to punishment. A large number used forgiveness in Question 20 to justify the early release of prisoners, often with no consideration of reform backed up by good behaviour in prison or a second chance as an argument for early release. It was also widely used as an argument against the death penalty because the death penalty gives no chance for forgiveness, even though in many countries that

use the death penalty, it is carried out some years later, allowing plenty of time for forgiveness to be given.

There are still a large number of students answering the six-mark evaluation question as AO1. Although this can help mid-range students to earn three or four marks, it makes it very difficult for more able students to access Levels 5 or 6. The level descriptors for Levels 5 and 6 require a reasoned consideration of two different points of view together with insights and application of religious teachings rather than just knowledge and understanding. Starting sentences with 'A Christian would think... or 'A Muslim would think'...' do not easily lead to such a response. It is good practice for students to analyse the worth of the arguments presented in relation to the quote rather than just to state them. Religious arguments should be used as reasoned evidence where it is appropriate to do so. This leads to a more coherent answer that better fulfils the assessment objective and higher level descriptors for AO2.

There was a growth in specific mentions of atheists, especially as an alternative in AO2. However, many references implied that atheism leads to many immoral actions in an attempt to provide an alternative to the more moral actions presented as religious. They were also unsuccessfully used in AO2 questions such as Question 10 which asks for an evaluation of whether euthanasia goes against religious teachings.

Quotes from religious texts are welcome and some students use them very well. However, some students have a very small 'pool' of quotes and use them frequently, regardless of whether they are relevant. It is good practice for students to use a quote to support an idea they have written and to justify its inclusion. However, this justification should not twist the meaning of the quote to one that is not a valid interpretation.

When quotes are used, they should be attributed to the correct religion. Part of establishing a context may also be to include who first said it. Although some religions share similar roots, their quotes and teachings are not interchangeable.

Knowledge of moral issues was patchy. Fertility treatment, euthanasia, illegal drugs, drug abuse and the death penalty were well known but reparation, corruption, embryology and trade proved more problematic.

Some of the four-mark AO1 answers offered an alternative opinion as required in AO2. Whilst this is perfectly acceptable, unless the question asks for religious attitudes to one specific issue, it often led to points of view and teachings becoming contrived.

Overall most students seemed to take the opportunity to show what they had learnt. It was a privilege to read some of their work because they clearly enjoyed studying the course and were able to demonstrate their learning in a fluent and coherent fashion.

Question 1 – Religious Attitudes to Matters of Life (Medical Ethics)

01 Most students gained two marks although some correct answers lacked clarity.

02 A third of students earned three marks. The most popular argument was that embryology kills embryos, developed by 'do not kill' or the first Buddhist precept with reference to the belief that life begins at conception. Common errors included embryo screening and fertility treatment. The question is asking for expression of a reasoned opinion about whether embryology goes against religious beliefs. In order to be successful, at least one religious belief had to be included.

03 This question was quite well answered. Clearly many had learnt about fertility treatment and were able to use relevant beliefs and teachings.

04 There were again some very good answers including references to adultery, the idea that the real mother is the one who gives birth to the child and the possible detrimental effect on the child when they are curious about their parentage.

05 Although one third of students earned at least four marks, many found this very difficult. Some wrote more about actions rather than considering whether religious views should be considered but did pick up some marks if their answer contained relevant and accurate material, which many did. However, the fact that it was difficult to fit this answer into an AO1 type structure which many use for six-mark AO2 questions limited their marks.

Question 2 – Religious Attitudes to the Elderly and Death

06 This question was well done and seemed to cause few problems. 83% earned both marks.

07 There was some confusion over the term ‘senior citizens’ but there were many good answers which focused on experience and wisdom and passing this on to younger generations. A significant proportion successfully argued that the young are the most valuable because they are the next generation. Some ignored the ‘most valuable’ and wrote about how the elderly should be cared for and respected.

08 Even though the question referred to hospices for the dying, many implied that what they were writing about was a care home for the elderly. Points that were relevant were credited but students should be reminded to read the whole question before they attempt an answer. Around one third of answers were awarded three marks.

09 This question was quite well answered although marks were restricted if students wrote only about life after death with no mention about how such beliefs can help the dying. Christian beliefs were generally well known but as in previous years, a surprising number wrote that Muslims believe in reincarnation. Beliefs about reincarnation / rebirth were often vague and inaccurate.

10 This was another question that required careful reading. The target was to evaluate whether euthanasia goes against religious teachings, not about whether it is right or wrong. The question made this quite clear but a significant minority of answers made no mention of teachings. Some chose atheists to provide an alternative view. This was not a good choice because of the requirement for religious teachings. Those who read the quote and addressed their evaluation towards it were largely successful; those who did not struggled to achieve more than Level 2.

Question 3 – Religious Attitudes to Drug Abuse

11 There were many good answers to this question but a significant number thought they needed to add an alternative opinion to the idea that they are useful because they cure ailments and found it difficult to do so. In AO1 questions such as this, opinions are not required. The question is asking for an explanation of religious attitudes.

12 This question was well answered with around 40% earning the full three marks. Rastafarian use of cannabis was a common alternative opinion.

13 This question caused few problems with rehabilitation being the most popular answer.

14 This was a well answered question but some responses contained errors. A number mentioned Jesus turning water into wine at the Last Supper. Many referred to the health risks associated with alcohol relating them to the teaching that the body is a temple. However, they should refrain from qualifying this with a statement such as damaging or destroying the Temple by drinking alcohol is damaging or destroying God. Many mentioned the detrimental effect on the mind making meditation difficult as in Buddhist teaching but in Islam, most reasons were to do with damaging the body rather than the mind which makes a person unfit to pray.

15 Three-quarters scored at least three marks on this question although this was more due to the effects tobacco has on health as a reason for not smoking and overcoming stress as an argument in favour. However too few addressed whether tobacco should be made illegal, preferring instead to give reasons why believers should or should not smoke.

Question 4 – Religious Attitudes to Crime and Punishment

16 Although this was generally well answered, a minority gave examples of two crimes rather than two causes of crime thereby rejecting the opportunity to earn two marks.

17 Little mention was made of obeying the law being a religious duty as the question requires but many gave good reasons why the law should be obeyed.

18 Reparation was often misunderstood. However, some credit was given to valid points about reformation, change and realising that a wrong had been done but for the full three marks there needed to be a strong indication that they understood the meaning of reparation.

19 Half of students scored three or four marks on this question. There were some very good answers but it is disappointing that such an accessible question proved too great a challenge for a significant minority.

20 Although there were some very good answers, the weakness in evaluative skills resulted in many able students not earning above Level 4. This quote should be quite easy to evaluate, especially if reformation and second chances feature largely in the answer. Although most made reference to these, they were often not approached in an evaluative way. Although forgiveness is an important religious teaching, it is not a determining factor in how offenders should be punished and whether they should be released early from a prison sentence. Forgiveness is often mistaken for reform and restricts marks earned by those who make this error. A significant number had insufficient understanding of a life sentence so they wrote about those who commit less serious offences being treated unfairly if they receive a life sentence so they should be released early. Those who understood the term used the severity of the offences committed to justify offenders remaining in prison for life.

Question 5 – Religious Attitudes to Rich and Poor in British Society

21 This was not well answered. Many answers read as though paying more than the minimum wage was charity rather than earned. Few compared the minimum wage with the living wage. This was not required but would have comfortably enabled more students to earn the full three marks.

22 There were many good answers to this question. A few listed causes with no development so scored only two of the three available marks.

23 This caused few problems with 90% being awarded the full two marks.

24 This is another example of a question being misread or not answered as written. There were a large number who wrote more about the irresponsible use of money than the responsible use. Thus there was much content about money being wasted on gambling. As the question is quite clear in asking about the responsible use of money, content about the irresponsible use earned no credit. The misquote ‘money is the root of all evil’ was widely used here and in Question 25.

25 Whilst there were some good answers, the overall impression from many students was that it is inevitable that if you buy a ticket you are almost certain to win a lot of money. This enabled students to make the point that when you win, you can donate a proportion of your winnings to charity, and so this justifies playing the lottery.

Question 6 – Religious Attitudes to World Poverty

26 Corruption is a key term in this section. However, a large proportion did not display great understanding of it. Many responses were quite generalised and not linked to corruption. Only around 75% of students who chose this question gained marks.

27 Most answers focused on justice with relation to the criminal justice system rather than its relevance to world poverty. Even though many of these answers had little relevance to this topic, they were credited as an explanation of the term ‘justice’ if correct.

28 This question caused a few problems because a proportion of students did not understand stewardship. Some interpreted it as looking after the planet and the environment but neglected to include people in their definition. They were able to earn marks by referring to such issues as global warming because limiting the effects of it will contribute to lessening world poverty.

29 Those who focused on trade tended to emphasise fair trade which allowed them to earn some credit. Some interpreted trade as charity and were less successful. There were some very thoughtful responses but they were in the minority.

30 Possibly because this tended to be answered last, a large number misread the quote as ‘Emergency aid should **only** be given to developing countries’. It was possible to earn a few marks answering the wrong quote by using long term aid as an alternative but not all did this. Those who read the quote correctly were able to score highly.

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.

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](#)