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GCSE

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

40555 Religious Expression in Society  
Report on the Examination

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4055  
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## 40555 Religious Expression in Society

### General comments

Schools and colleges are to be congratulated that they have prepared students well for this examination, evident in the quality of work seen in the exam. Few students missed out questions, and this fact is an indicator of good teaching.

It is clear that schools and colleges are teaching many key terms well, for example – devotion, revelation, inspiration. There are some key terms within topics which are less well-recalled by students, for example, edifice, faith commune.

As in previous years, those students who knew and used examples throughout their responses fared very well. The effective and plentiful use of examples demonstrates a high level of understanding, as well as good exam technique. Examples tended to be from the Christian tradition, as has always been the case, though examples from any tradition are always credited.

For the first time in the paper's history, there was no clear preferred question. Each question was attempted by approximately 62% of the candidature – previously the first two topics (Art and Architecture) have been significantly more popular, with Literature and Contemporary Society significantly less so. This change is very pleasing as it shows the paper to be well-rounded in terms of teachers' perception.

As has always been the norm, schools and colleges tend to focus their studies into just four topics, giving a deeper understanding of fewer rather than perhaps more superficially of more topics. However, for the first time, unusually the choice of just four is not of the same four topics across all schools and colleges. However there are still schools and colleges whose students are able to choose from all six topics. It would appear that, where a whole cohort is entered for Religious Studies, the tendency is to study just four of the six topics available, given that all students answer the same four.

In terms of average marks per question, the difference between highest and lowest was the smallest we have seen for the paper. Topic 5 – Music – scored the average best with 11.1, whilst Topic 2 – Architecture – the lowest at 10.45. This again shows that the paper was consistently demanding across all questions, and that teachers have prepared students consistently well across all topics. Schools and colleges should be pleased with their successful preparation of students.

### Question 1 – Religion and Art

62% of all students answered this question, gaining an average mark of 11.1.

01 Students who understood the term 'icon' fared well with the question. Some understood 'icon' in the sense of an individual, rather than an artform. This was credited, though such an approach usually made it a more difficult question to answer.

02 The same variant on interpretation met in 01 was met in this question occasionally. It was credited. Many students gave un-named icons, but were still able to secure full marks. Those students who scored poorly on the question did so because they simply described a picture they recalled, rather than drawing out and explaining its symbolism.

03 Few students could not provide at least a basic definition of calligraphy. Many believed this to be an artform found only in Islam, and so defined the term in relation to Islamic art, which restricted their mark.

04 It was common for students to work through the terms revelation, inspiration and devotion in their answer to this question. Hence, some were able to gain good marks – it was the best answered of the four-mark questions with an average of 3.04. A number used examples to demonstrate their points, which is a good way to push into the highest mark level.

05 The strongest responses included examples to underline the arguments being presented. Students seemed to find the statement straightforward and could answer from several points of view.

### **Question 2 – Religion and Architecture**

61% of all students answered this question gaining an average mark of 10.45. There was clearly a struggle with the term 'edifice' which undermined marks.

06 'Edifice' was not a term that most students knew – the average mark of 0.86 was significantly lower than any other question, given the average for others was at least 1.2. Invariably within a centre, students either knew the term or did not. This is a key term for the topic, so is something that schools and colleges should look to address.

07 Whilst marks for 06 depended on knowing the term, students could get full marks here without knowing the term, as long as they discussed 'best place of worship'.

08 Students generally found this a straightforward question. Common examples used included Christ the Redeemer and La Pieta. Where they floundered, it was because they described the statue, or wrote about it generally (what it is, where, what people do), so not answering the question set.

09 The best responses to this question were built around the use of specific examples, with David Mach's 'Die Harder', Pete Doherty's 'For Pete's Sake' and Andres Serrano's 'Piss Christ' being very commonly and well used. That students do study examples of blasphemy, as well as knowing the term, demonstrates good teaching and is to be commended.

10 This was generally answered well, though a number of students diverted their answer into discussing tombs and graves / graveyards, rather than the specific 'gravestones' asked by the question.

### **Question 3 – Religion and Literature**

61% of all students answered this question, gaining an average mark of 10.71.

11 This was a straightforward question concerning why poetry was important to some believers.

12 Most students were able to give a clear definition of 'devotion' and a good example.

13 Most students really struggled with this question, hence it being the worst answered of the four-mark questions with an average of 1.93. Students simply failed to address 'how' literature is used. Students often wrote about the value of literature, or the importance of using it. In contrast to these answers, the question wanted to know that holy books are read in acts of worship, for example.

14 This was a straightforward question, and many scored full marks by presenting arguments that religion was about God, so religious literature revealed what God was like. Where examples were used, answers seemed to be more coherent.

15 Some students struggled with this question, even though it seems quite straightforward. Most students were able to make the point that, given religious believers learn from reading religious literature, so would non-believers, and that there was so much which would be new, so non-believers would learn. The best responses also explored the idea that non-believers would not learn because of their attitude, such as, they would not take it seriously, they would not accept / absorb anything they read.

#### **Question 4 – Religion and Media**

62% of all students answered this question, gaining an average mark of 10.87.

16 There was a real mix in responses to this statement. Some students explored simply whether religious believers should or shouldn't watch on satellite. Others debated whether they should watch on satellite or some other platform. Others considered whether they should stick to their own religion or watch other religions. Still others explored the nature of these channels, particularly highly evangelical or fundamentalist programming. All of these were valid, and so gained marks.

17 Where students had studied a magazine, they did well. However, very few students were able to recall the religious message in a magazine article. Too many students wrote about the purpose and content of these magazines (service times, links to religious events and so on), hence not answering the question as set.

18 This question was well-answered by most students, who very often chose to discuss the assertion that the Islamic faith has been unfairly treated by the press. They gave good explanations and examples to give strong answers.

19 Few students struggled with this question. It is clear that schools and colleges have taught documentaries well.

20 Of the six-mark evaluative questions, this was the best answered with an average score of 3.85. It was well-argued by many students, who were able to point out the strengths and weaknesses of the internet. The best responses also offered alternative ways of spreading religious messages.

#### **Question 5 – Religion and Music**

64% of all students answered this question, gaining an average mark of 11.93.

21 This was one of the less well-answered AO2 three-mark questions, as students tended to focus on the importance of hymns rather than whether or not they aid understanding of the religion.

22 A number of students defined 'inspiration' in terms of an individual who inspires, rather than the concept of 'inspiration'. This alternative definition still gained credit.

23 This was a straightforward question, requiring an explanation as to why holy scriptures are sometimes put to music, with which most students had no difficulty.

24 Students were able to give many impacts of music. The most impressive responses gave examples and their known impact, and also considered the difference between impact on believers and on non-believers.

25 Responses to this usually focused on why mainstream is or is not the most important form of religious music. Few students chose to explore forms of music other than mainstream as an alternate view, though this was an obvious and perfectly valid way to answer the question.

### **Question 6 – Religion in Contemporary Society**

60% of all students answered this question, gaining an average mark of 10.9.

26 Of all the key terms which are general to all topics, this was the one which students struggled most with. Many could give basic 'not the materialistic world' style of answer, and their example then demonstrated spirituality; however, many struggled with the definition, though were still credited for their example which could usually be seen to exemplify the term.

27 This was understood by some to be asking if believers should do more (for example, help others, follow the Commandments). In other responses, it was understood to be asking if believers should be demonstrating their religion to others, in order to convert others. Both understandings were credited. It was interesting to see that a significant minority believed that private worship and praying was not an act of worship. Schools and colleges should encourage students to see the term 'act of worship' in its widest sense.

28 This was not answered as well as might be expected. Many students became embroiled in describing and explaining symbols, rather than saying why they are used. These responses picked up some marks, but the best responses very clearly addressed the question, using any description appropriately as exemplification of a point made.

29 Even though it was clear that a number of students did not recognise 'faith commune', they still managed to answer well as they clearly understood this to be a religious event / activity of some sort, and were able to give answers valid to both. Many understood a faith commune to be a monastery, though the majority did know what a faith commune is, and many of them used the example of Taize (less so, Corrymeela) to demonstrate that.

30 This was well answered, with many students pointing to the problems of people who are (presumed to be) Islamic as part of the proof that people should be cautious about being open about their religion. Some did take the chance to comment upon proselytization, which was worthy of some credit.

### **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](#)