



GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

40556 Worship and Key Beliefs
Report on the Examination

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40556 Worship and Key Beliefs

General Comments

This year AO1, which tests knowledge and understanding of two religions, was assessed using a 6, 2, 1 format. The six mark item required an answer on each of the two religions, whereas the one mark item required knowledge of only one. The two mark item was a more general question which did not require a specific knowledge of either religion. As the six mark questions are, in effect, two Level 3 questions, one for each religion, full credit was given for sound knowledge and understanding. The performance of students was not significantly affected by this pattern of AO1 questions compared with previous years. In fact the students generally did well, many of them gaining full credit for well-informed and thoughtful answers. Schools and colleges are reminded that a variety of patterns for AO1 parts are possible, but the total marks available for AO1 on all questions will always be nine.

In this year there were over 2,000 entries and the general standard of students' responses was impressive. This was best seen in answers to the six mark evaluation questions. To develop an argument and make effective use of one's religious knowledge and understanding in supporting it, is more challenging than the mere recall of information or the explanation of worship and key beliefs. Many schools and colleges continue to prepare students well in these skills. As usual, the best answers showed evidence of these skills in combination with quite an advanced level of theological understanding.

The purpose in describing the kinds of answers that gained credit for each question, and those that did not, is to amplify the mark scheme. It is useful to know this because there are common pitfalls to avoid and good answers can guide schools and colleges in how to teach a particular topic.

Question 1 – Places of Worship

01 Most students opted to agree with the statement "Symbolism is the most important part of the interior decoration of a religious building." Many good answers used an example such as the cross or a Buddha-rupa to explain their argument. A few who opted to argue against the statement, unfortunately used examples such as aids to worship which are not part of the building's interior decoration so did not gain full credit. Neither did answers which argued that the interior decoration was not important at all as this was not the focus of this question.

02 This part, like all the other one-mark parts on the paper, was answered correctly by nearly all students. However, there were a few who named items that are not features of the building such as the bread and wine or a holy book.

03 Most students knew the outside of a religious building in each of two religions well enough to score at least two marks for each. Full credit could only be given, however, for explaining the link between at least one aspect of the outside and the religion. Many students did so very well. For example, for Islam, they described the dome, the minaret and / or a place to wash or a shoe-rack, and in the course of doing so, they explained how one of these reminded Muslims of Allah or some aspect of their worship.

04 Students had little difficulty in thinking of one or two ways a religious building might be used by the local community. Both religious and non-religious uses were creditable. If one use was described, then a developed answer was needed in order to score both marks. Otherwise two uses briefly mentioned were sufficient.

05 Nearly all the students who answered this, were able to engage intelligently with the debate about whether or not religious believers should spend lots of money on their place of worship. There was a tendency with weaker students to stray into the debate about whether decoration was helpful or not but these arguments could only be credited if they focused on the expenditure involved in decorating the place of worship to a high standard. The best answers relied on specific reasons for the money being spent, such as stained glass windows, for the development of the argument. Reasons for supporting the statement were greatly strengthened by reference to religious teaching that expensive buildings were not required or suggested better uses of the money.

Question 2 – Worship

06 Nearly every student answered this correctly. Prayer beads of one kind or another was the most common answer.

07 While most students knew a great deal about aids to worship, some of them explained why they were used rather than how. This was not creditable unless they also referred to how they were used in the course of the answer. Nor were generic answers about aids to worship in general credited.

08 Most students could answer this part well. Many reasons were given for why religious believers should worship at home, some of them backed up with quotations which were very pertinent. Those who opted to oppose the statement, sometimes argued that they could worship anywhere but, more frequently, that they should go to the religious building to worship. Any of these approaches was credit-worthy.

09 This was not answered so well. Many students chose to explain why (as in purpose) religious believers worshipped in the building, but unless they focused on specific acts of worship in the course of their answer they could not gain credit. Where this was answered well, students had clearly been taught a series of actions that believers typically did when they worshipped at a temple, for example. Offerings to the murti, waving the arti lamp, ringing a bell, chanting a mantra – it was this kind of thing which the question was designed to elicit.

10 There was considerable material on either side that students could draw on for this debate. Most students gave one or two reasons to support each side of the argument. To gain full credit, though, at least one of these reasons on both sides had to be developed in a way that demonstrated an effective use of religious knowledge. For example, the reasons why certain religions specify a special day for worship each week, could be explained. Alternatively, the benefits of worshipping **every** day could be argued with reference to a religion that requires it. Unfortunately a few were distracted from the question focus by debating whether a religious building was necessary.

Question 3 – Pilgrimage

11 Nearly all students could answer this correctly. However, some thought “Hajj” was the name of a place.

12 Most students had little difficulty in explaining at least one reason why somewhere had become a place of pilgrimage. To get the second mark, however, they needed to develop the reason further or give a second reason with reference to the same place. On Makkah, for example, many said it was the place Muhammad was born and then went on to say he was the prophet of Islam or that Ibrahim and Ishmael had built the Ka'aba there.

13 Many students agreed with the statement that “The most important part of a religious pilgrimage is remembering the past.” They gave pertinent reasons with specific examples such as remembering the Holocaust at Yad Vashem or the Temple at the Western Wall. Others argued that other aspects were more important, the gathering of the “ummah” or the cleansing of the soul being frequently used. An unexpected, but entirely appropriate, response was to discuss the benefits, or otherwise, of dwelling on one's own past.

14 The actions of pilgrims at places of pilgrimage were reasonably well known. Because this question asked students to explain the actions, some credit was given for answers that included reasons for them. However, it was necessary to explain at least two actions in each of the religions and some students struggled to do this. Students who mentioned actions that are done in different places in the same religion, were allowed credit for their knowledge.

15 This completed the questions on pilgrimage which, this year, were answered to a better standard than in the past. Plenty of material was available to students for engaging in a debate on whether all religious believers should go on pilgrimage, a lot of it from a common sense point of view. The best answers also considered arguments that made reference to specific religions which do or do not make pilgrimage a duty. There was also much evidence of the effective use of students' own appreciation of why pilgrimage was to be recommended. It seemed that they had understood the purposes of pilgrimage well.

Question 4 – Origins and Beliefs

16 On the whole, the parts in this question were answered better than in previous years. The answers to this part in particular were very encouraging – the best answered of all the 6 mark AO1 questions. Most students knew enough about the teachings about the afterlife in two religions to score at least 2 marks on each. Many of the answers were a lot more detailed than was needed to show sound knowledge and understanding (Level 3). A small number included information about cremation and burial which, although it was accurate, did not gain any credit. Some answers seemed repetitive but this was to be expected given the similarities between some religions in their teaching on life after death. Students who merely said that Christians believe the same as the above and did not provide any specific explanation, received no credit for their answer on Christianity.

17 This question provided an accessible statement on which many students wrote at some length. Nearly all opted to agree with it and supported it with various arguments, but many also made a counter-point to the effect that it not a belief at all in Buddhism. A very few students seemed to be confused by the word “faith”. They wrote about having faith in general rather than specifically “faith in God”. These answers were credited to the extent that the comments made were applicable to faith in God. However, some were too vague to gain more than one mark.

18 Perhaps influenced by question 17 some students answered 18 as if it was about the difference believing in God made to a person's beliefs. However, only answers that focused on the effects on a believer's life could be credited. This included their emotional life. Many answers dwelt on the effects of knowing that God would judge you; but, again, only the present life of the believer was intended as the focus, so changes in their present behaviour could be credited but not comments about their ultimate destiny or future lives.

19 Nearly every student answered this correctly. However, a few gave “Allah” as the name of a founder.

20 The statement “Religious believers do not need to know about the origins (beginnings) of their religion” provoked some interesting responses. Most students understood that the focus related to how the religion was started. Those who said that Hindus do not know how their religion began were on to a good point immediately. A few mistakenly thought that the origins of the universe and life were intended. Sometimes their points could nevertheless be credited because they were also applicable to the origins of the religion. Another unexpected approach was taken by those who thought that believers would **not** need to know because their families or religious leaders would tell them. This was less easy to credit. The best answers used specific examples of what one or two religious founders achieved and gave reasons as to why believers would, or would not, benefit from knowing them. However, answers that focused entirely on the importance of the founder tended to stray from the question focus and did not gain full credit.

Question 5 – Practices and Belonging

21 Very few students got this wrong. The exceptions were those who thought a festival was similar to a rite of passage such as marriage. Some non-religious festivals were named but could not be credited.

22 Although most students opted to agree with “Festivals are the best way for children to learn about religion”, there were several who argued against. The best answers were those that suggested specific things that children could learn about their religion or specific ways in which they would learn, such as through acting in a nativity play.

23 Many students had clearly been taught well about dietary laws. Some who perhaps had not, wrote about the customs of fasting in Lent and Ramadan and gained credit that way. Some scope was of course allowed because not all religions have extensive rules in this area of life. Sound knowledge and understanding of each religion (Level 3) is not shown by a list of very brief bullet points, however long the list is, so the best answers were those which made at least two correct points and provided some development of one of them. Development could include an explanation of how kosher or halal meat is prepared, for example.

24 It was not difficult for most students to think of one or two reasons why religious believers pray. Two simple reasons were sufficient for the two marks, but a reason which was developed was also welcome. Strictly speaking there are important differences between prayer and meditation, but nevertheless the reasons why believers meditate were also credited.

25 Although there are a great variety of duties within each religion ranging from the ethical (“Love your enemies”) to the religious (“Pray five times a day”) and matters of lifestyle (“Do not cut your hair”), students did not seem to appreciate the breadth of responses this opened up. A few argued that some duties were more important than others, but a more common approach was to contrast what religions expect of their adherents with the expectations of a Western secular culture. Here there was a tendency to criticise religious attitudes to homosexuality and women; however, as neither of these are strictly duties, this was not usually a helpful approach. A few mentioned the unreasonable (and unscriptural) duties imposed on women which made a strong opposing argument. On the other side of the debate a very common contention was that religious believers know what their duties are and so must obey them.

Question 6 – Authority

26 Nearly every student answered this question well.

27 Many students were able to turn reasons why the holy book is important into reasons why the religious leader might speak about a reading from it. Others clearly had in mind the circumstances in which the leader might do this, for example in a sermon. Unfortunately, a few students did not read the question carefully enough and answered as if it was about why a religious believer might read the holy book.

28 Roughly equal numbers of students opted to support and oppose the statement that “religious believers need the support of their religious community to live a religious life”. Neither point of view was particularly well argued suggesting that this was an area of the specification with which many students were unfamiliar. The topic of “Authority” in general remains the least often answered on the paper. Some students misread the question and wrote about religious *leaders* needing the support of the community.

29 Many students had a detailed knowledge of the life of a founder in each of two religions which they put to good use in answering this question. However, it was made more difficult by having to explain how it might inspire someone to live a religious life. Those who knew little about the founders could not gain full credit but they gained some for suggesting at least one way they were inspiring to others.

30 There were many good arguments utilised on both sides of this debate. The question provoked many thoughtful responses about how a knowledge of religious teachings is still relevant in a world where there is intolerance and conflict, but also how religious teachings themselves can be, to some extent, to blame for this state. As always the best answers utilised specific examples of religious teachings to illustrate the points on each side. However, being the final question on the paper, the answers did suffer somewhat from students having to rush through it.

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.

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[UMS conversion calculator](#)