

GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

B1 / 40551 Religion and Citizenship
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

The Unit this year saw a slight increase in the number of students entered for the examination and once again the full ability range was in evidence, with the paper being accessible to the vast majority of students. Weaker students were generally able to gain a reasonable number of marks.

This year was the second year in which up to 4 marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) were awarded, meaning the total mark for the paper was 76. As a reminder to schools and colleges, a SPaG mark is awarded to each of the questions attempted. The highest of these marks is then taken forward and added to the total mark for the paper.

The emphasis on evaluation allowed students to show that they had considered a range of religious questions and could support their views with reasoned argument. The three-mark questions were generally well answered with many thoughtful and perceptive comments being made on the topics. There did appear to be an increase this year in the number of students who were giving two-sided arguments to the three-mark evaluation questions; this is not required and a one-sided response that engages with the question is perfectly acceptable. Two-sided responses are credited, however.

The six-mark evaluation questions produced many well-argued responses and made good use of religious teachings in supporting the points of view being put forward. These answers do not have to be perfectly balanced to reach the top marks and the inclusion of a non-religious counter-argument is acceptable. Where students scored less well on these questions, it was often due to a lack of religious teaching or religious views in the answer which limited the marks that could be awarded. As mentioned in last year's report, there is evidence that many schools and colleges use various forms of scaffolding to help their students tackle these six-mark questions and this is to be welcomed. However, schools and colleges should ensure that the methods used will deliver the best outcomes for students. In some instances, there is evidence that students state arguments for the point, arguments against it and then give a paragraph of religious teaching which may or may not be tied into a viewpoint being presented. This often appears as a paragraph of knowledge and understanding that sits isolated in the answer. As a result, rather than a well-rounded evaluative response that 'shows informed insights and the ability to apply knowledge and understanding of religion effectively' (Level 6 criteria), the answer often appears as 'several simple reasons with slight development of one' (Level 3 criteria). Where students have been more successful in gaining the full six marks, their answers have often had the religious view or teaching built into the points made, either for or against, rather than standing as a separate paragraph. In addition they have often, but not always, been based around simple methods such as stating the point, supporting it with evidence or examples, including an explanation and then moving on to the next point.

Many students included the views of several religions in their responses and were able to show a high level of knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of the different faiths as well as, in some cases, showing good knowledge of variations within a particular religion. This is to be welcomed and once again there was a decline in the numbers of students who confused the beliefs and practices of the religions they had studied. It was also encouraging to see once again a wide variety of different religious teachings being employed in the answers. It is perhaps worth advising that schools and colleges check the context of some quotations that are used, as on occasion, quotations used are out of context and do not really support the point a student is making.

This year there was again a decline in the number of schools and colleges where students attempted all six questions. This year, no reports were received of entire schools and colleges answering all six questions and this is to be welcomed.

Question 1 Religion and Relationships

This was the most popular question on the paper and elicited many good responses from students.

01 This part required a description of the role of parents in a religious family. This was generally well-answered, with plenty of development showing the role of parents. Where the answer was less well-done, students strayed into discussions about why it is important for people to have children or why children should respect their parents, making use of quotations such as 'Honour your father and mother'. In some cases, students listed a few points about bringing children up in the faith and teaching them how to pray, for example, before running out of steam. Many students failed to recognise that religious parents have the same responsibility as non-religious parents to love and care for their children and bring them up in a safe and stable environment, etc. Had these points been included then some students who limited their answer to a couple of points could have developed their response further and possibly gained full marks.

02 Many students scored well on this question, giving clear explanations of religious beliefs and teachings about sexual relationships. Many students focussed on marriage as the right place for a sexual relationship and then moved on to looking at sex before marriage or adultery, with some discussing homosexuality. Where the question was answered less well, students were often side-tracked into issues of abortion and contraception.

03 This part required a definition of the key term 'covenant'. It was disappointing to note that only just over one third of the students who answered the Religion and Relationships section gained this mark. Many confused it with convent, convert or chastity whilst others appeared to have never heard of the term and gave a completely random answer or omitted it altogether.

04 This part produced many thoughtful responses, with many students arguing that it was up to a couple whether they should marry or not. Many made the point that it was a good idea as it provided a stable environment for a family, whilst others recognised that marriage was not for everybody and that some religious believers such as Catholic priests were not permitted to marry.

05 This part required students to consider whether it was right for religious believers to use contraception. Where students knew about contraception, many provided thoughtful and well-argued responses; however, it was clear that many students did not have a full grasp of the topic. In many cases, students tended to turn the question into an AO1 question, stating, 'Muslims believe..., Christians believe...', without actually doing any evaluation of the ideas. Other students appeared to have limited knowledge of one religion and tried to rework it and apply it to other religions' attitudes. In addition there was evidence of a lot of incorrect information, with many students stating that Roman Catholics were against all contraception, when in fact many make use of natural methods. It is perhaps also worth noting that, whilst examiners recognise the point behind the phrase, 'Every sperm is sacred', the phrase is not a Catholic quotation but one from Monty Python!

Question 2 Religion, Sport and Leisure

06 This question required an explanation of the purpose and use of leisure time. In order to gain full marks, students needed to ensure that they addressed both 'purpose' and 'use' in their answers. This was generally well-answered with many students writing about its purpose as a way to relax, relieve stress, keep fit, etc. whilst also considering the uses and misuses of leisure time.

07 This part saw a mixed response. Some students resorted to the 'It's up to the individual what they think' response and consequently scored very few, if any, marks; others responded by looking at the potential benefits of taking time out to be quiet and to pray or meditate. There were many responses that argued that it was one way of relaxing and that religious believers may find some other activity, such as sport, equally relaxing.

08 This part asked for a benefit of being a team member. This presented no problems with the overwhelming majority of students able to correctly identify one benefit.

09 This part asked for religious beliefs and teachings that would encourage honesty in sport. There was a range of responses to this question. Some students talked about honesty being an important aspect of all religions and therefore religious believers should always be honest, or used the 'We are all equal' argument and should treat others how we would wish to be treated. These general attitudes gained credit but where students scored well, they were often able to make use of other relevant teachings such as, 'Do not lie' or talked about 'Right Action', 'Right Intention', 'My own occupation is to work to praise the Lord' and the possible karmic consequences of cheating. Some students found themselves becoming side-tracked through their discussion of Performance Enhancing drugs and also gambling.

10 This part generated a very varied set of responses, with some students simply agreeing, writing that as religions taught that 'Everybody is equal', no one should be paid more than anyone else and so sports superstars should not receive the salaries they do. Where students scored at the higher levels, they were often able to appreciate that the wealth of sports superstars did not always come from their clubs but often through sponsorship or selling their own product ranges, with David Beckham regularly appearing as an example. Students also appreciated that to be a sports superstar, much training and effort was required to reach the top level and that should be rewarded in some way. Many students also argued that whilst sports superstars had lots of money, that was not necessarily a bad thing, depending on how they used it; many examples were given of superstars setting up and supporting ventures in areas of need in Britain and abroad.

Question 3 Religion and Work

This question was one of the least popular ones.

11 In this part 11 most students were able to correctly identify one way in which Trade Unions could help their members. However, it was apparent that some students had little or no idea about what Trade Unions do.

12 In this part, many students were able to give clear religious teachings about the importance of work and gained marks as a result. Where students responded less well, they often ignored the need for religious beliefs and teaching and gave general points about why people need to work or they explained why believers should only work in certain jobs.

13 This part generated some well-reasoned responses, with students who were able to distinguish between 'fair wage' and 'minimum wage' frequently reaching the top level, often arguing that the minimum wage was not enough to live off and people should be given some dignity or pride and be rewarded with a wage that they could live off.

14 This question produced a very mixed response. Students were asked to select a religious voluntary organisation and to describe the work that the organisation does. Many students selected organisations that were not religious ones and whilst they still gained some credit for the identification of the work the organisation does, they were not able to reach the top levels. It is perhaps worth noting that whilst the Samaritans charity was set up by a Christian minister, it does not have any religious affiliation and is not classed as a religious organisation. Where students selected a religious organisation, they often talked generally about the organisation rather than focussing on its work.

15 This question required students to consider whether all religious believers should do voluntary work. Many responses employed general arguments making the point that it was not fair to ask people to work and not expect them to be paid. These responses were often characterised by a lack of clear religious teaching. Where students achieved higher levels, their responses were often built around the need for religious believers to serve others and therefore voluntary work was a good way to do this. Ideas of sewa, building good karma and quotations such as, 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me' helped to develop the points being made.

Question 4 Religion and the Multicultural Society

16 This question was generally well answered, with the majority of students scoring the mark. Where students did not score, they often talked about illegal immigrants.

17 This question generated a mixed response, with many students able to score well by using relevant religious teachings which they clearly linked to the issue. Where this was less well answered, students often talked about where the asylum seekers were escaping from but did not make the link to why religious believers would support them. Other students saw asylum seekers as immigrants and so, ignoring the question, gave their thoughts on immigration.

18 Like part 14, this produced a mixed response. Students could make use of any project run by a faith community, provided that they showed how the project helped people. Many students were not able to talk about such a project and often 'waffled', or they missed the word 'project' and talked about how the faith community helped. However, there was also plenty of evidence of many projects that are serving communities; possibly one of the most popular examples this year was the Trussell Trust of Food Banks, where local Christian communities are working together to provide food banks as an emergency measure for people who are in need.

19 This part was generally well answered, with many students making the point that people may not fully understand the true meaning of the festival and therefore should not celebrate it. This was often countered with the example of Christmas, which was seen as a way of people and communities coming together, so people from many backgrounds could join together to celebrate and at the same time strengthen community ties.

20 This question required students to consider whether religion and politics should not mix. The most popular method of tackling this question was to argue that they were both very different things and would cause trouble if they were mixed. Examples of theocracies were often cited as evidence at this point. However, the best answers went on to recognise that religion teaches moral principles and a religious influence on politics could have a calming and peaceful influence, provided it did not become the main way of governing the country. Other students made the point

that there was already religious influence in the Houses of Parliament and so with the presence of Anglican Bishops in the Lords and other Peers and MPs who followed a religion, religion and politics were already mixed and it seemed to work quite well.

Question 5 Religion and Identity

This was the least popular of the six questions on the paper.

21 This part required students to describe sources of authority a religious believer might use to help them make decisions. Where students scored well, they were able to provide a variety of examples and explain how they would help; for example, the Bible being seen as God's word and would have within it statements which would guide a believer or help them when making decisions. Where students scored less well, they tended to resort to a simple list of examples without including any explanation.

22 This was generally well done, with students arguing that you were not a true believer if you did not follow the customs and traditions of the religion, as these were part of the religion's history and gave a believer a connection with those who had gone before. There were equally well-argued points, including that customs and traditions were often out-dated and stopped a religion from moving forward and being relevant to people in the modern age, and so following them was not crucial; what was important was a person's relationship with God.

23 This required an explanation of the key term 'brotherhood'. Most students were able to gain this mark.

24 This part asked about the meaning and purpose of life and there were many good answers, with students able to outline the key ideas of various religions, such as breaking out of the cycle or rebirth, reaching mukti, doing the will of Allah, etc; where students were less sure, they were often able to gain some marks by focussing on the command to 'Be fruitful and multiply'.

25 This part required students to consider if there were more important issues in life to be concerned about than healthy living. The majority of students argued that without being healthy, it was very difficult to live your life well and made the point that as some religious believers followed food laws, then it was seen as being important to be healthy. Arguments to the contrary frequently made the point that if the purpose of life was to obey God, then that could result in people living lives that were not particularly healthy, particularly if they were called to work in areas of the world where there was disease and war.

Question 6 Religion and Human Rights

This question appears to have increased in popularity over recent years and this year was attempted by over half of the students entered for the exam.

26 This part required an explanation of what was meant by legal rights and the mark was gained by around three-quarters of the students. Where the mark was not awarded, students often gave a definition of human rights. The key point was that right was an entitlement by law.

27 This provided the opportunity for students to write about a human rights issue they had studied. This had a mixed response. It was clear that some students had not looked in depth at examples of human rights cases; however, many students took the opportunity to show a deep understanding of a particular issue they had studied. This question also appeared to be the most topical, as a number of students who wrote about the Right to Education and the fight by Malala

Yousafzai also brought into the debate the kidnapping of the Nigerian schoolgirls by Boko Haram that had taken place shortly before the date of the exam.

28 This part produced many thoughtful responses, with students often arguing that the right to life was surely the most important right, as without it the remainder of the rights became irrelevant. This was also echoed in the responses of students who argued that the right to food and water was more important. Some students did argue that the right to follow a religion was the most important, pointing out that we are only on earth for a short period of time; what happens to us afterwards is important and so we should have the opportunity to follow the teachings of our faith so that we have a good afterlife.

29 This was answered well where students took careful note of the question. The question required **ways** that a believer might protest and not **why** they might protest. The best responses showed a variety of methods that could be employed, with a brief description of what they were and how they might be of use. Where students performed less well, they may have responded with a simple list of examples or allowed themselves to go down the road of discussing the merits of non-violent versus violent methods. Students who discussed reasons why a believer might protest frequently scored few, if any marks.

30 This part provided students with the opportunity to consider the issue of minority rights. Where students were clear what minority rights were, they frequently produced well-argued, thoughtful responses based around the idea of supporting people, love of neighbour, ideas of equality and Right Action etc. Many went on to discuss that support for minority rights may not always be appropriate if the minority stood for something that was against the teachings of the religion. It was clear from weaker responses that some students had no real understanding of the term 'minority rights'.

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

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[UMS conversion calculator](#)