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GCSE

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

B2 / 40552 Religious and Life Issues  
Report on the Examination

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4055  
June 2015

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Version: 1.0

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## General Comments

Once again there was an increase in the number of students taking this unit. Many were well prepared and included the development necessary to obtain the higher levels. Answers using Christian, Muslim and Buddhist teaching proved to be the most popular for the answers requiring more specific religious teaching. Often using teachings from two religions proved to be very effective although in other cases the understanding of key teachings was rather superficial. This was especially the case when many religions were used as often, where they did this, the students mixed up the teachings and beliefs.

There were few rubric infringements but some students attempted to answer all six questions or parts from six topics. In these cases most of the answers lacked depth and many would almost certainly have scored higher marks if they had concentrated on four questions as required by the examination. In several schools and colleges students attempted the parts of the questions out of order. Although this is allowed, attempting all the six mark A02 questions first is not a recommended approach. Firstly because it often resulted in a failure to complete the exam because so much time had been taken up writing longer answers than those required for these questions. Secondly the questions are normally designed to lead logically from one part to another in a way which should be helpful to those taking the exam. Thirdly it was very noticeable that many, possibly even the majority, who did not follow the numbering as printed on the exam paper ended up missing out questions. This was in contrast to those who followed the numbering as set on the paper as there were relatively few unanswered questions in those cases. Accidentally leaving out a few questions could make a significant difference to the grade which the student receives.

Those who named the specific religions they were writing about in the longer answers invariably provided better responses than those who just generalised 'religious believers'. Several students attempted to use the same religious teachings whilst answering most questions. This is creditworthy if the teachings are relevant and applied but often 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 'Loving your neighbour' is not really helpful when writing about animal rights, genetically modifying animals, eating meat, or debating whether life begins at conception. Just stating that religious believers believe in karma – what goes round, comes around – without further explanation doesn't add a great deal to a debate about climate change, joining Pro-Life pressure groups or eating meat. Comments such as 'God said it and Jesus wrote it in the Bible' were sometimes incorrectly used to answer questions on genetically modifying animals, abortion laws, terrorism, pollution and climate change. Several students also expressed the view that Buddhists do things because of God and incorrectly stated that Buddhists believe that people and animals have a soul. A minority still mix up Islamic and Hindu beliefs and teachings. Muslims do not believe that pigs or cows are sacred or believe in reincarnation. Hindus do not worship Allah. On the other hand, where students were able to effectively use correct teachings and explain them, it helped them to achieve the higher levels.

Many students did not distinguish between a 'why' and a 'how' type question and failed to understand the difference between a 'describe' and 'explain' question. Understanding the command word is extremely important or the focus of the answer will not be correct. For example, the 'describe' command required students to write about the 'action' not 'why' they do it.

Some were unsure about the difference between an AO1 and AO2 type question. The three AO1 questions per topic did not require students to give their personal opinion but many did nevertheless. In addition some response also just made generalised comment where reference to religious views and teachings were required.

Most of the AO2 answers included beliefs and teachings from one or more religion but often they were listed rather than used in an evaluative way. The beliefs and/or teachings were listed as supporting or opposing a viewpoint but no real reasoning was given and little informed insight was demonstrated by many students.

Schools and colleges should be aware that whole questions on topics will consist of four or five parts, making up a total of 18 marks, 9 marks for AO1 and 9 for AO2. There will always be two AO2 questions, one a 3-mark question and the other a 6-mark question. Marks for individual questions for AO1 may differ from year to year, but, for each whole question, there will always be two or three questions for AO1, totalling 9 marks. Therefore any combination is possible, eg 2, 3, 4, or 1, 3, 5, or 3, 3, 3 or 1, 4, 4 etc. Whichever combination is chosen will apply to all whole questions on the paper. This enables examiners to examine the AO1 assessment objective in relation to the specification in the most appropriate way, depending on the content being examined from year to year. This is fairer to students. It enables technical terms, or more challenging parts of the specification to be examined appropriately and provides students with opportunities to write at greater length on issues where there is a greater body of knowledge or explanation available.

### **Question 1 – Religion and Animal Rights**

This was the most popular question on the paper and there were some very good answers. Many, however, used biblical quotes which apply only to humans to justify their ideas concerning animals eg 'Love thy neighbour' and 'Do not kill'.

- 01 Those students who knew the meaning of factory farming often gave good definitions and the example of battery hens was frequently used. A significant number did not know the answer or gave an answer which could have applied to any type of farming.
- 02 Many of the answers explained 'why' religious believers might promote animal rights rather than describing what they might do. This was a 'how' type question which did not require an explanation of the reasons religious believers might promote animal rights. It was an action based question and the focus was on the examples of how beliefs are acted upon. There were many good answers which included reference to using the media, supporting animal welfare groups such as the RSPCA or WWF, becoming a vegetarian etc.
- 03 There were some good answers showing knowledge of religious teachings including the Buddhist idea of interdependence, the Christian teaching of stewardship and the Eastern Faiths belief in samsara. Some responses were very general, ignoring the 'endangered' species and 'duty' by focusing on whether or not all animals should be protected. Some wrote 'how' animals might be prevented from becoming extinct rather than debating the statement.

- 04 Many responses were very general about animal experimentation and not harming animals rather than genetic modification, but there was a full range of answers. Weaker answers showed a lack of knowledge about genetic modification in relation to animals and so could not effectively apply appropriate teachings that effectively explored the religious views on the issue. However there were some excellent Hindu answers and from Christianity or Judaism good reference was made to religious teachings in Genesis.
- 05 Many argued that all religious believers should be vegetarians using the Buddhist / Hindu principle of not harming living creatures (1<sup>st</sup> moral precept or ahimsa). Others argued that it should be permitted to eat meat providing it was kosher or halal and met the rules given by their religion. The most common incorrect response 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.’

### **Question 2 – Religion and Planet Earth**

This was not such a popular question this year but was generally well answered although in many cases the three mark AO2 question only brought a superficial response.

- 06 The majority of students obtained the one mark for this question but some misread ‘conservation’ as ‘conversation’.
- 07 Like 02, many of the student answers explained ‘why’ religious believers might help look after natural resources rather than explaining what they might do. The best answers usually referred to recycling, reusing and reducing and referred to sustainable development and renewable energy. Many included various ideas of protesting including tree hugging, involvement of the press and educating people. Several responses only referred to animals and did not include what might be done to help look after fossil fuels etc.
- 08 Most agreed with this statement but the reasoning on the whole was rather superficial eg just mentioning that the world is amazing and has the ‘wow’ factor. Some responses did, however, include excellent examples to back up the arguments given. Some used the ‘awe and wonder’ as proof of God’s existence.
- 09 The idea of stewardship was used extensively in answering this question but some did not develop the problem of damage to the world by giving examples. Others included material suggesting that religious believers should not be concerned about pollution which was not the focus of the question. The Buddhist story concerning the bee gathering pollen without harming the flower and the first precept was used effectively as was the need to consider future generations. The better responses related the causes and effects of pollution to the obligation for believers to do something about it which they supported with reference to specific teachings.
- 10 Although often well answered, several students did not remember to show that they had thought about more than one point of view and only gave reasons for agreeing with the statement. Those who did give a balanced response usually referred to ‘dominion’, the debate about whether climate change is a natural phenomenon and what is already being done by governments. A lack of insight into the impact of climate change left many having difficulty in giving reasons to support the imperative ‘must’ apart from generalised answers about the need to care for the planet.

**Question 3 – Religion and Prejudice**

This was the third most popular question on the paper and there was a full range of responses.

- 11 This question brought a mixed response. A significant number did not know the answer and some confused scapegoating with stereotyping.
- 12 This three mark evaluation question brought the best responses in this section. Most agreed with the statement but some focused on the 'all' and argued that positive discrimination can be very helpful in some circumstances eg giving wheelchair users the front-row at an event in order that their view is not obstructed.
- 13 Like questions 02 and 07 many focused on 'why' rather than 'how'. Many showed that they understood what is meant by 'harmony' but did not treat it as an 'action' question with practical examples.
- 14 Most answers focused on equality with many of the better responses quoting the Fifth Commandment 'Honour your father or mother' or similar teachings from other faiths. Many focused only on the elderly without recognising that it also affects the young.
- 15 Different approaches were in evidence in answering this six mark evaluation question. Some compared the effects of religious prejudice with the effects of other types of prejudice eg with racism or sexism. Others interpreted religious prejudice as prejudice against religion or prejudice stemming from religious beliefs. Most did not reach the top two levels in answering this question.

**Question 4 – Religion and Early Life**

This was the second most popular question and was generally well answered although the six mark evaluation question proved to be a challenge for many.

- 16 Most students knew the meaning of the sanctity of life and scored the one mark which was available.
- 17 Students answered this question in different ways as anticipated in the mark scheme and many scored high marks.
- 18 Most understood 'Pro-Life' but many did not mention 'pressure' groups so the response to this question was rather mixed.
- 19 This question brought a full range of responses. Many were rather general in their approach, emphasising the need to protect the unborn child because of the sanctity of life and so abortion laws are necessary. However, many failed to focus on 'laws' and wrote pro-life arguments. The better answers usually developed this further by referring to specific circumstances where many would agree that abortion might be allowed eg if the mother's life is at risk.

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- 20 This question was quite a challenge for many students. Often inaccurate religious teaching was quoted about when life begins and many of the responses focused on AO1 material with little evaluation. The better answers often developed the idea that if life begins at conception then abortion is wrong as it is murder, so pro-choice supporters would not want this idea taught. There was often a good focus on 'teach' and many answers presented real insight into issues surrounding when life begins eg teaching at conception would make women feel guilty for having an abortion or it should be taught to reduce abortions or there is no accepted view so no 'one view should be taught.'

### **Question 5 – Religion, War and Peace**

This was the fourth most popular choice this year and was well answered by most students. Question 24 proved to be the most challenging in this topic.

- 21 This question was well answered by most with nuclear weapons being quoted as an example by many. A minority of answers were not specific enough as their responses could have applied to any weapon.
- 22 Most agreed with the statement and gave reasons such as it is wrong to terrify people, kill indiscriminately innocent civilians, against the golden rules etc. A minority did not reach the maximum mark as their answers focused on war and violence rather than terrorism and some misused 'Blessed are the peacemakers' as a justification for terrorism.
- 23 There were many good answers to this question. The Just War or Holy War criteria featured strongly in the responses. However, many gave additional material not worthy of credit as they explained why religious believers would not fight in a war. This highlighted the importance of carefully reading the question and staying focused on what was asked.
- 24 A range of religious believers who have worked for peace was used in response to this question eg The Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King, Irene Sendler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Mohandas Gandhi. Often an explanation of why the person worked for peace was given which was not what was asked. Many also wrote about the person with no reference to anything specific they have actually done in working for peace. This was an 'action' question and many missed this.
- 25 There were some good responses to this question although some missed out on the top two levels because they simply gave reasons for and against war and did not relate their answer to solving problems between countries.

### **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 Only about half the students understood what is meant by the generation gap.
- 27 This question was not well answered. Those who did focused mainly on the fact that many religions have ceremonies to mark the approach of adulthood and it enables the believer to show commitment to their faith.

- 28 This three mark AO2 question brought some very good responses with most agreeing that religion should be taught in schools. The importance religion plays in the world was very much in evidence with the emphasis being on the need to understand ethical issues, the beliefs of different faiths and overcome ignorance and prejudice as we live in a multi-cultural society.
- 29 This question brought a full range of responses. Many focused on young people getting mocked, teased or misunderstood if they choose to follow a religion. Other issues included finding the teachings difficult to understand or follow, services being uninteresting, marginalisation and not being able to join in some of the activities of their peer group. A small minority ignored 'choose' and substituted 'forced' but most focused on the actual statement.
- 30 Many of the answers were one-sided arguing against the statement that religion has nothing to offer young people today. Most highlighted the need for moral codes and guidance rather than mentioning some of the activities designed by faith groups for young people eg Taize, Spring Harvest, Girls' and Boys' Brigades or Summer camps. Arguments against were mostly around the idea that we live in a secular society which has an emphasis on science rather than religion.

### **SPaG (Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar)**

An extra four marks were again 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.

Like 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' and a few are still confusing 'conception' with 'contraception'. Many did not write in paragraphs for the six mark AO2 questions and some wrote incredibly long sentences. Commas and capital letters were often left out and/or put in the wrong places.

### **Overall**

The exam was taken seriously by practically all the students and some excellent answers were seen. It was obvious that many students were very well prepared for this unit. Some, however, did not read carefully enough the actual question and so did not focus on what was asked. Many did not distinguish between a 'why' and a 'how' question or between the command words of 'explain' or 'describe'. Those who answered the questions out of order generally did not perform as well as those who followed the question numbers as set out on the paper.

## **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](#)