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GCSE

# Religious Studies B

Unit 3: Religion and Morality  
Report on the Examination

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## General Comments

It is pleasing to report that the overall standards achieved in this examination matched the impressive standards demonstrated in 2012. Most students had been well prepared, with many displaying a wide knowledge and understanding of the specification content and an ability to apply and evaluate this knowledge. The full range of marks was used and only 1% of the total entry scored fewer than 13 marks.

There was a slight decrease in student entries this year, possibly due to the move from modular to linear assessment. Many schools and colleges appeared to enter their whole cohort from the year group. The total entry was split between full course and short course certification with slightly more girls entered than boys (51.5% v 48.5%).

In comparison with estimated grades from schools and colleges, achievement at A and A\* was higher than predicted but at grade C and below, estimates were higher than the actual numbers who achieved those grades. This matches the profile from 2012. The marking review demonstrated that some estimates were extremely optimistic, based on the actual performance of mainly weaker students, many of whom appeared to have worked extremely hard and to the limit of their ability to gain a comparatively low grade. Some other estimates were extremely pessimistic with students easily outperforming expectations of them. There are still many schools and colleges (around 25% of entries) that do not provide estimated grades.

This year, for the first time, there were five mark AO1 questions. This did not prove to be a problem because the topics examined enabled students to use a wealth of material. As we have stated each year, 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, e.g. 2, 3, 4, or 1, 3, 5, or 3, 3, 3 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.

2013 saw the return of additional marks for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG). Many students scored the full 4 marks which provided a helpful boost to their total. There were however, a small minority who did not reach the threshold level thereby not scoring any extra marks.

One reason why some fell below the threshold level was due to their handwriting. If examiners cannot decipher letters used in spelling words used, they will not give the benefit of the doubt by assuming the letters are the correct ones all the time. Indeed, it appears that the standard of hand writing is declining year on year. In some cases this is because of the time constraints but in many others shortage of time does not appear to have been a major issue. Incorrect punctuation, especially in long rambling sentences, does not assist examiners in deriving meaning in answers. In some cases the use of an amanuensis may be appropriate to ensure that students with very poor handwriting are able to gain full credit for their answers.

Students should be reminded to use specialist vocabulary where possible, write coherently, use paragraphs and appropriate punctuation and ensure that key words are spelt correctly.

### **Assessment Objective 1**

Many students displayed good knowledge and understanding. However, as in 2012, there was a noticeable weakness in many students' knowledge of technical terms such as genetic engineering, probation, justice and compassion. It is important that students know the technical terms included within the specification, because they will inevitably lose marks if they do not know them.

The 2 mark questions, which included definitions of some technical terms, were usually high scoring areas for students. However, there were some exceptions. Less than 60% of the total entry scored the full 2 marks on questions 04, 06, 17, 21 and 24. This was often because they did not know technical terms with sufficient accuracy, providing inaccurate or very generalised answers.

This year, for the first time, 5 mark questions appeared on the paper. Previous reports have indicated that an allocation of 5 marks (or even 6 marks) is a possibility for a single AO1 question. These questions, enabled students to achieve at the highest level because previously, many students who scored the maximum 4 marks would have scored 5 or even 6 marks if they had been available.

Command words used in these questions were the same as those used in previous 4 mark questions but many responses were disappointing. Only 5.7% of answers to question 14 rising to 11% on question 8 were awarded the full 5 marks. Despite the command words, many students felt they were answering an evaluation question and added their own opinion. Consequently, the struggle to provide a balance of religious opinion (which was not required) meant that some responses became contrived and lacking in detail required for level 5.

It is better if schools and colleges refer to command words commonly used in questions when preparing students for the examination, rather than making reference to the predicted number of marks available which can only be a matter of guesswork. There were however some excellent answers to these questions with around 1 in 5 scoring 4 marks – 'clear knowledge and understanding'. Some used a variety of beliefs and teachings supported by quotes or paraphrases from sacred texts. For 4 marks, these questions require some development. However lower scoring answers, did not provide sufficient development amongst their various listed quotes and teachings. In addition, references to such concepts as ahimsa, karma, compassion and love need more development than just the provision of the word.

As in previous years, many students were over-reliant on just a few quotations such as 'love your neighbour' 'treat others as you would like to be treated' and 'an eye for an eye.' These were often taken out of context and not properly applied to the topic they were writing about. On many occasions, quotations and teachings were twisted to fit the particular belief or attitude with varying degrees of success. This was especially the case with 'an eye for an eye' and the incorrectly quoted 'money is the root of all evil.' There appears to be a trend towards using obscure quotes from the Old Testament and passing them off as the Christian view when they appear to contradict mainstream Christian teaching. One such example, taken out of context was 'Who can make straight what God has made crooked'. This verse from Ecclesiastes 7:14 was used to rule out any modern advances in medical technology because humans do not have the right to correct errors God has made. At other points in the answer, some made reference to God's perfect creation.

Many used 'Do not take life which Allah has made sacred except for justifiable reasons'. This is a perfectly acceptable quotation to use but often, the phrase about justifiable reasons was omitted when it could have opened up a different aspect of teaching, especially about euthanasia and capital punishment. Such an interpretation would have enhanced responses and made them fit mainstream Islamic teaching much better.

Some students attributed their quotations to the wrong religion, especially referring to Hindus trying to please Allah, and in some cases they appeared to invent their own quotations. Although there are some similarities between Christian and Islamic teachings on some moral issues, using the Bible to justify Islamic points of view (and vice versa) should not be encouraged.

In the AO1 questions, asking why religious believers may agree or disagree with a certain moral issue (04, 14, 23) it is important that answers are focussed on what is asked rather than providing an alternative view as well. No credit is given for content explaining why religious believers take part in lotteries when the question asks why they will not take part.

It is pleasing to note that many answers to AO1 questions did include a religious response rather than a general secular or social response that may also be appropriate to a religious believer. This 'religious' approach produced a sharper focus to answers, and should be encouraged throughout. In higher tariff questions, the need for reference to religious beliefs and teachings limits marks given to secular or social responses.

## **Assessment Objective 2**

The assessment criteria for AO2 require the use of 'evidence and reasoned argument to express and evaluate personal responses, informed insights and differing viewpoints'. AO1 knowledge and understanding are expected to 'support their responses to the issues for evaluation' (Spec B page 24).

Once again, it was very evident in many responses to the 6 mark AO2 questions that students were prioritising knowledge and understanding over evaluation. Starting a 6 mark answer with 'Christians think...' with an alternative paragraph starting 'Muslims think...' before a brief concluding paragraph starting 'I think...' which repeats points made earlier, is unlikely to properly fulfil the AO2 criteria, especially in answers where what Christians and Muslims think are similar.

In a similar vein, starting a paragraph with 'I think Hindus would agree...' followed by a second paragraph starting 'I think Hindus would disagree...' are likely to produce knowledge and learnt understanding, rather than evaluation and reasoned argument. Answers set out in this way rarely progress beyond level 4 due to the dearth of true AO2 content. In some cases level 4 was appropriate, but it was clear that some more able students would have been able to achieve levels 5 or 6 had they approached the tasks in an evaluative way.

The grade descriptions for grades 'A', 'C' and 'F' on page 30 of the specification highlight quite clearly what the expectations are for students achieving particular grades. For Grade A, they need to:

'Use reasoned argument supported by a range of evidence to respond to religious beliefs, moral issues and ultimate questions, recognising the complexity of issues. They demonstrate informed

insight in evaluating different points of view to reach evidenced judgements about these beliefs, issues and questions.’

As last year, some students offered answers which consisted mainly of extended opinion unsupported by reason or evidence. For higher levels, students need to do more than this. Some quite long answers seemed at first glance to be quite impressive but upon closer examination, they mainly consisted of unreasoned opinion with a token bit of religion thrown in and often repeated.

Writing a conclusion is not necessary although many of the best answers did have one. However, it is best if this adds something new to the answer rather than just repeating points made previously.

However, despite these flaws in technique that were evident in many answers, the responses of many able students to this type of question were impressive with between 10.7% (Q20) and 21.6% (Q5) students reaching levels 5 and 6. At this higher level, it was pleasing to see so many well written and coherent answers containing the required reasoned evaluation of two different points of view. The majority of these higher level answers contained relevant religious arguments as an **integral part** of the answer, in level 6 answers, being evaluated rather than just being used to support an opinion. It is important that religious beliefs and teachings are used in this way by able students, rather than just being ‘bolted on’ in order to meet the requirement for religious arguments. This way, the requirement for a personal response is more easily met.

As in AO1, some quotations and teachings were overused, often twisted to fit a point of view when there are plenty better and more relevant quotes available. Being repeatedly told that the rich should help the poor (Q25) because religion tells us we are all equal seemed a little contradictory when the existence of rich and poor people is clear evidence that although maybe we should all be equal, we are obviously not all equal! Some went further and supported the idea that we are all equal with ‘an eye for an eye’ without justifying how this teaching is relevant to equality.

As is always the case, some students strayed from the quotation producing answers that were unfocussed or irrelevant. This was especially evident in Q25 where many focussed on why everybody should help the poor rather than rich people helping the poor and on Q30 where some preferred to answer with no consideration of the key word compassion. In addition, as elsewhere, some students used quotations out of context to support an argument that the religion(s) they were taken from do not hold.

The 3 mark evaluation questions were generally answered well and without too much difficulty. Many students earned the full 3 marks for each such question but some seemed unsure about what was expected of them. It would be helpful when preparing students for such questions if teachers could make them aware of the level descriptors for marking them i.e. for level 3, all that is required is several simple reasons (3+) or a well developed reason (or a combination of both). Unlike the 6 mark AO2 questions, no alternative response is required to balance it although an alternative on some occasions did help some students to achieve level 3 because it helped provide more reasoning in their answers. However, the search for an alternative did create difficulties, especially in 02 and 07.

Few answers lacked religious content (6 marks questions) or evidence of at least thinking about a religious concept or topic in order to provide a response (3 mark questions).

## A Few General Points

- A huge number of students referred to ‘love your neighbour’ as being one of the 10 commandments. Several other commandments were also ‘invented’ such as ‘thou shalt not take drugs’.
- Some students mixed up the religions they used. Some quotations were attributed to several Holy Books and at times, the Bible and the Qur’an seemed interchangeable. Whilst it is perfectly in order to study several religions in this course, studying just one or two in greater depth is less likely to lead to such confusion. There were also many references to God’s plan in Buddhist responses.
- It should be made clear to students that the only style of question that requires an alternative opinion is the 6 mark AO2 question. If in AO1, they are asked for religious beliefs and teachings either for or against something, they get no credit for the alternative.
- If different religions share similar beliefs e.g. life should not be taken by humans or God gives us the capacity to invent new technologies, marks are awarded once for the idea or belief with no extra credit given for stressing that believers in another faith think the same, even if students rewrite the idea.

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

- 01 Most students knew the meaning of transplant surgery, although some restricted their answers just to the donation of organs rather than to them being implanted into another person. Blood, limbs and other body parts were included in a minority of answers.
- 02 There were some very good answers to this question. Most disagreed with the quotation and provided 3 simple reasons to earn 3 marks. Some used the Jehovah’s Witness position to agree with the quotation but many wrongly made reference to the soul being in the blood rather than life.
- 03 This question was not well answered. Many did not seem to know what genetic engineering is although there were frequent references to saviour siblings and designer babies, possibly because these were included in the exam in 2012. A common definition appeared to be changing the appearance of adults, presumably by cosmetic surgery. Few referred to the inevitable destruction of embryos which could easily have been developed to improve answers.
- 04 The intention of this question was to focus specifically on AIH as opposed to other methods. However, the majority of answers were more generally on artificial methods of reproduction. As they were not incorrect, such general answers had to be credited so many earned the full 2 marks for correct reasons about why some religious believers agree with any form of artificial reproduction. This created some overlap with Q05 but the skills in AO2 are different from AO1 so this was not significant.
- 05 This question was answered well with 75% of students earning level 3 or above. Many answers were properly evaluative, unlike some of the other 6 mark AO2 questions. Some of the best answers made reference to different methods of artificial reproduction.

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## Topic 2 – Religious Attitudes to the Elderly and Death

- 06 This was a challenging question. The emphasis on a definition of death is that it is permanent, as many better answers made clear. Religious responses such as it is the beginning of the afterlife were given credit.
- 07 Answers were generally good. Many developed the idea of Heaven being a better alternative because it is with God, often balanced with Hell providing no comfort to earn the full 3 marks. Others included the provision of a religious funeral service with a positive homily about the deceased and grave stones to mark a burial. Those disagreeing with the quotation found it more difficult to earn 3 marks and many who tried to give a balanced view made it more difficult for themselves.
- 08 There were many good responses to this question although some did not seem to fully appreciate the meaning or implications of euthanasia. Many students focussed on the rights and wrongs of killing without focus on suffering. Several referred to a hospice as an alternative to euthanasia but in many cases, this would not be appropriate. Others referred to Jesus performing miracles to heal those who were suffering and used this as a reason to kill (or allow to die) those who suffer. Many who used 'Do not take life which Allah has made sacred except for justifiable reasons' did so without any discussion of whether eliminating suffering is a 'justifiable reason'.
- 09 This question was well answered with many different problems, some less important than others! Many answers contained more detail and explanation than the minimum required by the command word 'give'.
- 10 46% of answers were awarded level 4 or above. A key word in the quotation is 'always' and those who realised this were able to open up the answer to explain why this is not always possible. The fifth commandment featured in most answers along with the Islamic beliefs and practices relating to caring for the extended family. Some answers were over simplistic in trying to find an alternative point of view. It is not always the case that Muslims look after elderly parents at home and Christians use care homes or allow them to live independently in their own home!

## Topic 3 – Religious Attitudes to Drug Abuse

- 11 Most students gave 2 correct answers although a significant minority incorrectly gave cannabis as an answer.
- 12 This was well answered with many answers containing more detail than required for 2 marks
- 13 Although some students answered this question well, only around 25% were awarded the full 3 marks. The main reason for this was that the focus of the question was on funding treatment for alcoholics rather than whether religions agreed with drinking alcohol. Although the two aspects can be linked to produce a worthwhile answer, most did not effectively provide this link. The majority of answers were unsympathetic to alcoholics and some stated that they chose to be alcoholics so they should sort themselves out without wasting taxpayers' money. Many alternatives for spending the money were given but the idea that the money mentioned in the quotation derived from the purchase of alcohol

seemed to be lost. A few interpreted the question as money being used to give alcoholics a treat rather than to treat their illness.

- 14 This was not well answered, either because students chose just to focus on social drugs, especially alcohol or they did not restrict themselves to believers only using some legal drugs as the question requires. Those that included drugs used for medication in their answer tended to score more highly, especially if this was combined with consideration of social drugs. There was some confusion over the religious beliefs on tobacco, many saying that it was banned in both Christianity and Islam.
- 15 Questions on cannabis are always difficult due to the huge amount of misconceptions students hold. Many believe it is extremely harmful to the body and mind and very addictive whilst others believe it is harmless and non-addictive. Some believe that because Rastafarians use it in their religious observances, Christianity approves of its use.

However, as in last year's examination, there is a huge misunderstanding surrounding the medical use of cannabis and the legal position related to the prescribing of cannabis. For many students, cannabis is a medical 'super-drug' because it cures all manner of ailments including depression, glaucoma and arthritis whilst others were keen to point out that it effectively cures many forms of cancer. Whilst it is true that some sufferers illegally smoke cannabis for pain relief, I can only repeat the advice I included in last year's report:

*'There were many references to cannabis being a medically prescribed drug. Although an oral spray called Sativex which is derived from cannabis (which does not produce a 'high') is available by prescription to a small number of multiple sclerosis sufferers in UK, it is unlikely that this was in the mind of many students who referred to the medical use of cannabis. They appear to believe that cannabis (often referred to as weed) is available on prescription to relieve pain in cancer sufferers and for those suffering from depression. This is not true.'*

Whilst many weaker students wrote more in answer to this question than any other, they, along with many others, focussed more on whether cannabis should be used than on the question of legality.

#### **Topic 4 – Religious Attitudes to Crime and Punishment**

- 16 Over 90% of students answering this question correctly identified two valid reasons.
- 17 A large number of students did not know the meaning of probation. Some therefore did not attempt an answer. Most credit worthy answers associated probation as a monitoring exercise after early release from prison rather than a non-custodial sentence. As the probation service is involved after early release, this was allowed. Many mistakenly referred to bail whilst others implied close supervision by the police rather than monitoring by regular meeting with a probation officer.
- 18 This was not well answered, mainly because many made reference to forgiveness, love and second chances without any reference to repentance or more importantly reform. Whilst forgiveness is an important element in religious morality, no mainstream religion believes that it replaces punishment, especially punishment with the intention of reform. A minority misread the question as providing support for prisoners who are released early.

- 19 Whilst there were some good answers (30% achieved either level 4 or 5), some were disappointing. The idea of forgiveness was prominent in some responses as an alternative to capital punishment, more valid than when used for early release provided prison is imposed instead. The Islamic point of view was often misunderstood. Whilst not all Muslims agree with capital punishment, its deterrent value makes it a valid punishment in Shariah law. Many used the example of amputating hands of those convicted of stealing but despite showing severity of punishment, this is not capital punishment. Despite this being an AO1 question, many chose to give their personal opinions as well as the religious attitudes requested in the question. Some prefaced their own ideas with 'As a Muslim / Sikh / Christian etc.' as a way of giving religious attitudes but several students changed their own personal religion several times throughout the course of the paper! This doesn't matter but it cannot be considered to be good examination technique.
- 20 Many answers to this were surprisingly poor. Wherever there is a quotation suggesting that something is the best or worst, the logical way of answering it is to give reasons, supported by religious teachings to support it before giving a reasoned alternative preferably supported by religious reasoning. Had more students taken this approach, it is likely that they would have found the question more straightforward. Most interpreted a crime against a person as exclusively murder which restricted their responses, whilst some others gave the alternative as 'crimes against people' which affect more than just the person. This alternative was allowed although it was often badly argued.

### **Topic 5 – Religious Attitudes to Rich and Poor in British Society**

- 21 Whilst most students were able to describe the poverty trap, many used the word poverty in their answer with no indication that it means being financially poor e.g. 'not being able to get out of poverty' earned one mark rather than two.
- 22 Many made the good point that no family should be poor regardless of whether they are religious. Some others were clear that being religious does not and should not determine a person's wealth. However, these points were often just stated without any real reasoning which limited marks they were awarded. The idea that God provides religious people with all the money they want was not credited.
- 23 Only around 7% of students were awarded 5 marks for this question. There appears to be a common misconception that winning the lottery is easy and so answers focused more on the dangers of wealth caused when you inevitably win, rather than on the stewardship of money and whether gambling fits in with good spending patterns. There were many good Islamic answers supported by quotations from the Qur'an. A few students gave an alternative answer explaining why religious people will take part in lotteries. This was not required in the question so no credit was given for the alternative.
- 24 This was generally well answered although some seem to think that the minimum wage promotes equality as everybody earns the same.

- 25 This was an example of some students rewriting the quotation to produce one they felt more comfortable answering. The quotation specifically refers to the rich doing more to help the poor. However, it was common to see the valid alternative idea that everybody should help the poor but without any consideration of whether this should be a responsibility of the rich. The alternative was given some credit but alone, it could not reach levels 5 or 6 which require a reasoned consideration of two different points of view (one of which should be properly addressed to the quotation).

### **Topic 6 – Religious Attitudes to World Poverty**

- 26 This question provided few problems although some responses were more aimed at UK rather than LEDCs. Credit was given to these responses as they did answer the question as it was presented.
- 27 There were some excellent responses to this question. The best answers made the difference between long term aid and emergency aid clear and gave examples of projects offering both types of aid. Weaker answers were more generalised and did not make the difference between the two types clear. Some offered reasons why religious organisations offer aid which the question did not require.
- 28 20% of students either left this blank or scored no marks. This appears to have been because they did not understand the meaning of justice (a key term from the specification). Others ignored the word justice but provided a valid alternative that at least earned them some credit. Less than 1 in 5 scored all 3 marks. This highlights the importance of learning the meaning of the key terms as used in the specification.
- 29 Unlike Q28, this was well done with the majority of students scoring 2 marks.
- 30 As in Q25, the focus of many answers was not fully on the quotation, possibly because students did not understand the meaning of compassion. Thus answers tended to argue that the poor should be helped, often by offering charity without any use of the word compassion. The Islamic practice of Zakah was highlighted here in many answers. Whilst these answers received some credit, the question was about compassion not about whether religious believers should help. The dividing line is quite fine but it is important that students answer what the question asks, not a slightly different alternative that they feel more comfortable with.

### **Further Observations**

As has been the case in previous years, some examiners reported that students in some schools and colleges answered the 5 parts of each question in reverse order i.e. they did the 6 mark AO2 question first and then worked backwards to the first part. Whilst this is a perfectly within the rules of the examination, there was again no evidence that students who followed this pattern gained any advantage and as the separate parts of a question often build towards the final AO2 quote, they were possibly disadvantaging themselves.

There was some evidence of students answering questions in seemingly random order e.g. 5, 11, 2, 21, 9, 23 etc. Almost invariably, they were not successful and several missed out questions, possibly because they confused themselves about what they had done and what they still needed to do. Such an approach should be discouraged.

A minority of students ran out of time often through writing too much with plenty of repetition. As time was short, some of these answered their final 6 mark evaluation before the 4 shorter questions, presumably because there are more marks available for that question than the others. However, their attempts were usually poor and had they answered the shorter questions in what time they had left, they may well have been more successful.

As is always the case, a significant minority answered either a fifth question or all the questions on the paper, possibly because they had time remaining. They tended to be weaker students. They should be advised that they would be better off spending longer on the 4 questions they are required to answer rather than trying to answer extras. Usually, the extra questions they answer do not score as highly as the first 4 that they are required to answer and so for most, it is a complete waste of time.

The timing of the examination allows students to provide sufficiently developed answers to earn maximum marks on the four questions they choose to answer. If they have time left over, it is likely that they have provided insufficient development in what they have written and answering another question is not going to solve this.

It would be helpful if students followed these guidelines in setting out their answer booklets.

- Questions numbers should be written in the small box at the left hand side of the page to indicate the question answered and where the answer starts.
- Students should leave a couple of lines at the end of each answer, before they start the next answer. It is highly unusual for students to fill all 16 pages of the booklet so there is no need to condense the way they are set out.
- Answers should be written in black ink or ball-point pen as neatly as the student is able to write.
- Correct spelling, punctuation and grammar should be used throughout.
- The numbers of the four questions that the student has answered should be written in the left hand column of the grid in the top right hand corner of the front page.
- The details required on the front page should be fully and accurately completed and the script signed in the space provided.

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.

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

Most students gained 3 or 4 marks from the 4 marks available. Students should be reminded to use specialist vocabulary where possible, write coherently, use paragraphs and appropriate punctuation and ensure that key words are spelt correctly.

## **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](#)