

GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

B3 / 40553 Religion and Morality
Report on the Examination

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General comments

It is pleasing to report that the overall standard achieved in this examination matched the impressive standard demonstrated in 2013. Most students had prepared well, 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 were achieved.

Up to four marks were awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG). Each 6-mark AO2 question was awarded a SPaG mark and the highest one of the four awarded became the SPaG mark for the whole paper. A little over a third of students achieved the full 4 marks. A very small number did not reach the threshold level and thus did not achieve any marks.

The standard of handwriting in this examination is very variable. In some cases this may be because time constraints, but in many others, shortage of time does not appear to have been a major issue. Students may penalise themselves if their handwriting isn't legible.

The length of answers had some bearing on the SPaG mark awarded since the full criteria on which the judgement needs to be made were not able to be assessed. Answers of just a few lines which were not 'in the context of the demands of the question' were awarded a low SPaG mark.

Some students answered the five parts of each question in reverse order, ie they did the 6 mark AO2 question first and then worked backwards to the first part. Whilst this is permissible, there is 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 quotation, it is possible that they were disadvantaging themselves.

There was some evidence of students answering questions in seemingly random order, eg 5, 11, 2, 21, 9, 23, etc. Generally this approach was not successful and several students missed out questions, possibly because they became confused about what they had done and what they still needed to do. Such an approach should not be encouraged.

A small number of students ran out of time, often through writing too much and repeating information. Some students answered their final 6-mark evaluation before the four shorter questions, presumably because there are more marks available for that question than the others. However, these responses were usually weak and if students had focussed on the shorter questions in the time that was left they may have gained more marks.

A significant minority answered either a fifth question or all the questions on the paper, possibly because they had time remaining. Students should be advised that it would be a better use of time spending longer on the four questions they are required to answer rather than answering extra questions. Usually, the extra questions answered do not score as highly as the first four and so this is not a good use of time.

Overall, most students used the opportunity to show what they had learnt. It was a privilege to read some of their work. Many students had clearly enjoyed studying the course and were able to demonstrate their learning in a fluent and coherent fashion.

Specific points

- Technical terms in questions were generally quite well known, but some students did not demonstrate much knowledge of experiments on humans, or of cloning, hospices, stewardship or world trade. Students may penalise themselves if they do not know the technical terms included in the specification.
- Whilst there was an increase in the number of students earning full marks in the 5-mark AO1 questions, the assessment criteria require 'a detailed answer with some development and / or analysis' for five marks. Many students listed several beliefs and teachings (often repeated from other answers) with little development or application to the topic. Such answers will not achieve five marks.
- A disappointing number of students treated AO1 questions as AO2 by giving their own opinion or attempting to balance their answers with an alternative point of view. This resulted in some contrived answers that did not reach the highest levels of the mark scheme.
- As in previous years, many students were over-reliant on a limited number of quotes 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 applied to the topic for consideration. On many occasions, quotations and teachings were adapted 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.'
- The same approach also applied to the use of some beliefs. Whilst many students who studied Buddhism used the teachings well, others appeared to use metta, karuna and karma as often as they could, with no development and without attempting to make them relevant to the topic. Answers such as 'Buddhists agree with surrogacy due to metta, karuna and karma' did not score highly because they displayed little understanding and application. The same applies to teachings about sanctity, quality or value of life and the 'body is a temple'.
- The quote from Islam: 'Do not take life which Allah has made sacred except for justifiable reasons' is a perfectly acceptable quotation to use, but often the phrase 'except for justifiable reasons' was omitted when it could have opened up a different aspect of teaching, especially about capital punishment and turning off a life support machine. Such an interpretation may have enhanced responses.
- Some students attributed their quotations to the wrong religion (in some cases, students referred to Hindus trying to please Allah), or appeared to create 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. Whilst it is completely valid to study several religions in this course, studying just one or two in greater depth is less likely to lead to such confusion.
- In the AO1 questions which ask why religious believers may agree or disagree with a certain moral issue (04, 08, 13, 19, 27), it is important that answers are focused on what is asked, rather than providing an alternative view as well. No credit is given for content such as explaining why religious believers agree with experiments on humans when the question specifies why they disagree.
- Many answers referred to the idea that the rich should help the poor because religion tells us we are all equal. This seemed a little contradictory when the existence of rich and poor people is evidence that, although maybe we should all be equal, we are obviously not all equal. Some responses 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.
- It was 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 fully meet the AO2 criteria.

- 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 access above Level 4 because of the lack of AO2 content. It was clear that some students would have been able to reach the highest levels had they approached the questions in an evaluative way.
- Writing a conclusion to a 6-mark AO2 answer is not necessary, although many stronger answers did have one. However, it is good practice if this adds something new to the answer, rather than just repeating points made previously.
- The majority of higher level answers to 6 mark AO2 questions contained relevant religious arguments as an integral part of the answer, 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 students, rather than just being ‘bolted on’ in order to meet the requirement for religious arguments. In this way the requirement for a personal response is more easily met.
- In AO2 questions some students strayed from the quotation producing answers that lacked focus or were irrelevant. This was especially evident in Questions 10, 15, 25 and 30, where the key phrases and concepts (‘too valuable’, ‘illegal’, ‘lazy’ and ‘emergency’) were neglected by many. Providing only an alternative opinion limits marks, especially if students do not link this to agreement or disagreement.
- Many students made reference to God’s plan without any development as to what God’s plan may be and how it may be determined. A common theme was that one should not do anything to help those who are suffering because suffering and death are in God’s plan. A similar difficulty involved the concept of freewill. Many answers stated that religious believers can do whatever they want because humans are given freewill. Little or no mention was made of other beliefs and teachings that give clear guidance on issues of morality.
- Some students provide a definition of a moral issue as part of their explanation of religious issues. While this may help students to focus their thinking, it should be noted that no credit is given for the definition.
- Many students referred to ‘love your neighbour’ as being one of the Ten Commandments. Several other ‘commandments’ were also constructed, such as ‘thou shalt not take drugs’.
- The 3-mark evaluation questions were generally answered well. Many students earned the full three marks for each of these questions but some seemed unsure about what was expected of them. Unlike the 6-mark AO2 questions, no alternative response is required.
- If different religions share similar beliefs, eg life should not be taken by humans or God gives humans 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.

Question 1 Religion Attitudes to Matters of Life

- 01 Most students gave a correct answer. A minority provided a definition without mentioning what the initials mean.
- 02 There were some very good answers to this question. Most students knew what surrogacy is and gave attitudes both in favour and against. Nearly one third of students earned either four or five marks.
- 03 Most students answered this question well, making the point that religious believers should not be against transplant surgery because it saves lives. This was developed in various ways. A significant minority referred to Jehovah’s Witnesses, usually in relation to blood transfusion. As transfusion is not a transplant, such responses were given no credit. Their reasoning often

misrepresented the Jehovah's Witnesses' point of view. Only a small number of students seemed aware of the existence of bloodless transplant which Jehovah's Witnesses accept.

- 04 This question was poorly answered. Many students did not show much understanding of what experiments on humans are. Many made vague reference to harm and potential death. A minority made reference to embryology, which was accepted, as it does reflect a view that embryos are human.
- 05 Many answers demonstrated little understanding of cloning. However, the reference to 'all types of cloning' in the quotation did allow students to reference the more 'science-fiction side' of reproductive cloning. Therapeutic cloning was widely misunderstood. There were many references to cloning humans to provide or donate organs required for transplant. Few considered how and where these clones would live and whether they should have any rights, including whether it was acceptable to take out their organs as required, even though it would result in their death.

Question 2 Religious Attitudes to the Elderly and Death

- 06 The majority of students had little trouble in answering this correctly.
- 07 Many students did not answer the question that was asked. The word 'respect' is a key word, yet instead of expressing an opinion about whether the elderly should be respected, many wrote at length about provisions some faith groups make for caring for the elderly. Few argued that the elderly should not be respected.
- 08 Despite the question giving guidance about what a hospice is, a disappointing number of students seemed to confuse it with a care home for the elderly. Responses were credited for making general points that apply to both a hospice and a care home. Very few provided any indication that they knew that hospices are for all ages, not just the elderly.
- 09 This question was generally well answered, although many answers could not access beyond Level 4 because they did not include knowledge and / or understanding about both death and what happens after death. Although some answers demonstrated confusion about Muslims believing in reincarnation, there appeared to be fewer making this error this year.
- 10 Students who answered the question asked, rather than a pre-rehearsed response, accessed the higher levels of the mark scheme. However, a large number of students overlooked the reference to the value of life in the quotation. Consequently too many answers focused entirely on whether a life support machine should be switched off or not and were limited to Level 3. Many who did make reference to life being valuable tended to link it to the sanctity of life, which was acceptable. There was a lack of understanding about life support machines with many making reference to the person on the life support machine being in extreme pain and having the ability to personally request that it be switched off.

Question 3 Religious Attitudes to Drug Abuse

- 11 There were many incorrect answers to this question, including a range of class A drugs, to legal drugs such as caffeine.
- 12 This was well answered, with a range of good answers supported by various beliefs and teachings. Few argued against the statement, although some made reference to Rastafarians using cannabis to heighten spiritual awareness. This is an acceptable response.
- 13 Whilst there were some good answers to this question, many linked rehabilitation to punishment and forgiveness. Responses did gain some marks for this, but for full marks there had to be mention of breaking the addiction, a second chance to rebuild their lives or to improve their health / body / life.
- 14 Many students wrote that tobacco is considered to be haram in Islam which is incorrect, or that no religions forbid the use of tobacco. Much reference was made to tobacco clouding the mind but with little mention of addiction and craving. Health issues were widely used, often linked to the quote 'the body is a temple'.
- 15 Some students did not address the quotation in its entirety. The word 'illegal' was printed in bold on the question paper, yet most answers concentrated on whether alcohol should be drunk or not. Such answers received some credit, but without any reference to legality they did not access the highest levels of the mark scheme. It is important that quotations are read properly by students and that they address the quotation presented, rather than one they would like to have answered.

Question 4 Religious Attitudes to Crime and Punishment

- 16 Many students answered with a crime which is not a specific religious offence. The most popular correct answers included blasphemy and adultery.
- 17 Many students answered this well, focusing their responses on reform and reparation, eg cleaning off graffiti as community service. A significant minority questioned whether young offenders should be punished. As the question asks about how they should be punished, not whether they should be, this was irrelevant. Forgiveness earns little credit in a question about punishment unless the two are linked; it is not a replacement for humane punishment in any religious tradition.
- 18 There were some good answers to this question, especially from those who presented the reasoned opinion that whilst religion does teach the difference, so do other sources, eg family.
- 19 Some responses to this question gained no marks and some of these made no attempt to answer the question at all. The key word 'duty' was overlooked by many students but most managed to still write creditworthy answers.
- 20 This was a well-answered question with well-argued responses from both sides of the debate.

Question 5 Religious Attitudes to Rich and Poor in British Society

- 21 This was a well answered question with the vast majority of students giving a correct answer.
- 22 There were some good answers although only around a third earned the full three marks. Answering that ‘they can gamble if their religion says they can’ was quite common but was not credited unless students then provided teaching to support the view. Donating winnings to charity was widely used to support an alternative opinion.
- 23 This was a ‘how’ question. Most students understood it as such earned at least two marks. Responses which only included why believers should help people gained no marks.
- 24 Many answers to this question were vague generalisations about wealth. The ‘love of money’ quotation often omitted the ‘love of’ and was therefore used to support the incorrect Christian view that ‘wealth is evil’. Many responses made reference to tithing and zakah. However, as these apply to all, they had little relevance to the wealthy. Stronger responses made reference to money being earned and also used voluntarily to help the poor.
- 25 A large number of students overlooked the focus of the question on those ‘who are poor because they are lazy’. Some students only provided answers related to other reasons for poverty (an alternative point of view).

Question 6 Religious Attitudes to World Poverty

- 26 Students encountered few problems in answering this question.
- 27 The target of this question was the application of the key term ‘stewardship’. Those who did not know what stewardship is were unable to do this, so even though they wrote some general points about helping the poor, they were not awarded marks. Where students understood stewardship, this was a straightforward question. It is important that students have a good knowledge and understanding of the key terms in the specification.
- 28 Some answers to this question tended to be generalised and lacked focus on volunteering. However, many students found the question straightforward and most achieved either two or three marks.
- 29 Although world trade is included in the specification, it was disappointing that many did not appear to have studied it. Some included some valid information on fair trade but were unable to broaden it out to cover other aspects of world trade. Consequently, only a very small number of students earned the full five marks available.
- 30 Many students did not focus on the entirety of the quotation in the question. There were many lengthy responses about the need for aid without making any distinction between emergency aid and any other type. Many students were unable to access the higher levels of the mark scheme as they answered the question they preferred, rather than the one set.

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](#)