



GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

B3 / 40553 Religious and Morality
Report on the Examination

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General comments

There was much evidence that students had been well prepared for the examination both in content and examination technique. It is quite clear that students overwhelmingly treated the examination seriously and wanted to do their best.

Once again, there was an increase in numbers of students taking this examination based on previous years. Indeed the entries have increased year on year since this specification was introduced.

Each student was given additional marks 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. Thus between 0 and 4 marks were available. Those who scored lower SPaG marks did so as a result of the length of their answers. Answers which are very short and not in the context of the demands of the question cannot achieve the higher levels.

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.

The main cause for concern is that students must read questions carefully and provide the information the question requires. This was most evident in question 09 which asked for reasons why religious believers think the elderly are important, question 10 where students were required to focus on how religious beliefs and practices comfort the mourning, question 12 which required a reasoned opinion on why keeping a clear mind is important and question 24 which asked for religious views about the wrong use of money.

There was a lack of clarity in a proportion of answers. In question 18, rather than focusing on why religious offences are always wrong, many answers were very generalised with more attention given to offences rather than why they are wrong (or not wrong, if an alternative view was presented). The AO1 questions that asked for the difference between two key terms often consisted of two definitions. Where students gave two correct definitions, they earned two marks. The third mark was reserved for those who pointed out the difference, thereby fully answering the question.

Although there were still a sizeable proportion of students answering 6 mark evaluation questions (AO2) as though they were AO1 by using a formula to structure their answers (eg arguments for, arguments against, religious teachings, my opinion), more able students did seem to think more deeply about their answers and attempt to evaluate them properly. It is good practice to analyse the worth of the arguments presented in relation to the quote rather than just to state them. This leads to a more coherent answer that better fulfils the assessment objective for AO2.

Quotes from religious texts are welcome and some students use them very well. However, some students have a very small 'pool' of quotes and use them frequently, often regardless of whether they are relevant. It is good practice for students to use a quote to support an idea they have written and to justify its inclusion. However, this justification should not twist the meaning of the quote to one that is not a valid interpretation. However some quotes require little explanation. There were many instances of the following being used in answers: "Jesus said that 'you should treat people how you wish to be treated' which means you should treat people how you wish to be treated." If an explanation adds nothing to the quote, nor justifies its inclusion, it is not credit worthy in terms of deciding a level of attainment.

When quotes are used, they should be attributed to the correct religion. Part of establishing a context may also be to include who first said it. Although some religions share similar roots, their quotes and teachings are not interchangeable.

The teaching on freewill was used to justify many actions that do not reflect mainstream religious thinking. It was used as a religious teaching that supports the right to die when you choose (question 07), to use illegal drugs (question 12 and 15) and even to justify committing religious offences (question 18). Rarely was there any mention of consequences for using freewill to justify actions that are contrary to religious morality. If students wish to make the case for freewill allowing believers to do such things, the justification has to be strong and correct.

The assertion that we are all equal and should be treated the same also featured widely, especially when answering questions on poverty.

Knowledge of moral issues was patchy. Ageism, crime against property, caffeine and cannabis were well known but saviour siblings, retribution and apathy proved more problematic. It should be noted that a key term will only be used on the examination paper if it appears in the Specification.

Some of the 4 mark AO1 responses offered an alternative opinion as required in AO2. Question 19 asked for religious beliefs and teachings about retribution. Many students wrote that religious believers think that retribution is wrong before explaining why reformation is a better alternative. Unfortunately, the question was about retribution so content on reformation was largely irrelevant.

There were few very brief scripts. Even those who achieved lower marks usually made sufficient effort to provide plenty to mark. On the other hand, some wrote more than required because they provided a great deal of repetition.

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.

Question 1 Religious Attitudes to Matters of Life (Medical Ethics)

- 01 Most students knew sufficient to earn two marks although reference to designer babies was not credited because no religion teaches that they are acceptable.
- 02 Around half of students earned at least two marks. Only those who made the difference clear were awarded all three marks.

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- 03 Knowledge of saviour siblings remains a weakness. Although there were some good answers, too many students still believe that the sole purpose of a saviour sibling is to provide organs for their sibling and to face a life dominated by painful operations to give up the next part of their body. If students were to think a little more logically about the implications of what they write, they should conclude that their idea is too preposterous to even contemplate.
- 04 There were many good answers to this question; students included references to adultery and masturbation being against religious teaching. Those who made valid points about fertility treatment in general and not AID were awarded up to Level 3 if what they wrote was relevant to AID. In this question, and also in 05, the interpretation of 'Go forth and multiply' was often seen as an instruction to have as many children as you want regardless of the consequences and implications.
- 05 Many students denied themselves the opportunity to earn Levels 5 and 6 because they did not focus their answers sufficiently on 'a gift from God'. It was very common to see answers evaluating whether artificial methods of reproduction are acceptable. They earned a restricted mark because even though this was not what the question asked, some of what they wrote was appropriate.

Question 2 Religious Attitudes to the Elderly and Death

- 06 This question was not well done. Many wrote about voluntary and non-voluntary euthanasia with a significant minority of answers featuring Dignitas-style assisted suicide.
- 07 This is another question that asked for quite specific information. The target was to test evaluation of whether religious teachings can support a right to die. In order to answer this successfully, some consideration of religious teachings is essential. Too many answers contained no such information and just considered whether people should have a right to die or not usually based on suffering or pain.
- 08 Most students were able to gain two marks by giving a simple definition supported by some development, often in the form of an example.
- 09 Only a minority of students provided the information the question required by concentrating on why the elderly are believed to be important. There were plenty of answers about helping and caring for the elderly. It can be inferred that, as they should be cared for and helped, they must be considered important. However, this line of thinking was rarely explored properly to establish relevance. The best answers focused on the wisdom the elderly have along with the good advice they can impart to the young, anicca (the concept of impermanence and constant change in Buddhism) and the fact that the elderly brought the young into the world, usually linked to honour your father and mother (the 5th Commandment).
- 10 The expectation of this question was that students would focus on religious beliefs and practices associated with life after death – Heaven providing comfort and Hell less so. Where students followed this line of thinking, they found it easy to earn at least Level 4. However, those who took a different approach struggled. Many of these concentrated on whether individuals could or should comfort the mourning, often using 'Love thy neighbour' as justification for helping. Only a minority dealt with practices (eg funerals) as well as beliefs. This was required in the question and so Level 6 was not possible unless both beliefs and practices were considered, even briefly.

Question 3 Religious Attitudes to Drug Abuse

- 11 Most students earned two marks although some erred by referring to passive smoking (with no mention of illegal substances) or to damage the person inflicts on themselves.
- 12 There were some very good answers linking keeping a clear mind to religious practices, usually prayer and meditation. Some also developed answers explaining the need to keep a clear mind in order to assist decision making, especially in issues of morality. However, some chose to answer a different question. They appeared to believe it was appropriate to consider whether or not religious believers should take illegal drugs rather than considering whether religious believers should keep a clear mind. Some content was relevant but much was not.
- 13 A well answered question often containing reference to the relative harm caffeine and cannabis do to the person using them.
- 14 Again, many answered this successfully. To earn Level 4, students needed to consider both helping drug addicts and punishing them as this was in the question. Large numbers only wrote about helping them, so were restricted to Level 3. Many wrote about forgiveness which is a little outside the remit of the question. However, credit was given when this was linked to helping, as in most cases it was.
- 15 This was not well answered. Too many answers gave reasons why some drugs may be taken whilst others should not but omitted any in-depth content on taking drugs for medical purposes, which was a key element of the quote. Marks were awarded for such answers but they did not reach the higher levels. It is important that when preparing for the examination, students are advised to read the questions carefully and provide the specific information they require rather than more generalised information that is only partially relevant.

Question 4 Religious Attitudes to Crime and Punishment

- 16 Whilst knowledge and understanding of a crime against property was good, crime against the state was weak. Consequently a significant minority only achieved Level 1.
- 17 This was well answered although some did not give sufficient development required in an 'Explain briefly...' question so only earned one mark.
- 18 Too many students did not have accurate knowledge and understanding of religious offences and some of those that did were unable to explain why they are or are not always wrong. Consequently many answers were vague and earned minimal or no credit.
- 19 Retribution is a key term in this section. However, too few fully understood it. A significant number mistook it for reformation whilst many others used reformation as an alternative aim of punishment more preferred by religious believers. However, the question was an AO1 question that was quite specific in what it was asking. Of those who actually answered the question that was written, many used 'An eye for an eye..' for Christianity and Islam, using the amputation of hands as included in some interpretations of Shariah law as development. Those who established this link or linked 'An eye for an eye' with Jesus' teaching to turn the other cheek, to make the point that Christians do not agree with retribution, were usually successful in earning higher levels.

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- 20 Whilst most students were able to argue in favour of this quote using the religious basis behind many laws and doing as God requires, many struggled with an alternative point of view. Using freewill to justify breaking any law you wish or relying on automatic forgiveness shows a basic lack of understanding of two important religious concepts. Others argued for stealing food when in desperate need or breaking laws that are unjust or which conflict with religious beliefs or requirements and were more successful in doing so. Some less successful students focused on punishment, not on breaking the law.

Question 5 Religious Attitudes to Rich and Poor in British Society

- 21 This question caused few problems although many provided insufficient development needed in a question starting with 'describe'. Consequently, they usually earned Level 2.
- 22 Most argued against this statement and were successful in doing so.
- 23 'Apathy' is included in the Specification as a cause of poverty. Only a minority were able to provide a correct definition. Most confused it with either sympathy or empathy.
- 24 This question is another example of some students not reading the question carefully enough, or answering a question they may have preferred. It requires students to explain religious views about the wrong use of money. There were a substantial number of answers that concentrated on the right use of money, not the wrong use. Some wrote about the wrong use of money, including gambling and wasteful spending and then mentioned using money to help the poor as a better alternative. This approach earned some credit because the emphasis was on the wrong use of money, even though mention was made of the right use. The expectation of answers from the Christian perspective was that 'The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.' would be used to support answers. However, despite using previous reports such as this to encourage students to get the quote right, a large number are still using 'money is the root of all kinds of evil.' This misquote provides a different and incorrect perspective so cannot be deemed credit worthy. This was often coupled with the 'camel and the eye of a needle' quote. Too often, this was included with no correct justification or application to the wrong use of money so was considered irrelevant.
- 25 Although some flexibility was given in the definition of an excessive salary, there was a widespread lack of understanding of the concept. Some suggested that excessive salaries should be paid to doctors, nurses, members of the armed forces and even teachers rather than footballers. Others thought that, as Christians believe everyone is equal, everybody should be paid the same. It was quite common to read that excessive salaries are a just reward for hard work although rare to read that they reward talent. However, despite a lack of clarity in their definition and incorrect or debateable concepts presented as facts, most managed to include material worthy of some credit with many being awarded Level 3 or above. The 'money is the root of all kinds of evil' misquote earned no credit because it is irrelevant.

Question 6 Religious Attitudes to World Poverty

- 26 Most were able to argue in favour of the quote because fairtrade benefits the growers of the goods that are sold more favourably than non – fairtrade. Few mentioned the support given to communities in LEDCs in addition to the individual growers. Arguments against were mainly centred on the slight increase in selling price over other goods.
- 27 This question was well answered with a wide range of ways in which war may cause poverty being given.

- 28 Again, answers to this question were generally good. Emergency aid was well known although sustainable development was often more like long term aid which is only partially correct.
- 29 Many answers to this question were quite disappointing as they were rather general with little mention of specific projects in developing countries. However, these answers still attracted credit. There was no requirement to name religious organisations, so if organisations were wrongly named as religious eg Water Aid and Oxfam, credit was given for describing elements of their work that are similar to that of a religious organisation.
- 30 Although this question is comparatively straightforward, many struggled to develop an alternative to the quote. Even arguments in agreement tended to be vague and superficial, although there were many impressive answers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

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