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GCSE

# Religious Studies B

Unit 5: Religious Expression in Society  
Report on the Examination

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## General Comments

Students found the paper straightforward, with the vast majority attempting every part of every question they selected. Students had clearly been well-prepared for the exam, and seemed to find it very accessible, and were comfortable with its challenges. The average mark this year was higher than last year, suggesting students are better prepared for the exam, which is a credit to schools and colleges.

Following previous years, Religion and Art was the most popular question. Religion and Literature was less popular than in previous years. Religion in Contemporary Society remains the least answered topic. In terms of the marks accrued per question, Religion in Contemporary Society was the best answered, with students averaging 12.25 marks, as opposed to Religion and Architecture which students did least well with on average at 10.1 marks. Students continue to use examples from Christianity more than any other religion, but it is certainly true that schools and colleges are exploring wider range of examples from non-Christian religions now, so examples of music from Sikhism, mandalas from Buddhism, Islamic calligraphy, Hindu murtis and many others were seen.

The use of one mark questions as an opener to each Topic was a very good way in for most students. It lent confidence to the rest of their efforts. The five mark questions, which have been set before on this paper, acted as a good differentiator at the top of the ability range, whilst the accessibility of the language meant that all students could get something out of the question. Since the last time questions worth five marks were on the paper, schools and colleges have clearly worked to develop their students' skills.

In AO2 questions worth 3 marks, students are clearly very well prepared. As many students look to give a one-sided answer as those giving two points of view. Both methods are effectively used to secure full marks. It is pleasing to see that students are more measured in the size of responses. In previous years, it has been the case that some students wrote far more than was necessary and so used up time which they needed for other questions. Students at the top end are securing the three marks easily, but not writing as if the question was worth six and so making better use of time.

In AO2 questions worth 6 marks, the best students are actually interrogating the remit of the question, for example by challenging what is meant by 'best' in 25, or 'good' in 20. This allows them to create several routes of argument because, for example, in 25 if 'best' means 'most popular', the answer is very different from when 'best' means 'most spiritual'. Having several routes to argue gives more scope for a bigger and broader answer, and hence higher marks. So the best students are not simply agreeing and disagreeing with the whole statement, they are picking over its details.

Picture stimuli are given to be exactly that – a stimulus and support in answering questions. On this paper, a number of students used stimulus well to help them in formulating responses. Centres should work with stimulus in teaching the course, helping students to spot clues and interrogate images.

A common feature of those students gaining the higher grades is the use of examples to illustrate the points/arguments they make in any response (not just where specifically asked to). These students wrote fluently, explaining ideas, but added relevant examples. They had many examples to be able to draw from within each topic. Often students within a school or college used a very

wide range of examples, suggesting students are finding their own beyond those met in the classroom. Schools and colleges should encourage students to find their own examples, which they then have greater command to use, and which will enhance their responses. It is the norm for this to be the case on this paper, rather than the exception – which is pleasing and encouraging, and demonstrates that teachers are doing really well to engage students highly.

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.

### **Question 1 – Religion and Art**

This was the most popular question on the paper; students averaged 11 marks from the 15 available.

01 – Students found this a very straightforward question. Where students gave an example rather than a type (as the question asked) credit was given.

02 – Almost every student gained at least one mark for this question; most gaining two or more marks. Responses tended to be one-sided, either focusing on the value of art in worship, or on its merits outside of worship – either way could secure the full marks. In three mark evaluative questions, it is not necessary to answer from more than one point of view.

03 – Most students gained at least three marks from this question. The five mark level was a good differentiator at the top end of student responses, and allowed the stronger students to clearly show the depth of their knowledge and understanding.

04 – A number of students struggled with this question as they had no example to use. Schools and colleges should ensure students have studied examples of every genre in each topic of the exam. Some students wrote about the graffiti artist or described the piece, both of which missed the point of the question which was the religious message in it.

05 – Responses to this question were good. A number of students excelled, writing fluently and in depth about the idea of inspiration versus devotion or revelation. The strongest answers used examples to illustrate their points, for example, Michelangelo and the reason he painted the Sistine Chapel. Where schools and colleges can develop the habitual use of real examples in all their students' answers, they will see better marks achieved.

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## Question 2 – Religion and Architecture

Students made particularly good use of the picture stimulus in this question. That the text introducing the image stated it was an edifice, meant that students had something to write about in 07 and 10 if they were struggling to know what an edifice was, and also could give an example of a different architectural genre for 06.

06 – Most students had no problem with this question. Where a student failed to secure the mark, it was always because they gave an edifice as their answer.

07 – Most students gained at least two of the available marks on this question. Many made good use of the picture stimulus to help build their answer in terms of worship and visual impact. Schools and colleges should encourage and teach students to study images and picture stimuli as these will help either to jog memory or stimulate ideas. The better responses used examples to illustrate the points being made. Where students struggled, it tended to be as a result of over-emphasising graveyards rather than the edifices which are found in some. The topic allows for graveyard architecture as a separate genre, and so study of edifices should be focused into buildings such as cathedrals, which will prevent confusion between the two genres.

08 – Over half of all students gained full marks on this question. Responses were wide-ranging, though usually to argue only one side. Good answers explored the sanctity of places of worship, and the potential other uses by both secular and faith communities. It is impressive to see the breadth of ideas students have, often going far beyond the three marks available.

09 - This was a straightforward question for most students, with the vast majority gaining at least two marks. A very popular choice was Christ the Redeemer in Rio, but many other examples were also used. It is clear that schools and colleges have prepared students very well for questions on statues. Some students wrote about the sculptor or described the piece, both of which missed the point of the question which was the religious message in it.

10 – Again students made use of the stimulus picture in their answer. A number of students used specific examples to illustrate the points they made, which enriched their answer and pushed them to the higher part of the mark range. Where students struggled with the question, it was usually because of a difficulty with the term 'edifice', which is where using the stimulus was a great help as it gave something to reference, but also reminded students of such buildings as Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.

## Question 3 – Religion and Literature

The stimulus would have provided a good source of ideas and exemplification for several questions on this topic; few students made use of it. Schools and colleges should encourage exploration and use of the stimulus.

11 – Students coped well with this question.

12 – The vast majority of students gained two or more marks on this question. There was some good exploration by a number of students of whether many holy books would class as the words of God, as well as discussion of what might rank high enough to be classed as religious literature.

13 – The majority of students scored three or more marks on this question and gave a wide range of reasons. The best responses gave numerous reasons to explain the importance of holy books ranging from their holy origins to their value as a historical record to their use in worship. A number also wrote sophisticated arguments for importance on a personal level to individuals.

14 – Students gave a range of impacts of fiction books. Many referred to obvious specific examples such as CS Lewis 'Narnia', but there were some broader references so that JK Rowling's Harry Potter made an appearance in answers. The breadth of examples is very encouraging.

15 – A number of students read this question as referring to holy books and their contents. Whilst this gained credit, the question was open to a much broader interpretation. The best responses explored the meaning of 'good' as well as what counted as a religious story (focused on religion, or religion incidental). Where students are encouraged to approach questions with the thought 'It depends what you mean by...', they often give more wide-ranging answers, gaining higher credit.

#### **Question 4 – Religion and Media**

For this topic, it is helpful to students to know current news/events, as these can be used in answering questions on TV, satellite, radio and Internet. Exploring how each promotes or denigrates religion is an important area of study for the Topic.

16 – Students had no problem with this question.

17 – The vast majority of students gained at least two marks on this question and had much to say. It is good to see the number of students who habitually explain or illustrate the points they make, as this is certainly the route to higher marks and grades. Responses tended to applaud the internet for the accessibility of information; a few spoke about the problems/confusion caused by it.

18 – Again most students performed well on this question. Responses tended to cover the spectrum of potential impact from no impact because of disdain or disinterest, to finding the articles mildly interesting, to being converted by them. There seemed to be plenty for students to write about.

19 – Students were able to give many clear ideas on how radio promotes religion, and a good number of examples of how this happens. A small number were side-tracked into writing about how religious radio makes no difference or actually turns people away, which was not worth any credit.

20 – Students presented a very negative attitude to the media, seeing it as promoting everything bad and having no interest in good news. In this vein, it was usual to see a strong argument in support of the statement. Recent news items regarding the murder of Lee Rigby and the problems of paedophiles within the priesthood were well used to demonstrate how the media reflects only bad news. Having said that, the opposing view came through well, though less strongly, with references to good deeds by religious groups and individuals.

### **Question 5 – Religion and Music**

21 – Most students gave a creditable answer to this question.

22 – Students could give long lists of reasons why some believers write religious music, including using a lot of technical language such as inspiration, revelation and devotion. However, explanation of these reasons was done less well, and few used examples to illustrate their points, in contrast to how they had done in other questions. Given that in previous years, many students have found and used their own examples in this topic, this was surprising.

23 – Most students used at least one example to illustrate that the statement was obviously untrue. In this way, not only did they make a point but they illustrated it and exemplified it as a matter of course. Many gave the reasoning that it depended which particular mainstream music you chose to consider.

24 - Answers to this question tended to be limited to the power of music to enhance enjoyment, aid memory and learning. This was enough to gain full marks, but it was noticeable that answers were much less wide-ranging than for other questions. Music put to scripture is a given genre, and as such schools and colleges need to explore why it happens as well as what it is and its message.

25 – Many of the most successful responses questioned the term ‘best’, and used this as a springboard to explore the statement in depth. There was much discussion of the origins of religious and any other music, in which students ably demonstrated good understanding of key terms.

### **Question 6 – Religion in Contemporary Society**

26 – Most students gained a mark for their answer to this question.

27 – Most students could argue the pros and cons of the statement, often seeing it as a duty for religious believers to attend public acts of worship. A very small number misinterpreted the question to mean worshipping in public, though this did gain some credit – the question was about the ‘personal’ or ‘corporate’ worship debate.

28 – A number of students confused the term ‘faith commune’ with ‘monastic community’, but were still able to pick up marks as there are some similar reasons. The strongest answers understood the term clearly and had examples such as Taize and Corrymeela to draw on; they gave faith reasons around strengthening faith and a spiritual recharge, as well as social reasons, such as meeting like-minded people, and also the escape from a secular society.

29 – Most students could give several ideas about what it means to belong to a monastery; most commonly the commitment made and the rules which govern lives.

30 – This question had the highest number of full mark responses of all the evaluative questions. The strongest responses explored the intention of the wearer as well as the idea of what blasphemy is, with many questioning the type of symbol being worn. For the most part, students wrote about Christian symbols being more acceptable to wear (and not in blasphemy) than the symbols of other religions, and there was much discussion about the use of crosses as part of 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](#)