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GCSE

# Religious Studies B

Unit 6: Worship and Key Beliefs  
Report on the Examination

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## General Comments

This was the fourth time of examining this unit. Although there were fewer entries this year, the standard of students' responses in general was most encouraging. This was most clearly seen in answers to the six mark evaluation questions. To develop an argument and make effective use of one's religious knowledge and understanding in supporting it, is more challenging than the mere recall of information and also the explanation of worship and key beliefs. Many schools and colleges continue to prepare students well in these skills. As usual the best answers showed evidence of these skills but also much originality and flair.

A new challenge this year was the addition of four marks for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar. The majority of students proved themselves well prepared for maximising their performance in this respect: more than 60% achieved all four marks.

Unlike last year, there were no AO1 parts worth six marks which required answers about two religions. As these questions consist, in effect, of three marks for each religion, they cannot test the higher level of knowledge and understanding required for a four mark part. Therefore all six questions this year were designed to include a four mark part which could be answered using one or more religions. This greater degree of challenge in AO1 was balanced by an accessible two mark part which required some knowledge of two religions, i.e. one mark for each religion. The performance of students was not adversely affected by the change of pattern.

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.

The most common **rubric infringement** was attempting more than four questions. When this occurred, all the questions were marked and the marks for the best four were counted. Although it is fine for students to answer whole questions in a different order from that in the paper – question 4 before question 3, for example – it is potentially confusing for the student and the marker when they answer the parts within a question in a different order, such as 04 before 03. The confusion is greatest when students do not label their answers clearly with the number of the part they are answering. There were a few who failed to do this.

## Individual Questions

The purpose in describing the kinds of answers that gained credit for each question, and those that did not, is to amplify the mark scheme. It is useful to know this because there are common pitfalls to avoid and good answers can guide schools and colleges in how to teach a particular topic. However the mark scheme, which is a published document, gives full details how each of the parts was marked.

## Places of Worship

**01** Most students explained that religious buildings were used for prayer or worship and gave one or two examples (church, mosque, temple etc.). However, for a full answer, they needed also to explain that they were used for community gatherings of one or another. These could include use for weddings or funerals and for teaching children.

**02** Most students argued either for or against the statement; fewer gave a two-sided response (such as “Both the inside and the outside of a religious building are equally important” followed by reasons for the importance of each). Either approach was credit-worthy and yielded good answers. It was noticeable, however, that some students were side-tracked into a discussion of the relative merits of simple and ornate decoration in religious buildings: unless this was clearly related to the importance or otherwise of the building’s interior or exterior, no credit could be gained by this.

**03** The majority of students knew a symbol from each of two religions. Some described the Islamic symbol simply as a moon: only descriptions that included the star as well received the credit.

**04** The best answers used at least one example of a symbol and explained its meaning for worshippers in a religious building. Vague answers about symbols providing focus to worship and identifying the place of worship, while they gained some credit, did not demonstrate “sound knowledge and understanding” (Level 3).

**05** Nearly all the students who answered this (“Places of Worship” was the most popular question on the paper), were able to engage intelligently with the debate about how much money is spent. Again, there was a tendency to stray into another debate about simplicity versus ornamentation, but providing this point was clearly linked to the money spent, it was creditable. The arguments on both sides were well supported, many students using relevant quotations from holy books to support them.

## Worship

**06** There was a better understanding of the term “aids to worship” than was shown by the answers to a related question last year. However, some students failed to gain full credit because they merely **described** one or two aids to worship without **explaining** how they are used. Those who mentioned the example of prayer beads, as many did, and indicated that they were used to focus the concentration in prayer or meditation by the worshipper passing each bead through their fingers, were more likely to go on and score full marks.

**07** Most students knew a leader of worship in each of two religions. However, quite a few confused this role with that of the founder of the religion or even the one that the believers came to worship. Such answers could not gain credit.

**08** Most students could answer this part very well. A very few took it as an AO2 question and gave a contrary view but this did not receive credit. The most common level 3 responses explained three points, such as the greater convenience of worship at home, the more personal feel to the worship and the absence of other people who might distract the worshipper. Some developed their answer by referring to Jesus's teaching about going into a room and shutting the door to pray.

**09** Most students argued in favour of the statement but a few disagreed, citing other things such as following religious teaching as more important. Either approach was credit-worthy, providing it was supported by reasons. Referring to the command to pray five times a day in Islam or the stress-relieving benefits of meditation in Buddhism, was a good way to make a case for the overriding importance of worship.

**10** Only a few students failed to engage with this debate. Most gave good reasons to support both sides of the argument. The alternative to "only religious people" was interpreted in different ways: some envisaged that non-practising members of a religion were meant, others that atheists were in mind. Both approaches were credit-worthy.

## **Pilgrimage**

**11** Only responses that **described** a place of pilgrimage gained full credit. Some students knew the story behind the pilgrimage and the reasons why the pilgrims went there but this could not gain credit unless it was linked specifically to features of the place. The actions of the pilgrims were credited if they were specific to the place, such as circling the Ka'aba, but not if they were general descriptions applicable to many places of worship in the religion, such as meditating, celebrating communion and so on.

**12** Most students knew a key event that took place at a pilgrimage site in each of two religions. The most common errors were "Jesus was born in Jerusalem" and "Muhammad resisted Satan at Mina."

**13** The best answers used at least one example of a famous person in religious history and explained why pilgrims remembered him or her on a pilgrimage. Three reasons were often given: because the person was associated with the place of pilgrimage, because he or she was an inspiration to the pilgrims and in order to feel as though they were walking in his or her footsteps.

**14** Equally strong arguments were utilised for and against the statement. Some good responses argued that both remembering the event and going to the place where it happened were important because together they made the best kind of pilgrimage. Many students used reasons why pilgrimage is beneficial generally to argue that it was more important to go to the place. This was a valid approach providing that they were contrasted with merely remembering the event that happened there.

**15** There were two different approaches to the question, both of which produced good answers. In one, students argued for and against the statement as a factual claim, describing on the one hand, the decline in religious observance and, on the other, the millions who still go on pilgrimage. The other approach argued whether or not pilgrimage **should** be as important now as it was in the past, citing on the one hand the command to go on the Hajj in Islam and, on the other, the relative ease with which a pilgrimage can now be completed.

### Origins and Beliefs

**16** This question was answered very well in many cases, the best answers showing evidence of selectivity and a focus on three or four events which were “key”. Jesus, Muhammad and the Buddha were the figures which featured most often.

**17** Most students engaged well with this part but a few did not understand the term “founder”. Responses that argued God is more important because he sent the prophets and founders, gained credit because he can be considered a person.

**18** Only answers which focused on the importance of believing in God gained full credit. Some students misread the question as one about the importance of God. The best answers explained that believing in God brought hope, enabled a believer to be guided and made sense of all the other beliefs in a religion.

**19** Most students knew a belief about the afterlife in each of two religions.

**20** This question proved challenging as it was relatively easy to conclude an argument against the statement by agreeing with the statement: the more important the afterlife is perceived to be, the more important this life becomes as stepping stone to it. The arguments in favour of the statement were generally easier to formulate.

### Practices and Belonging

**21** A common error was to describe a wedding rather than explain why marriage is important. It was considered credit-worthy to describe rules about marriage as long as they illustrated the importance of the institution. For example, rules forbidding adultery show how marriage is valued.

**22** There was a tendency with some students to explain why believers pray or meditate, rather than sticking to “how”. The best answers used an example or two from each of two religions, such as Christians bowing their heads or raising their hands and Muslims kneeling and prostrating.

**23** This was answered very well by most students, the majority by attacking the statement. Two reasons to show they were not a waste of time were sufficient as long as one of them was developed. The relaxing benefits of meditation and the need to pray to make contact with God were often cited.

**24** Most students knew a food law from each of two religions, including the fact that there are no food laws in Christianity.

**25** The responses to this question were some of the most interesting on the paper, the arguments on each side being equally balanced. Many good answers argued that it depends on what the rule is that was broken: some rules in a religion are also part of the law of the land, whereas others are relatively minor or out of date.

## **Authority**

**26** There were many approaches to this question, all of them credit-worthy as long as they focused on how the holy books are used. Some dealt with the physical aspects of reading the book or scroll. Others described the occasions on which it might be read. A few explained the role of holy books as an authority in matters of life and belief. However, there were students who wrote in general about the contents and historical background of the books: these answers were not credited unless they linked these to the use of the books today.

**27** Students who understood the term “interpreted” could argue equally well either for or against the statement. There were some who made a good case for both personal interpretation and the assistance of religious leaders being important. However, quite a few students understood what is involved in “interpreted “ as no more than reading the holy books: these answers could not gain full credit.

**28** Most students (over 80%) knew who the founders of two religions were.

**29** As with 27, much depended on whether students knew the meaning of “tradition”. Good responses explained that tradition needs to be learnt so that it can be passed on, that it connects the present day with the origins of the religion and that to show obedience and respect to God, believers must understand all that is required of them. However, quite a few students gave only vague answers worth one or two marks, because they did not know what tradition involved.

**30** There were many good arguments utilised on both sides of this debate. Some of the reasons could even be used to make opposite points. For example, the need for leaders to have an in-depth knowledge of the religion could be cited either as a reason why only some people qualified, or as an argument that anyone who was prepared to make the necessary study of the religion, including women, could become a leader. Both approaches were credit-worthy.

## **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](#)