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GCSE

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES A

8062/16 Paper 1: Judaism  
Report on the Examination

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## General comments

There were over 11,000 entries for this component. Immediate feedback after the students had sat the examination indicated that centres felt the examination was fair and accessible.

A smaller number of students ran out of time on this paper this year, and it was good to see that the advice given last year had been taken on board. Nevertheless, it would still be helpful to remind students to be aware of the time and that they need to spend 50 minutes on each paper, in order to do both papers justice. Equally, it would be helpful to continue to remind students to spend roughly 25 minutes on each question.

Students should also be aware of the spread of marks. As AO2 is worth 50% of the marks on the paper, they should spend roughly half the time on these questions. There were more students this year who wrote an appropriate amount for 1 and 2 mark questions and centres are to be commended on helping students to understand how much to write and how long to spend on each question.

Many students were able to use clear Jewish teachings. However, some middle and lower ability students tended to confuse Christian and Jewish teachings and beliefs. Question 01.4, on two views about the Messiah in Judaism, tended to generate such responses, as did the question on the Jewish marriage ceremony (02.4) where some students wrote about the Christian ceremony. While students need to develop a solid knowledge base in both religions they study, they also need to be able to distinguish between them.

We also saw some fundamental misunderstandings of denominations within Judaism, particularly when students attempted to discuss progressive Judaism. There were some generalisations about progressive Jews not following mitzvot at all, for instance.

The quality and accuracy of textual references was very marked across questions 01.4 and 02.4. Some able students had a superb breadth of knowledge and were correctly able to employ textual references and quotes. Other students were able to correctly identify Jewish teachings and ideas, but did not always link them to sources. Some struggled to offer any teachings, particularly on 02.4, because they went off topic.

The AO2 marking criteria appeared to differentiate effectively, with each of the 4 levels accounting for a significant proportion of students. However, there does appear to have been a positive shift in the numbers of students getting levels 2 and 3, which would indicate that teachers are helping students to understand the criteria.

Students need to appreciate that using religious teachings in a descriptive rather than evaluative fashion will not enable them to reach the higher levels in AO2 questions. Some students had good AO1 knowledge, and wanted to write what they knew, but failed to evaluate. This was particularly the case for question 02.5 on the Shabbat.

Some students are making use of writing frames, but it is important that these are suited to the particular paper and type of question concerned as well as to the ability of the student. Some students had been trained in using writing frames that encouraged them to argue back and forth, evaluating whether the argument was weak or strong, but less able students tended to get lost in this structure and failed to address the target of the question when they used such an approach. Other students confused the rubric with that on thematic papers and attempted to include non-religious arguments in their essays, which are not creditable in the papers on the specific religions.

This year saw better application of religious teachings, for which centres are to be commended.

### **Question 01.1**

Question 01.1 asked for the word that describes God as maker of the world. Most students were familiar with the key vocabulary required, and so the question got them off to a comfortable start.

### **Question 01.2**

Question 01.2 asked students to give two promises God made to Abraham. Many students identified correct ideas; most were aware of Abraham being promised a son, many descendants, land and blessings. Less able students muddled Abraham with Moses and therefore gave incorrect uncreditable responses. Marks were evenly spread.

### **Question 01.3**

Question 01.3 asked students to explain two ways in which the nature of God as Judge influences Jews today. Provided that students had read the question carefully and responded to the word 'Judge' in the question, they had little difficulty in getting up to the 4 marks by explaining how Jews would follow God's laws and how they would fear a poor judgement in the life to come etc. Around a third of students therefore gained full marks. Most students gained some marks on this question, although some marks were dropped because they simply repeated ideas. Others wrote at length about one way in which it influences Jews, and mentioned the other way only in passing, and therefore did not gain the additional point for elaboration. A number of students went off topic on this question, preferring to discuss God's omnipotence, omnibenevolence and so on, and so about a sixth of students gained no marks despite attempting the question. This might be addressed by familiarising students with the command words in questions and practising looking for the key words or concepts.

### **Question 01.4**

Question 01.4 asked students to explain two views about the Messiah in Judaism. There were very few clear textual references apparent in the responses. Around a quarter of responses gained full marks. The majority of the marks awarded for religious content were for mention of the 'anointed one'. The majority of students were able to refer to Orthodox ideas about the Messiah, mentioning links to King David, the land of Israel and the restoration of Jerusalem. This was successfully contrasted with progressive ideas about a Messianic age and a time of peace, and the idea it will be a time of harmony and people working together to the same end. Around two thirds of students gained 2 marks or more which suggests that most students were able to answer the question with some accuracy.

### **Question 01.5**

Question 01.5 asked students to evaluate whether the most important mitzvot are between man and God. There was some evidence of an improvement in the AO2 response this year, to the benefit of middle ability students.

Level 1 responses were often characterised by an understanding of the term mitzvot as rules, but no understanding that there were different categories in relation to man and man, and man and God. The quality of reasoning was very simple, and responses were often short.

One indication of a Level 2 on this question was the simplicity of arguments offered, or brevity of response. Students tended to be able to construct a basic argument about rules in relation to God being most important because the whole religion was about following God, and maybe refer to the Shema. Typical arguments against the statement included the importance of 'Loving thy Neighbour', obligations to take care of the planet, and sometimes the importance of charity. Some students also tended to veer off target and get into AO1 type descriptions in relation to mitzvot.

Students achieving Level 3 on this question, were clearly aware that they needed to select religious material to exemplify their discussion, and presented plenty of valid points. However in some cases, the writing frame that they had been taught tripped them up, and led to circular or irrelevant arguments. Sometimes attempts to include non-religious arguments, which the thematic paper demands, prevented them from writing a Level 4 answer.

The Level 4 responses to this question stood out because of the quality and sophistication of discussion presented. More able students were able to discuss the nature of Judaism as a monotheistic faith, clearly underpinned with relevant Jewish references to the Shema, the first Commandment, the ban on idolatry etc. They were able to contrast this with the obligation to take care of other people, love thy neighbour and other appropriate arguments in support of other views. Some used the structure of the Ten Commandments to exemplify their points, and were therefore able to identify behavior towards others that would be considered sinful or wrong. Typically better conclusions tended to say that observing both kinds of mitzvot were important to be considered to be living a good Jewish life.

### **SPaG**

A majority of students gained a full 3 marks for SPaG, and it was clear this was well-deserved. Of those scoring less than 3, Very short responses tended to be a common factor. It was clear that centres had enlisted additional support for students where appropriate, and word-processed responses were evident. As a result, there were very few illegible scripts this year. The performance on SPaG mirrored the previous year's performance.

### **Question 02.1**

Question 02.1 proved to be straightforward, with most students able to identify the Bimah as the reading platform in the synagogue.

### **Question 02.2**

This question asked students to give two books of the Tenakh. This was more difficult than expected to mark, as it proved necessary to accept responses which treated divisions of the Tenakh as books in the collective sense, and so therefore Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim were allowed, although there were some very interesting attempts at spelling these terms. Many students gave Torah and then a named book of the Tenakh. Some incorrectly offered Talmud. Nevertheless, most students earned at least one mark, with the majority scoring both.

### **Question 02.3**

This question asked students to explain two contrasting ways a Jewish family might keep dietary laws in the home. Many students made a good job of this question; there was good discussion about separating milk and meat laws, and knowledge was then supported with a relevant quote, although some of these quotes were more accurate than others. Other students were able to talk

about Kosher certification, and methods of slaughter. Most students obtained at least two marks, and around half achieved full marks. Some students struggled, however, and wanted to discuss different approaches to eating away from home or a perceived lack of access to Kosher foods, but this was not the thrust of the question. Not following the Kosher food laws at home was not credited since this was not a way 'a Jewish family might keep dietary laws in the home.'

#### **Question 02.4**

This proved to be the most challenging question on the paper, with the quality of responses varying widely. The question asked students to explain two ways in which the marriage ceremony helped Jews to understand marriage. Some took the question and wanted to write about everything they knew about a Jewish marriage without any attempt to link to ways in which it helps Jews to understand marriage. Such answers were likely not to achieve more than 2 marks. Others wanted to discuss the engagement period before a Jewish marriage which did not form part of the question. A number of students became very confused and started writing about the Christian wedding ceremony, discussing vows. Others wanted to discuss how the Torah would be read in the ceremony in order to attempt to include 'forced' religious teaching. Better answers were able to discuss the bedeken, circling of the bride and groom, importance of the ring, responsibilities in the Ketubah, and breaking of the glass beneath the foot. However, some also confused the breaking of the glass with a Greek wedding and started to describe plate breaking.

This question required reference to an accurate sacred writing, belief or teaching. The majority of 5-mark responses linked the teaching from Genesis 2:24 about becoming one flesh. However these were relatively rare, with less than a fifth of students gaining all 5 marks.

#### **Question 02.5**

This question required students to evaluate whether 'Celebrating Shabbat at home is more important than celebrating Shabbat at the synagogue.'

Level 1 responses were typically short and the quality of reasoning was very simple. Both Level 1 and Level 2 responses were very descriptive of how the Shabbat is observed by Orthodox Jews, so the feel of the response was largely AO1, and there was little attempt to evaluate. There were good descriptions about what Jews do to observe the Shabbat, but the counter argument tended to involve seeing leaving the home to worship in the synagogue as 'work' or similar arguments

Level 3 responses included much correct knowledge and understanding as well as some evaluation. Often what prevented these students from achieving Level 4 was a lack of coherence in bringing their arguments together to present a reasoned conclusion based on the evidence. Conclusions tended to be weaker at this level, with reference to Jews making a personal choice about whether observing Shabbat at home or in the synagogue was most important; or global statements about both settings being important being in Judaism.

Again, Level 4 responses stood out because of the quality and sophistication of discussion presented. More-able students were able to discuss the importance and relevance of observing Shabbat at home, linking to the importance of family, an awareness of the special atmosphere, the importance of teaching the faith to children at home, etc. They were able to illustrate their argument with excellent subject knowledge about the key features of what went on in the Jewish home, discussing welcoming the Shabbat, the family meal etc. This was contrasted with arguments about how it was important to celebrate as a community, the presence of the minyan, the importance of the rabbi and the spiritual atmosphere in the synagogue. Conclusions at this level

were stronger, and more thoughtful. Many concluded by talking about the importance of celebrating in both settings, whereas others mentioned that there was more of an inclusive atmosphere at home as the whole family were involved, and this was the setting where more rest could be enjoyed.

It should be noted that examiners are aware and appreciative of all the meticulous preparation that teachers put into preparing students for the examination. Centres are to be commended for their hard work and dedication, shown clearly in the many excellent responses which are always a privilege to read.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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