
GCSE

Religious Studies A

8062/2A Thematic Studies
Report on the Examination

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General Introduction to the November Series

It has not been a normal year because of the Covid 19 pandemic. This resulted in the summer exam series being cancelled and the introduction of the November examination for Religious Studies. With so much school being lost this year it was difficult for students to prepare for these exams. This coupled with an entry of a few hundred compared to the usual well over 100,000 in the summer exams makes comparisons for this subject very difficult. The evidence base is obviously much less but nevertheless sufficient for this report to be useful.

Overview of Entry

The entry for this qualification was very much smaller than that expected had the examination taken place on the scheduled date in May 2020.

No specific section proved to be more difficult than another as there were only a limited number of unattempted parts to the questions. Several did, however, attempt to answer all six questions instead of the required four. This usually meant that they ran out of time or did not write in depth answers for the 4, 5 and 12 mark questions. This year the part 3 questions included the instruction 'In your answer you should refer to the main religious tradition of Great Britain and one or more other religious traditions.' This is not the instruction every year and it did cause some students to lose marks as they did not identify the main religious tradition as Christianity.

Overall some wrote general sociological type answers to the questions and lost marks for lack of specific religious content. Others included some excellent references to sacred writings and religious teachings and this frequently enabled them to score high marks. By far the most popular religious teachings included by students came from Christianity and Islam but none of the six major faiths were ignored.

Comments on Individual Questions

Theme A: Relationships and families.

This was a very popular question with a large number of students attempting this section.

- 01.1 The majority of students gave the correct answer of Polygamy but most of those who didn't chose the Monogamy option.
- 01.2 This was well answered by the majority of students who gave two accurate teachings, such as 'God hates divorce' (Malachi) or 'Of all legal things the one Allah hates most is divorce.' (Qur'an) or 'The throne of Allah shakes due to divorce.' (Hadith). Answers often mentioned abuse within marriage, adultery and the marriage vows ('Until death do us part.').
- 01.3 A minority of students made reference to adultery which in the context of sex before marriage was not credited. Many answers mentioned that sex before marriage maybe acceptable to some Christians or Buddhists if it is within a loving relationship and may lead to marriage. The contrast usually emphasised that most religions forbid it and regard it as a sin. Some developed their reason with reference to potential pregnancy.
- 01.4 Many answers related entirely to same sex relationships rather than same sex parents often with quotes from the Bible and Qur'an. Some credit was given to such answers but many of the best answers also included information about the bringing up of children (both positive and negative effects) and the provision of role models for children.
- 01.5 Most students correctly took this as an opportunity to give differing points of view about gender discrimination. Answers often contrasted ideas about equality with designated

gender roles, and gave religious justifications to enhance their answer, such as we are all made in God's image or 'There is no Jew nor Gentile, slave nor freeman, male nor female, all are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28) or that we are equal 'like the teeth of a comb'. By way of contrast, some referred to Paul's teaching that women should be silent in church. A minority focussed their response on discrimination against trans-gender people which was accepted as a valid interpretation of the question. It is pleasing to report that answers displayed sensitivity and thoughtfulness about the issue.

Theme B: Religion and life

This was the most popular choice by the students and was generally well answered.

- 02.1 Most knew that the answer was dominion.
- 02.2 This question was well answered with a variety of reasons being specified such as permission was given by God to Noah and his descendents to allow the eating of meat and food from animals provides health benefits.
- 02.3 A small number of students did not understand the term euthanasia but most were able to say that religions generally oppose its use because of the sanctity of life and the fact that it is illegal in the UK. Some might support euthanasia if a person is terminally ill and suffering greatly in order to end suffering.
- 02.4 Most students were able to gain good marks for this question about the use of natural resources. Many explained the ideas of dominion and stewardship and referenced it with appropriate quotes from sacred writings.
- 02.5 Although this was a very accessible question, some wrote about evolution rather than the Big Bang theory and the origins of the universe. Those that focused correctly on the statement used such arguments in support of the statement as God caused the Big Bang as a way of forming the universe or that most scientists believe that the universe had a beginning. So was God the first cause? On the other hand, the Big Bang theory does not need a supernatural cause as the universe could have come into being by accident and the creation stories are myths so it is impossible to believe both the Big Bang and Creationist ideas.

Theme C: The existence of God and revelation

This was the least popular question on the paper. It appeared that some answered this section although they had not studied the topics but wished to respond to all the questions on the paper.

- 03.1 Over two-thirds of those who attempted this question knew that the answer was Personal.
- 03.2 There were a wide variety of answers to this question concerning arguments which claim to prove the existence of God. These included a variety of philosophical answers such as the design or first cause arguments to arguments from experience and beliefs such as the resurrection of Jesus.
- 03.3 The instruction for this question and all part three questions included 'In your answer you should refer to the main religious tradition of Great Britain'. Many did not do this and so lost half the marks which were available. Most that answered fully gave an example of a person like St. Paul or St. Bernadette and their visions and contrasted it with the idea that visions are hallucinations and not real.
- 03.4 Although several students got this question right, some were confused with the other 'omni...s' and most did not refer to a source of religious belief and teaching in their answer thus losing out on the source mark.

- 03.5 This question concerning proof for the existence of God proved to be a good differentiator. Most students were able to attempt it and some of the answers were excellent with a higher percentage getting a level 4 than for any of the other part 5 questions.

Theme D: Religion, peace and conflict

This was another popular section and often brought very good responses.

- 04.1 Apart from a few students who gave Forgiveness as their answer, the large majority correctly identified Justice as being the right answer.
- 04.2 A well answered question with most earning 2 marks. Answers included reasons such as terrorism causes the death of innocent people, it is caused by hatred which is one of the three poisons, it is against the concept of the sanctity of life or ahimsa and it is illegal.
- 04.3 Some forgot to mention Christianity as an acknowledgement that it is the main religion in the UK and some were not sure what was meant by pacifism. Several wrote that many religious people believe that pacifism is right because killing can never be justified and used the Quakers as an example of people who believe in pacifism. This was contrasted by the belief that sometimes war is necessary and can be justified.
- 04.4 There was a wide variety of answers to this question. Many included reference to the Just War criteria. Popular points included it may be seen as right for religious believers to fight if there is a just reason for a war or if the war has a just cause eg. to defend their country or there is a good intention eg to overthrow an evil dictator. Some students did not provide a reference to sacred writings of another source of religious belief.
- 04.5 Many effectively contrasted the destructive effects of weapons of mass destruction with their possession as a deterrent. Some did not appear to understand what weapons of mass destruction are and wrote about weapons in general. Those that clearly understood the power of weapons of mass destruction included that they may kill thousands of innocent people and wildlife and cause immense suffering if they are ever used. Several mentioned the effects of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan which brought an end to the Second World War but contrasted it with their possession has brought peace in Europe in recent years.

Theme E: Religion, crime and punishment

This section was attempted by the majority of students with varying success.

- 05.1 Over 90% of the students got the correct answer for this question.
- 05.2 There was a wide variety of reasons given for why some religious people might break the law including through ignorance, poverty, mental illness, or the law was seen as unjust or against their faith.
- 05.3 A minority mixed up corporal punishment with the death penalty (capital punishment) and some did not refer to Christianity (the main religion in Britain). Many contrasted the idea that corporal punishment is degrading with the belief in some faiths that it acts as a good deterrent.
- 05.4 This was generally well answered with most students obtaining four or five marks. Many referred to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in the answer but some lost a mark by failing to do so. Many referred to the Lord's Prayer, Jesus' conversation with Peter about forgiving seventy times seven or Jesus' prayer on the cross asking God to forgive his crucifiers.
- 05.5 Many answers to this question lacked development with relatively few getting to level 4. The question gave the opportunity for students to evaluate the relative value of each aim of

punishment and some did this but there was a lack of reference to any religious teachings in many answers.

Theme F: Religion, human rights and social justice

Less than half the students attempted this section although it was sometimes well answered.

- 06.1 Most students were able to gain the mark for this multi-choice question concerning social justice
- 06.2 This was the least well answered part 2 question on the paper. Many did not know the meaning of positive discrimination and gave examples of when a person suffers because of discrimination.
- 06.3 Although this question was well answered by many, several missed the last part of the question and simply wrote about the different roles of women in society rather than their status in religion. Some failed to refer to Christianity and as this was the question which included the instruction 'In your answer you should refer to the main religious tradition of Great Britain' they were unable to get more than a maximum of two marks.
- 06.4 This question about why people should give money to charity was generally very well answered included a reference to sacred writings or a source of authority even if it was only Jesus said, 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' The best answers referred to technical terms such as metta, karma, zakah, khums, tzedakah and sewa.
- 06.5 This question brought a variety of responses. Although few achieved level 4, many realised a level 3. Many were able to use evidence from sacred writings to back up their arguments. Many quoted 'No man is to have sexual relations with another man; God hates that.' (Leviticus 18:22) or God created everyone equally or 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for all are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). Most chose to refer to Christian, Islamic or Jewish beliefs in their answer.

Concluding Remarks

Most scored 2 or 3 for SPaG although some are still having difficulty in spelling key words such as 'believe'. However, it was clear that nearly all the students had taken the exam seriously and tried their best.

Perhaps it was more evident than normal that in some instances the exam technique wasn't quite as fine tuned as usual. Marks were lost by several by not referring to Christianity in the Part 3 questions thus limiting their mark to a maximum of two out of four. For the five mark Part 4 questions, many did not specifically mention where the belief or teaching had originated. This meant that they lost out on the source mark. Maybe this was partly the result of the months off of school because of the pandemic. On the other hand many were able to demonstrate their thinking skills in their evaluation where nearly everyone gave arguments for and against the statement and came to a conclusion. In some instances more reference to religion would have meant that they would have received a level 3 rather than a level 2 in the evaluation questions.

For this series, in addition to the mark scheme, a general marking guidance document was provided to examiners across GCSE Religious Studies specifications to support marking. This document is available via Secure Key Materials for teachers should they wish to use it to support their marking of mock examinations.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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