

GCSE
**RELIGIOUS STUDIES (SHORT
COURSE)**

8061/5 Paper 5: Themes
Report on the Examination

8061
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General comments

This examination provided a challenge for students of all levels of ability. Many seemed to enjoy the opportunity to show what they had learnt. Students were generally well prepared in examination technique and most coped well with the requirement to refer to the main religion in Great Britain for 01.3 and 02.3 as Christianity. A maximum mark of two was awarded to answers that did not include at least one belief or teaching from Christianity. Most provided the required contrast and many scored all four marks on both questions. In 01.4 and 02.4, where a reference to sacred writings or a source of religious authority was required, unfortunately many students did not mention the source, especially in 02.4. This is a requirement for the ‘source mark’.

As in some other units, evaluation skills were mixed, with many still relying on formulae or writing frames to structure their answer. It was common to see students giving three reasons for and three reasons against, adding religious teaching of mixed relevance where they thought it necessary, before giving their own opinion in the conclusion. Some gave a brief evaluation of the strength or weakness of each argument but usually this didn’t really add any real insight or reasoning to the answer. Their apparent need to find three arguments for and against led to some weak points and very superficial reasoning for the third point (and in some cases the second point). Insisting on a specific number of points is not always helpful and if students are taught just to argue for and against, they miss out on more nuanced answers that an alternative rather than opposing view may provide for them. Whilst it is appreciated that using a technique such as this, or a writing frame such as PEE or DREARER, is helpful to students who find this style of question difficult, examiners formed the impression that some more able students were restricted by using it when maybe they could have earned more marks without it.

Although SPaG marks were not awarded on this paper, it is good to note that many students wrote with accuracy and fluency, using technical terms where required. However, for what seems like a growing proportion, their handwriting was extremely difficult to read either because it was very small, or because letter and word formation were really unclear and therefore really did obstruct meaning.

01.1

The multiple-choice question tested knowledge of a technical term (procreation) and over 90% of students answered it correctly.

01.2

This question, asking for knowledge of the role of parents in a religious family, was well done with around 8 out of 10 of students giving two correct answers. It was pleasing to see that many recognised the words 'religious family' in the question and gave answers such as raising children in their faith, teaching them the Bible or taking them to worship. Answers that did not have a specifically religious angle to them but which applied to any family, including religious families, such as protecting children and giving them food and drink, were also marked as correct.

01.3

Around 40% of students earned the full four marks. They tended to contrast either the Roman Catholic Church with a branch of the Protestant Church, or Christianity with Islam. Each of those choices was permitted and could earn a maximum of four marks. Where Christianity (or a group within Christianity) was not mentioned, the maximum mark was reduced to two marks, as it was if the two answers were not contrasting. A small minority appeared to have little knowledge about the meaning of the term 'contraception' and so scored no marks.

01.4

A large number of students wrote about same sex relationships rather than same sex marriage. This was allowed because the points and detail they gave were appropriate for both. Over 50% scored four or five marks, usually referring to Islam or the Roman Catholic Church not allowing it and citing Old Testament teachings to support their answer. They went on to use teachings such as 'Love your Neighbour' to justify why other groups in Christianity, often giving the example of Quakers, allow same sex marriage or allow same sex relationships but not marriage.

It is very important that students are made aware that to get this 'source mark', not only should they include a story or quotation / paraphrase of a teaching **but they also need to correctly identify the source**. This could be from a Holy Book, a specific part of a Holy Book, or from an authoritative religious figure such as Muhammad, Jesus or the Pope if they use a relevant quotation.

01.5

This question seemed to be welcomed by many and around 13% of students earned level 4 and nearly 50% earned levels 3 or 4. However, the statement referred to religious couples never divorcing and some students seemed to ignore the words 'religious' and 'never', writing a mainly secular answer with the odd religious teaching added. They did earn maximum level 2 if there was no religious content but needed to include beliefs and teachings within at least some of their reasoning to earn a higher level.

There seems to be a growing tendency to include atheism in AO2 questions. Responding to a statement such as this one, which has a clear religious focus, with reasoning described as atheist is unlikely to get much credit. Students seemed to assume that atheists all follow the same or similar social, moral or ethical code in the same way as religions tend to do, which is not really the case. Their rationale seems to be that if religions think one thing, then atheists think the opposite.

The question allows for non-religious views to be raised but these are only creditable if appropriate to the question. Perhaps Humanism may be a better choice than atheism if students want to give a non-religious or secular view.

As we have seen in the past, a proportion of students, approaching 10%, failed to attempt any part of question 2. It is possible that they may have run out of time although if this was the case, one would have expected at least some to attempt 02.1. It is possible that they were unaware that they had to answer the question or perhaps didn't look on in their booklet to find it, even though it is made clear in the booklet that they should 'answer both questions in this section'.

02.1

This examining of knowledge of a technical term (terrorism) seemed to cause few problems.

02.2

The large majority found this question, concerning ways in which victims of war are helped by religious organisations, straightforward and gave good answers. Many students gave several answers despite the question asking for just two. In such cases, only the first two are marked to avoid giving an unfair advantage to those who give a larger number to choose from.

02.3

Please see general remarks for 01.3 which also apply to this question.

Many students used Quakers as examples of pacifists, which was perfectly acceptable. The contrast was often Islam in its teaching of lesser jihad to defend the faith or Christianity in reference to the Crusades or Jesus asking the disciples how many swords they had and confirming with them that two were enough. Fighting in self-defence was also widely used as an acceptable contrast.

02.4

The word 'justice' in the question caused many difficulties. There were several interpretations. Many referred to the just war theory, criminal justice system, God being just in his judgement in the afterlife, retaliation, 'getting your own back on someone', self-defence and a wrong interpretation of 'an eye for an eye', often cited as Christian teaching (which Jesus disagreed with in the Sermon on the Mount). Consequently, only around 1 in 8 scored the full 5 marks.

02.5

The dual focus to this question of preparing for war being the best way to keep the peace was lost on some students. The phrase 'preparing for war' could be interpreted either as being on a personal level of an individual making the decision to fight if required or on a broader national level of countries stockpiling weapons and making it clear that they have them ready for use if required. Some students interpreted preparing for war as actually fighting, bringing in just war and holy war teachings in their reasoning. Many seemed to lose sight of 'the best way to keep the peace' and so lost some marks by neglecting an important element of the statement. Some wrote entirely secular answers and, despite good reasoning, could only earn a maximum of six marks.

Please also refer to general remarks about AO2 in the introduction and also in the comment to 01.5.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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