



GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES A

8062/17: Sikhism

Report on the Examination

8062

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General comments

Students performed well over the paper this year, with performance not dissimilar to that of 2019. Students found the questions straightforward, with very few questions not being attempted. The pre-release information was a clear aid to teachers and students, as the tailoring of teaching and revision work was evident in responses.

It was clear that for many students the pandemic meant that their handwriting and grammar was negatively impacted. A significant number of students wrote in a very untidy style, making legibility difficult; additionally, the simple use of full stops and sentencing has been forgotten by a not insubstantial number of students. The latter of these did affect SPaG marks. Students recognised the key terms of the questions were recognised, making their responses relevant in the main.

In the .4 (5-mark) questions, it is the case that students often do not name the source of authority for the teachings or concepts they relate. These questions require two points made and explained, with a fifth mark awarded for naming the actual source, e.g. Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak, etc. Whilst students freely use religious teachings, it is not so common for them to name the source, thus capping their response at 4 (from the 5 available).

Performance across the two 12-mark evaluation questions was similar, with the most common mark range for both being 6-10 (top of Level 2 to bottom of Level 4). It remains the case that students provide a lot of AO1 content in their 12-mark (AO2) questions as students described events in the lives of the Gurus (1.5), or the Amrit Sanskar (2.5). However, more clearly defined evaluative content was noticeable.

Teachers continue to drill technique in regard to the 12-mark AO2 questions, and this is very noticeable in the candidate responses. This has meant continued improvement in the quality of responses seen in the exam. Many students now use a style which sees them present an argument, and then evaluate its strength/weakness. Unfortunately, many students actually just present a different viewpoint in the guise of evaluation – for example, in 1.5, presenting arguments about how Guru Nanak taught equality through the setting up of the langar, and declaring the arguments strong “because he also said ‘There is no Muslim, no Hindu’”. This is simply a different argument or point of view, not an evaluation. This was noticeable in both 12-mark questions where that specific formula was used.

Question-based comments**1.1**

90% of students chose the correct answer.

1.2

Most students found this very straightforward, with 85% of students gaining one or full marks. Understanding the term ‘virtues’ was a guarantee of full marks. Some students did read ‘Vices’ for ‘Virtues’, so gave wrong answers. A very small percentage did not recognise the term at all, and guessed – offering Sikh beliefs, Gurus, or aspects of the gurdwara and worship.

1.3

48% of students gained full marks on this question. It is pleasing to see that it is the norm for students to focus on ‘influences’ – a clear shift from previous years where many students gave beliefs rather than the influence of those beliefs. Teachers are clearly now preparing students more effectively for this question.

94% gained at least a mark as the term ‘mulkti (liberation from rebirth)’ was very widely recognised. Those students who did not get full marks tended to fail to give sufficient explanatory depth, with a small number failing to address ‘influences’. Where students did focus on beliefs (not influences), they still gained some credit, albeit at a reduced level.

1.4

This question was very well addressed by the vast majority of students; 52% gained four or five marks. It is clear that Centres study the Mool Mantra, including the Sikh wording. Answers commonly gave the Sikh term with English translations and explanations.

Only 18% gained full marks, reflecting a lack of a named source. Mool Mantra was in the question, so was not credited. Those students who gained the source mark tended to use a teaching from the Guru Granth Sahib, or Guru Nanak (less commonly) to explain the characteristic chosen from the Mool Mantra. For example, having provided the characteristic of ‘Nir Vair’ which was explained as ‘no hate’, they then might explain that Guru Nanak said ‘There is no Hindu, no Muslim’. This gave the point, developed it, and then named the source with further development.

A very small number of students seemed to be unaware of the Mool Mantra, but used what they knew of the Christian God – omniscient, omnibenevolent, omnipotent. These are also true of the Mool Mantra’s description of God, so did gain credit.

1.5

The bulk of answers were awarded between 6 and 10 marks for this question which suggested that the lives of the Gurus taught Sikhs all they needed to know about equality. The question gave huge breadth to what students could write, and they took full advantage. Students really showed good subject knowledge, including of relevant teachings and quotations. It was unusual not to see reference to Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh – almost every candidate wrote something about their contribution. Many additionally wrote about the teaching of Guru Amar Das (compulsory langar, women community leaders), Guru Hargobind (52 Princes), Guru Har Krishnan (smallpox victims). Some responses were extremely wide-ranging, whilst others focused on one or two Gurus in more detail. All of these styles were creditworthy. Many students wrote very descriptive answers, so that they wrote a lot. Whilst this gave good material from which to make analyses and give evaluations, many students did not actually give a great deal or depth of evaluation. A small number of students confused what each Guru did, which did not stop them gaining at least some credit. A small number of students only gave this point of view, so their mark was capped at Level 2 (6 marks).

The tendency was for students to write a much bigger ‘agree’ side than disagree. The normal ‘disagree’ responses were focused on the Guru Granth Sahib, God, and modern life (compared to the times of the Gurus). This point of view was rather lighter for the vast majority of cases, at times only cursory – which restricted the marks they gained, even if it did give them access to Level 3 and the lowest mark in Level 4 (10).

The best students were able to make the points that the Guru Granth Sahib actually contains all the stories of the lives of the Gurus, and/or their teachings, so ultimately still proves the point of the statement to be true. They also made the point that knowing about equality is not the same as understanding it, and that often life experience was necessary – meaning that the Gurus laid the foundation for Sikhs to build their understanding on. Many weaker students used the langar and sewa as arguments to disagree, seemingly not realising that these come from the lives/teachings of the Gurus; better responses included these as part of their ‘agree’ point of view.

Some students got side-tracked into discussing the virtues associated with equality or mukti, or the pursuit of these, so moving away from relevant responses to the statement. Some contrasted their 'agree' point of view with examples of equality/inequality, rather than where Sikhs learn about equality. Some tried to offer other things taught by the Gurus as an alternative point of view. None of these had relevancy, and so the valid part of the response tended to be one-sided.

Practices

2.1

76% of students chose the correct answer. 'Gurpurb' was a key term which some did not recognise so had to guess at – the incorrect answers covering all three remaining options.

2.2

This was a very straightforward question, not least because the Covid pandemic and Ukrainian crisis broadened even further the different roles covered by gurdwaras. 86% of students gained full marks. Students who failed to attain full marks often wrote about elements of the gurdwara (palki, takht) or leaders in worship (granthi, rajji).

2.3

70% of students gained at least two marks for this question. Students wrote with confidence about sewa, often using the different forms of sewa (tan, man, dhan) to make their two points. Those students who did not gain full marks tended to give simple explanations in their points. A small number wrote about sewa in general, having failed to pay attention to the last three words of the question 'in the langar'. Many of these actually did get some marks as they used the langar as one of their ways.

2.4

Only 11% of students gained full marks, with 47% gaining three or more. Many of those who gained four marks did not name the source of authority, even though they wrote at length about Guru Hargobind's saving of the 52 Hindu Princes. The best students gave teachings and source from the Guru Granth Sahib about the event, either the event itself, the idea of all religions being one, or the injunction to teach children the stories of the Gurus. Unfortunately, many students gave these teachings without naming the source, so did not secure that fifth mark.

Some students described general activities from an act of worship, or activities which are not religious, eg sending gifts to the family – these gained no credit as the question sought why the festival of Divali was important not what Sikhs do.

A small number of students did not recognise Divali, and wrote about the Hindu Diwali instead, gaining no credit.

2.5

This was only very slightly less well answered than 1.5, with the most common marks being between 6 and 10. 55% of students gained marks within Levels 3 or 4. Students did not write as much as they did in 1.5, though there were very many lengthy responses. There was also less AO1 content in answers – probably because 1.5 lent itself well to story-telling, and there was less scope on for that on 2.5.

There were many very good responses to this question. Students wrote freely, coherently and in detail about a number of reasons why Sikhs should or should not go through the Amrit Sanskar. They backed up their points with quotations from the Guru Granth Sahib or the Gurus. Often they made the point of being gurmukh and the path to mukti as being open to any Sikh, amritdhari or not, which was richly evidenced via the Guru Granth Sahib.

Some students mixed up their Gurus, attributing the Amrit Sanskar to Guru Nanak or Guru Hargobind. This did not prevent them from gaining credit. It is the case that many students believe that Guru Gobind Singh ended the caste system completely in India as a whole through the Panj Pyare – which is, of course, not the case. Teaching needs to give students the clear knowledge that the Sikh Gurus systems to bring equality were within the Sikh community, and that this was at odds with the wider society in which the Sikh community found itself.

Some students made the mistake of arguing ‘the most important ceremony’, contrasting Amrit Sanskar usually with the birth ceremony or Akhand Path when they did. A small number of students wrongly understand the Amrit Sanskar and Khalsa to be two completely different paths for Sikhs, so argued for each being important to undertake. These all meant that a response was only relevant from one point of view, so the awarded mark was capped at Level 2: 6 marks.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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