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# GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES (SHORT COURSE)

8061/5 Themes  
Report on the Examination

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## General comments

Entries for this qualification saw a pleasing increase to just under 15,000, the highest entry this specification has attracted. Most students paired their themes paper with Christianity and Islam and so the majority of answers to themes questions included beliefs and teachings from those two religions.

Standards of work varied. The whole range of marks from 48 to 0 was awarded and the mean mark was around 24. This mean mark is negatively affected by the fact that a significant number, of around 10%, of students did not attempt any parts of question 2. Some scripts that earned grade 4 had no evidence that question 2 had been attempted. This may have been a timing issue but not even the multiple choice question, 2.1 was attempted. It is likely that some if not many did not realise they had to answer both questions. It is imperative that in preparing to answer this paper, students are clear that they must answer all five parts of **both** questions 1 and 2. There is no evidence of any students not answering question 1, but answering question 2 instead. Less than 1% of entries failed to attempt the multiple choice question 1.1 whereas almost 12% did not attempt 2.1- most of whom answered 1.5.

As in previous years, the large majority of students made a serious attempt to answer all questions. They had learned the content well and revised their learning prior to the examination. Many answers, especially in AO2, were a pleasure to read and brought credit to those who wrote them. However, in many cases, examination technique was not strong. Questions 1.3, 1.4, 2.3 and 2.4 require students to give two pieces of information with extra detail to earn the second mark. The best way to answer these questions is to write each detailed point separately, possibly with a blank line between them, rather than jumbling them up in a paragraph. This enables students to think more coherently and makes it easier examiners to follow the points being made and credit them accordingly.

In some instances, handwriting was difficult to read either through being extremely small or untidy with letters poorly formed. All such scripts were read and marked correctly but it presented quite a challenge.

A proportion of students submitted word processed examinations. It would be helpful if such submissions were printed with a font size of at least 12. Each of the three units that comprise the whole qualification should be printed and submitted on separate pieces of paper with a header to identify the unit. This would greatly assist the scanning and marking process.

Overall, an encouraging year both in the record number of students sitting the examination and the standards they achieved. This specification is clearly a successful way of giving students the opportunity of achieving from the full range of GCSE grades and demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs and moral issues

## Question-based comments

### 1.1

Around 90% of students were able to correctly identify 'cohabitation' as the answer to this question requiring the term for an unmarried couple living together.

**1.2**

This question asked for reasons why many religious believers accepted remarriage. Just over 50% of answers scored the full two marks, despite answers focused more on marriage rather than remarriage being credited, unless they were incorrect. Many gave answers about divorce rather than remarriage. Answers that made reference to valid reasons for divorce eg abuse, adultery, were allowed but only if it was made clear that these reasons for divorce can justify remarriage being accepted. A few interpreted remarriage as remarrying the person to whom they had been married previously. This interpretation was acceptable for marks. The most popular answer was because it allowed them to have children which they could not do outside marriage.

**1.3**

This question on religious beliefs about gender equality was generally well done. The most common contrast was between the traditional view of the different roles of men and women and the view that all humans were created equally and in the image of God. A minority used transgender rights as part of their answer but did not focus on equality as the question required, so earned little credit.

**1.4**

Around 20% of students either did not attempt this question or scored no marks. The question required students to write about beliefs about the role of children within the family. Some students focused entirely upon the role of parents towards their children which was not answering the question. On the other hand, some wrote excellent answers about the duty to respect their mother and father, many quoting from the Ten Commandments. The role to learn about the faith of their parents so they can share it in later life, looking after their parents when they are old and having children, when older, in order to keep the family going. Many quoted from teachings of either Islam or Christianity but did not provide an attribution for their quote. For 'Honour your father and mother', the Bible, the Old Testament, the book of Exodus etc were appropriate as attributions as was more generally 'the Ten Commandments'.

**1.5**

Just under 40% were awarded Levels 3 or 4 with almost 10% not even attempting the question which asked for an evaluation on the statement 'Married couples should not use contraception'. Although many were able to express Christian or Buddhist views correctly, knowledge of views in Islam was weaker. An outright ban on contraception in Islam was a common error. There were many references to contraception killing a foetus (or baby), but some more accurately restricted this to beliefs about the morning after pill.

The main reasons given in support was that marriage should be for procreation which contraception prevents. Responses for arguments against included, to prevent unwanted pregnancies (for various reasons) and to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections. A significant proportion ignored the phrase 'married couples' in the statement and wrote more generally about unmarried young people. Some better answers drew the distinction between natural contraception, which was thought to be acceptable, and artificial contraception, which was not.

Many students used a taught format in their answers, consisting of two or three arguments in favour, two or three arguments against, mention of religion and with a conclusion at the end that summarised the points made. This seemed to be helpful to some lower achieving students. However, some higher achieving students, whose evaluative skills are better developed, wrote excellent answers without reliance on a strict format. They often gave detailed, logical reasoning to support the statement, balanced with logical reasoning to support a different point of view, not necessarily opposing, with thoughtful reasoned comment about the merits of each case. They

often reached evaluative conclusions throughout the answer rather than just in a short final paragraph.

### **2.1**

As stated earlier, around 10% of students did not attempt this part of the question, or any of the other four parts. Of those who did attempt it, the overwhelming majority correctly identified the answer as option A, forgiveness.

### **2.2**

This question required reasons why a conflict may be said to be a 'holy war'. Around 50% of students were awarded 2 marks. Some gave criteria from the Just War theory that do not apply to holy war which were not credited although those that apply to both holy war and just war (eg just cause) were acceptable.

### **2.3**

Although more than 30% of students earned all 4 marks on this question, requiring beliefs about a country using weapons of mass destruction, many others wrote about weapons in general.

Many responses stated they were acceptable if they met the criteria of a Just War. Reference to their hugely destructive nature was often not commented on. Some students gave contrasting answers which could only earn two marks as the question asked for similar beliefs.

### **2.4**

More than 50% of answers that were attempted earned either 4 or 5 marks. This question, asked for reasons why believers choose to work for an organisation helping victims of war and although it provided a good opportunity to use 'love your neighbour', as a valid reference to sacred writings, many students did not identify its source. This resulted in the 'source mark' not being credited. However, it was credited as a valid point or as detail to support a similar point. Several answers were rather muddled. Writing each detailed point in a separate paragraph may encourage students to write their points more coherently.

### **2.5**

This statement, 'All religious believers should be pacifists and never fight', encouraged some students to write very thoughtful and coherent answers. They often compared pacifism as an ideal, to the reality of fighting, often in self-defence according to the Just War theory. Many compared Jesus' ethical teaching such as 'turn the other cheek' to him telling his followers to sell their cloak to buy a sword. There were also plenty of references to taking up the sword and dying by the sword. Quakers and Buddhists were regularly cited as pacifist believers, but there were few references to other religions or traditions.

As above for 1.5, 'taught formats' were used by many students and helped lower achieving students to produce an answer containing some reasoning. There was a higher proportion of Level 4 answers produced in this question compared to 1.5. However, the mean mark (including the 20% who didn't attempt 2.5) was just below 5 marks, possibly influenced by it being the final question.

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

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