



GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

8062/16 Paper 1: Judaism
Report on the Examination

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General comments

The paper was comparable to last year. It was clear that centres had prepared their students well for the examination. However, statistics indicated that students did not perform as well in the Practices section as they did in the Beliefs section. For some students it appeared that they ran out of time. For others, they tended to struggle with the questions on Rosh Hashanah and the Talmud.

Question 2.3 on Rosh Hashanah appeared to be difficult for some students. There was a lot of confusion with practices associated with Yom Kippur and distinguishing between the two days of Rosh Hashanah and the tenth of the Days of Awe being Yom Kippur. Students confused ideas relating to judgment after death with those concerning judgment in the year.

The importance of the Talmud, examined in Question 2.4 did not appear to be well known by some students. In addition, students found it difficult to refer to authoritative texts, though students were able to effectively link Talmud to Torah. Centres might like to see the list of relevant sources included in the mark scheme.

Question-based comments

1.1

This question asked students to identify the Shekinah as the term for the divine presence of God. Over 85% were able to do so. Some students may benefit from being given vocabulary lists and asked to learn the definitions, so that they feel more confident in answering such multiple choice questions.

1.2

Question 2.2 asked for the names of two men with whom Jews believe God made covenants. The majority of students answered with Abraham and Moses, although there was occasional reference to Noah and Adam. Over 88% students picked up the full 2 marks available, and over 95% gained 1 mark or more. Incorrect responses included reference to Jesus, Saints, Joseph, Elijah and Muhammad.

1.3

This question required students to explain two ways in which belief in charity influences Jews today. Better responses tended to focus on mitzvah, tithing, tzedakah and linking the concept of Tikkun Olam with the responsibility to care for others. Some students tended to give more generic answers about the importance of charity, responsibility to help others, often giving the teaching 'Love thy fellow'. Many students gave practical examples, which were creditable, so included references to volunteering, food banks and donating money. Around two thirds of students picked up 3 marks or more on this question, with over 40% gaining full marks.

It is worth noting that some students were clearly referencing Christian ideas but attempting to present them as Jewish ideas on this question. There were some references to CAFOD for instance. More general responses tended to refer to kindness, or start to discuss the sanctity of life.

1.4

This question, to explain two Jewish beliefs about life after death, saw many responses that gave Christian rather than Jewish ideas, so there were lots of references to heaven, hell and purgatory.

Better answers were able to discuss Jewish ideas, and the concept of Shoel was well understood and explained. Students referred to it as a place where souls were judged, before moving to Gan Eden. Many students discussed bodily resurrection, and correctly linked that to beliefs about burial instead of cremation. Reincarnation did appear, but in many cases, it was confused with Hindu ideas about reincarnation, rather than the Jewish understanding of transmigration of the soul with the purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah. There was some confusion over the concept of Gehinnom; some students understood that it was eternal damnation and separation from God. Some students focused on the word 'death' rather than 'life after death' and wrote about everything they knew about Jewish death customs which was not creditable.

Nearly 20% of students picked up full marks on this question and where they gave a reference to sacred writings they were appropriate and accurate. For example, references to 'Do not kill' as being something to avoid, to avoid a negative judgement from God, and therefore stay out of Gehinnom, for instance. As for all questions that require a source of sacred writing or source of Jewish belief and teaching, centres can aid students by going through the specification topics and identify a relevant source of authority and to make that explicit to them.

Over half of students gained 4 marks or more on the question, so many were able to identify two relevant ideas and elaborate. Nearly 90% of students picked up 2 marks or more.

1.5

This question differentiated well where students had to evaluate whether the belief in God as the Creator was the most important belief about God. Evidence of well-argued, reasoned consideration was seen in many responses. For example, students took the belief in the Creator and correctly discussed the creation story in Genesis; the concept of God creating ex nihilo; links to the celebration of Shabbat; the importance of stewardship; sanctity of human life and so on. They went on to contrast this with beliefs about God as a law-giver, judge and also the importance of the belief in one God and monotheism, often linked to the Shema. Others took a more philosophical approach and discussed God's transcendence, immanence, omnibenevolence, omniscience and omnipotence. Each way was creditable.

The Level 4 responses demonstrated excellent understanding, application and evaluation of religious material, and students were often able to identify relevant quotes to support their arguments.

Level 3 answers had more reliance on AO1 material and skill, rather than AO2 skill. So, students produced more relevant material, but were not as thorough in evaluating whether this, the belief in the Creator was the most important belief.

Evidence of students using writing frames was seen. Some students would argue backwards and forwards about whether there was a convincing or strong / weak argument or not. However, centres should consider the types of writing frames they use with students to ensure that the 'justified conclusion' is included in their response.

Approximately 25% of students achieved a Level 2 mark and just over 11% gaining a Level 1 mark. There was evidence in these responses that students did not have the breadth of knowledge to enable them to develop reasonable for and against arguments.

2.1

Students were asked to identify which event in life is associated with Brit Milah. Approximately 70% correctly identified birth. This was a smaller percentage than achieved on question 1.1 (which over 85% answered correctly).

2.2

In this question two religious features of the synagogue were required. Many students answered with either the Torah, Ner Tamid or Ark. Some answers referred to the Ark of the Covenant, which was marked as correct, but the terminology of Ark or Aron Hakodesh was more accurate. Some students wrote lengthy explanations which gained no extra credit. If it is a 'Give' or 'Name' question then a brief response is all that is required.

Some students misread the question and talked about the synagogue being a place of worship, study or assembly, and unfortunately, they didn't receive any marks if they approached the question in this manner. Other students just described items rather than naming them, this was creditable, providing they were clearly identifying a feature in the synagogue. There was some confusion around the Ner Tamid, with reference to everlasting candles to show God's presence and identifying a synagogue as a church or mosque. These responses were not creditworthy. However, just over 78% gained full marks on the question, with a further 13% picking up 1 mark.

2.3

Students were asked to explain two contrasting ways in which Jews celebrate Rosh Hashanah in this question. If students were insecure in their subject knowledge of festivals, they found this quite challenging. Many students got confused between practices associated with Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. The better answers seen were clear and well developed. For example, students made reference to the creation of the world.

Those students who knew about the shofar produced some excellent answers with many responses recognising that it was a way of reminding Jews to pay attention to God and referring to how many times it was blown. The custom of tashlich was well known, although there was some confusion about throwing stones instead of breadcrumbs into the water. The importance of reconciliation with others was also well known as was the custom of eating apples dipped in honey.

Just over two thirds of students gained the full 4 marks, showing a good understanding of the festival. At least 71% of students gained 2 marks or more. Nearly 5% left the response blank. It is important that students understand the word 'contrasting' can be substituted with 'different'.

2.4

Question 2.4 asked students to explain two ways in which the Talmud was important for Jews. Approximately 7% of students did not attempt the question, and just over 30% attempted it, but gained no marks. Some students gave excellent responses; they clearly knew it was the oral law and discussed rabbinical interpretation in the modern world. Many of these students ably picked up the fifth mark by saying that the Talmud was commentary on the Torah, or by mentioning the structure of the Mishnah and Gemara. Just over 10% gained full marks for the question. Around 50% of students gained 2 marks or more.

Some students thought the Talmud was the Torah or the Ner Tamid. Centres might find it helpful to provide students with the list of relevant religious references included in the mark scheme.

2.5

This was a straightforward question asking whether Jews should always worship in the synagogue. As already mentioned, students performed less well on all the section relating to practices. However, the full range of marks was awarded for responses to this question.

Nearly 20% of students gained a Level 4. These responses could effectively apply religious references to the issue. Students were able to write about the special atmosphere of the synagogue, and the importance of worship as a community. Many mentioned the importance of the minyan, the presence of the Shekinah, the importance of the Torah scrolls, the importance of the rabbi leading worship and so on. They went on to contrast this with worship in the home, and some mentioned the importance of the role of women in worship in the home. Others mentioned not being able to attend the synagogue due to disability or geographical location, while others discussed worship during lockdown and also during the Holocaust, and these responses were thoughtful and interesting to read.

Almost 40% of students attained a Level 3 mark. As for the essay on question 1.5, clarity and organisation of ideas started to become an issue at this level. Whilst students were able to bring plenty of material to the question, they would end up arguing backwards and forwards with themselves, again sometimes because they were trying to use writing frames that hindered them.

Around 30% of students gained a Level 2 with over 8% gaining Level 1. Responses at these levels included incorrect descriptions that the synagogue was literally 'God's house', or describing it as a holy place with some generic arguments about 'being closer to God', and God being more likely to hear / answer prayers because of being in the synagogue. They were able to construct an answer for and against worship in the synagogue, but the understanding demonstrated was more simplistic.

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG)

Overall the performance on SPaG was good. Over two thirds of students achieved 3 marks for SPaG, and over 20% achieved 2 marks. Just over 5% achieved 1 mark for SPaG, but this was often because they had written little on question 1.5.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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