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GCSE

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

8062/2A Paper 2A Thematic Studies (excluding textual studies)  
Report on the Examination

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## General comments

It is pleasing to see that the numbers taking this examination continues to be maintained at over 110,000 students. Most students were well prepared this year and made a serious attempt at answering all the questions for the four themes which they chose. Most students had a fair grasp of the subject matter; using the religions they had studied as the foundation for their answers. It was clear that the religion studied was not a barrier in attempting to answer any question.

Only a small minority broke the rubric and attempted to answer more sections than they are allowed. However, it has been noted this year that several students had not answered the first multi-choice questions for each theme in their answer booklets. It is possible that they ticked their answer on the actual question paper. Unfortunately, the question papers are not scanned and sent to the examiners. This means that up to four marks cannot be awarded and that could be the difference in a grade. All students need to be aware that all their answers must be written clearly in their answer booklets.

It is clear that many students are learning very stereotypical ideas of religious attitudes, which are not always true. For example, in 1.3, Protestant Christians were depicted as almost always for gender equality, whilst Muslims and Catholics were not. In 4.5, Christians were the pacifists, whilst Muslims fight, Jihad. It is important that students understand diverse attitudes within religions.

The increase use of teachings, in answering questions, is very positive, and the diversity of teachings, which are also directly valid, is a characteristic of better students. There were a number of examples of students giving atheist / humanist / science-based responses in questions which asked specifically for 'religious beliefs'. Students need to be clear in their approach to these questions that these are not religious beliefs, and will not gain credit.

The area where many students are missing out is the source mark (the 5<sup>th</sup> mark) for the part 4 questions. Some are giving a quote but are not attributing it to a source. Others are simply saying that in sacred writings it refers to the particular topic under discussion. It is not sufficient for the extra mark to say 'In Hindu scriptures' or 'In Jewish texts' etc. Students do not need to give chapter and verse but could, for example, say that in the Ten Commandments it says that 'Do not murder' or Jesus said, 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. That would be sufficient providing it was relevant.

Unfortunately, there were a lot of mixed up quotes this year such as suggesting that Jesus said in the Ten Commandments 'treat others how you wish to be treated' or saying that Jesus said 'there is neither Jew nor Gentile' or 'an eye for an eye' or claiming that the Bible says that 'if you kill a man it is as if you kill the whole of mankind'. Unfortunately, there were also many made up quotes such as Jesus saying in the Sermon on the Mount not to use weapons of mass destruction or quotes that were taken completely out of context and not relevant to the topic under discussion.

For the AO2, evaluation questions, it was pleasing to see that most students were focusing on the statement, rather than just arguing a topic for and against. Occasionally there were answers which did not bring in any religious content in their arguments and thus were capped at Level 2 and a maximum of 6 marks. It was good to see that there was an increased attempt to evaluate points. Many are adopting the approach to end a paragraph with 'This is a strong / weak argument because...'. What came afterwards often varied with some just giving a repeat of points made, or a new point to agree / contrast, rather than actually evaluating.

Overall students found this paper very accessible with few failing to attempt any of the questions for the themes they had chosen.

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## Question- based comments

### Theme A: Relationships and Families

This was a popular choice and with the exception of 1.4 was well answered.

#### 1.1

Over 90% gave the correct answer to this question on defining the term 'cohabitation'.

#### 1.2

There were many valid different reasons given for the acceptance of remarriage by religious believers and over two thirds gained both the marks which were available.

#### 1.3

Over half the students scored maximum marks for this four mark question. The most common points made were that Christians believe in gender equality as Paul said 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28), and that Muslims give different roles to men and women. A few didn't fully understand the question and wrote about gay rights.

#### 1.4

The question asked students to explain two religious beliefs about the role of children within the family. Many students did not read the question correctly and described parental roles, and what was done to children, rather than the role of children themselves. So students found this to be the most difficult part 4 question on the paper. Where students gained marks, they usually wrote about the Commandment to honour parents, and the Muslim duty to care for parents ('paradise is at the feet of the mother').

#### 1.5

The majority of students wrote a Level 3 response to this evaluation question on the statement, 'Married couples should not use contraception'. Most chose to argue 'be fruitful and multiply' versus good family planning. It was rare to see a discussion of the types of contraception being a factor which would have been a useful part of a response. There was also the widespread misconception that the pill is an abortifacient, whereas it inhibits ovulation, thus preventing fertilisation, rather than 'killing' a fertilised egg. Some responses were more akin to arguments against abortion.

Many students used arguments about sexually transmitted infections in their answers although they almost never suggested these were low risk / unlikely in marriage. Many arguments were more suggestive of a general 'use / don't use contraception' question, than the one set. It was common to see 'all Christians can't, whereas all Muslims can' use contraception. This is stereotypical type of answer which isn't accurate and it would be useful for students to recognise the diversity within religion and what often happens in reality.

### Theme B: Religion and life

Once again, this year this theme was the most popular choice of question on the paper and was generally well answered.

#### 2.1

Four out of every five students knew that the answer to the definition given was 'quality of life' with most of the remainder selecting the incorrect answer of 'sanctity of life'.

**2.2**

Most students were able to give two reasons why some religious people are against experimenting on animals. It is the case that some students erroneously think that 'Thou shall not kill', the Christian belief in sanctity of life and the Golden Rule all apply to animals. Where students referred to the sanctity or sacredness of life, but did not ascribe to Christianity, they gained credit as it is true for the Eastern religions.

**2.3**

This question on religious beliefs about an afterlife was the best answered of the 4 mark questions on the paper. Answers often focused on heaven and hell and a day of judgment, but some answered using beliefs about reincarnation and escaping the cycle of samsara.

**2.4**

There were some very good responses to why religious believers consider it a duty to look after the world. Most answered from a Christian perspective and, for example, wrote about stewardship. However, quite a number missed out on the fifth mark as they did not name a sacred writing or another source of religious belief and teaching despite giving quotes in their answers. It is important to give the source of the quotes.

**2.5**

This question, requiring evaluation of the statement, 'Euthanasia is never the best option', brought a full range of answers. Although a small minority did not understand the term 'euthanasia'. Many students argued for and against euthanasia, with the briefest of references to 'best option' and so missed out on the highest level marks. It was usual to see a 'sanctity of life' response to disagree with euthanasia in any form, with 'so this is why it is never the best option' on the end.

There were few explorations of how attitudes might differ dependent on the type of euthanasia being proposed (active versus passive, etc). Likewise there were few references to hospices or to hospital or respite home care as alternative options. These would have enhanced any answer.

Students seemed to understand the idea of relieving suffering, but only in terms of euthanasia (ie ending life); there was little reference to palliative care and what it entails. They also rarely went further than euthanasia brings an 'end of suffering', so did not write about the different forms of suffering a dying person and their family might endure.

**Theme C: The existence of God and revelation**

This was the least popular choice of students this year but was generally answered well by those who attempted this theme.

**3.1**

Two thirds of students gained the mark for this multiple-choice question concerning an example of special revelation. This was less than for the other 1 mark questions.

**3.2**

Most students were able to give two reasons why some people do not believe that revelations about God are real. Popular reasons included the idea that people were not telling the truth, or were hallucinating, or it hasn't happened to them or the belief that God doesn't exist.

**3.3**

This question concerning beliefs about miracles was well answered by students. Many responses included contrasting examples of miracles found in sacred writings with non-religious beliefs eg coincidences or scientific explanations. Some wrote about the belief in the miracle of creation or the miracles of Jesus as recorded in the gospels.

A number of students tried to argue that Buddhism does not believe in miracles; however this is incorrect, as many miracles are attributed to the Buddha, and the Buddhist consensus is that miracles are within the capability of any human who has achieved a higher state of knowledge / meditation. Buddhists believe in miracles but they don't attribute them to God.

**3.4**

Some students did not understand the omnipotence of God but those who did scored good marks with over a quarter getting maximum marks. Most focussed on the power of God in creating the universe and obtained the source mark by referring to Genesis. A minority confused omnipotence with omniscience, omnipresence or benevolence of God. A small number of students also made a challenge against God's existence or omnipotence using the problem of evil and suffering, this was not valid as it is not a religious belief, but rather a challenge of the belief, so it was not creditworthy.

**3.5**

For this question, requiring an evaluation of the statement, 'The only way to know God is by being enlightened', about one in five of the students misunderstood the term enlightened. There was a range of interpretations of enlightenment, from mysticism to understanding what is read in holy books to the sudden realisation from special revelation

**Theme D: Religion, peace and conflict**

This was a popular theme and most students performed well in answering the questions.

**4.1**

This was the best answered of the multiple-choice questions with the vast majority of students understanding the concept of forgiveness.

**4.2**

Most students scored at least a mark for this question on why a conflict might be said to be a 'holy war' but a significant number failed to get the second mark. Where students did not get full marks, it was usually because they gave an answer which was not obviously 'religious', but rather could be said of any war being fought. The most frequently given correct answers said that a holy war was authorised by an important religious leader or the purpose should be to defend their religion from attack or the belief that they are fighting for a sacred and noble cause.

**4.3**

Although many students obtained full marks for this question, which asked for two similar beliefs about a country using weapons of mass destruction (WMD), a number gave contrasting beliefs which could only attain half the available marks. Some students based their answers on supporting the actual use of WMDs, contrary to the teachings of all religions (given their disproportionate and uncontrollable results). Those who described religious support for the holding of these weapons as a deterrent, but without the intent to actually use them were credited. Almost without exception, students equated WMD with nuclear weapons which did not affect their ability to score marks, but a small number of responses referred to biological or chemical weapons as well.

**4.4**

Most found this question on why some religious believers choose to work for an organisation that helps victims of war very straightforward. If they did not gain full marks it was usually because they either did not name a source (even if they gave a quotation), or their answer focused on what religious believers do rather than why they do it. Many referred to 'Love thy neighbour' or the Golden Rule.

**4.5**

The question asked for evaluation of the statement, 'All religious believers should be pacifists and never fight'. The stereotype of Christians being pacifists and Muslims being fighters was evident in many answers to this question. It is important that students understand the diversity of thought and practice, rather than offering stereotypical views. More knowledgeable students did show how Islam is a way of peace, with violence as a last resort; and that Christianity is a way of peace, but with exceptions made via the Just War theory, where circumstances demand it (eg to overthrow evil etc). Exodus 20:13, Micah 4:3, and Dhammapada 270 were frequently quoted and many other teachings for and against the statement were evident in the responses.

**Theme E: Religion, crime and punishment****5.1**

This question, which asked students to choose an aim of punishment which could be described as taking revenge, was mainly correctly answered. The most popular incorrect answer was deterrence instead of retribution.

**5.2**

This question, on different types of crime was well answered by almost all students although a small minority gave examples of causes of crime rather than types.

**5.3**

Students scored good marks for this question concerning religious views about the treatment of people who have committed evil actions. Most students interpreted this question in terms of punishing criminals. Aims of punishment or types of punishment were often given to explain the beliefs.

Many students gave stereotypical ideas contrasting Christian forgiveness with Shari'aic style deterrence (ie brutal punishment). This ignored the fact that there are Christians and groups who support corporal and capital punishment, and that Prophet Muhammad's pronouncements on punishment were that they should be merciful.

**5.4**

Those who answered this question on why some religious believers might break the law, usually referred to stealing for survival. Other common responses seen was the intentionally breaking of unjust laws as an act of protest or being able to exercise religious freedom where it is forbidden by the law. Many found it difficult to justify the actions by referring to a religious source and so did not obtain the fifth mark.

**5.5**

The question requiring evaluation on 'Community service does not punish the criminal enough' was very open allowing a very wide range of answers. Many students made the mistake of not explaining that community service is a punishment used for minor crimes, so that they wrote, often at length, about it not being suitable for murder and other such extreme crimes. There seemed to be a lack of awareness that only crimes up to a certain level in the justice system be considered for community service.

The favourite quote was 'an eye for an eye' but several failed to mention any religious beliefs and so were capped at six marks. Some lacked focus on the latter part of the statement '...does not punish criminals enough' and simply compared different types of punishment.

### **Theme F: Religion, human rights and social justice.**

This wasn't a popular choice but those who attempted it generally obtained good marks.

#### **6.1**

Most students knew the answer to this question concerning a definition of justice and were awarded the mark.

#### **6.2**

This was a very straightforward question about causes of poverty with most students gaining full marks. A wide range of responses were given including unemployment, poor pay, high mortgage rates, debt, addiction, laziness, lack of education, etc.

#### **6.3**

The question asked for two similar religious beliefs about freedom of religion. Many students did not find this a very easy question with quite a number only scoring half marks. Many said that Christians and Muslims have an all-encompassing love for anyone of any faith which isn't always the case.

Those who gained full marks often took an equalities approach, saying that as all were equal, everyone should be able to follow the religion they choose. The Golden Rule was often quoted. Other responses seen wrote about the right to evangelise and mentioned that Christianity is a missionary religion (Matthew 28: 19). There were few answers about religious intolerance, though where they did occur these were valid in the context of the question.

#### **6.4**

Most students wrote really good answers about why religious believers should challenge racial prejudice. Illustrations were evident from many religions but the most popular included reference to Genesis 1:27, as it says that men and women are created in the image of God so there is no difference between anyone, and Galatians 3: 28 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for all are one in Christ Jesus'. Some students referred to the Parable of the Good Samaritan which showed that Jesus challenged the prejudices of his day. Most were able to gain the source mark for this question.

#### **6.5**

There were some excellent answers to this question requiring evaluation of the statement 'People living in poverty must help themselves to overcome any difficulties they face'. Good religious teachings were usually well applied, such as 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat' and 'Go to the ant you sluggard and consider its ways and be wise!' (Proverbs 6:6) and 'No one eats better food than that which they have earned by their own labours' (Hadith).

Some students did struggle with the arguments in favour of the statement but many expressed ideas about poor people needing to help themselves for their own futures, for self-esteem, for betterment, to work through bad karma. They usually argued more strongly that others should help and pointed out the duty of all religious believers to help / serve others, or to make the world a better place or to gain good karma - 'compassion-mercy and religion are the support of the entire world' (Japji Sahib).



### **Spelling Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG)**

Many were able to spell and punctuate with consistent accuracy, use rules of grammar with effective control of meaning overall and use a wide range of specialist terms, as appropriate, and so reached the high performance level. Most at least reached the intermediate level. In some cases the handwriting was difficult to read but generally the standard of literacy was good this year.

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

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