

Examiners' Report

Summer 2012

International GCSE Religious Studies
(4RS0) Paper 1

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Introduction

This specification was examined for the second time this year.

The question paper has 2 parts. Part 1 consists of 4 sections and candidates are required to answer one question from each section. Part 2 consists of 6 sections, each asking questions from the perspective of a specific religion. Candidates are asked to answer two questions from Part 2.

All questions included sub-questions that were designed to assess both AO1 and A02.

Some candidates displayed excellent, detailed knowledge and understanding of specific religious teachings and practices and were able to look at other points of view objectively. At the same time, there were candidates who appeared to have only limited knowledge and understanding of the specification, and who sometimes wrote a great deal of general knowledge surrounding a topic, without directly addressing the specific question. Specifically in relation to (d) questions in Part 1 and (c) questions in Part 2, some candidates seemed unable to consider the topic from more than one point of view. That meant they were only able to achieve up to Level 3 (out of a possible 5) for these questions.

By far the vast majority of answers were from the perspective of Christianity and Islam.

It is not possible to report on answers to all the questions on this year's examination because not all of them were answered, and some were answered by very few candidates. However, this report will illustrate both specific and general strengths and weaknesses wherever possible.

PART 1: Beliefs and Values

Section A: The universe, human beings and their destiny

Question 1

This question was popular and was generally answered well. Questions (a) and (b) provided some very good responses from candidates. There were a minority of candidates who struggled with what parts (c) and (d) were asking of them.

Question 1(a)

This question was answered quite well, there were various ways in which the question could be answered. The glossary definition gives two parts to the definition: a wrong thing and something that displeases God. Accepted full mark answers included 'breaking a religious law' as an alternative wording.

Question 1 (b)

Part (b) was answered very well. Candidates generally outlined three ways in which human beings can show that they care for the planet. Some candidates focussed on care of animals and/or humanity. Care of animals was tied very specifically to how this showed care of the planet. Candidates need to be careful to answer the demands of the question, and the specific things that are being asked.

Question 1 (c)

This question sometimes elicited a descriptive response outlining beliefs about life after death. Strong responses to the question were able to tie beliefs to the way people live well. Be mindful that when answering part (c) question candidates should be careful to explain, and show they understand the various concepts they are exploring.

Question 1 (d)

Answers to part (d) questions follow a format. High level answers are looking for both sides of an argument (usually two reasons on each side), a personal conclusion and reference to a named religion. In this question candidates often did not refer to specific religious beliefs, and generally relied on philosophical arguments.

Question 2 (a)

The question was either answered correctly (by candidates with a thorough understanding of the key word) or incorrectly, and there was little awarding of partial marks. Those who answered incorrectly were unable to show any understanding of what a cyclical view of human life is.

Question 2 (b)

Although many candidates were able to correctly identify teachings about human responsibility for injustice, there were a variety of different approaches in the answers given. Some candidates approached it from how religions might respond faced with injustice, while others explored how religions might view humanity as responsible for injustice. Both approaches were acceptable.

Question 2 (c)

A question about human responsibility for their actions, that was attempted well by candidates. Candidates were able to use religious and non-religious reasons well.

Question 2 (d)

The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether animals have rights. Most candidates responded well, however a significant minority of candidates focussed on whether animals should have rights; this was not the focus of the question.

Section B: Ultimate reality and the meaning of life

Question 3(a)

As a glossary definition question this question had a mixed response. Candidates seemed unclear on 'religious' liberation. Freedom was only able to gain one mark, and consequently this was often awarded. However, candidates who linked this freedom to rebirth or reincarnation were able to achieve full marks.

Question 3(b)

Most candidates were able to outline a religion's teachings about euthanasia. This question was generally answered very well.

Question 3(c)

A significant minority of candidates did not attempt this question. The phraseology of the question is from the specification. Those who did answer this question generally focussed on describing the meaning and purpose that religious believers give to life, rather than how the search can lead to belief in God.

Question 3(d)

Responses generally focused around the problem of evil to give contrary views, and many different reasons for the supporting views.

Question 4(a)

Generally well answered

Question 4(b)

This question asked candidates to outline beliefs about ultimate reality that did not include reference to God. This question was generally not answered well. Some responses to this question focussed on Buddhist views of the ultimate reality, or atheistic views, but this needed tying into ultimate reality in a much more complex way.

Question 4(c)

This was a well answered question overall, with many candidates able to offer a range of ways in moral evil may lead people to reject belief in God. Some used specific examples, or discussed the problem of evil philosophically. A small minority of candidates mixed moral evil up with natural evil.

Question 4(d)

This produced a number of well balanced answers and some very good answers that explored what it meant to live life to the full. Again, care needs to be taken when answering these questions to name a religion rather than relying on general religious arguments.

Section C: Relationships, families and children

Question 5(a)

Homosexuality was well understood overall.

Question 5(b)

Candidates generally answered this question well and understood what is meant by homosexuality.

Question 5(c)

While this question elicited some good responses from candidates, there were some who explored why family life had changed rather than how. Candidates need to be careful when reading the question.

Question 5(d)

Candidates generally answered this question with regard to religious objections to contraception and whether they are right or wrong. This was an acceptable approach and this produced good arguments, though a lot of answers tended to be one sided.

Question 6(a)

Most candidates learnt the complete definition and were able to score full marks.

Question 6(b)

Religious teachings about divorce were generally well and fully understood. Within Christianity, for example, many were able to point out that denominations have differing points of view or differing emphases.

Question 6(c)

This question was about religious responses to childlessness, and most candidates recognised the need to explore the various religious views about solutions such as IVF and adoption. Others explained why a couple might be childless according to religion and this was an acceptable alternative approach. Answers which described the choice not to have children were not credited.

Question 6(d)

Some very balanced discussions, and usually a specific religion was named.

Section D: Rights, equality and responsibilities

Question 7(a)

Gender bias was generally well understood, though some candidates gained only partial marks by giving a definition rather than an example.

Question 7(b)

This question was generally not answered well. A significant minority did not attempt this question, and those who did described an interfaith marriage. This question is in the 'Rights, equality and responsibilities' section and does not include the problems of interfaith marriage. Candidates should be careful to understand specification language.

Question 7(c)

This question provided some very good answers with examples being taken from modern day, or using notable figures such as Martin Luther King or Gandhi. Both approaches are valid and helped candidates show a good understanding of religious responses.

Question 7(d)

Some candidates did not answer the question, arguing why religious freedom is an important human right, rather than the most important. Consequently a number of candidates did not achieve higher levels in this question.

Question 8(a)

The right to liberty was well understood overall.

Question 8(b)

Candidates generally answered this question well, and were able to write about a religion's responsibility for the poor.

Question 8(c)

A large number of candidates answered about religious rather than non-religious attitudes. Thus, they were unable to gain any marks for this question. This highlights again the need to read the question carefully.

Question 8(d)

Candidates generally answered this question well, but a large number struggled to recognise the alternative viewpoint. It is important that candidates recognise that no matter how strongly they feel about an issue, there is always an alternative viewpoint.

PART 2: The Religious Community

Not all questions of this part of the paper were answered. Indeed, by far the vast majority of answers related either to Christianity or to Islam. It will therefore be more useful to offer some general observations on how the questions were approached, and illustrate them with reference to some specific questions.

(a) Questions

These questions asked for knowledge about certain aspects of the beliefs and practices of religious communities. With ten marks available the answers needed to be fairly detailed and comprehensive. In fact, some answers were very full and gained high marks. Some showed an excellent command of the detail of events and teachings. However some of the responses were far too short and/or general to gain more than half of the marks. There were also examples of questions not being read thoroughly.

For example:

Question 12(a)

This question asked for an outline of Jesus' teaching on discipleship. However, candidates tended to focus on the demands of discipleship, rather than linking them to Jesus' teachings. Such answers received some credit, but did not go beyond level three.

Question 14(a)

This question asked for a description of two of the activities that Christian pilgrims engage in when visiting Jerusalem. There were some very good answers to this question, but a significant minority responded with activities in Bethlehem. It is important to note that because Bethlehem is mentioned on the specification as a separate place of pilgrimage such answers could not be credited.

Question 15(a)

This question asked for an outline of teachings about other religions. Candidates were able to write well about the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna or Gandhi, but did not relate them to other religions.

Question 17(a)

This question asked three forms of devotion in the Hindu home. Those who mentioned more than three activities could only be rewarded for the three they outlined most effectively. By mentioning more, they often diluted the detail of their answer.

Question 18(a)

This question asked about the role of the Imam in Shi'ah Islam. The vast majority of answers focussed on the imam in Sunni Islam. As such they could be awarded no marks.

(b) Questions

These questions asked for an explanation of specific religious teachings or activities. Again it should be noted that each question is worth ten marks, and they need to be slightly fuller than answers to (c) questions in Part 1. Many candidates displayed a good understanding of beliefs and practices, sometimes at a very sophisticated level indeed. There were, however, some recurring weaknesses that might usefully be illustrated.

For example:

Question 12(b)

This question asked why the baptism of Jesus was important for Christians today. There were many good answers, but there were a large number of responses which focussed on why baptism was important for Christians today without mentioning the baptism of Jesus, and thus did not answer the question. There were also errors which could not be credited such as 'Jesus was baptised to have his original sin forgiven'; while this may be true for some Christians with regard to baptism, it is not in relation to Jesus.

Question 14(b)

This question asked for the features of place of worship of a named Christian denomination. Candidates sometimes did not name the denomination (even when they named the Church) and so were limited to level 1. This illustrates the need to read the question carefully.

Question 18(b)

This question asks about the importance of the ulema. A large number of candidates answering this question did not know what the ulema are.

(c) Questions

These are very similar to (d) questions in Part 1 and in fact carry the same number of marks. They ask for a balanced answer, with reasons for two points of view and a clear indication of why the candidate favours one or the other. Many candidates could do this effectively, though quite a large number only gave reasons for one point of view. This was far more prevalent in Part 2 than in Part 1.

Paper Summary

Teachers and candidates should note these general points.

Candidates should be encouraged to be note that questions can be asked from a religious or a non-religious perspective, or both.

Candidates should look out for questions that ask about 'different' points of view or reasons. Such questions require at least two perspectives.

Candidates need to read the questions carefully to avoid limiting the number of marks available to them. In this paper examples included reading 'religious' instead of 'non-religious', 'why' rather than 'how', and 'naming a Christian denomination'.

When asked to discuss an argument or proposition (in (d) questions in Part 1 and (c) questions in Part 2) candidates must give reasons for and against. Not to do so means the response will be marked out of 3 (rather than 5 marks). Candidates also need to indicate which point of view they support and why. In addition, they need to indicate a named religion in part 1 or be limited to level 3 of the mark scheme.

The question paper can ask questions based on any part of the material in a given section. Candidates should be encouraged to prepare for all of the material, rather than elements of a section. Individual questions in Part 1 and Part 2 can draw from any part of the sub section being examined. For example a question (a, b and c) in Part 2 could include material from any of the sub-sections: Founders and leaders; Rules for living; Worship and celebration; and Places of worship and pilgrimage.

Candidates should allocate sufficient time for Part 2. It is worth almost 40% of the total marks. Also, both the (a) and (b) questions carry 10 marks each and should usually be answered at some length.

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