

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

International GCSE Religious
Studies 4RS0

Paper 01

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Introduction

This specification was examined for the third time this year.

The examination was in 2 parts. Part 1 consisted of 4 sections and candidates were required to answer one question from each section. Part 2 consisted of 6 sections, each asking questions from the perspective of a specific religion. Candidates were asked to answer two questions from Part 2.

All questions included sub-questions that were designed to assess both AO1 and AO2.

Some candidates displayed an 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 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.

Report on specific questions

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, making objective comment on such questions impossible. However, this report will try to 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 (c) provided some very good responses from candidates. There were a minority of candidates who struggled with what parts (b) 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. This was a question where candidates either seemed to know the answer or did not; this highlights the need for careful learning of the key words.

Question 1(b)

Part (b) was answered very well on occasion, however, often candidates' answers often veered from the focus of the question. There are on the specification a number of things to explain human wrongdoing and often candidates explored these other areas. Candidates need to read the question carefully and ensure that their answer is focussed on its demands.

Question 1(c)

This question was generally answered very well. Candidates were able to suggest many reasons why some people do not believe in life after death. A minority of candidates while answering the question also felt a need to explain reasons why people do believe in life after death; this was not the focus of the question and candidates need to address the question asked.

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 failed to refer to a named religion and as such could only be awarded a level 3. The responses that were given to this question showed candidates understood what was being asked and came up with both simple and complex arguments.

Question 2(a)

The question was answered very well as candidates seemed to have a good understanding of what resurrection is. Answers which only referenced Jesus coming back from the dead received partial marks as it did not define but gave an example.

Question 2(b)

Although a lot of candidates were able to correctly identify teachings about the nature of human beings, there were a variety of different approaches in the answers given. All of the different approaches, whether about the creation in the image of God or the selfish nature, were creditable and candidates provided some very good answers. On occasion candidates did not seem to recognise what this question was asking. Careful preparation by candidates using specification phrases would aid in understanding what the questions are asking.

Question 2(c)

This question was attempted well by candidates of all abilities. Candidates were able to use religious and non-religious reasons well. Answers were able to be given that provided reasons accompanied by development.

Question 2(d)

The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether God has already decided our destiny. Most candidates responded well, but some struggled to provide alternative reasons in the opposing view, as such they were limited to level 3. In (d) questions both sides of the argument must be given to achieve higher levels.

Section B: Ultimate reality and the meaning of life

Question 3(a)

This question was answered well as most candidates seemed to have learned the definition, or they could utilise the knowledge developed from their studies to suggest possible definitions.

Question 3(b)

Most candidates were able to outline a religion's teachings about the cause of moral evil. Some candidates confused moral and natural evil and thus were awarded no marks. Although easy to mix up, candidates should have an awareness of the differences between the two.

Question 3(c)

In exploring why non-religious people may have differing attitudes towards euthanasia candidates were often to explain why one view was held, some candidates did not offer differing attitudes which must be addressed in a question that demands such. Some candidates also explained the differing views but failed to address the reasons these views may be held. Again, careful reading and analysis of what the question is asking would have helped.

Question 3(d)

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

Question 4(a)

Generally well answered. This is a word that candidates seemed to have learned well.

Question 4(b)

This question asked candidates to describe a religious conversion experience. Candidates seemed to struggle with what the question was asking. Most candidates defined what conversion was, rather than describing an experience. As such they have included a small reference to an experience as an example limiting the marks they could achieve.

Question 4(c)

This was a well answered question overall, with many candidates able to offer a range of reasons why people reject monotheism. Some utilised atheism as the alternative to monotheism, others polytheism. Either, or both, was acceptable and indeed the higher level answers included both.

Question 4(d)

This question caused few problems for candidates. Responses generally focused around the arguments for and against abortion and many different reasons for the supporting views.

Section C: Relationships, families and children

Question 5(a)

Civil partnership was well understood overall and candidates achieved well on this question. However, care should be taken to be precise, as 'gay marriage' would only be partially correct.

Question 5(b)

Candidates generally answered this question well and understood what is meant by celibacy. Often candidates utilised attitudes from across two religions which is acceptable by the phrasing of the question.

Question 5(c)

While this question elicited some good responses from candidates, there was some who described how relationships had changed rather than how non-religious are responding. Candidates need to be careful when reading the question.

Question 5(d)

Candidates generally answered this question well and were able to provide arguments on both sides. Candidates do need to be aware of the need to refer to a named religion.

Question 6(a)

Most candidates learnt the complete definition and were able to score full marks. Though there was occasional confusion with other types of family.

Question 6(b)

Religious teachings about promiscuity were generally well and fully understood.

Question 6(c)

This question was about why some religious people believe that divorce is wrong. Although they were able to do this, some candidates explored the reasons why religions believe divorce is acceptable. This question did not ask for differing attitudes and care should be taken to focus on the demands of the question.

Question 6(d)

Some very balanced discussions, and usually a specific religion was named. Candidates seemed to find this question straightforward.

Section D: Rights, equality and responsibilities.

Question 7(a)

As a glossary definition question this question had a mixed response. Candidates seemed confused by differing understandings of what justice is. Careful focus on key words would help overcome any confusion.

Question 7(b)

This question was sometimes not answered well. Most candidates outlined religious beliefs about racism rather than ways in which racism can be overcome. Some, however, found this very straightforward and could suggest many ways.

Question 7(c)

This question provided some very good answers with reasons being given from a variety of religious teachings. This showed candidates understanding of the variety of applications of religious teachings. A significant minority focussed on how those with disabilities could be supported which was not what the question was asking.

Question 7(d)

Some very balanced discussions, and usually a specific religion was named. Candidates seemed to find this question straightforward.

Question 8(a)

Equal opportunities were well understood overall.

Question 8(b)

Candidates generally answered this question well, and were able to write differing attitudes to followers of other religions. Most focussed on exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism within Christianity.

Question 8(c)

Candidates engaged well with this question and were able to develop the reasons they gave with specific examples. This question provided some excellent responses.

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 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 or only partially understood.

Question 12(a)

This question asked for an outline of the role of a member of the clergy within any one named denomination. Candidates who failed to name a denomination were unable to achieve beyond level 1. The scope for answers was large and candidates offered responses based on the role of a Bishop or the Pope. This was unexpected but within the demands of the question.

Question 13(a)

This question asked how Jesus interpreted the Ten Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. Some candidates answered very well, while others listed the Ten Commandments.

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 20(a)

This question asked candidates to outline what Muslims do when they visit Madinah; as such reference to the activities in Makkah could not be credited.

(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.

Question 12(b)

This question asked why Christians have differing attitudes to the role of the laity. Candidates generally failed to understand what was being asked and described what the laity were, or explore differing attitudes.

Question 14(b)

This question asked how the rites at a religious wedding service reflect the Christian view of marriage. Often candidates described the rites and made no link to how they reflect the view of marriage. Care should be taken to read the demands of the question carefully.

Question 18(b)

This question asks about the importance of the mosque to Muslims. This was generally answered well, but a significant minority explored the features of the mosque rather than its overall importance.

(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.

HOW TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

Following on from this report, it is possible to suggest a number of simple ways in which candidates can be helped to improve their performance:

- Candidates should be encouraged to be aware that questions can be asked from a religious or a non-religious perspective, or both.
- They should look out for questions that ask about 'different' points of view or reasons. Such questions require at least two perspectives.
- Where questions ask for "why", candidates should recognise that more than description is being asked for.
- Where some questions ask for one sided views, for example, why some Christians do not accept divorce, candidates should recognise that only one view is being asked for and being credited.
- 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) they must give reasons for and against. Failing to do so means they will be marked out of 3 (rather than 5 marks). They 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.
- 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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