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Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel
International GCSE
in Religious Studies (4RS0)
Paper 01

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Introduction

This specification was examined for the fifth 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 A02.

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(a)

This question was answered very well. There were various ways in which the question could be answered but candidates generally found it straightforward.

Question 1(b)

Part (b) was answered well generally. Candidates were able to talk about the big bang; and credit was also given for reference to evolution as a part of the creative process. Occasionally some answers focussed on religious beliefs rather than non religious views. Candidates need to read the question carefully and ensure that their answer is focussed on its demands.

Question 1(c)

This question had a mixed response. Candidates were generally able to suggest different religious views about the commonality of all living beings. A large minority of candidates struggled to understand what was meant by the commonality of all living beings- some focussed on humanity only, others failed to understand it at all. This phrase is in the specification and highlights the need to use appropriate terminology in candidate preparation.

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 struggled to refer to a named religion and as such were unable to access the full range of marks. Some candidates focussed on explaining what free will was without linking it to its importance for non-religious people.

Question 2(a)

The question was answered very well as candidates seemed to have a good understanding of what is meant by the afterlife.

Question 2(b)

A large number of candidates were able to correctly identify religious teachings about free will. This question produced some very good answers and showed that they understood the teachings of one religion. This is the type of question where only one religion or a number of religions can be credited in the response.

Question 2(c)

This question was attempted well by candidates of all abilities. Candidates were able to use non-religious reasons well. Answers were able to be given that provided reasons accompanied by development. Care should be taken by candidates to check what the question is asking, and that reference to spiritual world would not be credited.

Question 2(d)

The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether religious people should be selfish. 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 know what euthanasia is. This was very straightforward for candidates.

Question 3(b)

Most candidates were able to outline religious teachings about the nature of God. Candidates seemed well versed in the various elements of the nature of God in religion.

Question 3(c)

In exploring how a religious upbringing may lead to belief in God candidates were often able to describe a religious upbringing, some candidates did not link to belief in God which must be addressed in a question that demands such. This is a further example of a question that could utilize material from more than one religion. While not required, this enabled some candidates to reach the higher levels. Others were able to do this very well using just one religion.

Question 3(d)

This produced a number of well-balanced answers. Candidates engaged well with this question and seemed to be able to express themselves very well on both sides of the argument. Care needs to be taken when answering these questions to name a religion rather than relying on general religious arguments; failure to do so limits any response however well developed or balanced to 3 marks.

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 outline the purpose of life for non-religious people. The scope for answers was fairly wide. Candidates who achieved well linked their chosen teachings to the purpose of life well. Some candidates struggled to outline the purpose of life for non-religious people, while others misread the question as referring to religious people. Care should be taken in interpreting what the question means.

Question 4(c)

Most candidates answered this question well. They were able to articulate the differing attitudes to abortion. Sometimes candidates failed to make links as to why they might have these different attitudes. As such candidates sometimes struggled to get the higher levels of marks.

Question 4(d)

While this question seemed straightforward a large majority of candidates interpreted the question to be about belief in God, rather than belief in one God. While the reference to a named religion was straightforward, the focus on God rather than one God limited the success that candidates could find.

Section C: Relationships, families and children

Question 5(a)

This question was answered well as most candidates seemed to have learned the definition, or they could use their own understanding to use alternative phraseology.

Question 5(b)

Most candidates were able to outline religious attitudes to cohabitation. This answer was straightforward for most candidates.

Question 5(c)

In exploring why non-religious people may have differing attitudes towards divorce, candidates were often able to explain why one view was held, some candidates did not offer differing attitudes which must be addressed in a question that demands such.

Question 5(d)

This produced a number of well-balanced answers. Care needs to be taken when answering these questions to name a religion rather than relying on general religious arguments; failure to do so limits any response however well developed or balanced to 3 marks.

Question 6(a)

Generally well answered. This is a word that candidates seemed to have learned well; however a significant minority provided examples suggesting the need of a careful learning of key words.

Question 6(b)

This question asked candidates to outline ways in which religious communities can help support family life. Candidates seemed to answer this question well. A small number of candidates strayed into a discussion about why they might do this, while sometimes creditable as development this was not the focus of the question.

Question 6(c)

This was a well answered question overall, with many candidates able to offer a range of ways how non-religious people are responding to the changing nature of family life. Some candidates described the changes in family life which often were not linked to how they respond; or alternatively focused on religious responses. A careful reading of the question would have served the candidates well.

Question 6(d)

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

Section D: Rights, equality and responsibilities.

Question 7(a)

Candidates were generally able to explain what is meant by a multi-faith society. This indicated that there was precision in the learning of the key words.

Question 7(b)

This question was generally answered well. Most candidates outlined religious attitudes to disability well which were developed with examples.

Question 7(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, some candidates did not offer differing views which must be addressed in a question that demands such.

Question 7(d)

Some very balanced discussions. Candidates seemed to find this question straightforward. However, this was a question where candidates often forgot to name a religion and as such limited the available marks.

Question 8(a)

Freedom of opinion was generally well understood overall: the glossary definition was the answer most often seen.

Question 8(b)

Candidates generally answered this question well and were able to outline how one religion promotes racial harmony. Sometimes candidates strayed into explaining teachings which was not the focus of the question.

Question 8(c)

This question provided some very good answers with examples being given as to why religious people promote relationships between different religions. This showed candidates understanding of the variety of applications of religious teachings. A significant minority focussed on how they might do this which was not the focus of the question.

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 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 how one Christian, other than Jesus, contributed to Christianity. Candidates who failed to name a person and the contributions made were unable to achieve beyond level 1. The scope for answers was large and candidates offered varied responses. Candidates needed to go beyond description of the person's life to include the contribution he/she made.

Question 13(a)

This question asked candidates to outline the main activities during the celebration of the eucharist. Candidates generally answered this well and were able to outline the various stages of the service well. This was answered from different denominational perspectives which is acceptable.

Question 20(a)

This question asked for an outline of the main features of Juma prayers. There were some very detailed answers, but there were also a large number of very brief answers that only recited the features of prayers in general..

(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 referred to places other than Jerusalem and Bethlehem in Christianity. The vast majority of students read the question to mean both of these places and indicates a need to read the question carefully.

Question 13(b)

This question asked how the Sermon on the Mount is applied in the life of Christians today. There were some excellent answers, but a large minority described the teachings with little or no reference to how it is applied today which was the focus of the question.

Question 20(b)

This question asked how halal could be shown in practice. Most candidates limited their answers to the killing of animals. The answers which achieved more highly referred to more than the food 'example' because the question asked for examples.

(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.

- 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. There is no requirement to begin at question 1 and work through the paper. Some candidates very obviously began with part 2. Whatever works best for the candidate is permissible.

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