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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

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

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Summer 2017

Publications Code 4RS0_01_1706_ER

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Introduction

This specification was examined for the seventh 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. The answer showed that candidates had learned the glossary definition in the specification

Question 1(b)

Part (b) was answered well generally. Candidates' answers outlined the teachings within religions, on occasion more detail was needed to fully outline some of the teachings that were explored. The majority of the answers in the question came from Christianity and Islam, though all religions were credited.

Question 1(c)

This question had a mixed response. Candidates were generally able to suggest beliefs that non-religious people hold about the place of human beings in the universe. There were many possible beliefs that candidates were able to refer to but often they limited their answer to one belief that was often not explained in sufficient detail to achieve the higher marks. A minority of candidates explored religious beliefs rather than non-religious beliefs. A careful reading of the question is required.

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 seem to have utilised this format and made good reference to a named religion.

Question 2(a)

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

Question 2(b)

There were some candidates who answered this question by outlining beliefs about sin. To access the full range of marks candidates needed to link this to being the root cause of human wrongdoing. There were different ways that this could have been done by drawing on religious traditions. Most often candidates were able to use the story of the Fall within Christianity to answer this question. Care should be taken by candidates to check what the question is asking.

Question 2(c)

Candidates were able to use religious beliefs about having a special responsibility for the planet. Answers were able to be given that provided reasons accompanied by development. This question could be answered from specific religious perspectives or adopt a more general approach - both were valid and were credited.

Question 2(d)

The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether everything a person does is already determined. 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 omnipotent means. This was very straightforward for candidates.

Question 3(b)

Most candidates were able to outline beliefs about causation. A significant minority focused on Design rather than causation. Candidates should be clear about the difference between the two to enable them to answer the question asked.

Question 3(c)

In exploring why some people might be atheist. This question was answered very well by candidates and they were able to provide numerous reasons why and develop them appropriately.

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. Some candidates spoke about the arguments for and against abortion; candidates need to be aware of the need to link the arguments they are making to the statement stimulus. 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 value of life for non-religious people. The scope for answers was fairly wide. Some candidates struggled to develop the explanations that were given 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 how religious people respond to the problem of evil and suffering. This was answered from a practical perspective (helping and praying) or from a philosophical perspective (free will, etc). Both of these approaches were credited and candidates performed well on this question.

Question 4(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. Some candidates spoke about the arguments for and against euthanasia; candidates need to be aware of the need to link the arguments they are making to the statement stimulus.

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)

Some candidates were able to outline non-religious attitudes to childlessness. A number of candidates struggled to go beyond a very superficial statement - care should be taken in preparing for the exam to explore non-religious attitudes as well as religious.

Question 5(c)

In exploring how religious communities can contribute to family life candidates were able to draw on a range of religious communities and either answer from one religion's perspective or include reference to more than one. Again, both approaches are valid and creditable.

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.

Question 6(b)

This question asked candidates to outline different religious attitudes to homosexuality. Candidates seemed to answer this question well and draw on a wide range of reasons. A significant minority did not refer to different attitudes which limited the marks available. Candidates should read the demands of the question carefully.

Question 6(c)

This was a well answered question overall, with many candidates able to offer a range of responses of religious people to cohabitation.

Question 6(d)

This question caused few problems for candidates. Responses generally focused around the arguments for and against whether marriage is only a legal agreement between two people and many different reasons for the supporting views. There were a large number of candidates who struggled to look at opposing arguments.

Section D: Rights, equality and responsibilities.

Question 7(a)

Candidates were generally able to explain what is meant by compassion. This indicated that there was precision in the learning of the key words. Occasionally candidates provided examples rather than a definition that could only be credited as partially correct.

Question 7(b)

This question was generally answered well. Most candidates outlined non-religious attitudes to women well which were developed with examples. Sometimes candidates struggled to offer more than one attitude and were thus limited in the marks they could gain.

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.

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)

This question produced a number of different answers and often candidates struggled to understand or articulate what inclusivism means.

Question 8(b)

Candidates generally answered this question well, and were able to outline religious teachings about the responsibility of wealthy individuals towards the poor.

Question 8(c)

This question provided some very good answers with examples being given. Teachings developed by examples of religious people being involved in proselytisation. Some candidates struggled to have enough to talk about in their answers and should be better able to offer development.

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 13(a)

This question asked candidates to outline the main features of the temptations of Jesus. Candidates generally answered this well and were able to outline the various features well.

Question 14(a)

This question asked for an outline of how the principle of love is shown in the lives of Christians today. The scope for answers was large and candidates offered varied responses. Candidates needed to ensure that they focussed their answers on principles related to love rather than general Christian principles.

Question 18(a)

This question asked for an outline of the main activities performed during Id-ul-Adha. There were some very detailed answers, but there were also a large number of very brief answers that looked at why it was celebrated.

(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 13(b)

This question asked why public worship is important for Christians. There were some excellent answers, but a large minority described public worship with little or no reference to its importance which was the focus of the question.

Question 14(b)

This question referred to the death and resurrection of Jesus. A large minority of students only focussed on one of these and indicates a need to read the question carefully.

Question 18(b)

This question asked why the Imam is important for Shi'a Muslims. A large number of candidates referenced the imam in Sunni Islam who have different reasons for their importance. It is important that candidates are careful in answering the question that is asked.

(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.
- 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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