Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In Religious Studies (4RS1) Paper 01

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Introduction

This paper contributes 50% of the overall award at GCSE. The paper consists of four sections each offering a choice of two complete questions, each sub-question covers a section of the specification, and all candidates are expected to answer all four sub-questions from the question of their choice in each section. Details of the assessment content are provided in the specification. Centres are expected to use the Edexcel specification, rather than other published resources, when planning and teaching the course content. The examination is written based on the specification content.

This paper encourages an in depth study of religion today. 4RS1/01 consists of four sections, Beliefs and Values, Life and Death, Peace and Conflict and Rights, Equality and Social Justice. This was the second year of awarding for this Pearson/Edexcel qualification, though it was far from a normal year for either teachers or candidates. Most students were content with their teacher assessed grades awarded in the summer, following the cancellation of examinations in response to the Covid pandemic, as a consequence, the entry in the Autumn series was vastly reduced across all papers. It is therefore significantly more difficult to draw general conclusions from the limited evidence this provided.

By comparison to the previous examination series the following observations can be made:
a)-type sub-questions: Candidates, in general, were confident is accessing these questions. The majority of candidates suggested three valid points in response to the questions.
b)-type sub-questions: Questions continued to be well executed by candidates who grasped the concept of a developed reason.
c)-type sub-questions: This is the first question to be assessed according to Levels rather than a point-based system and candidates responded in a similar way to 2019.
d)-type sub-questions: In d) questions the standard remained much the same as last year with few candidates able to appraise their own arguments. Some who did attempt appraisal did so at the expense of the development of their arguments. The levels for d marking are firmly rooted in the demands of the higher order thinking skills so it is perhaps not surprising that these appeared to suffer most from the reduction in teacher contact time caused by school closures.

In addition, there was more evidence of entire sub-questions missed out by the candidates. This, again, may be directly attributable to the complications caused by the closure of schools.

SECTION 1: BELIEFS AND VALUES

4RS1_01_Q01a

1a) Identify **three** characteristics of God.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 1.5.

Questions are designed to be answered from the perspective of any religion the candidate has studied. This was a very straightforward question and few candidates struggled to suggest three valid characteristics. Many suggested that God is all-loving, merciful and all-powerful. Many achieved three marks with three well-chosen words.

4RS1_01_Q01b

1b) Choose **one** religion. Outline **two** ways its followers should treat animals.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 1.1.

Some candidates, rather surprisingly, struggled with this question. Many said they should be treated fairly or kindly but then struggled to develop this way in any valid religious sense. There were some strong responses from candidates in Islam where they had a good understanding of the basis of Muslim attitudes towards animal welfare and hunting for sport.

4RS1_01_Q01c

1c) Explain non-religious beliefs about free-will.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 1.4.

Many candidates continue to struggle with those questions specifically targeted at the beliefs of non-religious people. A number take religious views and try to take the religion out. Almost invariably they come back to the idea of free-will as a gift and life as a test. Those who did answer it well tended to consider the idea that behaviour is genetically determined and therefore a person has no free will against the idea that humans have complete freedom of choice only confined by societal limitations.

4RS1_01_Q01d

1d) "Everyone suffers; therefore, God cannot exist".

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 1.7.

The problem of evil and suffering gave many candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the arguments that enable a benevolent God to exist even in the face of hardship. Regardless of the religion considered the arguments to disagree with the premise tended to be strongly argued and well considered. Many candidates however struggled to find arguments to support the beliefs of atheists and humanists who may use the concept to add weight to their argument that God does not exist. Those that did tended to use the inconsistent triad as the basis of their argument. As in 2019 few candidates attempted to appraise the value of the relevant arguments or consider critically the views presented. Even fewer based their conclusion on any form of appraisal limiting their marks to Level 3 at best.

4RS1_01_Q02a

2a) Identify **three** rights animals should have.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 1.1.

An exceptionally low number of candidates attempted this question so observations for question 2 are even more subjective than usual. Many candidates gave three clear rights such as water, food and shelter. Some suggested that animals should be free, this was not credited, since neither farm animals or pets can be considered free.

4RS1_01_Q02b

2b) Choose **one** religion. Outline **two** beliefs about the immortality of the soul in this religion.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 1.2.

Many of the candidates who did attempt this question had very firm beliefs about an immortal soul but struggled to articulate the religious basis of this belief. Some unfortunately confused resurrection of the soul with reincarnation and therefore lost marks. Those who responded well based their argument firmly in the teachings of the faith under consideration.

4RS1_01_Q02c

2c) Explain the causes of human wrongdoing.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 1.3.

Since no religious content was required this response could consider approaches from a religious basis, a non-religious basis or a mixture of the two. Most chose to look at the religious beliefs on the topic considering ideas such as the misuse of free will and the temptations of Satan. Some also referenced ideas such as upbringing, inequality and human nature in terms of selfishness, greed and lack of empathy.

4RS1_01_Q02d

2d) "There is no proof that God exists".

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 1.6.

Many candidates approached this with some enthusiasm since there are many sound arguments to be made. Some gave very one-sided responses with little respect shown for the views of those who did not share their perspective. In order to progress to Level 3 candidates must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of views other than their own.
Although many opportunities exist to critically consider the evidence presented these were rarely taken with candidate instead focussing on scripture, both as a historical record and a source of teaching, and personal experiences of the reality of an ultimate authority such as the conscience.

SECTION 2: LIFE AND DEATH

4RS1_01_Q03a

3a) Identify **three** non-religious ideas about the meaning and purpose of life.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 2.2.

As is often the case some candidates did not read the question carefully enough and answered as though the question were 'Identify **three** religious' ideas ...'. It is difficult to know what precisely creates this difficulty, perhaps since it is a Religious Studies examination candidate feel obliged to demonstrate their religious knowledge. As a result, some responded with ideas such as 'to serve God', 'to achieve paradise' which are clearly religious, rather than the non-religious ideas required. Those who read, and answered, the question as written suggested ideas such as to make money, have a family, find love and companionship which were creditworthy.

4RS1_01_Q03b

3b) Outline **two** reasons why some people decide not to have children.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 2.8.

This could be approached from either a religious perspective or a non-religious one. In general candidates dealt with it very well, many suggesting that some chose to adopt because of the environmental pressure caused by overpopulation whilst other considered the role of vocation and the call to celibacy as a reason not to have children. Some candidates confused the choice to remain childless with childlessness caused by infertility which cannot be something anyone decides.

4RS1_01_Q03c

3c) Choose **one** religion. Explain the attitudes its followers have towards divorce.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 2.6.

By contrast this question was very firmly rooted in religious attitudes and produced a pleasing range of responses revealing well established attitudes from within a faith. Candidates were very good a giving clarity on which religion was under discussion, with responses starting 'Most Christians', for example. The vast majority of candidates answered from a Christian perspective with a significant minority from Islam. Though knowledge was sound and well explained some candidate responses suffered from a lack of breadth and depth, focussing on a single attitude from a particular religious tradition though the question clearly asks candidates to consider attitudes in the plural.
Many presented the idea that divorce, whilst not desirable, may be the lesser of two evils in some situations.

4RS1_01_Q03d

3d) "It is the responsibility of a family to look after their elderly relatives".

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 2.7.

This question produced some of the most heartfelt and passionate responses on the paper, perhaps a reflection of the impact of the pandemic on all of us. Most felt very strongly that care of the elderly was important for families and talked with respect and love of their own grandparents. Many had at least some awareness of the alternate side arguing that sometimes the responsibility became too much for a family and they needed the support of outside agencies. Some became very involved in a debate about how far this responsibility could be expected to extend. Was it just a person's parents or was every distant relative included? This approach

tended to distract them from the focus of the question. I am left wondering if, in a different year, this question may have produced very different responses.

4RS1_01_Q04a

4a) Identify **three** rights children should have.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 2.7.

Most candidates found this very straightforward, responding with ideas such as food, water, the right to have their views heard or the right to play.

4RS1_01_Q04b

4b) Outline **two** different attitudes to homosexuality.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 2.4.

Again, this did not require a specifically religious response. The majority of candidates approached it from a religious perspective suggesting the idea that it was forbidden by the scriptures, often developed by a relevant quote. This was then contrasted with the idea that as society has changed so the religious view has come to consider that sexuality may be, at least in part, genetically determined and therefore becomes more accepting of people who are not heterosexual even whilst disapproving of non-traditional sexual activity whether married or not.

4RS1_01_Q04c

4c) Choose **one** religion. Explain the attitudes its followers may have towards abortion.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 2.3.

Most candidates had a very good understanding of the beliefs concerning abortion of the religion under consideration. The majority, responding with respect to Christianity or Islam, were heavily weighted to those who disagreed with abortion however the vast majority of candidates were prepared to concede that there were exceptions to the rule, usually involving harm to the mother-to-be with a valid reason why the maternal life may be considered of paramount importance. Where candidates failed to score Level 2 marks (4-6) this tended to be because of limited explanation of the point they were making or a concentration on factual information rather than the attitudes the beliefs resulted in.

4RS1_01_Q04d

4d) "No-one should have sex outsides of marriage".

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 2.5.

This is a topic beloved by candidates, and, in many cases, it is something they have clearly thought about for themselves. Most had relatively little difficulty in supporting the statement though most focussed exclusively on adultery with little consideration of pre-marital sexual activity. Many, as an alternative, gave the stance of the Church of England, where cohabitation can be considered as a step toward marriage though few seemed willing to discuss the ideas non-religious people may have on the necessity of marriage before sexual activity takes place. Those who did seemed prepared to suggest that non-religious people were all thrill seekers and not prepared to commit to a monogamous relationship which reduced the value of the argument and the ability to critically appraise the ideas considered. Appraisal, or rather the lack of appraisal, remains an issue for almost all candidates.

SECTION 3: PEACE AND CONFLICT

4RS1_01_Q05a

5a) Identify **three** purposes for the death penalty.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 3.6.

This caused some candidates some issues, largely in identifying the requirements of the command word, in this case purposes. Some gave examples of the use of the death penalty, for example, lethal injection. Others gave crimes that may provoke the use of the death penalty, for example, murder. Those who understood what the question asked tended to use ideas such as, it is the only fair punishment for terrible crimes, it gives justice and/or retribution for the victim or its function as a deterrent.

4RS1_01_Q05b

5b) Outline **two** types of sin and their consequences.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 3.4.

Some candidates were comfortable with this question, particularly those who approached it from the perspective of a Catholic Christian. They discussed venial sins and mortal sins and offered valid potential consequences for each. A significant proportion of candidates struggled. They gave an example of a sin as a

type of sin, for example, murder or theft and then suggested a consequence. The consequence offered for both was often the same. For example murder and theft, the consequence for both was prison. As a result candidates tended to either do very well in this question or to struggle a lot.

A valid alternative approach suggested by some candidates was to look at sins against God as one type of sin, with a consequence requiring repentance and forgiveness, and sins against humanity as a second type, with a variety of different consequences offered. Although not covered by the mark scheme this approach was credited as a valid alternative approach.

4RS1_01_Q05c

5c) Choose **one** religion. Explain the attitudes to punishment in this religion.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 3.5.

Many candidates used this as an opportunity to debate the relative merits of punishment and forgiveness. This was a perfectly acceptable approach as long as the candidate concerned retained the sense that the question was about punishment. Some digressed so far that the response became a discussion of the importance of forgiveness much of which was irrelevant. A number of candidates considered the question by judging the relative merits of the various reasons why punishment exists, considering, for example, the importance of retribution versus the value of reform. Some included both aspects increasing the breadth of their response.

4RS1_01_Q05d

5d) "All religious people should be pacifists".

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 3.2.

Some candidates had a weak grasp of what pacifism means, choosing to regard it as a vague distaste for war that a person could overlook if the country required them to go to war. Few were prepared to embrace pacifism and support the view that violence is always wrong whatever the circumstances. However, many were able to construct valid arguments for the two approaches and the decision they came to largely depended on the religious tradition they based their answer on. Again, this was a question which lent itself to a deconstruction of the arguments but there was little evidence of this. For the most part candidates continue to give brief arguments from both sides and then conclude that the personal opinion they hold is the correct response. As a result, the higher marks in d questions continue to elude many candidates.

4RS1_01_Q06a

6a) Identify **three** causes of conflict.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 3.1.

Apart from the now familiar misunderstanding of the key word most candidates negotiated this question without mishap. Those who didn't read careful offered areas were conflict is currently present as suggested by the specification. Those who were more successful had two main approaches; some chose to consider major conflicts and looked at the causes of war such as politics, religion and resources, others focussed on inter-personal conflict and suggested causes such as envy, greed and bullying. Both approaches were equally creditworthy.

4RS1_01_Q06b

6b) Outline **two** reasons why some non-religious people are opposed to capital punishment.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 3.6.

This question suffered from a double default for some candidates. Some ignored the instruction to respond on non-religious views and gave ideas based on scripture. Some ignored the 'opposed' and wrote responses as though the question were 'Outline **two** reasons why some non-religious people are in favour of capital punishment.' Some, having avoided both these issues, gave perfectly valid views that a non-religious person may hold and then supported them with scriptural quotes or religious teaching that would not be used by a non-religious person.
Those candidates who read and understood the question suggested ideas such as it is inhumane developed by the use of the human rights act, or it doesn't work as a deterrent supported by a comparison of murder rates in countries that use, or do not use, the death penalty.

4RS1_01_Q06c

6c) Choose **one** religion. Explain the teachings about the importance of forgiveness in this religion.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 3.2.

This question was very focussed on the teachings of a specific religion rather than generic thoughts about the benefits of forgiveness. Those candidates who were familiar with appropriate teachings negotiated this very well, others were not so fortunate. Since the majority of candidates in this series answered from the

perspective of Christianity the most frequently seen teachings were those of Jesus such as 'Forgive seventy times seven'. Some used the example of Jesus' life as a teaching. Whilst 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do' was accepted as a valid teaching the assertion that Jesus forgave Judas was not. Whilst it would be entirely in keeping with the nature of Jesus to have forgiven Judas, Matthew 26:24 says 'But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.'

Many focused to good effect on the importance of God's forgiveness of humanity as essential for salvation and entry into heaven, or indeed paradise.

4RS1_01_Q06d

6d) "All sins should be crimes".

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 3.4.

Responses to this question pointed to the difficulty some candidates have in discriminating between sins and crimes. Some began with the assertion that all sins should indeed be crimes and then gave the example of murder which is in all societies already a crime. Such candidates then found it difficult to find examples of any sins which are not also currently crimes. Other candidates, with a clearer idea of the difference between a sin and a crime and the implications this has in the real world gave examples like speeding or parking on a double yellow line and went on to consider instances when committing these particular crimes may not be sinful.

Few candidates attempted to address those sins which pass unnoticed by all but God such as envy, expressly forbidden by the Ten Commandments, but how can the law make a judgement on whether someone is envious and if so at what threshold should this be considered a crime? Those who felt that all sins should be crimes often used the idea that sins are against God's law and so since God is both omniscient and benevolent his laws must be best for mankind.

A small number of candidates considered whether it would be possible or desirable to proclaim more modern crimes, such as internet abuse, as sinful. Most agreed that this would be possible using existing religious morality, but few considered whether this was useful or what issues it may cause for wider society. Again, though there were numerous opportunities to appraise the evidence and come to a justified conclusion few took the opportunity to make any but the most limited judgements.

SECTION 4: RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

4RS1_01_Q07a

7a) Identify **three** examples of discrimination.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 4.3.

Candidates found this question straightforward. The majority of candidates gave examples such as racism, sexism and religious discrimination.

4RS1_01_Q07b

7b) Choose **one** religion. Outline **two** reasons why many of its followers support human rights.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 4.1.

A significant proportion of candidates found it difficult to link religious beliefs to the issue of human rights. Those who did considered ideas such as the agreement between religious morality and the aims to the Human Rights Act. Many also reference the importance to religious people of the freedom of religion and the protection it affords minority religious groupings.
Some candidates wrote about human rights in generic terms often referencing the areas that may prove difficult for religious people in the Human Rights Act and failing to link this to religious support for human rights.

4RS1_01_Q07c

7c) Explain different religious attitudes to living in a multi-faith society.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 4.4.

Whilst this should have been an easily accessible question many candidates continue to confuse multi-faith societies with multi-cultural societies and so wrote about the benefits and challenges in terms of race rather than religion. Those who read the question carefully articulated the views of both those who welcome the opportunity to live with those of other faiths and bring the communities together, and those who would prefer to live in a mono-faith community where their beliefs are less likely to be challenged.

4RS1_01_Q07d

7d) "Women should be religious leaders".

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 4.2.

The thorny issue of women in leadership roles in faith settings continues to be problematic for some students. Some neatly avoided the key thrust of the question by proposing that women, of course, could be leaders but they would be religious leaders within the family or amongst other women. This left men, seen as stronger and wiser, to lead the men of the community.

Those who did address the issue of whether women should lead men in worship contrasted those institutions where men have exclusive rights as faith leaders with those that take a more liberal view. Some referenced a historical perspective suggesting that in the past women did have roles as leaders in religion. Many then decided that of course women should be religious leaders since they fulfilled leadership roles in every other aspect of life.

4RS1_01_Q08a

8a) Identify **three** practical ways religious people can help the poor.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 4.5.

Candidates were, in general, comfortable with this topic. They suggested various forms of charitable giving, support to find employment and many mentioned Zakah as a way of supporting those who are struggling.

4RS1_01_Q08b

8b) Choose **one** religion. Explain **two** of its attitudes towards the role of women in society.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 4.2.

A number of candidates had difficulty separating the role of women in society with the role of women in the family and religion. This led to problems when they were required to give two attitudes. Thos who understood the difference between religious and secular society often suggested that women should play a full role in society and have equal status to men. This was contrasted with the traditional role of women as wife and mother playing little part in wider society.

4RS1_01_Q08c

8c) Explain why religious people may disagree with some human rights.

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 4.1.

This proved to be rather more straightforward for many candidates than demonstrating why some religious people do agree with human rights. Many gave a range of valid examples when religious teaching may conflict with the rights and freedoms provided by human rights. These included the rights given to people to determine their own sexual preference when this directly conflicted with religious teachings on the subject. Many also mentioned freedom of speech as a right that enabled some to be openly critical of religious practice and to be blasphemous.

4RS1_01_Q08d

8d) "Prejudice and discrimination are the biggest problems facing society today".

This is taken from Specification Bullet Point 4.3.

The majority of candidates disagreed with this statement. Whilst they acknowledged that prejudice and discrimination are a problem, they argued that there were worse things to worry about, such as Global Warming and war. Many linked the evidence of Global Warming to a failure of society, and religious people specifically, to show stewardship of God's creation. Many argued that prejudice and discrimination, whilst serious, largely affected an individual or small group of individuals, whereas Global Warming and war risked the lives and livelihoods of whole populations.

The same patterns of approach to d) questions was also evident in Section 4 with very few candidates attempting to assess the quality of the arguments offered but rather reaching a conclusion based on their personal opinion on the issue. As a result, few were able to access marks at Level 4.

Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

1. Read questions carefully, answer the question as an entirety rather than one aspect of it.
2. Make sure you understand what is being asked for: What is the difference between a reason and an example?
3. In choosing a question look beyond the marks available for a) and b) sub-questions since the majority of marks for the paper are found in c) and d).
4. In both c) and d) sub-questions both breadth and depth of response are required. You are unlikely to achieve the highest levels by focussing on a single idea.
5. Focus on understanding what is required to access the higher levels of d questions. It is vital to analyse and judge the quality of the arguments offered. The conclusion of an evaluation should not be a statement of a personal opinion but should be firmly rooted in the evaluation of the evidence provided.