



GCE A Level Examiners' Report

Religious Studies
A Level
Summer 2024

Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.edugas.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner Eduqas

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Executive Summary

In Eduqas A Level Religious Studies in 2024 there was an increase in entries of 3.5% from June 2023. Overall performance this year was not as high as in 2023 but is in line with historical performance in years prior to this. 94.6% of the cohort were aged 18, comparable with the proportions in previous years. The proportional distribution of candidates across all ages is similar between 2022 to 2024. In terms of the candidates who were aged 18, 73.2% are female and 26.8% are male. This is comparable with both 2022 and 2023. The proportion of aged 18 entries from each centre type is comparable between 2022, 2023 and 2024. In all years, entries from Academies represent the largest proportion of candidates.

Positive aspects candidates' examination responses this year:

- **(AO2 Skills) and synoptic links:** there was a general improvement in AO2 skills, where students demonstrated the ability to structure essays well, make judgements, and provide clear analysis and evaluation. The integration of synoptic links, especially those that are perceptive and relevant, was a notable strength.
- **engagement with scholars and sources of wisdom and authority** - many candidates effectively engaged with a range of scholars, referring accurately to sources of wisdom and authority. This indicates a strong grasp of the material and the ability to connect various ideas and perspectives.
- **use of specialist vocabulary** successful candidates showed proficiency in using specialist vocabulary and this was particularly evident in discussions involving theological concepts, where candidates displayed a nuanced understanding of complex issues.

Issues for centres to consider:

- **poor handwriting was a serious concern** noted by many senior examiners this year. This highlights the need for appropriate access arrangements to be made by centres. Centres need to be aware of the state of their candidates' handwriting for (i) an extended period (the length of the exam) (ii) under exam conditions. Some responses given by candidates this year were simply unreadable and credit can be awarded in these cases (see Areas for Improvement 1: classroom resources).
- in all Components having a **clear knowledge and understanding of key subject terminology is essential** (see Areas for Improvement 2: classroom resources).
- **reading and understanding the question set:** A recurring issue was the failure of some candidates to fully address the questions set, often focusing on one part of the question or diverging into tangential issues. This highlights a need for better comprehension of the command words and key phrases in questions. (see Areas for Improvement 3: classroom resources)

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
1. Learning key terminology within the specification	Guidance For Teaching Document	Useful resources and a key word glossary
2. Gain a clear knowledge and understanding of each subtheme within the specification	Knowledge Organisers	Useful summaries of each sub-theme on a page of a4
3. Identifying key command words and phrases within each question – to select key information to address the question	Guidance For Teaching Document Exam Walkthroughs	Useful resources and a list of the question command words and their meaning. Shows how to break down each question, plan and select relevant information to address the question.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 1A: A STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates **AO1 skills** - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2 skills** - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q1 - Theme 1b: Jesus – his resurrection

Q2 - Theme 1c: The Bible as a source of wisdom and authority in daily life:

Q3 - Theme 2a: Religious concepts – the nature of God

Q4 - Theme 3b: Social developments in religious thought
– migration and Christianity in the UK

Q5 - Theme 4c: Religious identity through diversity in festivals

Contextual information

- overall for 2024, there are 1,583 entries for the Christianity pathway, an increase of 3.7% from June 2023. Of the 2024 candidates, 95.4% of them are aged 18, comparable with the proportions in previous years. The proportional distribution of candidates across all ages is similar between 2022 to 2024.
- of the candidates aged 18, sitting the unit qualification in June 2024, 72.7% are female and 26.8% are male. This is comparable with both 2022 and 2023.
- the proportion of aged 18 entries from each centre type is comparable between 2022, 2023 and 2024. In all years, entries from Academies represent the largest proportion of candidates

Positive feedback

- it was particularly pleasing to see candidates engaging with a range of scholars as well as referring accurately to sources of wisdom and authority.
- many candidates demonstrated clear synoptic links with other areas of the specification in their answers.
- AO2 skills generally continue to improve with many candidates structuring their essays well and clearly forming judgements throughout their essays as well as in the concluding paragraph.

Issues for centres to consider:

- candidates need to read each question carefully and focus on both the command word and other key phrases contained within it

- whilst making synoptic links is important, the links need to be relevant rather than forced. Candidates would make their critical analysis and evaluation of the question more effective if the link was more carefully chosen
- it would be good to see more candidates referring to the works of scholars that candidates have chosen to include in their answers
- **handwriting** continues to be a barrier to awarding. Appropriate access arrangements should be in place for such candidates. **Examiners cannot award credit for responses that are unreadable.**

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was the most popular question in Section A, (just!) with the joint highest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- included a range of information which demonstrated breadth and depth. This information included information from the Gospel accounts as well as from Corinthians 15
- referred to the transformational nature of Jesus's resurrection and how St. Paul later applies this to the analogy of the seed
- made a clear link between the physical resurrection of Jesus and the eschatological resurrection of all believers
- made to Bultmann's demythologisation of the New Testament and Wright's understanding of 'Life after life after death' as part of a wider application of knowledge and understanding.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- to focus on both part of the question rather than just one - do not concentrate solely on the Bultmann/Wright debate
- focus on their beliefs about the resurrection and the afterlife rather than historicity of it
- gain a greater accurate understanding of purgatory
- be able to explain St. Paul's defence of resurrection for all in 1 Corinthians 15.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- set out their intentions with an abstract at the start of the essay and then go on to successfully demonstrate support for their line of argument, using reasoning and or evidence, whilst presenting counterarguments
- provided an accurate representation of the views of Rudolph Bultmann and N.T. Wright whilst confidently and critically evaluating these views in the light of the statement. Developing each scholar's arguments, with sufficient and accurate exemplification
- made synoptic links that were perceptive and fully understood rather than forced and tokenistic. For example, in support of the historicity of the resurrection linking the beliefs with the kerygma and associating the beliefs with the major festival of Easter

- linking Bultmann's scepticism about the historicity of the resurrection and his reasons for deeming demythologisation as necessary with the compatibility of science and religion
- made good use of relevant specialist vocabulary

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- more focus on the question set
- demonstrate deeper engagement with and better understanding of the arguments put forward by NT Wright and Bultmann. In particular regarding Wright's arguments in favour of the historicity of the Resurrection, he puts forward counterarguments to support his own viewpoint (e.g. Swoon theory).
- when referring to Bultmann's views candidates need to effectively draw out the significance of demythologisation, with regards to the historicity of the Resurrection and the implications for the Early Church.

Q.2 This was the least popular question in Section A with the joint highest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- able to refer the set texts as well as relate them to the wider context of 'Heilsgeschichte' or salvation history
- referred to the 'meta-narrative' running through scripture and the ability to view one's life in the context of that
- made synoptic links to objective and subjective views of inspiration or the Lutheran understanding of sola scriptura or Divine Command Theory
- identified the different ways in which the Bible can be a source of authority and supported their answers with detailed and appropriate textual references e.g. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus on the question set rather than on evaluating the more generic issues of the relevance of the Bible for society today
- better use of scripture, including relevant quotes would be helpful as well as more engagement with scholars rather than giving isolated references to teachings such as the Ten Commandments, or Jesus' teachings on forgiveness, love, etc. often without referring to specific texts.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- explicit evaluation rather than mere description of the Bible's teachings on the meaning and purpose of life
- were able to distinguish between personal value and universally applicable value of the Bible's teachings on the meaning and purpose of life
- were able to make excellent appropriate synoptic links to areas of study such as scientific understandings of the meaning and purpose of life, including the views held by Richard Dawkins, New Atheism and religious language.
- were able to give specific examples of texts that may contravene purposeful living in the 21st Century. For example, In Genesis where human purpose is seen as 'to be fruitful and multiply', candidates evaluated this teaching in the light of population growth and being socially responsible towards the rest of humanity.
- analysed and evaluated the relevance of biblical teachings in regard to the relationship between God and humans who are created *imago dei*.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus on the question set rather than focussing on whether or not the Bible was outdated or not relevant in today's society

Section B

Q.3 This was by far the popular question in Section B with the highest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused specifically on the challenges of seeing God as Father and used their knowledge and understanding of a variety of feminist theologians (McFague, Ruether, Daly) to directly answer the question. They used their understanding to answer the question from the perspective of each of the theologians.
- demonstrated careful consideration of the implications of understanding God as Father
- included good discussion of the nature of religious language about God, especially the role of metaphor.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- read the question closely and identify exactly what they are being asked to do
- do not simply explain the theological perspective of ecofeminist Sally McFague without due consideration of the demands of the question

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- included detailed references to Scriptural passages where God is referred to using female language and used these passages to support the validity of referring to God as Mother
- focused on the question and referred to Sally McFague's ecofeminist viewpoint by drawing on the strengths of her argument, in line with the benefits this would bring to caring for the environment
- highlighted the doctrinal heresies that occur as a result of referring to God as Mother. For example, some would say that referring to God as mother undermines, the doctrine of the Trinity, Jesus' own life and teachings and the doctrine of creation.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- remain focused on the question rather than just presenting different viewpoints from feminist theology
- ensure a depth of evaluation of scholars' views – too often these were accepted uncritically
- engage with arguments that oppose the statement
- avoid stereotypes of fathers as cold disciplinarians and mothers as warm-hearted nurturers.

Q.4 This was the second most popular question in Section B with the second highest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- identified a wide range of challenges for Christian migration including, language barriers, styles of worship, pastoral issues, cultural assimilation, racial prejudices, etc. They were also able to consider ways in which these challenges were being dealt with
- made connections between the various challenges showing they are closely interrelated
- included a discussion of the way in which these issues may vary depending upon where the migrants have come from and whether or not they have come to the UK seeking asylum or for other reasons.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need to demonstrate an understanding of Christian migration and the challenges posed to Christian migrants
- needed to ensure they supported their main points with examples
- consider the lived context of migrants and make references to specific cases where appropriate
- avoid treating all migrants as the same – the needs of an asylum seeker from Syria might be very different to an economic migrant from Poland

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- had a clear understanding of what the term 'mission field' means and did not limit the idea of modern mission field to 'reverse mission', as well as how mission is seen in its historical context
- made good use of data regarding secularisation but also explored the debate beyond the secularisation thesis
- demonstrated understanding of the part mission plays in Christian theology and practice
- drew attention to the need for social mission rather than evangelisation.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- to remain focused on the question asked - some candidates had obviously wanted to answer a question on whether or not the UK is still a Christian country
- evaluate factual information rather than just describe it and engage more with the theology of mission.

Q.5 This was by far the least popular question in Section B with the lowest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated accurate and detailed knowledge and understanding of Orthodox Christmas celebrations
- made thorough and accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary in relation to the celebration of Christmas in the Eastern Orthodox Church

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- read the question closely and identify exactly what they are being asked to do
- do not just write generally about Christmas

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to clearly identify similarities and differences between Eastern and Western practices and beliefs
- focused on the reason for the celebration of Christmas (incarnation, birth of the Messiah/Saviour etc..) whilst being able to identify the significant differences in practices.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- gain a clear understanding of both traditions in order to attempt to address the question set
- an understanding of the diverse practices in the West would have ensured depth of evaluation and supported critical thinking.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 1B: A STUDY OF ISLAM

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates **AO1 skills** - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2 skills** - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q1 - Theme 1e: The role of shari'a and its importance for Muslims

Q2 - Theme 1d: Sources of shari'a (the way): Qur'an; sunna (clear trodden path) and hadith (report); qiyas (analogy); ijma (consensus)

Q3 - Theme 4a: The role of the masjid (mosque) in Islam.

Q4 - Theme 4c: Ramadan and Id-ul-Fitr

Q5 - Theme 2e: Zakah (purification through giving).

Contextual information:

- overall for 2024, there are 736 entries for the Christianity pathway, an increase of 6.3% from June 2023. Of the 2024 candidates, 92.0% of them are aged 18, comparable with the proportions in previous years. The proportional distribution of candidates across all ages is similar between 2022 to 2024.
- of the candidates aged 18, sitting the unit in June 2024, 72.8% are female and 27.2% are male. This is a higher proportion of female candidates compared with both 2023 and 2022.
- the proportion of aged 18 entries from each centre type is comparable between 2022, 2023 and 2024. In all years, entries from both Academies & FE Establishments contribute roughly 70% of the total entries.

Positive feedback

- good candidates provided a clear and logical structure to both their AO1 and AO2 responses.
- good candidates were very successful at directly defining or even challenging key terms in the statement or question
- use specialist vocabulary, the views of scholars and referred to key teachings/texts accurately and relevantly.
- recognised the diversity that exists within Islam.

Issues for centres to consider:

- **there are an increasing numbers of scripts for which handwriting** was a severe barrier to awarding. Appropriate access arrangements should be in place for such candidates. **Examiners cannot award credit for responses that are unreadable.**
- some candidates need to improve the paragraphing structure. Paragraphs should be short and not more than 15 lines or so, with a clear point to them, backed by some evidence or examples and should not throw in changes of perspective in the middle of long paragraphs. The point should always relate directly to the question and the response should flow logically.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was the was by far the least popular question in Section A but had comparable mean scores to Q2.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- referred to scholars, especially those who contributed to shari'a such as Imam Shafi.
- were able to use technical terms associated with shari'a accurately
- considered a breadth of uses, ranging to civil and criminal law
- explained how it helped Muslims to follow the 'straight path' in their daily lives and to be more aware of God through adhering to Islamic laws.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need to focus on the question set and not just describe shari'a
- should link shari'a to daily life, such as by referring to the Five Categories of action
- Provide a greater understanding of shari'a that goes beyond its use as general guidance e.g. shari'a as Islamic law.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- gave different perspectives, such as those of the scholarly Madhabs, which incorporated the views of scholars practicing ijtiḥad
- referred to the argument that only early scholars and companions had sufficient authentic knowledge to practice ijtiḥad
- considered a wide range of issues where ijtiḥad might be needed, including women's rights and physical punishments.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need to secure a clear understanding of ijtiḥad
- must focus on key phrases in the question such as 'long ago'
- need to secure a clear understanding of the positions of groups such as Salafi, Shi'a or modernist.

Q.2 This was by far the most popular question in Section A with very similar mean scores to Q1.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- explained the origins of these sources and their primacy in Islamic law
- covered the sunna well, including technical terms for Hadith categories and gave examples
- gave a specific focus on shari'a rather than general use or guidance.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- explain the use of Qur'an and sunna to form shari'a law by forming rulings, going beyond everyday use in ritual
- explain how they are used together with other sources, particularly ijma and qiyas, when needed
- refer accurately to religious requirements such as the Five Pillars, which are detailed in sunna, not the Qur'an.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- clearly argued the Qur'an was revealed by God, the Hadith inspired and delivered through God's messenger, and the system of shari'a based on God's commands
- showed how many aspects of shari'a included human interpretation, mentioning hadith collectors, Madhab scholars, ijma and qiyas sources and individual opinions
- hinted that coming from God could mean the revelation of the Qur'an, and various forms of inspiration, including the system of shari'a itself
- pointed out that inevitably human interpretation came through scholars and rulings and various sources such as qiyas, and it depended on how far these were made in a context of God-consciousness and in agreement with the Qur'an as to whether they might be considered in some way 'from God'
- came to an overall conclusion balancing the above considerations.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- consider the hadith and their origins related to God's messages as well as human collectors.
- refer to qiyas and ijma, and explain why these might be considered human sources, or human but within a God-given system.
- develop a clear focus in discussion, responding to the words 'every aspect'.

Section B

Q.3 This was the second most popular question in Section B with the highest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- defined masjid as a 'place of prostration' and detailed its prayer functions including adhan, place for purification, communal prayer hall and leadership of various prayers
- gave a range of roles including prayer, charity, education and festivals, showing breadth.
- referred to the military and political roles of Muhammad's first masjid as well as the roles of modern mosques in Western countries providing centres for support and guidance for Muslims living as minorities
- considered different masjids, ranging from those providing functional prayer spaces to larger community centres.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- refer to prayer - providing an organised, appropriate place for congregational prayer would be appropriate.
- give further examples could be added, such as marriage and social functions, legal advice and so on.

- go beyond a consideration of just Muhammad's first masjid, which was relevant but further examples were needed for breadth.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- defined 'all' functions including prayer, social, legal, political, educational and so on
- achieved and effective evaluation by challenging concepts such as discussing the idea of the masjid. Arguments followed that different masjids could have different most important functions
- arguing some functions are more important than others does not mean any are unimportant but does mean they are not equal – a nuanced point made in good responses
- linked functions and considered dependency. For example, prayer might be considered dependent on educating Muslims on reciting the Qur'an in Arabic, learned from classes provided by the mosque.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses

- focus on the wording of the question - how equal are the functions? Avoid the temptation to drift back to describing functions in an AO1 style
- by differentiating importance from equal importance.

Q.4 This was the most popular question in Section B with the lowest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- included taraweeh prayers to recite the whole Qur'an; ascetic practices of seclusion in mosques; additional du'a prayers and other acts of devotion
- expanded on the importance of the 'Night of Power' and how this is marked with personal devotions
- included the spiritual effects of selflessness when applied to developing humility through charitable giving and sharing of food during Ramadan.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- could learn definitions for spirituality and use them in responses.
- explain how the traditions or rules of Ramadan contribute to spiritual development rather than just describing Ramadan
- refer to a broader range of Ramadan traditions, including religious and social.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- linked the statement to specific concepts in Islam and compared them: ihsan and ummah in particular
- contrasted gaining personal reward to achieve Paradise in the afterlife with the development of good community relations in worldly surroundings here and now
- considered and compared several possible benefits, including individual salvation and reward in the afterlife
- sometimes even challenged the statement by questioning whether keeping Ramadan, as an act of devotion, was really about benefits.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- instead of just describing ways in which Ramadan united Muslims link this to benefits.
- develop more coherent responses. This involves acknowledging different views whilst not necessarily agreeing with contradictory positions

Q.5 This was the least popular question in Section B with the second lowest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- explained that zakah as a pillar is an act of obedience to God involving cleansing a Muslim of selfish thoughts
- linked zakah to desire for reward in the afterlife, with purification being a means of getting there
- focused on purpose more than description of the mechanics of paying and receiving zakah.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- gave descriptive details but could have been improved by explaining how those details provided a purpose in purification
- explain how everything is believed to have been given by God in the first place, so giving is returning possessions to God through obedience
- focus on zakah. Some answers detailed other forms of giving such as khums and sadaqat, but these were not asked for in this question.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- provided a clear outline of how the response would be set out, such as by starting with an introduction about what all aspects of Islam might include and what being central could mean
- took an aspect, such as belief in tawhid, briefly explained it in a sentence, related it to the poor, then judged if this was a central part of the aspect – thereby developing a well analysed paragraph
- responded to 'central' rather than important – keeping the response focussed.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus on the specific statement set and not on a different question such as comparing the importance of two pillars of Islam
- relate each part of Islam and each paragraph to support for the poor
- ensure a clear judgement is given which is coherent with the argument made.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 1C: A STUDY OF JUDAISM

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates **AO1 skills** - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2 skills** - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

- Q1 - Theme 1b: Moses and the establishment of the covenant of law
- Q2 - Theme 1c: The Torah as a source of wisdom and authority
- Q3 - Theme 2a: Beliefs about the nature of God/concept of God:
- Q4 - Theme 3b: The challenge of science
- Q5 - Theme 3e: Judaism and migration: the challenges of being a religious and ethnic minority in Britain with reference to key features of aspects of Jewish life

Contextual information

- overall for 2024, there are 84 entries for the Judaism pathway, an increase of 2 candidates from June 2023. Of the 2024 candidates, 96.4% of them are aged 18, comparable with the proportions in previous years. The proportional distribution of candidates across all ages is similar between 2022 to 2024.
- of the candidates aged 18, sitting the unit in June 2024, 69.1% are female and 30.9% are male. This is a higher proportion of female candidates compared with both 2023 and 2022.
- the proportion of aged 18 entries from each centre type has shifted compared with the base year. Entries from Secondary centres have fallen from 58.8% in 2023 to 37% this year. This has been balanced by a rise in the proportion of entries from Academies from 18.8% to 40.7%.

Positive feedback

- good candidates demonstrated confident, critical and perceptive analysis of the issues in parts (b) which indicate improvements being made in the cultivation of successful analytical and evaluative skills
- good candidates made accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary in context
- good candidates include accurate views of scholars/schools of thought, e.g. in Q.4.

Issues for centres to consider:

- **there continues to be a number of scripts for which handwriting** was a severe barrier to awarding. Appropriate access arrangements should be in place for such candidates. **Examiners cannot award credit for responses that are unreadable**

- where responses were not as strong in response to AO2 questions there was a tendency to embark upon AO1-type narratives or biographies with insufficient analysis and evaluation
- in Q2b some candidates failed to understand the term 'icon', and thus gave a response that was not fully accurate. The same can be said, but to a lesser extent, about Q5b where the concept of assimilation had not been clearly understood.
- responses which rely on phrases such as 'this is a strong/weak point' but without accompanying evaluative reasoning are also still evident.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the most popular question in Section A with the highest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- the two-fold focus of the question was addressed with balance and accuracy
- the nature of the covenant as being conditional, and one that displays the characteristics of a suzerain treaty was discussed in some depth
- focussed on the significance of the Mosaic covenant at the time of Moses with reference to it bringing about order and organisation to the Israelites, a people who lacked coherence at that time, and establishing them as a nation once again
- the significance of the giving of the Ten Commandments at the time of Moses was also discussed.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- a clearer understanding of the difference between the concepts of 'conditional' and 'unconditional' in relation to the Mosaic covenant was required
- a clear understanding of the differences between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants was required, as a minority of candidates confused Moses with Abraham, and did not address the Mosaic covenant at all
- the question required an examination of the nature and significance of the Mosaic covenant 'at the time of Moses', which candidates who wrote about the contemporary significance of the mitzvot did not address
- less of a narrative of the life of Moses and the Passover event, and greater examination of the nature and significance of the Mosaic covenant was needed

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- identified and addressed the issue by demonstrating that there is diversity within Judaism regarding attitudes to the legal value of the Mosaic covenant within Judaism today
- the expectations of modern-day society were used to good effect in developing a cogent argument, for example with reference to medical issues that were not evident at the time of the making of the original covenant
- the legal value of the mosaic covenant was also analysed in relation to whether or not the conditions were only for a particular group of people during the wilderness years following the Exodus from Egypt.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- maintaining the focus on the legal value 'within Judaism today' would prevent the inclusion of uncreditworthy material regarding the general laws of secular society
- greater inclusion of evidence of the diversity within Judaism regarding the legal value of the Mosaic covenant within Judaism today
- the inclusion of greater evidence from contemporary society in order to support the views given.

Q.2 This was the least popular question in Section A with the lowest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- the twofold focus of the question was addressed with balance and accuracy
- relevant evidence and examples were cited and examined, with accurate references to sacred texts and sources of wisdom
- the accurate use of specialist language was noteworthy.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- the response should reflect the twofold nature of the question
- maintain the focus of the question: for some candidates their response became nothing more than an examination of the different understanding of how the mitzvot should be followed in modern-day society
- specialist language such as 'Sefer Torah'; 'Talmud'; 'Aron Kodesh'; 'Bimah'; 'Yad' need to be used accurately
- relevant references from Jewish sacred texts would enhance the response.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- the term 'icon' was understood along with its diversity of connotations
- thorough, sustained and clear views were given, supported by extensive examples from Jewish practice, and sacred texts
- responses successfully identified and addressed the issue by demonstrating that there is diversity within Judaism concerning this topic.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- a basic understanding of the word 'icon' was required
- maintain the focus of the question, which was centred on the Torah: the question did not require a detailed discussion of something else within Judaism as being more of a religious icon than the Torah.

Section B

Q.3 This was the second most popular question in Section B with the lowest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- candidates referenced Deuteronomy 6:4 accurately and appropriately
- the nature of the Abrahamic covenant was noted in relation to the belief in absolute monotheism
- the relevant clause of the Pittsburgh Platform was cited in relation to Reform Judaism

- beliefs about God and God's characteristics were discussed, demonstrating depth and breadth
- referred to Maimonides and his discussion on the nature of God to good effect.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- an understanding of the term 'monotheism' was required
- the focus of the question needed to be maintained: a mere narrative account of the making of the covenant between God and Abraham without using it to explain wider Jewish beliefs about absolute monotheism was not sufficiently creditworthy
- Maimonides' discussions about the nature of God needed greater clarity.
- avoid the use of Christian concepts and terminology.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- consideration was given to the characteristics of God to which Jews remain steadfast
- the perception that some of the characteristics attributed to God within Judaism might be easier to grasp than others was addressed successfully
- the problem of evil and suffering in the face of a God that is held to be both omnipotent and omnibenevolent formed the basis for an interesting discussion.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need less of an AO1-type description of the characteristics of God and more analysis and evaluation (AO2) as befits the question type
- need to maintain the focus for evaluation: for some candidates the response went off on a tangent about the Inconsistent Triad and the successes/weakness of Holocaust theodicies.

Q.4 This was the least popular question in Section B but achieved the highest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- gave some consideration of the term 'bereshit'
- made accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary such as 'de novo'; 'ex nihilo'
- provided an examination of differences in the responses of Rashi and Maimonides to the creation event
- included a range of scholarly views
- considered the diversity within Judaism regarding metaphor, allegory and reinterpretation of scripture.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need to address the trigger word: a narrative account of the story of creation from Genesis without an examination of its significance did not meet the demands of the question set
- need to address the key words in the question: in this instance it was specifically focussed on 'the creation event', and yet many candidates responded as if this was a general question about the relationship between Judaism and science
- should include a range of scholarly views
- should refer to the diversity of views within Judaism in response to the creation event.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- referred to the diversity of views within Judaism towards scientific discoveries which were used to good effect
- advances in medical science were cited and analysed in order to address the issue raised by the question
- the Jewish principle of pikuach nefesh (Leviticus 19:16) was used well in order to illustrate that the saving, protecting and preservation of life is of utmost importance within Judaism
- views of scholars were used appropriately with regard to re-interpreting scripture in order to bring about a reconciliation with scientific discoveries.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need to provide a greater diversity of responses from within Judaism relating to scientific discoveries
- avoid lengthy AO1-type explanations of scientific discoveries such as Darwin's theory of evolution for example, but rather use the information for relevant analysis and evaluation
- reference to modern-day Jewish medical ethics, where decisions are made based upon Halakhic tradition, would have enhanced many responses.

Q.5 This was the most popular question in Section B with the second highest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- both strands of the question were dealt with accurately showing a thorough understanding of the challenges arising from kashrut and dress in British society
- the challenges of keeping the requirements of kashrut were discussed in detail
- and included issues such as the lack of kosher food shops in many areas; the diminishing number of Jewish butchers; the difficulties for Jewish children who attend secular schools; the expense of hiring a shomer to supervise non-Jewish kitchens at celebratory events; the fact that such requirements highlight the fact that Jews are different from others in society leading in some cases to isolation and discrimination
- the challenges of dress codes were ably exemplified with reference to Hasidic Jews and the potential which this has to isolate and separate them from wider secular society, as well as making them the focus of discrimination
- the requirement for modest dress for women amongst some Jewish denominations was also discussed as a challenge in that it could be seen to be out of line concerning attitudes to women in general in contemporary British society.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- ensure that the twofold focus of the question is addressed
- note the key words in the question and construct a response accordingly: in this instance there was a tendency to lose sight of the fact that the question was about 'challenges' with many candidates not addressing this at all, and instead writing generally about Jewish food laws and dress codes
- address the correct assessment objective: some candidates adopted an AO2-type response by arguing that not all Jews face challenges and proceeded to discuss and highlight Reform Judaism's approach to the food laws for example.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- thorough, sustained and clear views were given, supported by extensive, detailed reasoning with candidates referring to the diversity of thought within Judaism regarding this statement
- the focus of the question was sustained, and the discussion remained centred upon 'Jews in Britain'.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- a basic understanding of the word 'assimilation' was required
- there is a need to address the specific focus of the question: the statement centred on 'Jews in Britain' however some candidates approached this from an international standpoint
- a consideration of the diversity of thought within Judaism regarding this statement would have greatly enhanced the response.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 1D: A STUDY OF BUDDHISM

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates **AO1 skills** - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2 skills** - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q1 - Theme 2b: The nature of ultimate reality: Pratityasamutpada, karma and rebirth

Q2 - Theme 2d: The Four Noble Truths

Q3 - Theme 1a: Accounts of the birth of the historical Buddha and the Four Sights

Q4 - Theme 4a: Going for refuge

Q5 - Theme 3a: Historical development of Buddhism

Contextual information:

- overall for 2024, there are 391 entries for the Buddhism pathway, a decrease of 8.9% from June 2023. Of the 2024 candidates, 94.9% of them are aged 18. The proportional distribution of candidates across all ages is similar between 2022 to 2024.
- of the candidates aged 18, sitting the unit in June 2024, 74.4% are female and 25.6% are male. This is comparable with the earlier years.
- the proportion of aged 18 entries from each centre type remains consistent with earlier years. FE Establishments remain the largest centre type with 45% of the entry this year.

Positive feedback

- many candidates were able to demonstrate a wide range of skills in terms of demonstrating knowledge, understanding, evaluation and analysis.
- candidates showed an increasing grasp of the difference between the part (a) and part (b) responses with most confining evaluation and analysis to part (b).
- there was increased evidence of familiarity and ease of use with specialist language and vocabulary.

Issues for centres to consider:

- continuing to develop the skill of reading the question set and answering what has been asked rather than providing a generic response would support confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issue.
- candidates would continue to benefit from examination essay practice in order to improve style, structure and timing which would all benefit overall coherence.
- a continued focus on candidates formulating their own views on the topics covered would assist in their responses being thorough, sustained, clear and mature.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q1. This was by far the least popular question in Section A with the lowest mean scores overall in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the three key terms in the question
- provided a balanced response incorporating each of the three terms in sufficient depth
- showed the purposeful connections between the three and how they were linked together.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- note each of the terms in the question which have to be examined and as far as possible spend sufficient time writing about each
- clarify the understanding of the complex concept of pratityasamutpada as required by the specification
- focus on drawing together the three terms in an integrated fashion rather than treating each in isolation.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- kept the focus on the wording of the question with regard to whether the concepts under discussion helped or not in understanding reality
- noted the addition of the term karma – which connects more closely to rebirth - and the removal of the term bhavachakra and wrote accordingly
- had a thesis outlining their viewpoint as to whether other aspects of Buddhism were or were not of help in understanding reality.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- avoid reading the question as though it were simply asking for which is or is not the most important Buddhist teaching in general
- gain some further insight into the specific topic through an understanding of Buddhist beliefs about ultimate reality
- develop the skill of linking ideas and connecting concepts in order to produce holistic analysis and evaluation.

Q.2 This was the most popular question in Section A with the highest mean scores overall in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- showed a developed understanding of the Four Noble Truths
- were able to break down each of the Four Noble Truths in detail using specialist language and vocabulary
- either integrated the medical metaphor or wrote about how it connected with the Four Noble Truths in appropriate detail.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- develop more breadth and depth in understanding the Four Noble Truths

- note what is meant by the medical metaphor and think about how it supports and provides a useful platform for understanding the Four Noble Truths
- try to be clear on the sequence of the Four Noble Truths and that, for example, magga (the path) is the last of them rather than nirodha (cessation).

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to focus on the precise wording of the question as to whether the Four Noble Truths are *essential* by querying the word *essential* and suggesting what other aspects of Buddhism might or might not be essential
- noted that the question asked about *all* Buddhists and showed depth and breadth in suggesting varying responses from, for example, lay/monastic Buddhists, convert/heritage Buddhists, Theravada/Mahayana Buddhists, etc.
- reached a balanced conclusion using personal insights on the whole nature of Buddhism and on whether indeed any single belief/teaching can be essential on its own for Buddhists.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- avoid a narrow scope in approaching the question as though it were simply asking which is the most important Buddhist belief/teaching
- keep in mind that Buddhism is not a single religion/unified belief system but is an umbrella term incorporating variety and difference
- avoid answering the question with a paragraph on why the Four Noble Truths are or are not essential followed by haphazard paragraphs on why, for example, the Five Moral Precepts or the Refugees or the Lakshanas are or are not essential.

Section B

Q.3 This was the by far the most popular question in Section B but achieved the lowest mean scores overall in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- showed accurate knowledge and understanding of both the Four Sights and dukkha, anicca and anatta
- understood the words in the question as to the wider religious interpretations of the Four Sights and wrote accordingly
- were able to link in a variety of ways each of the Four Sights with dukkha, anicca and anatta.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- show more accurate knowledge of the Four Sights and the sequence in which they happened
- avoid writing more than is required by the question in terms of details about the birth of the Buddha and his early life in the palace
- develop more detailed understanding of dukkha, anicca and anatta and ways in which they connect with the Four Sights.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- showed very good understanding of the different ways in which the biography of the Buddha could be interpreted such as it being mythical, symbolic or hagiographical

- were able to break the question down and focus on key parts such as what might be understood by Buddhists – for example, lay/monastic Buddhists, convert/heritage Buddhists, Theravada/Mahayana Buddhists
- gave some consideration as to whether or not an accurate historical record of the Buddha was even possible given the circumstances of, for example, the oral tradition and transmission of the life of the Buddha.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- gain a greater understanding of the issues surrounding whether or not the biography of the Buddha can be reconstructed as an accurate historical record
- avoid giving generic responses as to whether or not events in the life of the Buddha – such as those surrounding his conception and birth – did or did not happen
- use examples from the life of the Buddha as evidence to support the views being developed in the response.

Q.4 This was the second most popular question in Section B with the lowest mean scores overall in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- showed knowledge and understanding of the overall concept of refuge in its ordinary meaning and more specifically for Buddhists.
- were able to show breadth and depth in examining each of the refuges and how the teaching on each might vary between different schools of Buddhism.
- used a wide variety of specialist language and vocabulary in developing their response to the question.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- gain a greater understanding of the variety of ways in which going for refuge might be understood by different Buddhists
- avoid stating in a simplistic fashion what each of the three refuges are for Buddhists
- think about ways in which a context can be provided for the concept of going for refuge in terms of what 'refuge' might mean.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- understood what the phrase 'of equal value' might mean in the question
- had an opening stated thesis as to whether one of the refuges is or is not of more value than the others or whether all are of equal value and followed this through in each paragraph of the response
- showed critical analysis and perceptive evaluation by introducing different approaches to the refuges from, for example, lay/monastic Buddhists, convert/heritage Buddhists, Theravada/Mahayana Buddhists.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- gain greater confidence in discussing the refuges rather than repeating entirely the AO1 material from the part (a) question.
- understand the potential for depth and breadth in responding to a simple question and possibly plan out ideas beforehand.
- be aware of differences between, for example, lay/monastic Buddhists, convert/heritage Buddhists, Theravada/Mahayana Buddhists and how they might understand the refuges.

Q.5 This was the least popular question in Section B with the highest overall mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- detailed knowledge of the three Buddhist traditions in Japan.
- showed ability to select carefully and condense knowledge and understanding of the three traditions appropriately in answering the question.
- supported their examination of the three traditions with an abundance of specialist language and vocabulary in context.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- know, understand and be able to differentiate between the three Buddhist traditions in Japan.
- develop a better understanding of specialist language and vocabulary which is required in answering questions such as this one.
- consider the importance of selecting material carefully with questions such as these so that the limited examination time is used appropriately.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- showed depth and breadth of knowledge regarding the specialist terms koan, nembutsu and daimoku
- had a clear overview of Buddhism in general and how the koan, nembutsu and daimoku might or might not be very important expressions of Buddhist teachings
- provided an analysis of ways in which the koan, nembutsu and daimoku might be similar or dissimilar to other expressions of Buddhist teaching and how this might impact on their relative importance.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- avoid writing a pre-learned response on what is or is not the most important Buddhist teaching.
- develop an understanding of more than just the nembutsu and the Pure Land tradition in order to access higher levels.
- think about the whole range of connections that might be made between different aspects of Buddhism in discussing whether or not they are very important expressions of Buddhist teaching; for example Buddhist meditation and the koan, reciting mantras in Tibetan/Vajrayana Buddhism and reciting the nembutsu, the importance of the Pali Canon in Theravada Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra expressed in the daimoku.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 1E: A STUDY OF HINDUISM

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates **AO1 skills** - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2 skills** - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

- Q1 - Theme 2d: Key moral principles of Varnashramadharma
- Q2 - Theme 2b: Trimurti
- Q3 - Theme 3a: The reasons for the development and growth of ISKCON
- Q4 - Theme 1d: Nature and significance of the Upanishads
- Q5 - Theme 4e: Philosophical understandings of the nature of reality and Religious experience found in Samkhya yoga and Advaita Vedanta

Contextual information:

- overall for 2024, there are 94 entries for the Hinduism pathway, an increase of 35 candidates from June 2023. Of the 2024 candidates, 97.9% of them are aged 18, comparable with the proportions in earlier years.
- of the candidates aged 18, sitting the unit in June 2024, 81.5% are female and 18.5% are male. This is a lower higher proportion of female candidates compared with both 2023 and 2022.
- the proportion of aged 18 entries from each centre type remains comparable with earlier years. Entries from Academies make up 97.8% of the total entry.

Positive feedback:

- successful responses demonstrated a deep understanding of key Hindu concepts and teachings such as the ashramas, dharma, Trimurti, Upanishads, and philosophies like Advaita. They were able to not only explain these concepts but also analysed and evaluate the issues surrounding them.
- good response consistently supported their arguments with specific references to Hindu texts, practices, scholarly opinions, and real-life examples. This strengthened the credibility and depth of their analysis and evaluation.
- good candidates provided balanced views, often considering multiple perspectives on an issue. They presented arguments and counterarguments, leading to well-rounded conclusions that reflected a nuanced understanding of complex religious and philosophical topics.

Issues for centres to consider:

- some candidates continue to not read the question carefully enough and fail to select information to address the question set especially in AO2 questions. These questions very often contain words and phrases that try to help or guide candidates - 'central importance' or 'unique'. It is also good practice to refer back to the question consistently in the answer
- for weaker candidates in Section B there was a tendency to embark upon AO1-type narratives or biographies with insufficient analysis and evaluation
- responses which rely on phrases such as 'this is a strong/weak point' but without any accompanying evaluative reasoning or evidence are also still evident
- candidates should be encouraged to structure their AO2 responses in a clear and coherent way, with a logical conclusion.

Comments on individual questions/sections**Section A**

Q.1 This was the popular question in Section A with the highest overall mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- identified the four ashramas and the significance of the concept within Hinduism referring to such issues as cosmic order and the attainment of Moksha.
- identified the main duties associated with each ashrama and their significance within that particular life-stage and within an individual's life journey as a Hindu.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- candidates need to focus more on the definition of the trigger word - 'Examine' as a number of candidates did little more than describing the some of the duties within each ashrama. examine means - 'Portray and account for different facets of, or angles on, a complex practice, concept or belief.'
- focus not only on what happens during each ashrama but also on why these duties are seen as important and significant.
- refer to specific examples and evidence in support of points made.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- identified the role of dharma within various aspects of Hinduism and discussed its importance and significance within those aspects
- referred to the importance of following dharma in the lives of Hindus and its importance for attaining moksha
- referred to how dharma can be viewed as restrictive and a blind concept that must be followed in certain aspects of life and gave evidence in support of the argument that all of a Hindu's life is governed by dharma
- counter argued that Hindus have a lot of free choice within the religion and referred to evidence such as choosing their personal deity and bhakti.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus on the question set and identify the key words
- support arguments with specific references to Hindu texts, beliefs, practices and scholars.

Q.2 This was the least popular question in Section A with the lowest overall mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- discussed not only the three gods within the Trimurti and their individual characteristics and significance but also beliefs about the Trimurti as a whole
- referred to the Trimurti as representations of Brahman, earth, water and fire, time as being cyclic and the three gunas
- referred to the significance of the Trimurti in the context of Saguna Brahman.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus more on the trigger word - 'Examine' as some of the answers given were no more than descriptions of the gods of the Trimurti
- gain a secure knowledge and understanding of the difference between Brahman and Brahma, and Vishnu and Shiva.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the question set
- provided a balanced response which considered the importance of the Trimurti within Hinduism and to individual Hindus and considered the importance of other concepts such as ahimsa, karma and varnashramadharma
- provided a balanced conclusion based on the arguments presented.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- read the question carefully and focus on the key words such as 'most important' and 'concept'
- consider both sides of the argument in terms of the importance of the Trimurti and focus on only the concepts which could hold more importance.

Section B

Q.3 This was the second most popular question in Section B with the second lowest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated a thorough knowledge and understanding of Prabhupada's life and work and how he was responsible for the growth of ISKCON
- gave specific examples as evidence.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need to secure a detailed knowledge and understanding of Prabhupada's life and works
- need to provide specific examples to show his influence in the context of the question set.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- discussed the definition of 'traditional'
- considered the pluralistic nature of Hinduism and whether ISKCON should be regarded in the same way as Vaishnavism or Shaivism
- referred to the similarities and differences with specific examples.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- avoid answering as an AO1 question and presenting only knowledge and understanding of ISKON - address the question set
- support all arguments presented with specific examples.

Q.4 This was the least popular question in Section B but with the highest overall mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding were able to refer to specific parts of the Upanishads
- focussed on the keywords in the question - origin and background
- made use of scholarly opinion as evidence and examples.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus on the question set and the keywords in the question - origins and background
- use specific examples from the text as evidence.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- referred to the importance of the Upanishads today because of their content and teaching especially the path of jnana yoga
- presented arguments and counter arguments focused on the question and supported by clear reasoning and specific examples
- referred to other texts in the context of the question set.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need to identify the key words in the question set - 'still' and 'today' and focus their analysis and evaluation around this.
- support any arguments by valid and relevant reasoning, evidence and examples.

Q.5 This was the most popular question in Section B with the second highest overall mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of Shankara and Advaita
- explained in detail a number of concepts such as Nirguna Brahman, Maya and the different levels of reality which were exemplified with specific evidence.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus on the question set and avoid referring to irrelevant material such as Madhva and his beliefs
- use specific and relevant evidence and examples.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the key words in the question set - 'fully understood' and 'nirguna'.
- were able to discuss in detail the strengths and weaknesses of understanding Brahman as Nirguna and Saguna
- provided a balanced conclusion in the context of the question set.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus on the key words and issue in the question set - 'fully understood' and 'nirguna'.
- support any arguments presented with specific examples and scholarly opinion
- aim to reach a balanced conclusion.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 2: A STUDY OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates **AO1 skills** - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2 skills** - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q1 - Theme 2b: Religious responses to the problem of evil (i): Augustinian type theodicy

Q2 - Theme 2f: Issues relating to rejection of religion: Atheism

Q3 - Theme 3f: A comparative study of two key scholars from within
and outside the Christian tradition and their contrasting views
on the possibility of miracles

Q4 - Theme 4f: Religious language as a language game

Q5 - Theme 3b: Mystical experience

Contextual information

- overall for 2024, there are 2,888 entries for Eduqas A Level Religious Studies, an increase of 3.5% from June 2023 and a decrease of 5.8% from June 2022. Of the 2024 candidates, 94.6% of them are aged 18, comparable with the proportions in previous years. The proportional distribution of candidates across all ages is similar between 2022 to 2024.
- of the candidates aged 18, sitting the Religious Studies A Level qualification in June 2024, 73.2% are female and 26.8% are male. This is comparable with both 2022 and 2023.
- the proportion of aged 18 entries from each centre type is comparable between 2022, 2023 and 2024. In all years, entries from Academies represent the largest proportion of candidates.

Positive feedback

- candidates showed an increasing grasp of the difference between the part (a) and part (b) responses with most confining evaluation and analysis to part (b).
- there was increased evidence of familiarity and ease of use with specialist language and vocabulary.

Issues for centres to consider:

- further developing the skill of reading the question set and answering what has been asked rather than providing a generic response based on, for example, the name of the scholar would support confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issue

- improving essay styles, structure and timing which would all benefit overall coherence.
- continue to help candidates to develop formulating their lines of reasoning on the issues covered in the specification as this would assist them in providing thorough, sustained, clear and mature lines of argument.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the popular question in Section A with the highest overall mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the concept of theodicy
- showed a sound grasp of the logical sequence/development of Augustinian type theodicies
- used specialist language and vocabulary in context such as ‘privatio boni’, ‘seminally present’ and ‘the Fall’.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- clarify before writing how Augustinian type theodicies work beginning with the perfection of the creation
- clarify the views of Augustinian type theodicies on how the presence of natural evil in the world can be explained with reference to the Fall
- focus on the question which concerns Augustinian type theodicies and not cosmological or teleological arguments about creation.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- kept the focus on the wording of the question with regard to Augustinian type theodicies being ‘a very successful’ response
- demonstrated either breadth or depth of knowledge in presenting reasoning to support or counter the statement in the question
- had a thesis outlining their viewpoint which was followed through in the response.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus on the wording of the question and avoid writing about the problem of evil in a generic fashion
- avoid reading the question as a strengths/weaknesses of theodicies in general
- keep in mind that if the question requires a comparison with Irenaean theodicy, this would be indicated in the statement.

Q.2 This was the least popular question in Section A with the lowest overall mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- used examples and evidence to show knowledge and understanding of the terms atheism and agnosticism
- had a clear understanding of different types of atheism and different types of agnosticism
- provided a balanced response where atheism and agnosticism were dealt with equally.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- have an understanding of what agnosticism means and the ways in which it can be differentiated from atheism
- avoid general statements about atheism and agnosticism which are unsupported by developed evidence
- develop more breadth and depth in understanding the term atheism beyond a simplistic definition of what it means.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- showed breadth and depth in presenting a range of views which supported or countered atheistic arguments
- noted that the question did not ask for any specific areas and were thus able to range widely with detailed reasoning on scientific, evidential, psychological and other approaches
- reached a balanced conclusion using personal insights and showing connections with other elements studied such as reference to secularisation in the UK.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus on the wording of the question as to the arguments being successful and perhaps consider more what that might mean – for example successful in what ways and to whom avoid a narrow scope when there is an open and wide-reaching statement for discussion as, for example, in simply focussing on Freud as an atheist and his understanding of religion
- keep in mind that the approach of scientism – that science is always right and outweighs any other approach – should be balanced by other empirical evidence such as that of people's religious belief.

Section B

Q.3 This was the second most popular question in Section B with the lowest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- showed accurate knowledge and understanding of both Hume and Swinburne
- provided a context for the concept of miracles and the two specified approaches
- were able to examine the views of Hume and Swinburne coherently through the use of apt sources of wisdom in terms of their definitions of miracles.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- demonstrate knowledge of what is required in the specification i.e. knowledge and understanding of both Hume and Swinburn
- clarify knowledge and understanding of what each approach to the possibility of miracles is through better use of key quotations and definitions.
- avoid giving general responses with a variety of different scholarly approaches to miracles in addition to or in place of what is required by the question.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- noted that the question was directly on Swinburne's responses to Hume views and wrote accordingly.

- showed clear understanding of the scholarly views of Swinburne particularly with regard to the principle of credulity and testimony.
- gave some consideration to the wording of the question as to whether Swinburne's responses were or were not valid.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- gain a greater understanding of Swinburne's approach to miracles in general and to Hume in particular
- avoid giving generic responses as to whether or not miracles can happen since this is not required by the question
- use examples of miracles as evidence to support the views being developed in the response.

Q.4 This was the most popular question in Section B with the second highest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- showed knowledge and understanding of the overall religious language debate so as to place Wittgenstein in context
- were able to use key specialist language and vocabulary in context such as 'life form' and 'family resemblance'
- used helpful analogies to help in explaining the demands of the question set such as language being akin to a toolbox.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- gain a greater understanding of Wittgenstein and language game theory as in the specification.
- avoid repeating the same point in different ways such as how the rules of chess, the rules of football, the rules of rugby which might contain the same words are used in different ways.
- be clear that the question is about how religious language is meaningful to those participating in the religion rather than examining language in general.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- understood what the overall problems of religious language might be
- used the views of scholars/schools of thought such as Tillich or Logical Positivism in an apt fashion in the context of analysis and evaluation
- kept the focus on the question asked rather than providing a discussion of whether or not religious language is meaningful.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- gain greater confidence in discussing the overall complex area of religious language and the issues involved
- understand the specialist language and the views of scholars/schools of thought and use them appropriately such as symbol, myth, falsification
- focus on whether language games is the best way of resolving the problems of religious language by having an initial thesis such as, for example, analogy being the best way.

Q.5 This was the least popular question in Section B with the highest mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- provided detailed knowledge of Rudolf Otto and what is meant by mystical experience.
- used specialist language and vocabulary in context such as 'mysterium tremendum et fascinans'.
- supported their examination of Rudolf Otto's understanding with evidence and examples taken from Otto such as Isaiah's mystical experience in the Temple (Isaiah 6:1-7).

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- examine what is meant by terms such as numinous and 'mysterium tremendum et fascinans' rather than simply state them
- be able to differentiate between the views of William James and Rudolf Otto on mystical experience as they are not the same
- develop a better understanding of mystical experience as being different from and more than what is described as a miracle.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- kept a clear focus on the term 'numinous' and ways in which it might or might not be inadequate
- juxtaposed and discussed different approaches such as those of William James, his pragmatism and the terms passive, ineffable, noetic and transient
- provided an analysis of the term 'numinous', its possible meaning and why it was invented/introduced by Rudolf Otto.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- avoid writing a pre-learned response which does not answer the question such as whether or not mystical experiences can happen.
- develop an understanding of the specialist language and vocabulary involved particularly with regard to 'numinous'.
- move away from writing mostly about William James and his approach to mystical experiences since this is not what the question requires.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 3: A STUDY OF RELIGION AND ETHICS

Overview of the Component

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates **AO1 skills** - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2 skills** - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q1 - Theme 4d : Religious concepts of free will with reference to the teachings of Pelagius and Arminius

Q2 - Theme 4f: The implications of libertarianism

Q3 - Theme 2b: Aquinas' Natural law – the role of virtues and goods in supporting moral behaviour

Q4 - Theme 3c: Fletcher's Situation Ethics – Application of theory

Q5 - Theme 1a: Divine Command Theory

Contextual information:

- overall for 2024, there are 2,888 entries for Eduqas A Level Religious Studies, an increase of 3.5% from June 2023 and a decrease of 5.8% from June 2022. Of the 2024 candidates, 94.6% of them are aged 18, comparable with the proportions in previous years. The proportional distribution of candidates across all ages is similar between 2022 to 2024
- of the candidates aged 18, sitting the Religious Studies A Level qualification in June 2024, 73.2% are female and 26.8% are male. This is comparable with both 2022 and 2023.
- the proportion of aged 18 entries from each centre type is comparable between 2022, 2023 and 2024. In all years, entries from Academies represent the largest proportion of candidates.

Positive feedback

- many candidates are showing ever improving skills with their AO2 responses. There were some impressive examples of evaluation that showed an ability to integrate scholarly ideas from a wide range of sources to progress an argument without unnecessary or lengthy explanation of knowledge.
- overall, there was a significant improvement of candidate's knowledge and understanding of the specification content and thus what the question required. Candidates were mostly very clear in section A whether their content was to be drawn from religious or secular sources.
- candidates responded very well to the section B content, with enthusiastic engagement with the questions, especially on Q5. They were able to draw from their developed knowledge from two years of study to give responses that drew from second year material where relevant and necessary.

Issues for centres to consider:

- **The issue of legibility is an increasing barrier to awarding.** Examiners could not read scripts well enough to be able to award marks that reflected what the candidate may have intended to communicate simply because the words could not be deciphered. Candidates should have handwriting assessed early on for legibility and measures should be put in place to ensure their exam scripts can be read. Those that do not qualify for typing or a scribe should practice handwriting under timed conditions regularly. Those with large handwriting should consider writing alternate lines and spacing their words further apart. Those with small handwriting should be mindful that a scanned script will pixelate when enlarged and become unclear.
- some candidates find it difficult to apply ethical theories when asked to do so in the AO1 questions or in those asking them to identify the implications of applying them. This is a particular area that is worth some attention to increase candidates' confidence.
- some candidates would still benefit from working on their AO2 technique to avoid simple explanation of different, often unrelated, views without engagement with the question. It would be useful for some to consider what it would take for a theory to be considered 'effective' or 'persuasive' at the outset.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the popular question in Section A with the highest overall mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- clearly understood the difference between the two scholars
- gave good accounts of Pelagius as saying grace was offered through revelation and examples given of Biblical commands that offered guidance
- provided clear explanations of Arminius as saying prevenient grace was the balancing of the urge to sin by the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- address the question set rather than explaining predestination instead.
- could work on differentiating between the different key scholars (Arminius, Augustine, Pelagius and Calvin)
- focus on the different definitions of grace from each scholar so that they understand it as a specific term.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- some great recognition that there were different religious views about free will and the conclusion may depend upon which view was being considered
- gave interesting ideas about consent – whether a person is ever free if under the influence of grace (or alcohol!)
- links made to the problem of evil and the problems that arose from trying to justify God's nature in the face of suffering
- we're discerning about which scholars they used to answer this question rather than giving an account of any libertarian or determinist scholar they knew regardless of whether they contributed to the debate of religious free will.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- candidates can practice looking at the difference between AO1 and AO2 style responses so that they evaluate rather than simply describing alternative views
- when deciding whether a view is convincing, candidates could back up their decision with reasoning and evidence
- think about whether there is a difference between liking an approach and it being convincing. Often, we like things that are irrational or unsupported by evidence.

Q.2 This was the least popular question in Section A with the lowest overall mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- used Sartre, Sirigu and Rogers to show how their work could lead to implications mentioned in the question.
- recognised that blaming other agents under Sartre for our own action is bad faith, but that blame is required for ourselves if we are free agents
- made sure that they considered both areas of implication mentioned in the question.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- some candidates would benefit from taking a closer look at the specification and differentiating between religious views of free will and libertarianism as described on the specification.
- moving away from a simple explanation of scholars, and towards a closer focus on the question regarding implications such as how normative theories could contribute to 'bad faith'
- take a closer look at Rogers and consider the negative implications of blame that cause incongruence in a child.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to discuss whether 'right' and 'wrong' were useful, meaningful or powerful if Libertarianism is true
- demonstrated that Libertarianism led to human ideas being unhelpful / helpful depending upon which scholarly position we view it from
- engaged with the question and brought up their own ideas or arguments that were then supported by scholarship and examples.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- notice that the question was not asking whether Libertarianism was true or for an explanation of deterministic theories
- avoid treating Libertarianism as though it is a normative ethical theory such as Situation Ethics or Natural Law
- consider the element of the question that referred to 'human' ideas and try to avoid conflating this with 'divine' ideas of right and wrong.

Section B

Q3. This was the least popular question in Section B with the second highest overall mean scores in this section.

- (a) **What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:**
- were able to isolate the issues of virtue and goods, generally did well
 - managed to relate these two areas of Natural Law to the bigger picture by showing how practicing virtues would help one to identify and perform real goods successfully
 - were able to give accurate definitions of the virtues and consider the source of our knowledge about the virtues as a way of distinguishing between the cardinal and theological virtues.
 - were able to utilise precepts and acts to deepen their explanation of what constitutes a 'real' good as opposed to an 'apparent' good.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- avoid answers that go on a grand tour of Natural Law and waste time describing the four levels of law or the precepts at the expense of the named parts of the question
- could make sure that they understand how Aquinas differed from Aristotle in his use of Virtues to avoid explanation of the wrong scholar
- would benefit from spending a little more time mastering the difference between 'acts' and 'goods' in Natural Law to avoid conflating the two.

- (b) **What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:**
- were able to consider the nuances of Natural Law and recognise that it is not solely absolutist, therefore some of its other features might still be useful in modern society
 - were able to use Finnis' Natural Law or Proportionism to point out that there are other ways to make Natural Law effective for modern living
 - could point out the kinds of dilemmas that contemporary society needs help to deal with and consider whether Natural Law can manage those problems.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- be aware of the two aspects to this question so that candidates do not focus on one area at the expense of the other
- could have spent more time considering the 'absolute' part of the question rather than simply focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of Natural Law
- consider how to use examples succinctly to illustrate a point and avoid lengthy story telling.

Q.4 This was the second most popular question in Section B with the second highest overall mean scores in this section.

- (a) **What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:**
- recognised that the command to 'love' applied to the church and to Christians in their behaviour towards same sex couples as much as it did to the same sex couple, generally performed better
 - used the principles to work out Christian moral behaviour and were able to show that the Church should avoid homophobia or unjust behaviour towards same sex partnerships
 - were able to show that agape is a verb (a behaviour) rather than a noun (a feeling) successfully showed that agape involved helping victims of discrimination or injustice rather than judging them.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- avoid giving lengthy examples that do not relate to the area of application, for instance about whether abortion or stealing can take place.
- try and go beyond the command to be loving and use the principles to help work out how best to show that love.
- it helps to understand that Fletcher was challenging the laws or rules that criminalised same sex relationships and felt a more pragmatic approach was to allow people to have private lives.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- considered the meaning of the word 'effective' and laid out what would be required of a theory for it to be 'effective'
- used Fletcher's own examples to illustrate their arguments
- successfully challenged Fletcher with Ethical Egoism and suspicion of altruism or used scholars like Finnis to demonstrate that a rule of law was more practical than Fletcher.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- avoid unsupported accusations that Situation Ethics can allow genocide or rape out of love with no example or evidence of how such actions could ever be 'loving' for Situation Ethicists
- consider the value of challenges to Situation Ethics that can be levelled against any and every theory (e.g. that it is inaccessible to children or people with learning delays) without any purpose or support
- ensure that you are clear what agape means so that you do not confuse it with sexual infidelity as a direct consequence of loving one's neighbour.

Q.5 This was the most popular question in Section B with the highest overall mean scores in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- understood that to answer the question required them to consider the Euthyphro briefly to allow them to show Adam's development
- were able to give wonderful examples of God's commands, both from Biblical scripture and scriptures from other world faiths
- were several candidates who worked hard to show how Divine Command Theory could be understood meta-ethically as well as normatively.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- ensure that candidates understand the arbitrariness problem as one 'horn' of the Euthyphro dilemma to avoid having to explain the same problem twice.
- clarify the arbitrariness problem as more than simply the accusation that God commands cruelty or changes his mind. Instead explain how goodness defined as God's will means that there is no basis beyond His will for the thing we are calling 'good.' This leads to the possibility that He could command cruelty and that cruelty would now be a good thing because he commanded it.
- carefully consider the extent to which criticisms are needed in this response. As an AO1, only include the key criticisms that will help you explain the theory itself more clearly.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- recognised that Divine Command Theory was not limited to Christianity were able to point out the contrasting commands from across the world's religions and across different denominations as a problem.
- were able to consider the nuances possible in this question by suggesting that both theories were equally poor or equally good.
- were able to make use of scholarship from economics, psychology and sociology where they had studied it to support their views.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- avoid simply repeating the AO1 essay from part a. There is a cross over of material, but the skills that candidates should display are very different.
- avoid simply focusing on one theory in a question that requires you to decide the priority between two theories
- could consider how to respond to arguments with related counter arguments rather than simply describing unrelated points and counter points
- could consider more carefully why acting in self-interest might be considered a bad thing.

Supporting you

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Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

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