

GCSE Examiners' Report

Religious Studies
GCSE
Summer 2025

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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 unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and component level. 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.eduqas.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.
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Executive Summary

The 2025 summer examination series for GCSE Religious Studies (Routes A and B) saw strong overall performance across all components, with evidence of improved candidate engagement, reduced non-attempts, and greater awareness of exam timing strategies. Most questions were accessible and yielded a broad range of responses. AO2 responses (evaluation and analysis) were often stronger than AO1 responses (knowledge and understanding); candidates demonstrated more confidence with 'd' questions than previously, often providing a range of arguments and supporting them with sources of wisdom and authority.

Route A Component 1 (Religious, Philosophical and Ethical Studies)

There was a wide range of responses. AO2 answers were often thoughtful and analytical, though AO1 'c' questions suffered from candidates failing to write about more than one tradition. Use of specialist language was strong, but some responses appeared rehearsed and failed to meet the demands of the question.

Route A Component 2 (Christianity)

Candidates often showed good understanding of beliefs and practices, with stronger use of religious terminology and sources than previously. Question 2b (Christian reconciliation) was widely un-attempted or inaccurately addressed, pointing towards a gap in teaching of this area of the specification.

Component 3 (World Religions)

Buddhism: Stronger performance than previous years, especially in AO2 responses. Candidates engaged well with 'd' questions, though the 'b' questions were slightly less accessible.

Hinduism: Responses displayed confident use of religious language and sources of wisdom and authority, but questions involving the Triguna and Raksha Bandhan were poorly answered by many. There were also some misconceptions, particularly confusing Brahman and Brahma.

Islam: Candidates performed well, with strong subject knowledge and religious language use. However, misinterpretation of the question focus (especially in 1c and 1d) affected some responses, often due to pre-prepared answers that were then not tailored to the specific demands of the question set.

Judaism: Improved engagement and understanding, especially in 'd' questions, was evident. However, confusion between figures like Moses and Abraham, and inappropriate references to Christian beliefs, impacted accuracy for some candidates.

Sikhism: Overall strong performance, with candidates demonstrating sound knowledge and accurate use of terminology. Question 2d was weaker compared to 2024, with some overly descriptive or formulaic responses limiting evaluative depth.

Component 1 Route B (Foundational Catholic Theology)

Candidates performed less well on this component than in previous years recently, with many struggling more with 'c' and 'd' questions. There were some strong performances, with greater inclusion of accurate and relevant sources of wisdom and authority to support the points and arguments made.

Component 2 Route B (Applied Catholic Theology)

Candidates performed well on this component, with many using religious language and sources of wisdom and authority effectively to support their answers. Candidate performance across the 'c' and 'd' questions was stronger in this component.

General strengths across components:

- Increased candidate familiarity with AO2 expectations.
- Improved use of specialist religious language and sources of wisdom and authority.
- Greater exam technique awareness (e.g., concise 'a' responses to improve timing).

General areas for improvement across components:

- Ensuring responses meet the specific demands and rubrics of each question.
- Avoiding formulaic or pre-prepared answers that limit analytical engagement.
- Improved teaching coverage of some areas (e.g. Christian reconciliation, Triguna, Raksha Bandhan).

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Route A Component 1 – Religious, Philosophical and Ethical Studies in the Modern World

Overview of the Component

Two assessment objectives (AOs), with equal weighting, are tested within each question. This paper carries 50 percent of the whole award.

A01 is tested in question types 'a' 'b' and 'c' and requires a demonstration of accurate knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. The criteria for assessment incorporate an understanding of the impact of beliefs on individuals and communities and the use of specialist language and, where appropriate and relevant, references to sources of wisdom and authority.

A02 is tested in question type 'd' and requires demonstration of informed analysis and evaluation. The criteria for assessment require judgements to be formed from an analysis of different viewpoints which are supported by accurate knowledge and understanding. Viewpoints might include religious and non-religious beliefs and moral reasoning and will employ the use of specialist language and, where appropriate and relevant, references to sources of wisdom and authority. More marks are available for responses demonstrating a range of viewpoints, but it is important to note that these need not be contrasting viewpoints.

Through at least two different religious traditions candidates are expected to consider a range of religious, philosophical and ethical issues.

Question 1 focuses on issues of relationships in the twenty-first century.

Question 2 focuses on beliefs, and their impact, on the nature of life and death, and the origin and value of the universe and human life. In this question, in addition to the two religious traditions, there is a requirement to consider non-religious beliefs.

Question 3 focuses on philosophical questions relating to the origins and nature of good and evil, the aims of punishment and treatment of criminals.

Question 4 focuses on contemporary issues of human rights and social justice. Specific issues such as wealth and racial prejudice and discrimination are considered.

This year's paper performed well with a wide range of responses. It was pleasing to see the number of candidates who referred to contemporary debates in their responses. A02 'd' questions were generally stronger than A01 responses. This was particularly the case with 'c' questions where responses often focussed on only one tradition. There were a concerning number of responses which appeared pre-prepared and did not meet the demands of the question. The use of specialist language was generally good, even within lower-level responses. In this component, specialist language includes religious terms but also language connected with philosophical and ethical issues e.g. conscience, morality, punishment. As will be identified later in the report (under 'd' questions) the use of sources of wisdom and authority sometimes impeded the quality and coherency of response.

All questions were accessible and there were fewer non-attempts and spoilt papers than in previous years. This component is the longest paper and also the first paper of the three components. In previous years there has been issues with timing which has resulted in candidates being unable to engage successfully with particular questions. There seems to be an increase in candidates' awareness of the time limitations of the paper. For example, briefer but correct definitions given in the 'a' questions which gave extra time to complete the final questions of the paper. There was an increase in candidates attempting all questions, even if they were unsure, and this often supported them gaining some developmental credit.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

Responses to 'a' questions are credited up to 2 marks and require a definition of a key concept. There was a pleasing engagement with all these initial questions. Candidates were generally writing less and not feeling the need to 'fill the lines'. This had an impact on their overall timing and ability to complete the final question. Generally accurate definitions were given although some candidates gave a definition of 'discrimination' rather than 'prejudice' in 4a.

AO1 'b' Questions

Responses to 'b' questions are credited up to 5 marks and require a description of a key issue or belief. In the question stem the demands of the question will be stated. For example, describe 'from one religion' / 'two different features' / 'how different'. These demands support candidates to focus on the specific areas of content that are relevant. It is important that candidates focus on these demands. For example, in 4b a number of responses referred to 'why' religious charities work to reduce poverty rather than 'how'. There were some excellent responses where candidates were able to synthesise accurate knowledge with an informed use of specialist language.

AO1 'c' Questions

Responses to 'c' questions are credited up to 8 marks and require an explanation from two different religions or religious traditions. Responses to these questions often under-performed. This appeared to be the result of a number of factors. In some cases, the demands of the questions were not met. For example, in 1c some candidates focussed their answer on the 'roles of women' and not on 'the role of women in worship'. However, the majority of situations where responses under-performed related to the rubric demand to 'explain from two religions or two religious traditions'. Some candidates only wrote about one religion/religious tradition with no reference to different practices or beliefs. Some candidates wrote as if the two religions/religious traditions had to have opposite beliefs and practices. This meant that religions/religious traditions were presented as polarised and often resulted in inaccurate portrayals. This was particularly the case in responses to 1c where some responses gave stereotypical responses regarding the role of women in worship. There was an increasing number of responses that included one religious tradition and humanism. In 'c' questions, only references to religions or religious traditions can be credited.

AO2 'd' Questions

'd' questions are the sole questions for testing AO2 objectives and are awarded up to 15 marks. It was pleasing to note the significantly improved engagement and standard of responses from previous years. There were some excellent responses where accurate knowledge and understanding led to an informed and justified viewpoint. Even weaker responses often included developmental points including limited statements of different viewpoints. Many responses contained analysis throughout while some gave summaries at the end of each paragraph or end of response. There are no set rubrics regarding where the analysis occurs. Fewer candidates were polarising their responses into arguments 'for' and 'against', which was very pleasing to see. The rubric asks for 'different points of view' which might be all 'for' or all 'against' the argument. There was evidence of some candidates feeling they needed to 'shoehorn' a specific quote into their argument. This often distorted the religious belief and produced a contrived evaluation. Creditable sources of wisdom and authority might derive from references to sacred texts but for this paper might also derive from references to the government, religious leaders, parents, conscience or moral reasoning. Such references are only required where they are appropriate and relevant and add to the argument. As with the 'b' and 'c' questions there were some instances where candidates did not focus on the specific demands of the question. In 'd' questions, this seemed to arise from pre-rehearsed answers. This was especially the case in 1d where many responses focussed on the challenges of inter-faith marriage and 2d where many responses focussed on abortion. Both of these had been questions in past papers.

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Route A Component 2 - Christianity

Overview of the Component

'a', 'b' and 'c' questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

'd' questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Section 1 comprises Christian beliefs and teachings across a range of topic areas.

Section 2 comprises Christian practices across a range of areas of study in the specification.

The exam addressed a broad range of topics from the specification, and the majority of students attempted every question, with the exception of 2b which was widely left unattempted, despite being a clearly defined topic on the specification. Many demonstrated a strong grasp of Christian beliefs and practices, and the most successful candidates showed awareness of the varied beliefs and practices within the faith.

In their responses to the 'd' questions, a significant number of students were able to engage in analysis and evaluation, effectively fulfilling the AO2 criteria. These answers reflected an understanding of how Christian beliefs and practices influence the lives of believers. Top-performing candidates presented their arguments with a high level of evaluative skill. While lower-scoring candidates tended to offer more basic responses, they still managed to explain why certain beliefs and practices are important and were generally able to provide a concluding judgement.

The overall use of religious terminology throughout the paper showed an improvement. Candidates often used it to reinforce their points and demonstrate in-depth understanding. References to sources of wisdom and authority were generally used well; the strongest responses incorporated direct or paraphrased biblical quotations and other authoritative references to enhance their arguments.

Centres must ensure that, through their teaching, all aspects of the specification are covered. Centres should avoid encouraging pupils to learn model answers for 'd' questions, and instead, focus on teaching pupils to use their knowledge to evaluate and analyse the content outlined on the specification. Candidates should be encouraged to read questions carefully to ensure the focus of the question is being addressed in their responses.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The 'a' questions require a straightforward definition of one of the eight key concepts. These questions performed well. For 1a, candidates had either learned the Eduqas definition of 'incarnation' or gave a valid definition in their own words. Some candidates gave incorrect definitions, with a small minority confusing incarnation with resurrection or reincarnation. 2a was extremely well answered, with almost all candidates receiving full marks. A significant number of candidates elaborated by naming the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit alongside a definition such as 'the three persons of the one Christian God'. Although this additional detail wasn't required for full marks, it was encouraging to see such a strong and widespread understanding of the concept.

AO1 'b' Questions

The 'b' questions require a description of a belief, teaching or practice. Candidates generally performed well on 1b, with the majority of candidates successfully describing traditional beliefs about heaven. The best responses used, either by paraphrasing or quoting, biblical teachings to describe beliefs about heaven. All traditional beliefs about heaven were credited, including what Christians believe heaven is like and how Christians believe people need to act to get to heaven. Some candidates also included descriptions of hell and purgatory which were not worthy of any credit and centres would benefit from ensuring pupils read questions carefully so they can focus their responses more specifically. It was disappointing that 2b was generally answered poorly, with many not attempting it at all. A significant number of candidates showed limited, and often inaccurate understanding, and it was not attempted by over 12% of the cohort. Although the topic of Christian reconciliation appears in the specification, it seemed unfamiliar to many. Some candidates confused reconciliation efforts with the work of other Christian organisations like Tearfund and Open Doors. However, those who did grasp the topic were often able to give thoughtful explanations, referring to specific examples of how Christians work to repair relationships and promote peace and unity, in divided communities, and with God.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require an explanation of beliefs, teachings and practices. For 1c, it was pleasing to see candidates explain in detail different interpretations of creation. The best responses used a wide range of religious terminology and subject specific language to back up their explanations, as well as referring to sources of wisdom and authority. Some candidates simply gave a description of creation, which did not meet the demands of the question, as the focus was on explaining different Christian *interpretations* of creation. Again, it is important that candidates are encouraged to read questions carefully. It was disappointing that for 2c, over 15% of candidates did not attempt the question, which would imply that many struggled to understand the term 'eucharist'. It is really important that centres focus on and teach the key religious terminology on the specification, not just the eight listed key concepts, in order to be able to access questions. Those candidates who did attempt 2c and were confident with the term were able to successfully explain the different Christian beliefs about the eucharist, with the best candidates using sophisticated religious language such as consubstantiation and transubstantiation to highlight their knowledge and understanding.

AO2 'd' Questions

The 'd' questions are designed to test candidates' ability to analyse and evaluate a given statement. It was pleasing to see that these were well-attempted this series, with over 96% of candidates attempting 1d and 95% attempting 2d. Overall, responses to this question type continue to be strong, with many candidates demonstrating a sophisticated level of analysis and evaluation. In question 1d, for instance, several responses stood out for their insightful comparisons between Christian beliefs about God's omnipotence and other Christian beliefs, showing a clear understanding of the significance of each.

However, it remains important that centres avoid encouraging candidates to memorise and reproduce model answers based on specific specification points. This approach was evident in responses to question 2d, where some candidates appeared to have been taught to write broadly about the different types of Christian worship and apply this to the role of the church. Since the question specifically required analysis the main role of the church, not worship in general, this limited the effectiveness of many answers. The best answers evaluated the role of the church as a place of worship compared to its social and community functions. Candidates were awarded marks regardless of whether they interpreted church to mean the building or the organisation, with some excellent responses mentioning both.

Spelling, punctuation, and grammar (SPaG) were generally of a good standard in 1d responses, though there is still room for improvement. Centres should remind candidates about the correct use of capital letters for proper nouns and consistent punctuation throughout their writing.

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Component 3 Route A - Buddhism

Overview of the Component

'a', 'b' and 'c' questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

'd' questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Section 1 comprises Buddhist beliefs and teachings across a range of topic areas.

Section 2 comprises Buddhist practices across a range of areas of study in the specification.

Most questions were attempted by most candidates, with every candidate on the Short Course answering 1 'c' and 1 'd'. A range of marks across the band descriptors were awarded, showing that all the questions were accessible and gave opportunities for high-level responses. Candidates were aware of the specific skills that the different questions required so most answers were focused. There was also less mention of Christian or non-religious perspectives in answers this year. There was extensive use of appropriate religious language, and many candidates were also able to refer to various sources of authority which elevated the quality of their answers. Analysis and evaluation were demonstrated well with many high-scoring candidates confidently discussing the validity of their arguments. Lower-scoring candidates were often able to offer more than one point of view.

Overall, the Full Course exam performed in a similar way to 2024, with only 1a and 2b being less accessible this year. Candidates found the 'c' and 'd' questions significantly more accessible this year. The number of entries for the Short Course dropped this year so it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons with previous series, however, apart from 1a, candidates found the paper to be more accessible than last year and examiners were able to award across the range of marks.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The 'a' questions require a straightforward definition of a key concept. Generally, candidates performed well on the 'a' questions. Candidates had either learned the Eduqas definition or gave a valid definition in their own words. A great many supported their definition with an example, and whilst this isn't a requirement, it did help to demonstrate their understanding of the key concept. Some candidates were able to pick up a mark for a suitable example even if the definition was weak or incorrect. Very few candidates confused the key concepts with other Buddhist ideas.

AO1 'b' Questions

The 'b' questions require description of a belief, practice, teaching or view. Generally, the 'b' questions performed in a very similar way to those in 2024. Many candidates understood the requirement to describe rather than explain. In most cases, candidates had read the questions carefully and had confined their answers to the topic being examined. Many candidates were able to display an impressive knowledge of many beliefs about Amida (and the Pure Land) for 1b, other responses picked up marks for being able to describe general beliefs about Bodhisattvas. Overall, 2b was answered well, with candidates showing good knowledge of the many ways that malas could be used by Buddhists. Better answers were coherent and made excellent use of appropriate specialist language.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require explanation of a belief, practice, teaching, or view. Generally, responses to both 'c' questions were very good with candidates drawing on a thorough overall knowledge and understanding of many elements of the course. The 'c' questions were accessible with many candidates receiving over half-marks for these questions. They were popular questions in the Full and Short Course exams, attempted by every Short Course candidate. 2c saw candidates referring to offerings made to the dead as well as those made during puja and to monastics. The question was answered in different ways: some candidates explained each offering e.g. the symbolic nature of candles, flowers etc.; others gave more of an overview of the reasons for making offerings, with generating positive karma being seen as a major justification. Relatively few candidates merely described the Eightfold Path, but some candidates seemed to struggle with the *how* and considered *why* it is important. Weaker responses to 1c were general, with an over-emphasis on the value of the karma accrued by following the Eightfold Path rather than explaining how the different qualities developed by magga might help a Buddhist reach nirvana. Stronger answers either considered the value of the three sections of the eightfold path (wisdom, morality, meditation), looked at specific parts (e.g. right speech, right livelihood, right meditation), or how it helps to overcome the Three Poisons. In many cases, the specific steps of the Path were effectively used as examples to consolidate each point made, e.g. reference to 'right action' when explaining that a person's karma helps them reach nirvana. In the 'c' answers, many candidates were able to effectively explain the impact of Buddhist beliefs and teachings. It was also pleasing to note candidates' understanding of concepts and their ability to use them in a confident manner.

AO2 'd' Questions

The 'd' questions require a statement to be analysed and evaluated. Generally, performance across these types of questions continues to improve, with the mean mark increasing in the Full Course. In most cases knowledge and understanding were used effectively to develop discussions. Higher scoring responses did evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of the arguments put forward, with this being done in a way that flowed confidently from the points made. Most candidates responded well to 1d with evidence of them receiving excellent teaching of these topics. Most candidates considered whether the Four Sights were, in fact, the most important events in Buddha's life showing a very good awareness of the significance of other life-changing incidents. Better responses considered the impact of his early life, his time as an ascetic and/or his enlightenment, making judgements as to which was the *most* important and which had the biggest impact on the Buddha. Weaker responses did concentrate on the relative value of each of the four sights whereas the focus of the question was on discussing whether seeing Four Sights was more important - and had a bigger impact - than other events in the Buddha's life. Some candidates assessed the importance of the Four Sights and other events for Buddhists today, possibly mis-reading the statement in the question. Some candidates mis-read or misunderstood the focus of 2d and did not consider whether ceremonies for the dead were a 'waste of time', instead discussing whether they were important or not. However, there were many excellent responses that showed real engagement with the statement and were able to answer from

an extensive understanding of the different course components. Better responses often opened with a bold statement, e.g. 'Ceremonies for the dead *are* a waste of time ...' which led into explanation and analysis of why they might be. This was often more effective than the overused phrase 'I agree/disagree with the statement' especially if an answer considered whether ceremonies for the dead were important or not, rather than a waste of time. It was pleasing to note that many candidates showed very good knowledge and understanding of various ceremonies for the dead, with better answers being able to select information that was pertinent to the argument they were making. There was also effective use of religious language and reference to sources of authority across both 'd' answers.

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Component 3 Route A - Hinduism

Overview of the Component

'a', 'b' and 'c' questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

'd' questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Section 1 comprises Hindu beliefs and teachings across a range of topic areas.

Section 2 comprises Hindu practices across a range of areas of study in the specification.

Most questions were attempted by the majority of candidates. A range of marks were awarded across the band descriptors for both Full and Short Course candidates, demonstrating the accessibility of all questions. It was pleasing to see a large number of candidates confidently quoting relevant sources of wisdom and authority in their responses. Religious language and key concepts were used accurately by many candidates and the diversity of views within Hinduism were often included. However, some candidates failed to consider carefully the rubric or demands of the question. Analysis and evaluation skills were clearly demonstrated by many candidates, particularly in 1d, and even weaker candidates were often able to give more than one viewpoint in AO2 essays.

Candidates must be reminded to read the whole question – too often the key component of a question was ignored; this was particularly the case with question 2b where the word *how* was misinterpreted as *why*. The ability to evaluate and critically analyse information was a key issue when awarding marks in the AO2 questions. Some teaching approaches are hindering higher achievement because candidates appear to have been trained to use formulaic structures. Whilst this structure may help some learners, it can sometimes prevent the analytical evaluation needed to access the higher bands. Similarly, candidates who conclude each paragraph with phrases such as, "this is a strong / weak argument because..." often fail to provide genuine evaluation and simply restate the preceding point. Comparing Hindu beliefs with Christian or atheistic ones in the AO2 essays isn't credit worthy and candidates should be reminded of this. It is also important that centres teach all the content of the specification; candidates' lack of knowledge of the Cosmology section has been an issue now on two successive papers.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

These questions require a definition of one of the eight key concepts. The majority of candidates provided accurate definitions of moksha and puja, often including detailed additional explanations in their responses that was not required.

AO1 'b' Questions

These questions require a description of a belief, teaching or practice. Candidates generally performed well on 1b, with those achieving marks in the top band demonstrating excellent use of key terms such as Nirguna and Saguna, and making reference to Vedantic traditions, such as Advaita. Unfortunately, a number of candidates in both Full Course and Short Course failed to gain any marks due to confusion between Brahman (the Ultimate Reality) and Brahma (the creator deity).

Question 2b proved to be challenging for those candidates who failed to respond to the question's focus - *how* cows are protected in Hinduism. Describing why cows are considered sacred meant that while responses displayed some relevant knowledge, they did not fully address the set question. Top band answers, however, demonstrated a strong focus on the question, clearly explaining a variety of practices aimed at protecting cows both in India and the UK.

AO1 'c' Questions

These questions require an explanation of beliefs, teachings and practices. Question 1c proved to be the most challenging question on the paper for many students. A significant number failed to gain any marks due to confusion between the Triguna and the Trimurti, or assuming the Three Qualities (Triguna) were Hindu virtues such as dharma or ahimsa. Many candidates left this question unanswered, particularly those doing the Short Course qualification. Lower band responses generally made brief or vague statements, such as identifying the gunas as personality traits, or listed one or two gunas with limited explanations. Stronger responses gave clear explanations of each named guna and their influences on human behaviour and spiritual development. Some top band candidates referenced key ideas such as prakriti, and the link between the gunas and the Trimurti in Samkhya philosophy.

Question 2c enabled candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the importance of various forms of worship within a mandir. Responses in the higher bands demonstrated strong subject knowledge and a clear understanding of how different rituals in worship convey deeper spiritual meaning. In contrast, answers within the lower bands often explored general themes in worship, such as communal and individual devotion, and the use of key terms and understanding of the significance of specific rituals were often absent.

AO2 'd' Questions

These questions require analysis and evaluation of a statement. Question 1d was well attempted, with most candidates engaging meaningfully with the concept of karma and offering alternative viewpoints. However, the depth of evaluation varied considerably across the bands. Lower band responses tended to be descriptive definitions of karma, with little or no consideration of alternative religious beliefs. The higher band responses demonstrated a high level of evaluative skill throughout the entire essay, explaining and analysing key ideas and linking their analysis back to the demands of the question. The use of key terminology and sources of wisdom such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads was particularly effective, helping to support sophisticated and well-reasoned judgments.

In 2d, a disappointingly large number of students were placed in Band 1. In many cases, this was due to a failure to address the named festival (Raksha Bandhan), with candidates instead focusing on Diwali or Holi. These responses were often entirely descriptive of the practices of both festivals, with little or no evaluation or engagement with the demands of the question. Band 2 and 3 responses typically included some accurate information about Hindu festivals but lacked meaningful evaluation or analysis, with any arguments only being presented in isolation. Additionally, many of these candidates still overlooked the named festival, again writing about Diwali or Holi in ways that did not demonstrate clear relevance to the specific question being asked. Those who achieved marks in the higher Bands

demonstrated a much stronger evaluative focus, competently exploring the ethical, social and spiritual significance of Hindu festivals, and in some cases linking their analysis to wider Hindu values such as dharma, bhakti, or varna.

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Component 3 Route A - Islam

Overview of the Component

'a', 'b' and 'c' questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

'd' questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Section 1 comprises Muslim beliefs and teachings across a range of topic areas.

Section 2 comprises Muslim practices across a range of areas of study in the specification.

This paper covered a wide variety of areas of the specification. Most candidates performed well and questions were widely attempted. This series saw a big decrease in papers achieving 0. Subject knowledge was generally very good across both the Beliefs and Teachings and the Practices sections of the exam. Students regularly and fluently used religious language (for example 'kutub' in 1d instead of 'holy books', with the Arabic names for the kutub themselves) and there was some excellent use of sources of wisdom and authority. Even in lower achieving responses, often the use of religious language was attempted and sources of wisdom and authority were referenced.

There were some persistent issues with candidates answering the question they wanted to see rather than the one in front of them, possibly because of pre-prepared responses. For example, in 1c, lots of candidates discussed Judgement Day without then making this relevant to heaven. Similarly, some discussed predestination. In 1d, some candidates appeared to have been prepared for a question on Muhammad or Ibrahim which then dominated their response and meant they were often describing rather than analysing. Sometimes this meant excellent explanations did not reach the higher bands as they didn't meet the AO2 requirements.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The 'a' questions require a straightforward definition of a key concept. The majority of candidates engaged well with these questions and gave accurate definitions.

AO1 'b' Questions

The 'b' questions require a description of a religious belief or practice. These questions were generally well done, particularly 1b. Candidates who knew who Jibriel was were often awarded the higher bands for their responses as they could describe beliefs about him and incorporate general knowledge of angels, which also applies to Jibriel. Reference to other religious traditions (mainly Christianity) was not credited, although this was rare. Very few candidates didn't know who Jibriel was and described a different concept, e.g. a prophet or a festival. 2b was also mostly done well, but some candidates went off-topic and discussed other practices, e.g. halal food or prayer, without making them relevant to fasting.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require an explanation of a religious belief or concept. Most candidates performed well on these, and this year the standard of awareness of the impact of belief on individuals and communities was high. For example, in 1c, students were generally aware of the purpose of heaven and how this could make individuals act. Some candidates did misinterpret the question and wrote about 'nature' (environment) and 'purpose of heaven.' 2c had the lowest attempt rate, and mean mark across the paper. This is surprising, as it applies to an entire section on the specification. However, many students focussed well on the importance of the Ten Obligatory Acts rather than just describing them. High achieving candidates could make a general point about why the Acts are important (e.g. to teach how to treat others) and then use individual Acts to support this point. It was also pleasing to see that these centres have prepared students for questions on Shi'a Islam, with only a few students referring exclusively to the Five Pillars of Sunni Islam.

AO2 'd' Questions

The 'd' questions require a statement to be discussed and analysed, and it was pleasing to see improvement on these skills this year. Most candidates provided at least two simple, contrasting views demonstrating their understanding of the requirement to give differing points of view. It is important to note that these do not need to be *contrasting* viewpoints.

For 1d, many candidates demonstrated a depth of knowledge and referred to both the prophets' collective and individual importance, drawing on a wide range of sources of wisdom including Qur'an, Hadith and many referenced Injil and Tawrat. Although not required for full marks, this series showed candidates often using a conclusion to ensure their analysis responded to the demands of the question, while other candidates used their analysis throughout to discuss the statement. Some candidates did miss out on the higher Bands by solely writing a comparison of the prophets without relating back to the question, and centres could benefit from ensuring that candidates know to answer the specific question given. Many candidates responding to 2d had clearly been well-prepared for a question about Islamic traditions in Britain and around the world. There was an impressive and insightful range of knowledge about specific practices, for example differences in sacrificing an animal for Eid ul Adha or blood donations for Shi'a Muslims during Ashura, and there was also some mention of specific local celebrations. The highest achieving candidates linked teaching or other sources of authority to belief or practice and considered the impact of this. This does not necessarily mean rote learning of quotes from holy books but could be consideration of the actions of role models or traditions.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2025

Component 3 Route A and B - Judaism

Overview of the Component

'a', 'b' and 'c' questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

'd' questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Section 1 comprises Jewish beliefs and teachings across a range of topic areas.

Section 2 comprises Jewish practices across a range of areas of study in the specification.

This year's paper performed well with a wide range of responses for each question type. Generally, candidates engaged with the questions with an increasing number of examples of candidates making developmental points rather than not attempting questions. It was pleasing to see the number of candidates who referred to the diversity of belief and practices within Judaism with references to Orthodox, Reform and secular Jews most frequently cited. As identified later in the report some responses polarised the differences between Orthodox and Reform Jews without recognising there is a range of similarities and that each tradition has a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices.

Particularly noteworthy was the number of responses that demonstrated a real understanding of specific Jewish concepts and were able to appropriately and confidently refer to them in 'd' questions. However, as identified later in the report, there were a number of responses which explained the content through a Christian or Muslim lens. This paper is solely focussed on Judaism as a world faith and no credit is given for references to other religious or non-Jewish beliefs.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

Responses to 'a' questions are credited up to 2 marks and require a definition of a key concept. There was a pleasing engagement with these initial questions. There was a good understanding of the term 'kosher' with many examples given to support the definition. Candidates were generally confident in defining the term 'mitzvot' although a few mis-read the question and focussed their definition on bar mitzvah, which wasn't creditworthy.

AO1 'b' Questions

Responses to 'b' questions are credited up to 5 marks and require a description of a key issue or belief. The standard of response to 1b was extremely high. It would appear that candidates had engaged with this concept and were confident in expressing the importance of pikuach nefesh. Many candidates referred to examples of pikuach nefesh which had obviously supported their understanding of this distinctive concept.

Responses to 2b were often less successful and there were a significant number of non-attempts. In attempted responses it appeared a number of candidates were not used to the term 'tenakh' and although some could give a definition of what the Tenakh is there were only a minority of responses that could give an accurate description of *how* the Tenakh was used.

AO1 'c' Questions

Responses to 'c' questions are credited up to 8 marks and require an explanation. In both of these questions there was often confusion regarding Moses and Abraham and, in a significant number of responses, Jesus. In responses to 1c there were some excellent responses which explained the importance of each of the different components of the Covenant. There were many references to the impact of circumcision on Jewish identity today. Some responses focussed upon the Akedah (binding of Isaac) which were not creditworthy as part of the Covenant.

Responses to 2c question often under-performed with a specific focus on a description of a Seder meal. Many responses focussed on suggestions of symbolic understanding of what might be on a table for the Seder meal. A significant number of responses framed the symbolic understanding within an expression of belief about the importance of Jesus. Of particular concern was the interpretation by some candidates of the practices associated with the Seder meal. Common misconceptions included references to Jews today kill other living creatures to smear their doorposts, and that a chair is placed at the table for Jesus to appear. Some responses were focussed on the demands of the question and explained the conceptual understanding of the importance of Pesach with reference to God's deliverance, community identity, the celebration of liberation from slavery and teaching the children the history of the Israelites.

AO2 'd' Questions

Responses to 'd' questions are the sole questions for testing AO2 objectives and are awarded up to 15 marks. It was pleasing to note the significantly improved engagement and standard of responses from previous years. There were some excellent responses where accurate knowledge, understanding and effective use of specialist language led to an informed and justified viewpoint. Many responses made appropriate reference to a broad understanding of Jewish beliefs and practices. In responses to 1d many responses referred to the importance of the Talmud, Maimonides, the mitzvot and the Oral Torah. In question 2d the vast majority of responses understood the wider role of a synagogue as a place of study, community and worship. References were made to contemporary potential challenges such as disability access, safety and ability to travel to as there is a decreasing number of synagogues. The majority of responses also identified the particular significance of the home in Judaism with appropriate examples such as references to Shabbat and keeping kosher.

Even weaker responses were usually able to give developmental points including limited statements of different viewpoints. Many responses contained analysis throughout while some gave summaries at the end of each paragraph or end of response. There are no set rubrics regarding where the analysis occurs. Fewer candidates were polarising their responses into arguments 'for' and 'against'. The rubric asks for different points of view, which might be all 'for' or all 'against' the argument.

There was evidence of some candidates feeling they needed to shoe-horn a specific quote into their argument. These were often justified as supporting evidence through a Christian lens which then impacted on the credibility of the argument. The use of sources of wisdom and authority sometimes impeded the quality and coherency of response.

It was pleasing to see the diversity of Judaism beliefs and practices within many responses. However, many of the polarised portrayals of Orthodox and Reform traditions included significant misconceptions. For example, many candidates argues that synagogues were important for Orthodox Jews but not for Reform and the whole of their response was structured around this argument, with limited supportive evidence.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES
GCSE
Summer 2025
Component 3 Route A – Sikhism

Overview of the Component

‘a’, ‘b’ and ‘c’ questions test candidates’ AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

‘d’ questions test candidates’ AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Section 1 comprises Sikh beliefs and teachings across a range of topic areas.

Section 2 comprises Sikh practices across a range of areas of study in the specification.

Most questions were attempted by most candidates, and although 2b had the highest number of non-attempts, it still had a 92.4% attempt rate showing sound knowledge of the concepts across the paper. A range of marks across the band descriptors were awarded, demonstrating that the questions were accessible but also gave opportunities for high level responses. Many candidates quoted relevant sources of wisdom in their responses, including reference to scripture and the lives and actions of the human gurus. Religious language was used well by many, including the use of the key concepts across the questions. The AO2 skills of analysis and evaluation were demonstrated very well by many, with some higher scoring candidates discussing to the validity of arguments, while lower scoring candidates were often able to give more than one viewpoint. There was an increase in mean mark on both 1c and 2c, when compared to performance on 1c and 2c in 2024. There was a decrease in the mean mark for 2d when compared to performance in 2024.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 ‘a’ Questions

The ‘a’ questions require a definition of a key concept. Most candidates excelled in defining the key terms for both questions and often provided detailed examples in support, which, whilst not necessary, did serve to strengthen some weaker definitions. Candidates who scored lower gave very weak or inaccurate definitions. The vast majority of candidates knew of the concept of ‘sewa’ and were able to give appropriate examples; however, ‘sangāt’ was not as well answered in comparison. Almost all candidates achieved full marks on 1a.

AO1 ‘b’ Questions

The ‘b’ questions require a description of a belief, teaching or practice. Many candidates struggled with b, often missing the specific focus on ‘describe’ in the question. 1b was generally answered well, with most able students referring to, and developing, the teachings from the Mool Mantra. Some lower ability students were able to gain some marks through using generic beliefs about the nature of God. Higher scoring candidates offered detailed descriptions while some less able to candidates veered into explanation of how beliefs about the Nature of God might influence Sikhs in their beliefs and practice. In 2b, those who did correctly identify examples of how the martyrdom is commemorated were able to demonstrate comprehensive understanding and displayed a high level of knowledge. It was also evident that students would include generic festival practices if they were unable to remember distinct practices associated with commemorations. This helped lower scoring candidates gain some marks. Higher scoring candidates were able to refer to gurburbs being

the day's commemoration. Some candidates confused the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh with the martyrdom of gurus and so referred to Diwali.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require an explanation of a belief, teaching or practice. Candidates showed varying levels of understanding of the two concepts examined through the 'c' questions. Responses to 1c ranged from basic definitions of the law of karma to more in-depth discussions exploring how specific beliefs, attitudes, and practices influence the accumulation of karma and its consequences. Some also addressed God's role in judgement and the administration of karma, as well as the relationship between God and humans, with Mukti identified as the ultimate goal for Sikhs. Higher scoring candidates demonstrated an awareness of specific teachings which might influence beliefs, although reference to specific quotes was not necessary to gain full marks as reference to conscience, the vices, virtues and foundations of faith also provided appropriate sources of wisdom. Several attempts at 2c showed a good overall knowledge of the variety of reasons for why a Sikh might worship at a gurdwara. Those who struggled invariably gave overly descriptive information regarding the features of a gurdwara without explaining the significance or symbolism of them in relation to the conduciveness for worship. Higher ability students were able to give a range of reasons for their wanting to worship at the gurdwara and were able to make the connection between the individual and their being part of the sangat; linking to the sangat's role in spiritual edification.

AO1 'd' Questions

Responses to 1d varied in quality, from simple statements of a point of view to detailed evaluations. Many used formal writing structures which often led to more descriptive rather than evaluative answers; the use of such structures, while supporting the less able, limited the more able and led to underdeveloped analysis and evaluation. High achieving candidates offered sophisticated arguments and used quotations and references to the teachings or practices of the gurus effectively to support their points. Many were able to make appropriate comparisons to the possibility of being able to practise equality; recognising the constraints Sikhs practising in the UK might find in relation to cultural standards and expectations. They demonstrated consistent critical thinking throughout their responses. Weaker responses inclined to argue whether Sikhism is a religion of equality rather than whether possible to practise equality; and made common errors such as saying that women cannot be granthis. Responses to 2d varied significantly, from simple statements of the symbolic meaning behind each of the Five Ks to more sophisticated responses arguing that faith is a person matter rather than something needed to be outwardly proven. The higher scoring candidates showed good evaluative skills, recognising alternative practices as demonstrations of faith, and used arguments to show a critical understanding of the topic. Higher performing candidates were able to highlight the link between the different 'code of conduct' that sahaj-dhari and amrit-dhari Sikhs might have before and after an amritsanskarn. They used sources of wisdom, key terminology, and maintained continuous evaluation throughout their answers.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2025

Component 1 Route B – Foundational Catholic Theology

Overview of the Component

'a', 'b' and 'c' questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

'd' questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Section 1 is entitled 'Origins and Meaning' and comprises Catholic beliefs, teachings and practices across a range of areas of study within this topic.

Section 2 is entitled 'Good and Evil' and comprises Catholic beliefs, teachings and practices across a range of areas of study within this topic.

There were a significant number of entries for this paper, increasing from the previous year, and it was pleasing to see few unanswered questions. Candidates generally coped with the demands of the questions and were well prepared, as this is one of the first exams in the calendar. Most responses were contained within the space given in the exam paper, with less additional pages used than in previous years. This is good to see as it shows time is then used well across all questions. A range of marks were awarded across the bands. Many responses were developed by the use of religious language and specialist terminology, including a range of sources of wisdom and authority, enabling candidates to develop their response further. There was evidence of a range of strategies for planning responses and keeping time across the paper and fewer running out of time on the final 'd' question, however, a small number of responses failed to meet the demands of the questions or left questions out.

Although 'a' questions require a definition of key concepts, candidates should also include these concepts in responses to other questions, linking to sources of wisdom and authority where relevant, in order to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. Some candidates wrote in more general terms and failed to focus on the question. Candidates would benefit from being prepared for the different types of questions and then expectations of each one, using the trigger words e.g. define, describe, explain and discuss (using evaluation and analysis) to focus their responses. A non-religious viewpoint should not be included in c questions. Candidates must read the whole question carefully as some failed to focus on different religious traditions. Candidates were more aware of the demands of the 'd' questions where a non-religious view must be included in 1d but can also be included in other d questions where relevant.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The 'a' questions require a straightforward definition of a key concept. The majority of candidates engaged well with these questions. An example helped candidates who struggled in giving a definition. Providing examples served to strengthen weaker definitions in order to gain full marks e.g. 1a(i) examples of stewardship.

AO1 'b' Questions

The 'b' questions require a description of a belief, teaching or practice. 'b' questions will sometimes ask for a description of *two* particular aspects or beliefs or practices. This structure can help candidates focus their answer rather than repeat their description. In such instances, full credit will only be given for responses that consider the required two, e.g. 1b focused on the 'Creation of Adam' painting. Generally, the 'b' questions were answered well, demonstrating a good range of knowledge and there was a range of sources of wisdom in 1b that focused on peace.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require an explanation of a belief, teaching or practice from the Roman Catholic religion, and either Judaism or another Christian tradition. Some responses failed to achieve high marks as they only included one religion, and some were descriptions rather than explanations. It is expected that within the explanation there will be relevant references to specific sources of wisdom and authority. In 1c, some candidates mixed up the origin of humanity with the origin of the universe so lost marks through not reading the question properly. Some candidates struggled with concept of Original Sin in 2c and only answered from one perspective. Sources of wisdom and authority might include reference to specific sacred texts but also to teachings and practices of religious leaders and other sources of authority such as parents/carers, the law of the land and individual conscience. It is important that candidates refer to a source of authority that is relevant to the demands of the question and is not contrived.

AO1 'd' Questions

The 'd' questions require a statement to be analysed and evaluated. There were some excellent examples of insight and engagement with the issues in the questions. Although some candidates found it difficult to express their thoughts clearly, there were many examples of sophisticated philosophical thinking. 1d's focus on sanctity of life enabled some candidates to use knowledge from across the specification, such as abortion and euthanasia, as examples of applied ethical issues, however some candidates seemed not to understand the term 'sanctity of life'. Generally, performance across these types of questions had further improved from previous years. Some candidates had used such a framework of describing how one religion would respond to the statement and then a description of how another group of religious or non-religious might respond, often these responses were contrived and did not allow for justified, relevant arguments to be made. Candidates need to be aware that the different viewpoints do not need to be contrasting viewpoints. The many strong responses made judgements throughout with many having given a summative viewpoint as a conclusion. It is important that accurate and detailed knowledge and understanding is used to form the specific judgement. Again, the responses need to include sources of wisdom and authority in order to access the full range of marks.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2025

Component 2 Route B – Applied Catholic Theology

Overview of the Component

'a', 'b' and 'c' questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

'd' questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation of aspects of religion and belief.

Section 1 is entitled 'Life and Death' and comprises Catholic beliefs, teachings and practices across a range of areas of study within this topic.

Section 2 is entitled 'Sin and Forgiveness' and comprises Catholic beliefs, teachings and practices across a range of areas of study within this topic.

There were a substantial number of entries for this paper and it was encouraging to see few spoiled scripts or unanswered questions. Many candidates demonstrated effective strategies to stay focused on the specific requirements of each question and made good use of the time available, with few resorting to brief notes in response to the final evaluation question as has happened in previous years. This was supported by the use of the space within the exam paper, with many candidates writing high level responses without going on to extra pages. The wide distribution of marks across the band descriptors indicates questions offered scope for stretch and challenge while being accessible. Many responses were strengthened by the appropriate and accurate use of subject-specific terminology. There was also a noticeable decline in the misuse of philosophical, ethical, and religious terms. It was especially pleasing to see relevant references to contemporary issues in responses to 'd' questions e.g. the current legal debate around the change in law regarding euthanasia. These real-world connections appeared to engage students and deepen their understanding of the specification's expectations. However, a significant minority of responses did not address the precise demands of the questions.

Candidates should ensure they understand the demands of the question, underlining keywords can often help this focus. Reference to non-religious beliefs cannot be credited in 'b' and 'c' questions. Non-religious beliefs are not required in 'd' responses but can be credited where relevant to the question. Candidates should ensure key concepts are learned and used across all question types. Full coverage of specification should be ensured in preparation for exams.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 'a' Questions

The 'a' questions require a straightforward definition of a key concept. The majority of candidates engaged well with these questions. An example helped candidates who struggled in giving a definition. This was seen in 2a(i) which asked for a definition of 'absolutism'. It was clear there were candidates who were aware of the term but found difficulty in actually defining it. Providing examples served to strengthen weaker definitions.

AO1 'b' Questions

The 'b' questions require a description of a belief, teaching or practice. 'b' questions will sometimes ask for a description of *two* particular aspects or beliefs or practices; candidates need to focus on the demands of the question and avoid repeating their first point. In such instances, full credit will only be given for responses that consider the required two. Generally, the b questions were answered well although some responses in 1b struggled with the description of Catholic beliefs about purgatory, highlight the importance of ensuring coverage of the full specification.

AO1 'c' Questions

The 'c' questions require an explanation of a belief, teaching or practice from the Roman Catholic faith. Some responses failed to achieve high marks as they were descriptions rather than explanations. It is expected that within the explanation there will be relevant references to specific sources of authority. Sources of authority might include reference to specific sacred texts but also to other sources of authority such as the Magisterium, religious leaders and others. It is important that candidates refer to a source of authority that is relevant to the demands of the question.

AO1 'd' Questions

The 'd' questions require a statement to be analysed and evaluated. There were some excellent examples of insight and engagement with the issues in the questions. Although some candidates found it difficult to express their thoughts clearly, there were many examples of sophisticated philosophical thinking. Generally, performance across these types of questions had further improved from 2024. There were fewer examples of formulaic responses of for and against, which can inhibit the flow of arguments within the discussed response and do not always allow for a justified argument. The vast majority of responses made judgements throughout, with many including a conclusion to focus their evaluation and judgement: either approach can be used to access full marks. It is important that accurate and detailed knowledge and understanding is used to form the specific judgement, supported with sources of wisdom and authority. 2d focused on forgiveness and some candidates used current news to debate the importance of forgiveness, or to question if everyone deserves forgiveness, resulting in some excellent responses.

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