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# GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES (SHORT COURSE)

Sections 1 - 4: The study of religions  
Report on the Examination

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8061  
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## General comments

Many students were able to show what they had learned over the course with a degree of success.

In all religions, it is important to emphasise the importance of knowing technical terms. If a technical term appears in the specification, it is required for study. Students who did not appear to know the five moral precepts (Buddhism), the afterlife (Christianity), the Prophet Ibrahim (Islam) and the sanctity of human life (Judaism) were unable to achieve many if any of the five available marks in question 01.4 in each religion.

It may be useful to consider the way the different AO1 question types should be approached:

- In question 01.2, no detail is required. Two lines are provided for each answer and that should provide more than enough space to earn the two marks. Some students wrote much more than is necessary, taking valuable time away from answering other questions.
- The key concept in 01.3 questions is how a certain belief or religious teaching influences believers today. Many wrote at length about the belief or teaching without providing much information about how it influences believers today. They were awarded limited credit for the information they provided but to access all the marks available, there needed to be clear reference to influence.
- It is advised that it would assist students in 01.4 if they made sure to include 'a reference to sacred writings or another source of Buddhist / Christian / Muslim / Jewish belief and teaching'. Any reference to a valid source will provide the extra mark for this element of the question.

There were some outstanding answers in response to the twelve mark AO2 questions. Across all four units, there were many responses achieving a mark within the highest level – Level 4. Many such answers were a pleasure to read.

Some students benefit from using a writing frame, usually based on an acronym such as 'farm' or 'sonic'. Whilst these can be helpful to some students, the bullet points provided in the 12 mark questions themselves provide good guidance for the responses:

- The first bullet, 'Refer to Christian/Muslim/Jewish/Buddhist teaching' does not need its own paragraph because on the four religion papers, the quote is clearly based on a religious belief. Beliefs and teachings should naturally appear within arguments presented rather than being listed separately. In answering an AO2 question specific to the religion they have studied, a significant number of students made reference to beliefs of other religions or of atheists. Widening religious content in this way does not assist, for example, an answer to 'The Oneness of God (Tawhid) is not the only important Muslim belief'. The views of other religions or of atheists are irrelevant here, and there is no benefit gained in including the point of view of different religions (or no religion) on these four religion papers because there is no comparative element between religions required. Such an approach is more appropriate to Section 5 (themes).
- The second bullet point in the 12 mark questions states answers should 'give reasoned arguments to support this statement'. This could provide a good first and possibly second or third paragraph, especially if teaching of the religion clearly features in it (required in the

first bullet point). Often, two or three reasoned arguments are sufficient to build a convincing case.

- The third bullet point in the 12 mark questions states answers should 'give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view'. This is not necessarily opposite or against the one provided above. Whilst some responses argued for and against the statement, this is not required and sometimes there may be other ways of providing a different point of view.
- The justified conclusion asked for in the fourth bullet point in the 12 mark questions does not need to be long, especially if the concluding comments or statements are added throughout the answer. However, it should not just repeat points that have already been made but it should offer a reasoned summary to complete the answer, possibly containing a new insight or piece of reasoning.

Students should be aware that each of the two booklets they are provided with for the religion papers has four additional pages. If students need extra space for their answers, they should use the four pages in the answer booklet they are working in, rather than space they may not have used after question 01.5.

### **Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG)**

Many students were awarded Level 3 for SPaG. This does not indicate perfection but consistent accuracy, effective control of meaning and use of specialist terms where appropriate. Answers that did not provide a lot of evidence for judgements (just a few lines) were unlikely to be awarded any more than Level 1.

## **8061/1 – Buddhism**

### **Question 01.1**

Only just under 60 percent of students successfully chose Anatta. This highlights the importance of learning specialist terms.

### **Question 01.2**

Only a quarter of responses achieved marks on this question which asked for two of the Five Aggregates. This is a term named on the specification and it is important that students know these terms. Many responses which achieved marks scored two, with few scoring just one.

### **Question 01.3**

Most students were able to recall the Four Sights with more than half of responses achieving at least three marks. No marks could be awarded for merely identifying two of the Four Sights but this was no problem as those that knew them were generally able to give some detail. It appeared that the stumbling block in some responses was showing how they influence Buddhists today.

### **Question 01.4**

Less than half of responses identified any of the five moral precepts. Of those that did, nearly half of them achieved the full five marks. There was a wide selection of incorrect answers with many giving two stages of the Eightfold Path or guessing possible alternatives such as 'love your neighbour'.

### **Question 01.5**

A quote stating that something is 'the most important...' lends itself to explaining reasons why and then giving reasons in support of something else being more important. Some responses did this well and achieved the higher levels. Responses that did so were even more successful if they included a justified conclusion such as pointing out that they were all of the same importance or explaining why they thought one particular part of the Eightfold Path was more important. Usually, this conclusion was different from the rest of the response and allowed some simple reasoning in many cases allowing a higher level to be awarded. However, some students produced vague responses, some of which were not based on Buddhism.

## **8061/2 – Christianity**

### **Question 01.1**

This was well known with the majority of students choosing the correct answer.

### **Question 01.2**

Students appeared to find this question more challenging. The expected answers were: 'by faith', 'by works', 'by the grace of God', 'by obeying God's law', and those who knew two of these earned the marks. However many responses included more than was required. Although credit was awarded to answers which were correct, students wasted valuable time by writing answers which included too much detail. Most responses gained marks on this question but a small minority of students did not attempt an answer.

### **Question 01.3**

There were some good answers here by students who knew exactly what the incarnation was and could show how the beliefs involved influenced Christians today. However, many seemed to have little idea what the term 'incarnation' meant which limited the marks that could be awarded. Around a third of responses were not awarded marks on this question. The most common error was the guess that incarnation must be linked to death because 'reincarnation' relates to dying. It is essential that key terms from the specification are learned.

### **Question 01.4**

This question was generally answered well. Many responses earned four or five marks and only a small minority did not achieve any marks or didn't attempt an answer. There were some responses which were unable to earn the full five marks because they did not provide a reference to sacred writings or another source of Christian teaching and belief, and there were many that could have been used in relation to this question. Responses which did include this information mainly used The Parable of the Sheep and Goats and Biblical descriptions of heaven and hell. Unfortunately a few students answered this question in relation to karma and reincarnation.

**Question 01.5**

This question produced many interesting answers showing excellent evaluation of some of the issues here and providing good support from their knowledge and understanding of the importance of the resurrection. Other responses appeared to demonstrate some gaps in knowledge. Many wrote that Christianity would still exist because it existed before Jesus so the resurrection is not relevant to the existence of Christianity. On the other hand, some made reference to the existence of Judaism mentioning that Jesus was a Jew and that without the resurrection, maybe a different version of Judaism would have been created. The latter idea was a good addition to some answers. Others wrote that it would exist because Christians would just follow the Bible, without their questioning whether there would be a New Testament had the resurrection not happened. A lot of students correctly recognised the role of the disciples/apostles in spreading the message, some referring to Pentecost which some seemed to believe happened before the resurrection and ascension.

However, despite there being many good and interesting answers, few provided a link between the crucifixion and resurrection and defeating sin and offering salvation to all, nor to the fulfilment of prophecy. Although none of these points were necessary for twelve marks to be awarded, these were other possibilities which could have been included.

**8061/3 - Islam****Question 01.1**

The answer was well known with most students earning the mark.

**Question 01.2**

This was poorly answered with a minority of responses appearing not to know any of the five roots of Usul ad-din Shi'a Islam. Many seemed to guess incorrectly, many guesses being based on the five pillars. Tawhid was the most common correct answer but in addition to those who did not attempt an answer, nearly two fifths of responses received no marks, highlighting the importance of learning key terms and concepts. Correct answers were credited regardless of whether they were an Arabic transliteration or English words – either or both are acceptable.

**Question 01.3**

In contrast to 01.2, this was well answered. The idea that the Qur'an provides guidance to teach Muslims how to live their lives as Allah wishes them to was commonly seen as a way the Qur'an influences Muslims. The second way needed for the further two marks often included advice on how to follow the religious requirements of the faith eg praying five times daily or observing the five pillars. There were many responses which earned the full four marks.

**Question 01.4**

For those who knew about the Prophet Ibrahim, this was a straightforward question and many earned the full five marks. They commonly recounted the stories related to Ibrahim destroying idols and his willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael. However, a large number of students either gave vague answers about prophets in general or wrote that he was the first prophet.

**Question 01.5**

There were some very good responses to this question with nearly a fifth of responses reaching Level 4. Some responses, whilst writing some creditable, relevant material, misread the question as saying that Tawhid is the **most** important Muslim belief, instead of **not the only** important Muslim belief. They achieved some credit but as their focus was not fully directed to the quote, they could not be placed in the top level, although many achieved Level 3.

Many answers made comparisons between Tawhid and some of the other names of Allah or between Tawhid and the practices Muslims observe as part of their submission to Allah. A noticeable number of response began very well but then petered out and later arguments were not followed through. This may be due to time management, possibly depending on the order in which students answered the papers.

**8061/4 - Judaism****Question 01.1**

Only two fifths of students were able to identify charity as a key moral principle in Judaism.

**Question 01.2**

This was well answered with almost four fifths of responses earning the full two marks. Answers such as omnipotent, omniscient, one and creator were commonly seen. A very small number of students did not attempt an answer.

**Question 01.3**

Again, there were a high proportion (over two fifths) of responses which achieved full marks on this question. Of those responses which didn't, the common error was not to focus on the influence of the Ten Commandments on Jews today. Writing 'they do not commit adultery because one of the Ten Commandments is not to commit adultery' was not sufficient for two marks. A significant minority identified 'love your neighbour' as one of the Ten Commandments. As that provides a workable summary to the final six commandments and is valid Jewish teaching, those that correctly showed how it influences Jews were given credit for doing so. This was similar to those who took all the Ten Commandments as a whole, rather than splitting them into individual commandments.

**Question 01.4**

One in three responses gained the full five marks on this question. There were many good references to Pikuach Nefesh, especially in the example of breaking Sabbath law to save or preserve life. Not all students were able to show they understood the meaning of 'the sanctity of human life', but many of those who did were able to achieve high marks.

**Question 01.5**

Nearly half of responses achieved either Level 3 or 4 on this question. Many good answers included a focus on olam ha-ze (the world as it is now) and olam ha-ba (the world to come),

weighing up the balance between them in the context of the importance of living in the present. Some also included a focus on chesed as an appropriate way of exercising freewill. Some opened the quote up to include the role of the Messiah in the Messianic age to come.

However, many wrote rather generalised answers, often referring to reincarnation as a general principle and freewill being a free choice to do whatever you want without consequence. A minority used this question as a chance to agree or disagree with life after death with no reference to the quote and despite the quote specifying 'For Jews', some wrote an atheist view as an alternative. It is important to remember that whilst mention of divergent views within the faith are welcomed, views of other faiths or none are not required in this paper.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.