

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/05 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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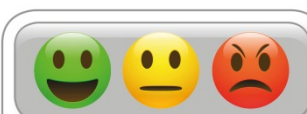
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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

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. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Assessment structure change

Following feedback from teachers and examiners, we are replacing the 6-mark combined assessment objective questions in GCSE Religious Studies J625. These changes will make our assessment more straightforward for students, teachers and examiners. We have also made a minor change to a level of response descriptor in the mark scheme. These changes will be introduced for the 2020 exam series.

What has changed?

- For Components 01–05 (Beliefs and teachings and Practices) the 6-mark question which was previously assessed using a combination of AO1 and AO2, is being replaced by a 6-mark question which will be assessed using **AO1 only**.
- For Components 06–10 (the religion, philosophy and ethics papers) there are two 6-mark questions. One will continue to be assessed using AO1, and the other which previously used a combination of AO1 and AO2, will now be assessed using **AO2 only**.
- In our levels of response descriptors we have changed 'adequate but underdeveloped' to 'satisfactory'.
- We **haven't** changed 15 mark questions which are assessed using a combination of AO1 and AO2, or made any changes to the specification content.

How are we supporting you?

We have updated the sample assessment materials to reflect these changes for '**Christianity** Beliefs and teachings and Practices', 'Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a **Christian** perspective', so you can see what our new question papers and mark schemes will look like. These can be found under the assessment tab on the GCSE Religious Studies qualification pages. We will update the sample assessment materials for the remaining components ready for teaching in September 2019.

In September we are hosting a webinar which will add further clarification to this update, and answer any questions which this might raise. Look out for more information on how to book your space on this in the next few weeks.

In September we will also provide a candidate exemplar resource, which will provide more details about these changes to help your students become familiar with the knowledge and skills needed in our qualification.

If you would like further information please contact the Religious Studies Subject Advisor on 01223 553998 or email religious.studies@ocr.org.uk.

Paper 5 series overview

GCSE Religious Studies Paper 5 is the Hinduism-Beliefs, Teachings and Practices paper. It assesses both candidates' knowledge and understanding of key elements which are part of Hinduism as it is practiced in the contemporary world and the ability to discuss and evaluate the impact of Hindu belief and practice on different groups of Hindus.

All questions and sections of questions are compulsory, and the majority of candidates at least attempted the entire paper, with 2 (d) the section most commonly left unattempted. No wholly blank scripts were observed. In comparison to the previous year this was a substantial improvement, with candidates appearing more confident in their recognition and use of technical language.

Candidates who did well on the paper tended to be well prepared in terms of exam skills. They were aware of the different requirements for different types of question, offering focused and succinct response to short answer questions rather than talking around the question. Most candidates were also aware that more than a few lines offering a personal opinion would be required to deal adequately with the (e) parts.

With regards to part (e) questions, while candidates have been successfully encouraged to include a range of views on an issue, these are often presented as additional knowledge rather than being engaged with discursively. Since the level descriptors explicitly limit the marks available for pure knowledge to 3 out of 15, and the AO2 descriptors expressly require developed discussion and analysis for the higher levels simply adding more views does not automatically equate to higher level marks. Overall the most common form taken by responses to (e) part questions is that of blocks of knowledge which may include some justified viewpoints, but which are discursive only in that they describe different perspectives on the stimulus - they neither relate to one another nor analyse the views contained in them. Candidates using this approach therefore struggle to demonstrate the 'comment on' and/or 'comparison of' elements required for the highest level AO2 marks.

Question 1 (a)

- 1 (a) Outline the difference between sakam karma and nishkam karma.

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Responses to this question were mixed overall with candidates split fairly evenly between those who were clear on the distinction between selfish and selfless karma and those who were not. Candidates gained a mark for knowing what karma is but without more specific knowledge many did not achieve more than that single mark.

A common error was to classify one of them as positive and the other as negative karma; it was possible to develop this in ways which included some creditable material but as a statement of the meanings of the two terms it is incorrect as sakam (selfish) karma results from morally good actions as well as bad ones.

Exemplar 1

Sakam karma describes the karma that is result of your thoughts in your ~~previous~~ life. If you have good thoughts, you will get good karma and if you think bad thoughts, you will get bad karma. Nishkam karma describes the result of having certain desires, passions or hatreds, or rajas. For each rajas, a certain amount of good karma or bad karma will affect you.

Exemplar 1 shows a typical response which gains one mark for the knowledge that karma is the consequences of previous lives playing out in future ones but cannot gain further credit since there is no clear understanding of the two forms specified in the question.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Describe **one** Hindu belief about the nature of the atman.

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Most candidates addressed this question well. All seemed to be aware of the concept of the atman and the most common response was to describe it in terms of an eternal soul.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Describe what Hindus mean when they use the term 'liberation'.

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Most candidates were able to offer a creditable response to this question, writing about the end of samsara and/or freedom from karma. However, a substantial minority of candidates appeared to be under the impression that Question 2 (b) (Outline what Hindus mean by the term 'detachment'.) was asking them about the same concept specified in this question.

Question 1 (d)

(d) Explain why Hindus might disagree about the relationship between Brahman and the world.

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Candidates who did well on this question focused on the material world, maya and/or samsara in their responses. Some distinguished Brahman from personal forms of deity, or considered the difference between nirguna and saguna Brahman in this context. Others focused in a more general way on the difference between monist and dualist understandings of reality (they did usually use these terms, and they were not required to do so in order to gain marks). However, candidates who did less well wrote detailed responses about the connections between Brahman and atman, rather than focussing on the world, as required by the question. Some candidates also drifted off the point into consideration of Hindu attitudes to environmental issues.

Exemplar 2

Some hindus believe in Nirguna Brahman. This is the belief that Brahman is all pervading and has no form. They believe that "in truth Brahman is all," because Brahman is everywhere in the world but cannot be seen or felt. These hindus are usually dualists and believe that our atman is dependent from Brahman's atman. ~~so~~ Brahman is not our atman. Other hindus believe in saguna Brahman. This is the belief that Brahman has form and can be pictured. This allows for hindus to focus more on Brahman during worship because they believe he lives in an outside world as a life-form. This means they view Brahman

In Bhagavan form, which means they believe [6]
 that Brahman is a ~~life~~ life form in a different
 world.
 Many Hindus also believe in Brahman through
 antaryami form. They believe that Brahman
 is in the hearts of everyone and is reflected
 in the world through nature and humans.

Exemplar 2 demonstrates a response which gained full marks, clearly addressing both what Hindus might believe about the nature of Brahman and why/how differences in these understandings lead to different views about Brahman's connection to the world. It is useful to note that the knowledge and understanding displayed is sufficient for full marks even though the candidate has misapplied the term 'dualists' to their account of nirguna Brahman and Advaita (unnamed) - the chosen word is wrong, but the understanding of the concept they wish to communicate is clear and adequate.

Question 1 (e)

(e) 'People have no control over their future rebirths.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Hinduism
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

✍ Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

The most common approach to this question was to take the view that people have control over the karma they create in their current lifetime even if they do not know and/or cannot change the karma built up from previous births. Some candidates also considered detachment from karma as relevant to this question. Overall most candidates presented a fairly simplistic understanding of good karma as leading directly to moksha and so concluded that if a person were good enough over a succession of lifetimes they would be able to control and ultimately end their rebirths. It was interesting to note that many candidates who did understand selfish/selfless karma, as required for Question 1 (a), did not translate that understanding into these more extended discussions of the concept.

Exemplar 3

✍ Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

Some could believe that a person doesn't have control over their rebirths due to them being reborn as one of the four realms; an animal, a human, a demon or a god. If you are reborned as an animal or human it is somewhat easier to control your chance of reaching Moksha, however as a god or demon, this takes longer, making it harder to reach Moksha. It is also hard to determine what lives you will have in the future as no one can know how much good karma and bad karma they have by the end of their life.

However, some could argue that by following varnashramadharma you can have control over your life. To follow this means you are carrying out the duty that is yours. This belief is explained by the story of Prince Arjun not wanting to kill his cousins in a war. His chariot driver, Krishna, - an agent of Vishnu, told him that as a soldier of war, his duty in life was to kill and him killing his cousins was his duty. Hindus would use this to carry out their role in life, allowing them control over their rebirths as it wouldn't matter because doing what is designed for them is right. For example, if you were reborned as a tiger the right thing to do would be kill and hunt and mate because that is what a tiger does.

In my opinion, you do not have control over what you come back as and this means you ultimately could not have control. Although you are still able to follow your varnashramadharma, you cannot control what you will be, not even by trying to control your karma. Therefore, I agree with the statement.

Exemplar 3 demonstrates a typical e part response, consisting of three paragraphs of justified or developed views on the issue.

Question 2 (a)

- 2 (a) Name **three** of the four margas.

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This question proved problematic for many candidates with a substantial number of incorrect responses being offered. Candidates offered three purusharthas, 3 parts of the mahayuga, 3 of the ashramas and 3 different lokas. The confusion appeared to arise from an unfamiliarity with the term 'marga' with candidates guessing which of the sets of four things they knew about might be meant by that term. In spite of this confusion though very few candidates left the question unattempted.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Outline what Hindus mean by the term 'detachment'.

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A lot of candidates, in effect, repeated their response to Question 1 (c), on liberation, here - writing about the separation of the atman from the body or from samsara. Some of them attempted to reverse this, and framed it as the trapping of the atman within samsara and therefore being separated (detached) from Brahman. Most candidates taking these approaches seemed to begin with a general English-language understanding of being unattached - often offering a definition as a starting point - and then looked for something in their knowledge of Hinduism which might fit that understanding. Those candidates who answered the question well did appear to begin with a recognition of this as a Hindu-specific term.

Question 2 (c)

(c) Why might a Hindu go on a pilgrimage?

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Answers to this question were often quite generic but this did not prevent them gaining full marks. The wording of the question meant that candidates could write an abstract consideration of pilgrimage in principle, give a list of different reasons or develop one or two reasons in relation to an example. All three of these approaches were seen used successfully.

It is worth noting that some candidates appeared to have studied both Hinduism and Islam and confused the two - a small but noticeable minority of responses spoke of having to do pilgrimage to Makkah once in a lifetime as a core religious requirement and some even reference the Ka'baa as the home of Brahman.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Explain why sadhus/sadhvis might be important for Hindus.

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This was the question most commonly left unattempted. It was also sometimes attempted with some very generalised material that strongly implied a lack of recognition of the key terms in the question. Candidates who achieved good marks on this question were aware that they were being asked about a specific kind/group of holy people within Hindu traditions and were able to talk about the different ways in which an individual who is themselves liberated, or close to it, can be of help to others seeking liberation.

Question 2 (e)

(e)* 'Dharma is the only thing that really matters.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Hinduism
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

Most candidates took the approach of arguing that since there are concepts in Hinduism besides dharma it cannot be the only important thing. This perspective does imply a limited understanding of the concept of dharma and its relationship to other aspects of Hinduism but it allowed for a degree of discussion by proposing an alternative candidate to be the only thing that matters - karma was the most common choice.

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