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# **GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCE  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
AS/Advanced**

**SUMMER 2023**

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### **Online Results Analysis**

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### **Annual Statistical Report**

The annual Statistical Report (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

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**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**General Certificate of Education**  
**Summer 2023**  
**Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**

**UNIT 1A: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY**

**General Comments**

The paper did not raise any concerns and was variously accessed by the candidates with a full range of Bands and marks being awarded.

The most popular question in Section A was Q2 (attempt% 54.8%). The most popular question in Section B was Q5 (attempt% 42.7%).

Unfortunately, some candidates seemed to be unaware of the different skills that need to be demonstrated when responding to AO1 and AO2 questions.

Handwriting remains a concern for a number of scripts and centres need to be aware of their candidate's handwriting form and ability under exam conditions and, if necessary, make appropriate arrangements so that their work can be accessed by WJEC examiners.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Section A**

**Q.1 (a) Outline different ways in which Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians understand the Eucharist. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- gave detailed information and made good use of religious terminology (Transubstantiation, Transignification, Transfinalisation, Consubstantiation, Memorialism, Virtualism.)
- made use of Aristotelian accidents and substances as part of the response.
- were clearly aware of the different understandings that exist within various denominations.
- used different names for the Eucharist which reflected the different understandings e.g. Mass and Holy Communion.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided only a general discussion of Eucharist and/or a description of services/liturgy.
- did not have a secure understanding of Eucharistic practice in different denominations, e.g., Protestants believe in Transubstantiation and Transignification or a general sweep that all Christians believe in sacraments.

- Q.1 (b) 'The theoretical beliefs about the Eucharist do not affect the practice of different denominations.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to discuss the impact on practice with detail and analysis followed by evaluation/ and an effective conclusion.
- considered 'practice' in terms of regularity of celebrating and / or receiving, that for all there is an element of sharing, for all there is an element of remembering, question of admission to receiving whether baptism or confirmation required too and across denominations e.g. non-Roman Catholics cannot receive in a Roman Catholic church.
- were aware of the experience of a ceremonial style of service and a non-conformist style of service that they could compare and contrast.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- did not answer the question in terms of considering: '*do not affect the practice*' and consequently too often there was a regurgitation of AO1 information, with little or no discussion or evaluation of how understanding can link to practice.

- Q.2 (a) Explain how the Eastern Orthodox and Western churches celebrate Christmas differently.** [AO1 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided accurate details along with appropriate terminology to show clear knowledge and understanding of the different celebrations of Christmas in Eastern and Western churches.
- ensured they gave a balance response, addressing both traditions, looking at: timing, length and mode of preparation, as well as how celebration of Christmas begins and continues.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- simply provided a generalised discussion of Christmas celebrations (sometimes with no mention of either tradition).
- conflated how the two traditions celebrate Christmas, e.g. how Western Church celebrate Christmas in January.

- (b) 'Eastern Orthodox and Western churches share very few beliefs and practices with regards to the celebration of Christmas.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to discuss the statement with consideration of both 'beliefs' with general understanding e.g. that all are celebrating Christ's birth and so analyse and evaluate that they share the most important aspect.
- they also recognised that whilst in terms of 'practices' there are different customs, the focus on going to church is shared.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- attempted to answer and AO2 response with AO1 material, any analysis/evaluation was purely accidental e.g. they are celebrating the same event, but the timing is different.

## Section B

- Q.3 (a) Explain the need for the doctrine of the Trinity within Christianity. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- clearly focussed on the 'need' aspect of the question set and were able to offer explanations.
- some were able to provide an accurate chronological need for the Trinity to combat heresies and as a result were to explain the need for the doctrine of the Trinity.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- only offered generalised discussion or descriptions of the Trinity and/or of the heresies without addressing the question of the need for it.

- (b) 'The monotheistic claims of the doctrine of the Trinity are not valid.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- some utilised much of the mark scheme, e.g. if a degree of mystery and faith are accepted then the doctrine is valid to billions who have and do believe it., whilst Jews and Muslims will often say that the doctrine of the Trinity invalidates Christianity from being seen as a monotheistic faith.
- used the heresies as a starting point for analysing and evaluating that the claims of the doctrine are not valid with sound evaluation and provided an appropriate conclusion.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- little or no engagement with the statement and were unable to evaluate the issue of how valid monotheistic claims are.
- provided generalised or descriptive accounts of different ideas about the Trinity with little or no analysis or evaluation e.g. K Barth and/or the filioque controversy in particular.

- Q.4 (a) Examine E.P. Sanders' views on the role of works in justification. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- also good use of the advanced information, and wrote well about E. P. Sanders wrote well and made good use of religious terminology.
- also demonstrated clear knowledge and understanding of his link to St. Paul and beliefs within Judaism.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote about Luther rather than E.P. Sanders who sometimes simply got a brief mention at the end of the response.
- wrote about justification in terms of faith and works in general terms (or faith vs works and became evaluative).

**Q.4 (b) 'Faith not works is necessary for salvation.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- focussed on biblical material, Luther and the Council of Trent with candidates really able to engage with the statement in their debate
- provided evidence to support their evaluation and provided an appropriate conclusion.
- brought in the ideas of Aquinas and the need for inner and external actions to be aligned appropriately for a good work, but could this occur without faith.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided a generalised discussions about the importance of faith / works without that awareness of the biblical debate or the context of Luther and the Council of Trent.
- gave descriptive accounts of the different views on this topic without and any analysis or evaluation of the statement or appropriate conclusion.

**Q.5 (a) Explain how Christians interpret and apply the birth narratives to the doctrine of the Incarnation.** [AO1 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- referred to the birth narratives appropriately and confidently alongside doctrinal terminology e.g. hypostatic union, kenosis, substantial presence and consequently addressed the question.

**Features of weaker responses**

- attempted to answer a different question and wrote about the differences between the birth narratives.
- made little if any mention of the doctrine of the Incarnation or terminology around it.

**Q.5 (b) 'Redaction criticism is important for understanding the biblical birth narratives.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated clear understanding of Redaction Criticism and were able to evaluate its importance or its unimportance with regard to the birth narratives.
- sustained a balanced analysis and evaluation, with an appropriate conclusion.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote an AO1 response about Redaction Criticism.
- gave descriptive accounts of differences similar to Q5(a) and did not fully engage with the statement/question.
- others were muddled about what Redaction Criticism is, and as a result the evaluation was confused.

## Summary of key points

- It should be noted that all questions carry equal marks. Many candidates wrote considerably more in either their part (a) or part (b) responses.
- Candidates should carefully plan the amount of time they spend on each response so that the last question does not get shortened. Using 'bullet points' for a final AO2 answer due to lack of time will rarely merit many marks.
- Candidates should be encouraged to remember to focus on AO1 skills in part (a) responses and AO2 skills on part (b) responses.
- Candidates should also be reminded that capitals letters should be used for various religious terms such as: God, Jesus/Christ/Christian and names of scholars.

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**UNIT 1B: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ISLAM**

**General Comments**

Candidates responded quite well to this paper. Q1 was the most popular question in Section A (attempt% 54.4%), with candidates fairly confidently on the subject matter for both Q1 and Q2. They were slightly less familiar with the social side of Id-ul-Fitr for Q3 (a), but knew a great deal about the benefits of fasting for Q3 (b). Q4 was the most popular question in Section B. Q5 asked candidates about various aspects of Muhammad’s role in Madinah, but candidates often knew only about one or two aspects.

Candidates achieved the full range of bands (1 to 5), across their different responses. There were perhaps fewer Band 5s overall, which might be addressed with slightly more detailed knowledge and understanding, e.g., through greater use of accurate and relevant quotations and more critical discussion for AO2, engaging more with the specific term or terms in the statement given, and criticising it.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Section A**

**Q.1 (a) Examine the concept of tawhid (oneness) with reference to Allah. [AO1 15]**

This was a popular question which was quite well answered. Candidates generally knew what tawhid meant and could explain it as the most important Islamic belief, linked to the Shahadah, the statement of faith, fundamental in taking on Islam as a religion. The extent to which this was explained and elaborated as a concept, with examples and evidence to back up those explanations, helped to differentiate responses and place them within appropriate bands.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- referred to oneness in many ways, such as unity in the universe, creation and so on, as examples of how the single power Allah is manifested.
- provided quotations such as from the Qur’an 112 to explain the basis of tawhid.
- referred specifically to the term ‘uncompromising monotheism’ and explained what it meant.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote basic details that God was one with no sons, a valid contrast with Christianity, but a simplistic notion without much further elaboration.
- did not support answers with any quotation or evidence.
- described belief in God without explaining tawhid as a concept of unity and oneness.



**Q.1 (b) 'The Islamic concept of Allah is totally coherent.'**  
**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 15]**

Good candidates recognised the significance of the words 'totally' and 'coherent' in the statement. Most candidates contrasted the idea of Allah being a huge power able to create the universe, with the delicate emotional heart felt feelings with a Muslim's own heart. Candidates had various reasons for concluding that this was either irreconcilable or that it was perfectly possible, given the infinite nature of the power of Allah who is able to operate at both macro and micro level according to many interpretations.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- understood and engaged with the term 'coherent'.
- mentioned and explained the potential problem in Allah being both transcendent and immanent.
- considered if matters of revealed faith needed to be logically coherent or merely unquestionably accepted, as applied to beliefs about Allah.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- assumed they were coherent and did not offer any alternative view – this could be agree, but in a different way, not necessarily agree and disagree.
- did not recognise the significance of the word 'totally', meaning in every way, in the statement.
- confused the coherence of the concept, with matters of personal faith of Muslims, i.e., assumed all Muslims would agree.

**Q.2 (a) Examine Muslim beliefs about nabi (prophets) within Islam.** **[AO1 15]**

Nabi may be defined as prophets in general, as an overall category. They contain those who carried out the role of rasul, messengers bringing a holy book, which refers to a few nabi but not many. Many did not bring a book but did leave an example to people of their time and often acted as nadir, warners, to guide their peoples away from the worship of idols. Sometimes terms are used loosely, but candidates should have a clear idea about these roles and explain them in their responses.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- identified the key roles of nabi (prophets) and explained several aspects of these roles.
- gave numerous examples such as from Ibrahim, Musa, Isa and Muhammad.
- focused on the beliefs, including the term risalah, in the overall context of Islamic beliefs about tawhid, risalah and akhirah.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote only about Muhammad and ignored earlier prophets.
- assumed all prophets brought holy books and only mentioned those who did.
- described the life of prophets, rather than explaining Islamic beliefs about them.

**Q.2 (b) 'Muhammad was the ideal prophet.'**  
**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 15]**

Few candidates offered any definition of 'ideal' and launched into their responses with the assumption that 'ideal' meant good. A few realised that 'ideal' meant the best one without fault, and made contrast and comparison with other, earlier prophets. One line of argument was that Muhammad as 'seal' of the prophets was 'ideal', correcting the distortions of the previous. A different line was that all prophets were equal and indistinguishable as ideal examples, but people corrupted earlier messages which Allah then refreshed and finalised.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- defined and engaged with the term 'ideal'.
- included a comparison of Muhammad and the role of another prophet or prophets, with the focus of whether they were ideal.
- explained any issues with their lives in terms of ideal and whether this meant they were not or meant it depended how they dealt with the issues and they could still be ideal in the face of adversity.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- assumed 'ideal' simply meant good, without making any definition or understanding the exact meaning of the term.
- agreed that Muhammad was ideal and offered no alternative view or different aspects in discussion.
- described what Muhammad did more than discussed was it ideal.

**Section B**

**Q.3 (a) Explain the social importance of Id-ul-Fitr for the Muslim community.**

**[AO1 15]**

Candidates generally knew I'd-ul-Fitr was an important occasion, but did not always identify many social aspects. Some wrote about Ramadan instead. Social aspects of Id include gathering and greeting each other with Id Mubarak at the mosque, including greeting those who are strangers and of different backgrounds and wealth status as equals. Family is another social aspect, as is charity, including others with 'Id' payments and sharing food. Social celebrations with friends are a further dimension, all helping to gain a sense of fulfilment and enjoyment on completing Ramadan.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- featured the many different aspects of the social importance.
- focused answers on the community aspects.
- used subject specific vocabulary such as 'Ummah' and explained what it meant.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- described what Muslims do on the day of Id, rather than explain the importance.
- did not differentiate between social and other aspects.
- mixed individual and community aspects.

**Q.3 (b) 'Fasting in Islam benefits the individual far more than the community.'**  
**Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

This was well answered, and most candidates wrote clearly structured discussions, with an introduction defining the terms and then a paragraph about individual benefits followed by one on community benefits, then drawing the response together with an evaluative conclusion. Most found several benefits for each, and often concluded there was more spiritual benefit for the individual since their reward would be through Allah's judgement of their obedience in keeping Ramadan as an individual, with reward given in the hereafter.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- defined several benefits for both individuals and the community.
- clearly distinguished the benefits for the two categories.
- made an overall evaluation weighing up both at the end.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- only wrote about individual benefits.
- described what Muslims do to fast, rather than defining benefits.
- wrote a little about both, but made a simplistic conclusion, such as writing there were benefits for both, without weighing them up.

**Q.4 (a) Explain different reasons for giving in Islam. [AO1 15]**

Candidates responded reasonably to this question although few clearly started by defining different sorts of giving in Islam, such as voluntary and compulsory as well as general giving through charitable actions or even good character. Those who did found it straightforward to develop this into the reasons behind each, especially good will to benefit fellow members of the Ummah; obedience to Allah's command in following the Pillar of zakah and gaining reward from Allah in the afterlife.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- Defined several different reasons, often linked to different categories of giving.
- Used subject specific vocabulary and explained it, such as zakat, Sadaqat and khums.
- Identifies reasons such as promoting equality, following the Sunnah of Muhammad and gaining personal reward with Allah.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- only referred to giving zakat.
- identified a few reasons beyond it is a Pillar and a way to afterlife in heaven/ paradise.
- described giving, without reference to reasons behind it.

- Q.4 (b) ‘Supporting the poor is essential within Islam.’**  
**Evaluate this view.** **[AO1 15]**

There are many reasons why supporting the poor is important, and nearly all candidates found some to include in their responses. Fewer candidates focused on the key word essential, and those who did were able to make some comparison with the Shahadah and Salah. They discussed the relative importance of each, and some considered that all were essential to complete the Five Pillars. Others noted that it was not always possible to support, and to receive help might be more appropriate for some.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- discussed several different ways of support, ranging from essential payments to voluntary extras.
- considered human rights and the need for food, as the duty of humans to share it.
- discussed Muslims role as stewards of God’s creation, including support for the poor.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote that supporting the poor was good, without addressing ‘essential’.
- did not consider support beyond zakat.
- wrote little about different viewpoints.

- Q.5 (a) Outline Muhammad’s role as a religious, moral, political and military leader in Madinah.** **[AO1 15]**

This was a very broad question requiring candidates to show their skills at organising an outline. Not all were able to do this well, some describing in detail. The best responses understood the command word “Outline...” and were able to make a clearly structured response, summarising each of the four areas, clearly showing understanding.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- considered all aspects of Muhammad’s role as required by the question.
- kept to the terms of the question: the Madinah period.
- organised their answers to give a broad outline, as required by the question.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote in general about Muhammad’s role in Makkah and Madinah.
- gave detail about one aspect, missing the others.
- wrote about some aspects which were not relevant, such as the Night of Power.

- Q.5 (b) 'The establishment of the first masjid was the most important factor in the development of Islam in Madinah.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** **[AO2 15]**

Various different factors for the development of Islam in Madinah were identified, such as Muhammad's preaching; success against enemies in battles; tribal alliances; inspiration from Allah and the revelations sent down to address specific situations; the friendship and support between Ansar and Muhajirun emigrants, and so on. Good responses made some attempt to show how the first masjid was a centre, but also make some comparison with other factors, weighing up the overall importance in a conclusion.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- identified various factors in the development of Islam in Madinah, of which the first masjid was one.
- included wider aspects of the role of this masjid, such as training, social support and military centre.
- compared roles with other factors, such as Muhammad's skill in leadership.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- referred only to the first masjid.
- narrowly defined the role of this masjid as prayer.
- did not consider other aspects in the success of Madinah.

**Summary of key points**

- Candidates need to understand the requirements of command words in questions, especially 'outline' for AO1, which may require different skills from detailed 'examine' questions.
- Practice focusing on the key words of AO2 statements which differentiate them: for example, 'ideal' 'essential' and 'most important' means more than good and require specific responses.
- Candidates' ability to write clearly structured AO2 arguments is improving, but could improve further, through the use of clear definitions of key terminology at the start of responses, which are then referred back to at the end.
- Candidates need to be familiar with different aspects of the role of nabi (prophets) and to be able to distinguish them from messengers (rasul).
- Candidates need to be aware of the social events at Id-ul-Fitr and different aspects of Muhammad's leadership.

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**UNIT 1C: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF JUDAISM**

**General Comments**

The paper was accessible, with candidates attempting all of the questions on the paper and achieving a range of marks across each question. The most popular question in Section A was Q1 (attempt% 62.5%). The most popular question in Section B was Q3 (attempt% 47%).

Most candidates correctly attempted both parts (a) and (b) of their selected questions and there were no rubric infringements. Although, a small number of candidates disadvantaged themselves either by only providing very brief responses, or by only answering one part of a question, either (a) or (b).

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Section A**

**Q.1 (a) Explain the importance of the mitzvot (commandments) for Orthodox and Reform Jews today. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided a thorough explanation of the importance of the mitzvot, including exploring the different divides within the mitzvot (for example: positive, negative, and constant mitzvot; ritual and moral mitzvot).
- gave a thorough explanation of the difference in interpretation of the mitzvot between Orthodox and Reform Jews; for example, by making explicit reference to the Pittsburgh Platform.
- focused on the importance of the mitzvot today by identifying that certain mitzvot can no longer be practised (for example, the mitzvot concerning the Temple) and that certain mitzvot can only be practised in Israel, and thus cannot be observed by Jews living in diaspora.
- used specialist language (for example, mitzvot aseh and mitzvot ta'aseh) and included accurate details (for example: 613 mitzvot; 365 negative mitzvot; 248 positive mitzvot).

**Features of weaker responses:**

- gave generic responses describing the mitzvot, but lacking any specific details.
- did not discuss the differences in practice between Orthodox and Reform Jews.
- strayed from the demands of the question, for example, by focusing too heavily on the Ten Sayings or describing the covenant with Moses.

**Q.1 (b) 'Mitzvot contribute effectively to spirituality in Judaism.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- clearly focused on the contribution of the mitzvot to spirituality in Judaism, for example, by referring to Hasidic practices such as the strict observance of the chukim mitzvot and devekut.
- evaluated how and why the mitzvot may not be understood to contribute effectively to spirituality (for example: their perceived lack of relevance to modern life; perceiving the mitzvot as burden; the fact Reform Jews have adapted or disregarded many of the mitzvot).
- unpacked alternative sources of spirituality in Judaism which may be seen as more effective than the mitzvot (for example, Torah study, prayer, and the observance of festivals).

**Features of weaker responses:**

- made little connection between the mitzvot and spirituality in Judaism.
- provided descriptive responses, rather than evaluating how the mitzvot contribute to spirituality.

**Q.2 (a) Outline the importance of the Ten Sayings (Aseret ha-D'ibrot) within Judaism.** [AO1 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- unpacked the importance of the Ten Sayings (for example: by identifying their position as the first of the 613 mitzvot; by identifying their divine origin being given to Moses on Mount Sinai; by identifying that they are considered to be universally applicable and immutable).
- outlined the distinction between the first four commandments which govern the relationship between man and God (ritual) and the final six commandments which govern the relationship between man and man (moral).
- identified the understanding of the Ten Sayings as categories for all the other mitzvot and that they provide the template for Jewish life.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- listed the Ten Sayings with little or no explanation of their importance.
- re-told the story of Moses with little or no reference to the Ten Sayings and their importance.

- Q.2 (b) 'The Ten Sayings are not the most important ethical guide for Jews.'**  
**Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- clearly focused on the connection between the Ten Sayings and ethical living for Jews.
- engaged in analysis and evaluation of the importance of the Ten Sayings in relation to ethical living for Jews. For example: by considering the final six commandments as a guide for ethical behaviour; by considering alternative sources of ethical guidance for Jews (such as the wider 613 mitzvot, societal laws, and guidance from rabbis or members of the Jewish community).
- provided relevant supporting examples and references to scholars (for example, Bernhard W. Anderson and Maimonides).

**Features of weaker responses:**

- made little connection between the Ten Sayings and ethical living in Judaism.
- provided descriptive responses, rather than evaluating the importance of Ten Sayings in relation to ethical living.

### **Section B**

- Q.3 (a) Outline the role of the synagogue in Judaism. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- closely focused on outlining the role of synagogue, rather than simply describing the features found within a synagogue.
- made use of specialist vocabulary (for example, bet k'nesset, bet midrash, bet tefillah, and shul).
- considered both the religious and social roles fulfilled by the synagogue.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- described the features of the synagogue, without drawing any connection to the role of the synagogue.
- made little or no use of specialist vocabulary.

- (b) 'The Synagogue should be the heart of a Jewish community.'**  
**[AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- evaluated the role of the synagogue clearly in relation to the concept of community. For example, considering the synagogue as a community centre, a social centre, and as a space for community education.
- included a wide-ranging discussion of other aspects of Jewish community life, such as the importance of the home as the heart of a Jewish community.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- Provided generic responses about what happens within the synagogue, without analysing the meaning or purpose of such rituals for a Jewish community.



**Q.4 (a) Outline the nature of the covenant between God and Abraham. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided a comprehensive response, with a strong focus on the nature of the covenant covering the three promises made to Abraham (land, offspring, blessing and redemption).
- Made thorough and accurate references to sacred texts such as, Genesis 12 and 17.
- included use of specialist vocabulary such as, unconditional covenant, patriarch, polytheistic, monotheistic, Abraham meaning 'father of many', and Isaac meaning 'laughter'.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- narrated the complete biography of Abraham and ignored the specific demand of the question to focus on the nature of the covenant between Abraham and God.
- included unnecessary references to Moses and the Mosaic covenant.

**(b) 'The covenant between God and Abraham cannot be a universal covenant.' [AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- gave a comprehensive evaluation of both the exclusive and universal nature of the Abrahamic covenant, with reference to relevant supporting examples.
- included specific references to scholarly views for example, Nicholas de Lange.
- Made use of specialist vocabulary for example, brit milah, mohel, consecration.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided a general discussion of the Abrahamic covenant with no reference to universality or exclusivity.
- confused details of the Abrahamic covenant with the Mosaic covenant, and vice versa.
- no use of specialist vocabulary.

**Q.5 (a) Explain the meaning and purpose of Jewish life with reference to beliefs about God and humanity. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses**

- rooted the meaning and purpose of life for Jews within a religious context and used specialist language adeptly.
- made a connection between the expectations of human behaviour in this life and belief in life after death.
- used specialist vocabulary such as, tzelem, nefesh, pikuach nefesh, and yetzer hara and yetzer hatov.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- made little or no reference to specialist vocabulary.
- provided generic responses to the purpose of life with little reference to religion.
- referred to irrelevant atheist perspectives.

**Q.5 (b) 'The Shema does not contain the most important beliefs within Judaism.'** [AO2 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- referred to specific content of the Shema.
- demonstrated a clear understanding of the importance of the Shema for Jewish belief.
- demonstrated a clear understanding of the importance of the Shema across all traditions of Judaism, whilst identifying that not all Jews put into practice its content (for example, Reform Jews may not wear tefillin).

**Features of weaker responses:**

- made little to no connection between the Shema and Jewish beliefs.
- provided descriptive responses not addressing the demands of the question; for example: describing the mezuzah, describing the tefillin; describing how many times the Shema is recited.

**Summary of key points**

- It is important that candidates divide their time equally between attempting parts (a) and (b) of each question. It should be noted that both part (a) and part (b) carry equal marks, therefore there should be some parity of time spent on attempting each question.
- It is important that candidates use specialist vocabulary in context; in the higher band responses it is an expectation that candidates are using a range of specialist language and vocabulary throughout their responses. The quality of part (a) and (b) responses is enhanced when candidates use specialist language and Hebrew vocabulary appropriately and with confidence.
- In part (b) responses candidates must use the skills of analysis and evaluation; simply repeating AO1 material about question 'topics', without any evidence of analysis and evaluation, will not allow candidates to move up the marking bands and achieve the higher marks.
- There were some quotations and occasional references to scholarly views, but this should be further encouraged.

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

## General Certificate of Education

Summer 2023

### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

#### UNIT 1D: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF BUDDHISM

##### General Comments

This year's paper was accessible to the majority of candidates. As with most years, some questions were more popular than others. In Section A, the majority of candidates favoured Q2 (attempt% 65.9%), whilst Q5 was the most common in Section B (attempt% 54.1%). However, both questions in Section A proved difficult for some candidates as they failed to focus on the specific requirements of each question. Centres must be aware of this in order to prepare their candidates for future examinations.

Most candidates took full advantage of the Advanced Information in preparation for the examination. As a result, there were fewer weaker or irrelevant responses. Many candidates structured their answers correctly and offered clear knowledge and understanding of Buddhist beliefs and practices when responding to AO1 questions. There were also examples of excellent answers, whereby candidates engaged with the questions and offered thorough responses to the questions set.

However, it was also evident this year that a number of candidates gave descriptive AO1-type responses or offered simplistic comments when responding to AO2 questions. It would benefit candidates to show more independent thought and develop their responses with stronger counter arguments.

Many candidates referred to sources of authority and scholarly opinion, yet only the stronger candidates were able to link them to the question. Some weaker candidates failed to identify the author of the quotes and others failed to explain their relevance within their answers.

It was good to see a larger proportion of candidates referring to the diversity within Buddhism and correctly identifying the different beliefs and practices.

##### Comments on individual questions/sections

###### Section A

**Q.1 (a) Examine the Buddhist chanting practice of going for refuge three times. [AO1 15]**

###### Features of stronger responses:

- were able to identify the three refuges and explain them with accuracy.
- explained the practice of chanting and make use of the Pali phrasing to illustrate their point.
- referred to the diversity within Buddhism and explained the different beliefs and practices correctly.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- failed to address the focus of the question.
- provided information on the three refuges with little or no reference to the practice of chanting.
- were very superficial.
- lacked awareness of the diversity within Buddhism.

**Q.1 (b) 'Going for refuge is more relevant to Buddhists than other possible refuges in the modern world.'**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to identify 'other refuges' Buddhists may use in the modern world e.g., political and social refuge, the family as a place of security and comfort.
- referred to convert Buddhist who seeks refuge in the local community.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- failed to engage fully with this question.
- compared the importance of each refuge rather than focussing on 'other possible refuges'.

**Q.2 (a) Explain how different meditation practices are used for cultivating qualities which lead to awakening.**

**[AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to correctly identify and explain a range of meditation practices e.g., samatha, metta bhavana, vipassana and zazen.
- could explain in detail how each meditation practice cultivates the qualities needed to reach enlightenment e.g., samatha cultivates mindfulness, metta bhavana cultivates loving-kindness, vipassana develops wisdom and insight, zazen leads to the realisation of Buddha–nature.
- focussed on the question and made relevant references to scholarly opinion.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- failed to identify the how different meditation practices are used for cultivating qualities which lead to awakening.
- gave generic and descriptive answers e.g., sitting crossed legged, walking meditation, sitting down and chanting.
- used inaccurate terminology when referring to some meditation practices e.g., zen instead of zazen.

**Q.2 (b) 'Meditation is an essential practice for Buddhists today.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated a good understanding of meditation as a tool to train the mind.
- referred to the Eightfold Path and the benefits of meditating.
- were able to identify the diversity of views within Buddhism and correctly comment on how it is not seen as essential for Pure Land Buddhists.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- failed to offer any counter arguments to the statement.
- replaced the term 'essential' with 'important' in the question set, and so failed to address the focus of the question.
- could not differentiate between beliefs and practices.

**Section B**

**Q.3 (a) Examine the three types of dukkha within Buddhism.** [AO1 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- focussed on the question set.
- were able to correctly identify and explain each type of dukkha with relevant examples.
- recognised the difficulty with translating the term 'dukkha'.
- referred to the Buddha's teachings to enhance their answers e.g., the Story of Kisagotami and the Parable of the Poisoned Arrow.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- confused the three types of dukkha with the three fires / poisons.
- referred to suffering in general.
- identified the three types of dukkha but gave incorrect explanations e.g., explaining sankhara dukkha as the suffering of change.

**Q.3 (b) 'The Four Noble Truths are accurate accounts of reality.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- offered a focussed response to the question by referring to the medical metaphor to exemplify 'reality'.
- engaged with the question and offered other teachings which could also be seen as accurate accounts of reality.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- gave a description of the Four Noble Truths without evaluating the statement.
- ailed to make the connection between the Noble Truths and reality.
- struggled to identify the elements of the Four Noble Truths.

**Q.4 (a) Explain the notion of karma within Buddhism with reference to the Dhammapada, Chapter 1 ‘The Pairs’ and Chapter 9 ‘Evil’. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided detailed answers correctly identified karma.
- referred to both chapters of the Dhammapada and included them to support their explanations.
- were able to directly quote from the Dhammapada.
- were also able to link the teachings on karma to further Buddhist teachings e.g. samsara, bhavachakra, anatta.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- only gave general knowledge on karma.
- lacked specific reference to the Dhammapada, chapter 1 and chapter 9.

**(b) ‘The historical Buddha’s rejection of questions about the existence of God was legitimate.’ Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- made good use of sources of wisdom to support their views.
- referred to the Parable of Poisoned Arrow to explain the dangers when asking metaphysical questions.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- missed the point of the question and ignored the reference to the ‘historical’ Buddha’s rejection, and therefore gave a general discussion on the rejection of God.
- provided little or no counter arguments.

**Q.5 (a) Examine two main features of the Buddha’s Awakening under the Bodhi Tree. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- identified two main features and structured their answers accordingly e.g. Firstly...Secondly.
- provided a range of features including detailed accounts of the four watches and the defeat of Mara within a mythical and psychological context.
- referred to the life of the Buddha as hagiographical and mythical in nature.
- offered more than just a story, they were able to explain the significance of both features.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided a narrative of everything they knew about the Buddha’s Awakening without focussing on two main features.
- focussed on the events leading up to the Buddha’s Awakening e.g. the Buddha’s birth, life in the palace, the Four Sights as features of the Awakening.
- lacked depth of understanding of the features they had referred to.

**Q.5 (b) 'Awakening is impossible to explain in words.'**  
**Evaluate this view with reference to Buddhism.**

**[AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- offered convincing arguments and were able to refer to the Buddha's teachings to explain their views e.g. The Parable of the Turtle and the Fish.
- were able to explain how awakening is an experience to be realised rather than explained.
- commented on how the Buddha eventually taught about awakening.
- made interesting synoptic links with Philosophy of Religion by referring to the Buddha's Awakening as being ineffable and noetic.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- missed the point of the question.
- offered comparisons with other aspects of the Buddha's life which are easier to explain.
- focussed on 'what awakening is/isn't' and failed to elaborate on the difficulty when expressing in words.

**Summary of key points**

- Candidates should read each question carefully in order to identify the focus of the question. This will ensure that candidates correctly address the question asked.
- Candidates should avoid overusing the phrasing of the question in order for their answers to read coherently.
- Candidates made good use of religious terminology, yet these need to be used consistently and correctly within their responses. There were further examples this year of candidates misspelling terms such as the Buddha, Buddhism, and Buddhists.
- Candidates should be encouraged to make relevant reference to the diversity of views within Buddhism. There were several generalisations such as Buddhists believe or all Buddhists agree/disagree.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### General Certificate of Education

Summer 2023

### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

## UNIT 1E: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF HINDUISM

### General Comments

The paper was accessible to the majority of candidates and answers spanned the bands with some excellent responses. In Section A, the majority of candidates favoured Q1 (attempt% 56.2%), whilst Q4 was the most common in Section B (attempt% 42.7%). Some candidates give an introduction at the beginning of their answers at both AO1 and AO2. This is generally good practice as it sets the context for the answer and recognises the issue or issues that need to be discussed. There were no specific issues or problems with any of the questions set.

However, it is apparent that the educational turmoil due to the pandemic has had an effect on the standard of the evaluation questions in particular. Responses to Part (b) questions had greatly improved over the years, but that improvement seems to have been lost. Many responses although containing different views were not supported by reasoning, examples and evidence. There was also a return to the ping-pong template of answering evaluation questions and although this can be an effective and useful way of answering it can also limit the more able candidates.

### Comments on individual questions/sections

#### Section A

**Q.1 (a) Explain the use of the Vedas and the Ramayana in Hindu daily life.**  
[AO1 15]

This was a popular question and no major difficulties or issues arose.

#### Features of stronger responses:

- were balanced in their discussion of the Vedas and the Ramayana.
- were able to refer to the four Vedas and their different content, and therefore their different use in daily life.
- focussed on the ethical teaching of the Ramayana and the different role-models within the epic and how these are used in daily life.

#### Features of weaker responses:

- weak responses on the whole had very little knowledge and understanding of the use of the Vedas
- did not focus on the question set and made little reference to use in daily life.
- gave the story of the Ramayana and nothing else.



- Q.1 (b) 'Hindu texts are still relevant for Hindus today.'**  
**Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

This was a very accessible question for the majority of candidates.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- clearly structured responses, where candidates provided a variety of arguments agreeing and disagreeing with the statement.
- referred to a wide range of Hindu texts referred to apart from Vedas and Ramayana.
- provided arguments were supported by clear reason and evidence.
- made frequent evaluative judgements made on the strengths or weaknesses of the arguments presented.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- were descriptive rather than evaluative in nature.
- did not focus on question set and very little in terms of supporting evidence.
- made no specific reference to Hindu texts
- went off on a tangent, arguing that other things were more relevant.

- Q.2 (a) Outline the three paths to liberation within Hinduism. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- identified the three paths and were able to outline them correctly.
- made very good use of key words and terminology.
- exemplified each path with references to Hindu texts or individuals e.g., Gandhi with karma yoga.
- focused on the question set and linked each path to liberation.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- were unable to identify the three paths to liberation. They referred to one and then included other concepts such as varnadharma and ahimsa
- demonstrated limited knowledge and understanding, with limited accuracy.
- provided Imbalanced responses with a greater focus on bhakti yoga and only a fleeting reference to karma yoga and jnana yoga.

- Q.2 (b) 'All paths to liberation are equally important within Hinduism.'**  
**Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each path.
- could identify that although paths are different, they lead to the same goal.
- recognised that different paths suit different people.
- used a variety of arguments and came to a balanced conclusion.
- referenced some paths being exclusive to high castes for example.
- concluded that all paths are of equal value, leading to moksha.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- made a limited number of repetitious arguments.
- provided a basic attempt at analysis.
- lacked knowledge and understanding of the three paths, leading to very basic and superficial arguments with little or no supporting evidence.

## Section B

- Q.3 (a) Explain the teachings of karma and reincarnation in Hinduism, with reference to achieving moksha. [AO1 15]**

A popular question, and one which was very accessible to candidates. The question asked for two areas of knowledge and understanding – karma and reincarnation, but also their part in how a Hindu achieves moksha.

### **Features of stronger responses:**

- provided balanced answers, dealing in detail with both karma and reincarnation.
- made detailed reference to different types of karma and the journey of the atman.
- focused on the question set and linked the two concepts to achieving Moksha

### **Features of weaker responses:**

- ignored karma and reincarnation's role in achieving moksha, and gave a general answer on karma and reincarnation.
- provided answers which focussed almost entirely on karma with very little reference to reincarnation.
- demonstrated limited knowledge and understanding of the concepts.

- (b) 'Achieving moksha is the greatest influence on Hindu lifestyle.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

### **Features of stronger responses:**

- provided clearly structured arguments given, with evaluative judgements made.
- Use supporting arguments including the idea that attaining moksha is the goal of a Hindu's life and will therefore influence all aspects of lifestyle.
- referred to alternative arguments that advocated for other influences being stronger such as personal relationship with God.
- clearly supported their arguments with reasons and evidence.

### **Features of weaker responses:**

- made a limited number of arguments, with little attempt at analysis and evaluation. made little reference to achieving moksha.
- provided imbalanced answers, which focused on everything in Hinduism being more of an influence than moksha, with very little support in terms of evidence or examples.

**Q.4 (a) Compare the views of Gandhi and Ambedkar towards the Dalits. [AO1 15]**

This was a very popular question and clearly accessible to candidates.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding of the views of Gandhi and Ambedkar towards the Dalits, why they held those particular views and the implications that followed from this. Such as a clear understanding of Gandhi's view on varna and caste.
- responded correctly to the command word 'compare' and showed the ability to explain the main similarities and differences in their views.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- confused the views of Gandhi and Ambedkar.
- lacked an understanding of Gandhi's view on varna and caste.
- demonstrated limited knowledge and understanding of their views.
- misunderstood Ambedkar's call for separate electoral colleges for Dalits.
- failed to compare the two.

**(b) 'Varna is no longer practical in today's world.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- focused on the question set – the practicality of varna in today's world.
- were supported by extensive reasoning/evidence.
- made thorough and accurate use of technical vocabulary.
- referenced the differences between urban and rural areas in terms of practicality.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- were not always focused on the question. Arguments were presented on whether the varna system is justified in today's world rather than if it is practical.
- demonstrated inconsistent evaluation.
- presented views that were not supported by specific evidence, examples and/or reasoning.

**Q.5 (a) Explain the importance of the festival of Holi in shaping Hindu identity. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- focused on the question set, with clear links made between practice of Holi/celebrations of Holi and their importance in shaping Hindu identity. They examined how Holi inspires faith in God, helping Hindus advance on the spiritual path, creating a sense of belonging to the community, the virtues needed for the attainment of Moksha and the belief in good overcoming evil.
- demonstrated thorough, accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding evident throughout their response.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided limited, descriptive responses which described the practices without linking them to identity – thus a failure to meet the demands of the question.
- demonstrated no real understanding of Hindu identity.
- were able to show some understanding of the virtues expressed in Holi, but made no link to how it shaped Hindu identity.

**(b) Festivals based on mythical events are no longer meaningful today.’ Evaluate this view with reference to Hinduism. [AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- used a variety of arguments to address the question, including that mythical events are meaningful as it is their message that is important. They are not supposed to be taken literally.
- also argued that mythical events are fabrications that have no place in today’s world. demonstrated strong evaluative judgements supported by examples, evidence and/or reasoning.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- made a limited number of arguments to address the question, with little attempt at analysis and evaluation.
- made little reference to specific mythological events.

**Summary of key points**

- The quality of handwriting of a small number of candidates is an issue that needs to be addressed by their centre making suitable provision for them.
- Candidates should be reminded to number the questions and part questions they are completing within their answer booklet to ensure that all their work can be assessed without issue.
- Candidates need to focus on the question set in terms of knowledge and understanding in the part (a) AO1 questions and especially when presenting arguments in the part (b) AO2 questions. A little time spent reading the question carefully, and planning a response before beginning to write the answer, will be time well spent.
- Candidates need to support their AO2 arguments with specific evidence and examples and relate each argument to the question set. It is good practice to directly refer to the question in their response.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**General Certificate of Education**  
**Summer 2023**  
**Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**

**UNIT 1F: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF SIKHISM**

**General Comments**

The paper was accessible to the majority of candidates and answers spanned the bands with some excellent responses. In Section A, the majority of candidates favoured Q1 (attempt% 76.8%), whilst Q3 was the most common in Section B (attempt% 56.1%). Some candidates give an introduction at the beginning of their answers at both AO1 and AO2. This is generally good practice as it sets the context for the answer and recognises the issue or issues that need to be discussed. There were no specific issues or problems with any of the questions set.

However, it is apparent that the educational turmoil due to the pandemic has had an effect on the standard of the evaluation questions in particular. Responses to Part b) questions had greatly improved over the years, but that improvement seems to have been lost. Many responses although containing different views were not supported by reasoning, examples and evidence. There was also a return to the ping-pong template of answering evaluation questions and although this can be an effective and useful way of answering it can also limit the more able candidates.

Only limited commentary can be provided on each question due to the low number of entries for this Option.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Section A**

**Q.1 (a) Examine the importance for Sikh identity of worship in the gurdwara. [AO1 15]**

This was the most popular question in Section A.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- focused on the question set and linked practices of worship in the gurdwara to expressions of Sikh identity.
- were able to refer the four doors in the gurdwara, langar and sewa and link them to expressions of equality which is a major part of Sikh identity.
- focussed on different aspects of worship such as congregational worship, kirtans and special occasions as being expressions of distinctive beliefs and practices.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- mainly described the features of a gurdwara without any link to worship or identity and therefore did not focus on the question set.
- demonstrated a basic knowledge and understanding of the practices of worship in the gurdwara.

- Q.1 (b) 'Fulfilment of religious needs rather than social needs is the most important role of the gurdwara.'**  
**Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

This was a very accessible question for the majority of candidates.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were well structured and provided a variety of arguments agreeing and disagreeing with the statement.
- a wide range of religious and social needs were identified and evaluated.
- arguments presented were supported by clear reasoning and evidence.
- made frequent evaluative judgements made on the strengths or weaknesses of the arguments presented.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- were descriptive rather than evaluative in nature.
- did not focus on the question set and there was very little in terms of supporting evidence.
- made no specific reference to Hindu practices social or religious.
- had no real understanding of the complexity of the relationship between religious and social.

- Q.2 (a) Examine the spiritual values expressed in the Sikh festival of Diwali.**  
**[AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- identified the values expressed in the festival of Diwali such as bravery, courage and self-sacrifice.
- made very good use of key words and terms
- exemplified each virtue with reference to the historical background.
- focused on the question set and linked the virtues to different aspects of the celebrations.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- were very descriptive in terms of background and practices with no real link to question set.
- demonstrated limited knowledge, understanding and accuracy.
- provided only a limited recognition of spiritual values.

- (b) 'Vaisakhi is more important than Diwali in Sikhism.'**  
**Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each festival.
- could also identify that although they are different, they can be equal in importance.
- compared the relative value of each festival within Sikhism.
- referred to a variety of arguments made leading to a balanced conclusion.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- made a limited number of repetitious arguments.
- provided only basic attempts at analysis.
- lacked knowledge and understanding of the two festivals leading to very basic and superficial arguments with little or no supporting evidence.

## Section B

- Q.3 (a) Explain how the Guru Granth Sahib is regarded as a living guru in Sikhism. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- explained the many practical and spiritual ways the Guru Granth Sahib is regarded as a 'living guru'.
- referred in detail to different practices concerning the Guru Granth Sahib.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- ignored the words 'living Guru' and simply wrote all they knew about the Guru Granth Sahib.
- did not focus on the question set.
- demonstrated a limited knowledge and understanding of the role of the Guru Granth Sahib and how it is regarded in Sikhism.

- (b) 'The Guru Granth Sahib is not relevant for Sikhs today.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided clear arguments, with evaluative judgements made.
- referred to arguments supporting the statement included that the Guru Granth Sahib is outdated and therefore cannot possibly give guidance on contemporary issues.
- referred to alternative arguments that stated that the Guru Granth Sahib was a complete guide to being a Sikh and therefore was always relevant.
- any arguments given were clearly supported with reasoning and evidence.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided a limited number of arguments, with little attempt at analysis and evaluation.
- made little reference to the relevance of the Guru Granth Sahib today.
- lacked support in terms of evidence and examples for the arguments presented.

- Q.4 (a) Examine the concept of God within Sikhism. [AO1 15]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding of the concept of God in Sikhism.
- were able to refer to different understandings of God within Sikhism, such as the understanding of God as nirguna and saguna and the implications of these beliefs.
- referred to God as transcendent and immanent.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- demonstrated limited knowledge and understanding of the concept of God in Sikhism.
- provided no specific examples/teachings in their response.
- did not understand the breadth that exist withing the Sikh concept of God.

**Q.4 (b) 'The concept of God is the most important concept in Sikhism.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- focused on the question set – the importance of the concept in Sikhism.
- supported their views with extensive reasoning/evidence.
- made thorough and accurate use of religious terminology.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- did not always focus on the question, which referred to the importance of the concept.
- provided only an inconsistent evaluation of the issue.
- did not support the views given with specific evidence and examples.
- compared the concept of God to practices and festivals, rather than other concepts.

**Q.5 (a) Examine the material and spiritual value of sewa within the Sikh community.** [AO1 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- focused on the question with clear distinction made between material and spiritual values.
- referred to Man and Tan and explained their importance.
- demonstrated thorough, accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding of sewa and its implications throughout evident throughout.
- provided specific examples given during their response.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided limited, descriptive responses about sewa, ignoring the context of the question set.
- showed limited knowledge and understanding especially about the spiritual value of sewa.

**Q.5 (b) 'Sewa is the most important Sikh teaching.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 15]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- contained clearly structured responses, with a variety of arguments agreeing and disagreeing with the statement.
- provided arguments based on thorough knowledge and understanding of sewa, which were supported by clear reasoning and evidence.
- made frequent evaluative judgements.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- offered a limited number of arguments, which were made and repeated.
- made little attempt to support their arguments with reasoning or evidence.
- demonstrated some confusion between varna and ashramas.



## Summary of key points

- The quality of handwriting of a small number of candidates is an issue that needs to be addressed by their centre making suitable provision for them.
- Candidates should be reminded to number the questions and part questions they are completing within their answer booklet to ensure that all their work can be assessed without issue.
- Candidates need to focus on the question set in terms of knowledge and understanding in the part (a) AO1 questions and especially when presenting arguments in the part (b) AO2 questions. A little time spent reading the question carefully, and planning a response before beginning to write the answer, will be time well spent.
- Candidates need to support their AO2 arguments with specific evidence and examples and relate each argument to the question set. It is good practice to directly refer to the question in their response.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**General Certificate of Education**  
**Summer 2023**  
**Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**

**UNIT 2: SECTION A - AN INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION AND ETHICS**

**General Comments**

Candidates were able to access both questions on the paper and answers were seen across the ability range. In Section A, the majority of candidates answered Q1 (attempt% 64.3%).

Stronger responses were clearly focused on the specific demands of the question and material was carefully selected and explained and evaluated in detail. Weaker responses were often very general and sometimes covered a lot of ground which was not relevant to the questions set. Weaker AO2 responses often saw points as strong because they 'came from a source of wisdom' without really engaging in a discussion about any specific texts.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Q.1 (a) Outline the roles of virtues and goods in supporting moral behaviour within Aquinas' Natural Law theory. [AO1 30]**

This question asked for specific understanding of aspects of Aquinas' Natural Law, but responses which referred to wider aspects of the theory in a way that made this relevant to the question were able to gain credit.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- showed a clear understanding of the different nature of both types of virtue found within natural law and their respective origins.
- were able to explain the meaning of each virtue and give examples of these virtues in practice, with excellent responses explaining how the virtues supported the ability to act on the precepts.
- gave a clear definition of real and apparent goods, demonstrating how real goods related to genuine interior acts without conflating the two concepts.
- drew out the idea that nobody intends to do evil, hence the term apparent *goods* showing that humans sometimes reason incorrectly.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- a number of weaker responses only addressed one aspect of the question or discussed other areas of Natural Law without mentioning goods or virtues.
- Natural Law was at times mixed up with either Divine Command Theory, Situation Ethics or Virtue Ethics.
- a surprising number of candidates could not accurately distinguish between goods and acts, and defined real goods in terms of having good actions and good intentions without ever stating what 'good' meant in the context of Natural Law.

- Other candidates had very little understanding of a virtue as a positive character trait and incorrectly identified other aspects of Natural Law such as the precepts or the laws as virtues.

**Q.1 (b) ‘The deontological approach of Natural Law is the most practical way to make moral decisions in today’s society.’  
Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

Many candidates understood the focus of the question and were able to discuss how the deontological nature of the theory made it either practical or impractical. Candidates were able to argue successfully on both sides and were rewarded for the quality of reasoning.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- clearly focused on both the deontological nature of the theory and its practicality.
- were able to compare Natural Law with other ethical theories in order to assess whether it is the most practical.
- were able to discuss the Principle of Double Effect and assess whether this added to the practicality of the theory.
- identified the Roman Catholic origins of Natural Law and discussed whether this background limited its practicality in the modern world.
- gave effective examples to illustrate some of the issues with a deontological approach in the modern world.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- were clearly confused about the teleological aspects of Natural Law and tried to argue that it allowed for both teleological and deontological approaches to decision making, often losing accuracy in the process
- did not address the specific question and simply discussed the generic strengths and weaknesses of the theory. Some responses only considered one aspect of the question – the deontological nature or the practicality.
- the secular nature of society was often asserted as a weakness without being fully analysed and evaluated.
- some conflated Natural Law with Divine Command Theory or argued that it was purely biblically based, without understanding the place of Natural Law in the different levels of law.

**Q.2 (a) Examine Fletcher’s four working principles as a means of assessing morality. [AO1 30]**

This question also asked for a specific aspect of Fletcher’s Situation Ethics to be explained, but as with the natural law question, responses which referred to wider aspects of the theory in a way that was relevant to the question were able to gain credit. It was pleasing to note many more responses demonstrating an accurate grasp of positivism.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated a thorough and accurate understanding of each of Fletcher’s working principles, making good use of examples such as abortion or Fletcher’s own examples to illustrate how they could be used to assess morality.

- referred to the biblical basis of Situation Ethics using relevant quotations to illustrate this.
- explained the role of agape and the way in which the working principles demonstrate agape in practice.
- made clear links to the fundamental principles or other aspects of the theory without losing focus on the working principles in the bulk of their response.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote lengthy introductions about the different approaches to ethics before starting to address the question.
- defined relativism and pragmatism in very general terms without relating these directly to agape.
- confused the working principles for the fundamental principles and wrote about these instead.
- listed the principles but they were not explained or illustrated.

**Q.2 (b) ‘Situation Ethics only works as a means for making moral decisions for religious believers.’**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

Candidates were generally able to address this specific question but sometimes struggled to find more than one aspect of the issue to discuss.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- the relative merits of Situation Ethics for believers and non-believers were discussed, but the better responses also considered whether the theory would work for all religious believers.
- good responses identified the biblical basis of the theory. Higher level responses were sometimes able to discuss the differences between Old and New Testament approaches to ethics in order to analyse the issue.
- were able to use scholars such as Robinson, Barclay and occasionally Kierkegaard to evaluate the extent to which Situation Ethics works for different groups of people.
- often drew on specific principles as evidence to support their reasoning rather than making generic comments.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- some responses confused Situation Ethics with other ethical theories and presented it as absolutist or focused on biblical laws, failing to recognise its relativist approach.
- other responses identified Fletcher as a religious figure akin to Aquinas, failing to recognise his change in belief over the years.
- many weaker responses simply asserted Britain as a secular society as a weakness without fully analysing or evaluating this.
- arguments were repeated with little development.

## Summary of key points

- Good responses focused clearly on the exact demands of the question and were able to address the required aspects in detail, making effective use of specialist vocabulary in context.
- Centres should encourage candidates to make use of specific examples and evidence to illustrate their AO1 responses as many accurate yet concise responses could have been improved by this approach.
- Arguments raised in AO2 questions must be analysed and evaluated with reference to evidence and examples, rather than simply asserting a point in opposition with no commentary.

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**UNIT 2: SECTION B – AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION**

**General Comments**

The most popular question in Section B was Q4 (attempt% 70.1%). It was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates were able to access the questions on the paper with some excellent responses being seen. Both questions in Section B produced responses which were rewarded across the full range of bands and marks available.

It was clear that this year's Advanced Information had helped candidates since the majority of answers were strongly focused on the question. However, in a minority of cases it appeared that some candidates were not fully prepared for the questions.

Many candidates had a firm grasp of the material needed to answer the question. There are some examples of excellent of teaching and learning going on with regards to the specification. There were pleasing levels of both AO1 and AO2 skills being demonstrated.

However, there is evidence that some candidates were not familiar with some aspects of the specification. For example, phrases such as 'objectivity' and 'authenticity' proved challenging in a number of cases. Also, it was clear that some candidates' responses were less focused as they tried to use their pre-prepared knowledge, rather than adapt it to the specific question set.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Q.3 (a) Outline different challenges to the objectivity and authenticity of religious experience. [AO1 30]**

**General Comments**

This was not a popular question. A range of responses were seen for this question which shows that a number of candidates were able to access the question. Candidates were rewarded for both breadth and depth of knowledge for this question. However, it was clear that candidates were not able to fully access the question. Many candidates misread the question and explained different views on mystical experiences.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- introduced the concept of religious experience in general before presenting the challenges of such experiences.
- were able to identify the challenges presented by Caroline Franks-Davis (description, subject and object) with appropriate exemplification.
- commented on the difficulty of verifying religious experience claims and the problem of falsification was often discussed well.

- clearly understood what was meant by the terms in the question: 'objectivity' and 'authenticity' and could link their examples to show how they challenge either the objectivity or authenticity of the experience.
- Able to use a variety of challenges to religious experiences well such as those from Freud, Logical Positivism and lack of evidence etc.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- often confused Richard Swinburne as a critic of religious experiences.
- muddled Franks-Davis' explanation of the main challenges and gave no examples to support each category of challenge.
- provided little awareness of different challenges to religious experiences other than Franks-Davis.
- often referred to generic challenges without real development – e.g. miracles could be the result of someone taking drugs.
- lacked awareness of different scholars and their ideas. Often points were made without any connection to the individual who developed those specific challenges.

**Q.3 (b) 'Challenges to religious experience are not valid'.  
Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**General Comments**

This question appeared challenging for a number of candidates. Some candidates did not attempt to answer the question at all and some only provided a superficial paragraph. It was clear though, that some candidates were confident and knew how to apply their knowledge to the question and effectively evaluate the challenges.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided strong evaluations with connections made to the statement throughout their response.
- had a suitable counter argument to each point made, which was often supported by a mini conclusion.
- referred to the Richard Swinburne and discussed his views well to show that some challenges to religious experiences are clearly not valid.
- used scholars and philosophers to support their arguments, and used other scholars to counter or 'disprove' what another had stated effectively.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- just regurgitated knowledge from the part (a) with no connection/evaluation on whether the challenges were valid or not.
- lacked depth and understanding of different challenges which prevented any real evaluation/analysis of the points given.
- demonstrated little understanding of arguments that could support the validity of religious experiences and render the challenges invalid.

- Q.4 (a) Outline the different cosmological arguments presented by:**  
**(i) Aquinas' Three Ways**  
**and**  
**(ii) The Kalam Argument, with reference to William Lane Craig.** [AO1 30]

**General Comments**

This was the most popular question and responses to this question were very pleasing on the whole. It was clear that the majority of candidates were fully prepared for this question. The full range of marks across all bands were awarded for this question. It was apparent that candidates had very superficial knowledge of the Kalam Argument and William Lane Craig in comparison to Aquinas. That said, more able candidates were able to successfully explain Aquinas' three ways with accurate exemplification along with Craig's library analogy correctly.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- provided a suitable introduction that was focused on the question which referred to the cosmological argument being a posteriori and inductive.
- demonstrated a thorough and accurate knowledge of Aquinas' Three Ways, with accurate and relevant examples to support each one.
- used short quotes from Aquinas' Summa Theologica were used effectively to support points made.
- William Lane Craig was commented on in sufficient detail by referring to his library analogy to illustrate his rejection of actual infinities.
- referred to Craig's second form of the argument with God being a Personal Creator.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- identified the cosmological argument being a priori and deductive.
- answers often muddled Aquinas' Three Ways and matched the wrong example to the explanation given.
- not able to give any comments on William Lane Craig and therefore only answered half the question set.
- often used knowledge of the teleological argument for the views of Craig, e.g. using Paley's watchmaker analogy and attributing it to Craig.
- confused Aquinas' teleological argument with his cosmological argument.

- Q.4 (b) 'Cosmological Arguments are effective in proving God's existence'.  
Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**General Comments**

This answer provided pleasing responses. The majority of candidates were able to offer some evaluation and analysis of the issue. The level of evaluation differed greatly across the scripts which as a result saw the responses being awarded marks across the full range. It appeared on occasions that some candidates were preparing for a different question where their lines of reasoning did not match the statement given.

**Features of stronger responses**

- made confident judgements throughout the answer that were supported by strong reasoning and evidence.



- referred to scholars including Hume, Russell, Hawkings, Aquinas and Craig.
- provided deep and meaningful evaluation.
- were able to compare the effectiveness of the cosmological argument with the teleological or ontological arguments.

#### **Features of weaker responses**

- provided a weak analysis and evaluation, e.g. there was a lot of repetition of Aquinas' Three Ways with no evaluation of the points made.
- had a lack of knowledge of the support and opposition of the cosmological argument.
- often evaluated the teleological argument or ontological argument without linking the points to show why/why not the cosmological argument is/not effective.
- contained incorrect references to Charles Darwin and Evolution which did not help evaluate whether the cosmological argument is effective or not.
- made limited use of specialist language and scholars.

#### **Summary of key points**

- For Q3, candidates seemed to struggle with understanding the different challenges to religious experiences. There were often very superficial accounts of Franks-Davis' challenges and some responses were unable to correctly identify them. However, some excellent scripts were seen which outlined the challenges with good accuracy.
- Responses to the Cosmological Argument (Q4) were generally answered better compared to the challenges of religious experience (Q3) which showed that candidates had prepared well for this question.
- For Q4, candidates generally displayed good knowledge of Aquinas' Three Ways and were able to expand off his views by using Aquinas' correct examples.
- Also for Q4, knowledge and understanding of William Lane Craig's Kalam Cosmological Argument was often answered weaker compared to Aquinas' Three Ways. Many candidates often mistook Craig for William Paley and started to write a response that suited the teleological argument.
- Evaluation skills were varied across both questions and on par with last year's exam series. It is becoming clear that centres are using the various support material and texts now available to support the teaching of good evaluation skills. On the whole, evaluation skills seem to be progressing stronger amongst candidates as the specification ages.

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**UNIT 3A: A STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY**

**General Comments**

The examination paper did not raise any concerns and so fulfilled its aim of setting appropriate questions in a fair and accessible manner. The full range of marks were employed to the responses provided. In Section A, the majority of candidates favoured Q2 (attempt% 66.7%), whilst Q4 was the most common in Section B (attempt% 82.9%).

Handwriting remains a concern for a number of scripts and centres need to be aware of their candidate's handwriting form and ability under exam conditions and, if necessary, make appropriate arrangements so that their work can be accessed by WJEC examiners. Candidates should be reminded of the need for capital letters for key terminology, e.g., God, Jesus, Christian, England and Wales.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Section A**

**Q.1 Examine diverse views on the Bible as the word of God. [AO1 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated thorough, accurate and relevant knowledge which answered the specific demands of the question.
- balanced not only the overall objective and subjective views of scripture but then: either took a deeper dive into them considering for example how these diverse views may present themselves as a consequence in regard to divorce, slavery and abortion. Or considered a range of scholars accurately examining their diverse views.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- approached the 'diverse views' aspect of the question solely by how strictly or otherwise a church or individual may follow the Bible e.g. Roman Catholics strictly follow the Ten Commandments.
- confusion between or actual fusion of the views of the Protestant churches and Roman Catholic church'.

**Q.2 Examine different challenges faced by Christians migrating to the UK.** [AO1 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- included and explored challenges beyond language and worship styles and so referenced Biblical migration and present challenges within the political, social and economic situation today e.g. numbers of and consequent housing, NHS access and so potential discrimination or racism.
- recognised that these problems could be added to within a church context of unfamiliarity and so a need to move/establish a church of their own understanding and especially so if doctrinal or moral issues are also perceived to exist.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- gave stereo-typical responses e.g. that no African migrant could speak English.
- only made occasional reference to the Middle Eastern migrants/Christian converts from Islamic countries, which would have lent greater weight to these arguments.
- made irrelevant reference to the solutions to the challenges faced by migrants.
- incorrectly stated that the idea if you were a Roman Catholic migrating into the UK, you may not be able to find a Roman Catholic church.
- generally referred to immigration and/or asylum from a non-Christian perspective.

**Section B**

**Q.3 'It is valid to use the apocryphal Gospels to understand Jesus.'**  
**Evaluate this view with reference to Christianity.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- effectively evaluated and analysed the question set with particular regard to J. D. Crossan and N.T. Wright aiding their responses.
- Understood the content of the apocryphal Gospels and were able to use this to contrast with the canonical Gospels.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- generally attempted to respond to this question using AO1 information rather than AO2 skills in style.

**Q.4 'A scientist must be an atheist.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- entered into the evaluation focusing on Dawkins and McGrath as illustrated in the mark scheme, clearly focussing on analysis and evaluation of the question set.
- referred to other scholars such as Polkinghorne, Einstein, Flew, particularly picking up the point that the Big Bang theory was first proposed by a Roman Catholic priest and scientist Georges Lemaitre.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote about Dawkins and McGrath but only using AO1 information. Gave irrelevant information, debating scientific issues such as evolution and the Big Bang. They failed to recognise that he was a Christian scientist, Georges Lemaitre, who developed the Big Bang theory.
- erroneously try to turn the question into one of whether God exists or not.

**Q.5 'Feminist theology has had little impact on modern Christian practice.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- read the question carefully and analysed and evaluated on the 'little impact' and 'modern Christian practice'.
- referred almost without exception, to the works of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly with some Sally McFague taking their propositions and analysing and evaluating what impact could be determined today.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- presented AO1 answers about feminist theology.
- provided inaccurate sweeping evaluations, such as:
  - Christians believe a woman's place is to stay at home.
  - believe that women cannot be ordained priests.
  - you are extremely unlikely to see a woman vicar/priest (a third of all Church of England clergy are women).
  - in modern Christian practice women priests receive unequal pay (pay is equal to relative position).
  - have to fight for maternity rights (no).
  - do not have access to higher roles due to lack of experience (half the bishops in the Church in Wales are women). The highest-ranking bishop of forty-two dioceses in England is a woman (London).
- presented incorrect chronologies, e.g. was unaware that Mary Daly died in 2010 and so cannot be commenting on Pope Francis or any other impact since her death.
- some were unaware that Rosemary Radford Ruether died in 2022.

**Q6. 'The aims of the World Council of Churches are not affected by the non-membership of the Roman Catholic Church.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- maintained a balance of analysis and evaluation to the question set.
- brought in Gospel considerations such as command to love neighbour as self and Jesus' prayer that 'they may all be one'.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- presented AO1 information rather than demonstrating any AO2 skills, describing the WCC and its work and where the Roman Catholic Church is and is not involved.
- often provided generic information around the questions of membership/witness and balance of numbers between WCC/RC Church.

**Summary of key points**

- Candidates' handwriting (particularly under exam conditions) needs to be afforded more consideration by centres, as examiners cannot credit work they cannot read.
- The single most regular credit depriving activity in Section B is candidate's writing an answer in part (unnecessary introductions) or answering an AO2 as if it were an AO1 question.
- In accordance with the Banding and Marking guidance, capital letters are expected in a response to various religious terms such as: God, Jesus/Christ/Christian and for scholars' names/England and Wales.

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**UNIT 3B: A STUDY OF ISLAM**

**General Comments**

In Section A, the majority of candidates favoured Q2 (attempt% 81.0%), whilst Q5 and Q6 were the most popular in Section B (attempt% 82.0%).

Candidates performed well this year (perhaps in some part to the Advance Information) and this appears to show that teachers and candidates have put in considerable effort to overcome the disruption of covid years and achieve high standards of work, both in acquisition of knowledge and in application of evaluative and discursive skills. Both should be congratulated on their work and efforts.

All questions were answered by candidates, and some candidates performed well on all. More chose Q2 than Q1 in Section A, but those who did choose Q1 tended to perform more strongly. In section B, Q5 and Q6 were by far the most popular choices. Many candidates performed equally well across all their questions, and some performed better with Q5 than Q6, so centres might consider this in their teaching to ensure all areas of the syllabus, including crime and punishment, are covered equally well.

Candidates demonstrated good grasp of knowledge and command of technical and specialist vocabulary. Some had learned scholarly opinions, although more might consider mentioning names of one or two scholars or opinions in their answers. Many grappled with statements and used words such as 'moreover', 'conversely' and so on, showing confident and critical analysis. Candidates could be reminded, nevertheless, that Section A is assessed according to AO1 and Section B AO2: a few candidates wrote a considerable amount of knowledge in section B without fashioning it into an argument or discussion.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Section A**

**Q.1 Examine Sufi teachings on the role of personal, mystical religious experience as a way of experiencing God. [AO1 30]**

There were very few weak responses to this question and some outstanding ones achieving Band 5.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- made correct use of terminology to explain practices Sufis use to experience God.
- gave lengthy, detailed and precise explanations of a range of Sufi practices and their role in lifting the heart and mind of the Sufi towards union with God. Despite this being perhaps a less familiar area of the syllabus, many showed expertise and had clearly spent much time and effort to master and fully understand the concepts involved.

- provided a clear explanation with a focus on experience of God.
- referenced famous Sufis such as Rumi, and the practices of those Sufis.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- described some Sufi practices without explaining how they helped Sufis to experience God.
- wrote short, generalised responses.
- used little terminology or loose terminology, without giving precise meanings.

**Q.2 Explain the problems created by segregation and assimilation for Muslim communities in Britain today. [AO1 30]**

This was the most popular choice of question and reasonably well answered, but there were proportionately fewer Band 5s achieved than Q1. Very few defined the terms, which made an excellent opening paragraph in those responses which did. Reference to scholars, academic opinions and so on was also scant but a few did refer to the Muslim Council of Britain and Ziauddin Sardar.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- wrote clear definitions of segregation and assimilation.
- included reference to issues arising from attitudes both within and outside Muslim opinions covered a broad range of different problems, e.g., clearly understood that access to halal food, prayer facilities, wearing headscarves and time of for festivals might be issues.
- a few delved deeper into issues of separate identity and how far some felt their theological beliefs compatible with a western lifestyle.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided general information about some of the problems of Muslims without defining the terms in the question.
- only covered a narrow range of problems, usually only food and dress.
- loosely wrote about problems for Muslims, without focusing specifically on Britain today.

**Section B**

**Q.3 ‘The doors to ijtiḥād are closed.’ Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

Few chose this question, but those who did made good attempts. Ijtiḥād, individual interpretation, was often made by the companions of Muhammad after his death, to clarify issues which the people were unsure about. They thought that the companions had lived alongside Muhammad and knew best what he would have done, but as time went on and memories faded, the validity of this was questioned. Such statements of overview and context were referred to by one or two candidates.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- clearly defined ijtiḥād and set out the direction of the discussion in a clear, short introductory paragraph.
- provided a contextual overview referring to opinions such as those of the companions.
- recognised the significance of the discussion with reference to understanding of modern-day issues.

- noted that many still continue to practice ijtiḥād, arguing it is essential to make sense of modern-day issues.
- Recognised that there are different opinions by school of thought, especially within Shi'a and Salafi scholarly opinion.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- referred to ijtiḥād in general terms without reference to context of closing the doors.
- argued simply no, without reference to other opinions. Candidates do not need to agree with any particular line, but should show understanding of different views.
- did not offer any conclusion or personal evaluation to round off their response.

**Q.4 'Shari'a may be divine, but its interpretation is no more than human.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** **[AO2 30]**

Candidates knew what Shari'a was and defined it in terms of the Qur'an and ḥadīth.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- focused clearly on the words human and divine, and linked every paragraph or point made to these words, thereby developing an effective discussion.
- clearly referred to a range of sources of Shari'a and assessed each one, including ijma and qiyas, which could be defined and discussed.
- good conclusions discussed the extent to which interpretation was rooted in the context of divine sources and divinely inspired respect, through scholarly research and devout practice. This might make interpretation more than a matter of human free choice for some.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- provided an AO1 focussed response or became lost in the factual details.
- made little reference to the key words - divine and human.
- structured their response simply around agree and disagree, repeatedly switching between the two, without any in-depth analysis or evaluation.

**Q.5 'Islamic responses to scientific views about the origins of the universe are effective.'**

**Evaluate this view.** **[AO2 30]**

Most candidates knew a lot about scientific theories such as big bang, oscillating earth and steady state. Many also referred to evolution as an extension of the creation process, which was accepted. Some focused on the time aspect as opposed to stages of creation.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- referred to a range of theories and different possible Islamic responses.
- focused the discussion on those responses, not just the detail of the theories.
- referred to empirical evidence in science and discussed how far a response referred to revealed knowledge, which some might see as faith based rather than rational, could be effective in the modern, technologically advanced era.
- provided an evaluation of the effectiveness of these views, as opposed to whether they agreed or not.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- described the scientific theories but failed to provide any Islamic response.
- wrote about whether Islam and science were compatible, not whether Islamic responses were effective.
- loosely based their response about science in general.

**Q.6 'Islamic teachings on punishment are still appropriate today.'****Evaluate this view.****[AO2 30]**

Few candidates opened by scoping their responses, but those who did achieved clearer discussions overall. By scoping, a candidate might write about what the punishments were and when they might apply, as opposed to reasons for not carrying them out, different opinions about them and the authority of secular law and punishments for certain aspects of life.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- Defined the scope of punishments that would be discussed in the response.
- Understood the significance of 'today' as opposed to what was accepted in different societies in the past.
- Referred to different Islamic opinions about punishments today.
- Most referred to capital punishment, supported by some and opposed by others, and referenced Utilitarian principles underpinning the purpose of punishment on society in general.
- Some referred to non-Islamic scholars such as James Rachels, and their opinions on Islamic punishments in different contexts., showing evidence on breadth and depth in their answer.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote only about the death penalty, which was relevant but a broader range of punishments could have been referred to.
- do not refer to the time aspect: punishments today.
- assumed that Muslims took a simple, single opinion about punishments.

**Summary of key points**

- All questions on the paper were chosen, those on Sufism, ijihad and shari'a less so. Centres might consider ensuring these areas are more familiar to some candidates.
- Definitions of key terms, reference to scholars and specific focus on the exact wording of the statement were strengths of the best responses.
- Candidates should ensure they address AO2 in Section B and not become side tracked into giving too much AO1 description, as AO2 is assessing the skills of analysis and evaluation.



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**UNIT 3C: A STUDY OF JUDAISM**

**General Comments**

In Section A, the majority of candidates favoured Q2 (attempt% 53.1%), whilst Q5 was the most popular in Section B (attempt% 77.8%).

It is evident from candidates' responses that all questions were accessible and covered the full range of responses. Moreover, there were a number of strong scripts that demonstrated confident, critical and perceptive analysis of the issues in Section B which indicates improvements being made in the cultivation of successful analytical and evaluative skills.

It was noticeable that many candidates had engaged fully with the topics which featured in this year's examination paper, with many being able to cite relevant up to date issues within Judaism in their answers. This was particularly evident in response to Q2 concerning the debate about embryo research; and Q3 where current events in Israel were cited to good effect as part of the debate. Such independence of thought, and the ability to apply contemporary issues to the statement under discussion made for interesting reading. Whilst this was especially apparent in the higher band AO2 responses where candidates argued their points fluently, supported by extensive detailed reasoning, it was also evident within some responses from lower bands albeit without the accompanying depth of reasoning and evidence.

With regard to Section A questions where answers were not as strong, it was evident in some cases, as in Q1 for instance, that some candidates failed to understand the Jewish terminology accurately, and thus gave a response that was not accurate. Where responses were not as strong in response to Q2 it was sometimes the case that the candidate was knowledgeable about the scientific facts regarding embryo research, but that this was at the expense of the focus of the question which was that of 'Jewish contributions' to the debate.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

**Section A**

**Q.1 Explain the purpose and role of Aggadah in midrash. [AO1 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated an accurate knowledge and understanding of the three broad categories of Aggadah and the way in which it is used to add depth of understanding and meaning to the Jewish experience.
- were able to explain how Aggadah works by reference to relevant examples such as Lamentations 1:1.
- used scriptural examples to illustrate how Aggadah was used to explain inconsistencies found in the biblical narrative: e.g. in the Book of Genesis both man and woman are created in the first chapter, but then man is suddenly alone in the second.

- used the midrashic tale concerning Abraham and the destruction of the idols as a story that offers a moral lesson.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- some candidates entered into a detailed discussion about midrashic method, albeit with a very good understanding, instead.
- in a minority of cases, candidates confused Aggadah with Halakhah.
- entered into an AO2-style debate about which was of greater importance, Aggadah or Halakhah.

**Q.2 Examine different Jewish contributions to the debate about embryo research.**  
[AO1 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- showed an in-depth understanding of both Bleich and Tendler's differing responses, for example, to the ethical debate about embryo research.
- handled the scientific background information appropriately and concisely, without it overwhelming the response at the expense of discussing Jewish contributions to the debate.
- referred to the debate surrounding ensoulment.
- utilised the concept of pikuach nefesh successfully.
- discussed aspects of Jewish law in relation to 'building a fence around the law' and Tendler's stance that a fence that causes pain and suffering is to be dismantled.
- referred to relevant, up to date issues in the field of embryo research.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote at some length about the scientific processes of IVF and stem-cell research, but did not relate those processes to Jewish contributions to the debate in any significant detail.
- lacked a basic understanding of embryo research which meant that ensuing references to Jewish contributions were inaccurate and/or confused.
- in a minority of cases the response their response became a discussion about abortion and a perceived lack of gender equality in Judaism.

**Section B**

**Q.3. 'Zionism is not specifically a Jewish movement.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

**Features of stronger responses:**

- handled the differing definitions of 'Zionism' with skill and used them to present a confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issue.
- made very good use of the views of the major denominations of Judaism.
- referred to the covenantal foundation of the Jewish faith when discussing the desire for a return to the Promised Land.
- recognised the impact of the Mizrachi party which became the religious wing of the Zionist movement.
- referred to relevant, up to date issues concerning the current state of affairs between Israel and Palestine in relation to the statement in question.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- entered into a detailed narrative about defining Jewishness, but with little discussion linking the information to the statement in question.
- outlined the historical background of political Zionism but with insufficient analysis and evaluation.
- offered only a limited number of issues for discussion.

**Q.4 ‘Holocaust theologians have been unsuccessful in addressing the challenges raised by the Holocaust.’**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- confidently analysed and evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of a range of named Holocaust theologians critically and to good effect.
- made judgements regarding whether or not some responses were more successful than others.
- used arguments such as that of Mackie’s Inconsistent Triad argument and applied them successfully to the debate.
- used the views of scholars in order to support the argument being made.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- lacked a clear understanding of theological responses to the Holocaust.
- contained too much AO1-type content which was not backed up with sufficient analysis and evaluation.
- some responses slipped into a Christian debate about atonement, punishment for sins and the concept of Original Sin.

**Q.5 ‘Family life is the main strength of Judaism.’**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- offered evidence in support of the statement by discussing the raising of a family as being a sacred duty in Judaism as set out in sacred texts: Proverbs 22:6; Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:3 for example.
- demonstrated an understanding of the Jewish family home as a mikdash me’at serving to argue that many rituals within the home have great significance and serve to remind Jewish believers of the importance of their faith and maintaining Jewish principles.
- made comparisons between other Jewish institutions such as the synagogue; keeping the mitzvot and festivals in order to evaluate which, if any, might be considered to be the main strength of Judaism.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- some candidates lost the focus of the statement and digressed into a discussion about a perceived lack of gender equality in Judaism. Unless this was specifically linked to a relevant argument concerning the family being the main strength or otherwise of Judaism than it could not be credited.
- in a minority of cases the response was unbalanced with the candidate disregarding family life as the focus for evaluation in the first sentence and then proceeding to discuss the importance of the synagogue or a particular festival for the remainder of the response.

- in some cases, the response became an answer to a completely different question: that of ‘what is the most important thing in Judaism?’ comprising of a list of suggestions but lacking in any significant analysis and evaluation.

**Q.6 ‘Aids to worship are vital in Kabbalah.’  
Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- understood the esoteric nature of Kabbalah.
- used relevant examples of aids to worship which functioned as the foundation for purposeful analysis and effective evaluation of the issue.
- offered an opposing view by highlighting that aids to worship are not totally confined to Kabbalah.
- referred to differences of opinion from a variety of Jewish groups in order to craft a successful response.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- did not really understand the concept of Kabbalah.
- tended to offer only a very limited response.
- entered into a discussion about aids to worship which was general in nature, and not specifically focused on Kabbalah.

**Summary of key points**

- It was evident in this year’s cohort that candidates who have kept up to date with contemporary Jewish thought and issues, and who have been able to apply them accurately, were able to achieve marks within the higher bands.
- It was also evident this year that there has been less of a reliance on following a set framework in order to answer AO2 questions. Whilst a framework can be a useful aid for less confident candidates, it has been good to read responses which flow naturally from one point to another in order to craft extensive and relevant evaluative responses.
- The inclusion of accurate references to scholarly views, sacred texts and sources of wisdom where relevant has been an improved feature of many responses this year.
- Accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary continues to be a characteristic feature of stronger responses. However, it was evident that the inability to understand the meaning of specialist Jewish language and vocabulary such as ‘Aggadah’; ‘Midrash’; ‘Zionism’; and ‘Kabbalah’ prevented several candidates from accessing some of the questions accurately. Maintaining and increasing knowledge of such terms should continue.
- Poor handwriting was evident in a number of scripts, and this presented a significant challenge to understanding. It is important that centres assess the handwriting of candidates prior to the examination period so that appropriate access arrangements can be made.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**General Certificate of Education**  
**Summer 2023**  
**Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**  
**UNIT 3D: A STUDY OF BUDDHISM**

**General Comments**

In Section A, the majority of candidates favoured Q1 (attempt% 53.8%), whilst Q3 was the most popular in Section B (attempt% 85.7%).

The paper seemed to be accessible to the vast majority of candidates resulting in a range of marks that reflected the varying standard of the responses.

There were some excellent answers which showed thorough knowledge and understanding at AO1 and critical analysis and perceptive evaluation at AO2. Overall, there was evidence of improvement in the quality of candidate's answers in both Section A and Section B, and all concerned should be commended for this. Areas which have improved over the past few years include structuring answers (use of introduction, paragraphs etc.); use of key words and connectives to link information, viewpoints, arguments; better understanding of what 'evaluate' entails; arguments and counter arguments carefully structured and less 'for' and 'against' type of evaluation.

The Advance Information for this year's examination and whilst there was evidence that this resulted in candidates having more in-depth and thorough knowledge and understanding of the various topics that arose on the question paper. This was often demonstrated through accurate and relevant knowledge, purposeful evidence and examples, a good range of scholarly views.

Some candidates are simply not focusing on the question set and adopting a 'write all you know' approach. Whilst this approach will gain them some credit it will not enable them to attain the higher bands.

Candidates also need to be aware that Section B questions are analysis and evaluation questions and whilst some brief AO1 content is expected, the focus needs to be on creating evaluative arguments and judgements. Stronger candidates used their AO1 knowledge and understanding as examples and evidence in support of the arguments presented. Weaker candidates simply went off on a tangent and gave AO1 knowledge on topics that were loosely linked to the question set.

## Comments on individual questions/sections

### Section A

#### Q.1 Examine the changing roles of women in Buddhism. [AO1 30]

A generally well answered question.

##### Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated satisfactory to good understanding of the changing roles of women in Buddhism.
- were able to describe some of those roles e.g. first ordination of women by the Buddha, the eight guardhammas, the Dragon king's daughter, contribution of Rita Gross. They were able to link the discussion with the whole of Buddhism, and discuss the significance of the changing roles of women in its widest possible context, i.e. within particular schools of Buddhism e.g. how women within the Theravada school, in countries such as Thailand, are still to a great extent unable to gain full ordination; contribution of women such as Ouyporn Khuankaew; the Chinese lineage; the dual sangha; role of women in Western Buddhism.

##### Features of weaker responses:

- focused entirely on the relationship between Buddhism and feminism. Although this is partly relevant it is different in focus to the question set.
- ignored the word 'changing' and gave a description of the traditional role of women in Buddhism.

#### Q.2 Explain possible reasons for the popularity of Buddhism in Britain. [AO1 30]

Answers ranged from satisfactory to good with only a few excellent answers.

##### Features of stronger responses:

- recognized the key information relating to the popularity of Buddhism in Britain, e.g., historical context; secular nature of society in Britain today; meditation and mindfulness; rejection of Christianity.
- referred to Buddhism in Wales, and the popularity of some Welsh Buddhist retreats.

##### Features of weaker responses:

- listed reasons for the popularity of Buddhism rather than selecting valid reasons and discussing them in depth.
- wrote extensively about a particular aspect, but within this discussion there was a general lack of focus, and often a great deal of irrelevance.

## Section B

- Q.3 'Buddhism is not a religion.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

This was a very popular question, which was generally well answered.

### Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated a good understanding of the debate whether Buddhism is not a religion. The main focus of most answers was on the Bachelor v Brazier debate.
- were able to draw on key areas of this debate, and many were able to reference appropriately, use the analogy of the painting (Bachelor), and eagle in a canary's cage (Brazier) etc. to support their arguments.
- were also able to draw on other areas of this topic and evaluate the arguments purposefully e.g. contribution of Ninian Smart and Noah Rasheta.

### Features of weaker responses

- tended to describe rather than analyse and evaluate i.e. describe the contribution of Bachelor and Brazier, rather than use the information at hand to facilitate their answer in a more evaluative context.

- Q.4 'Tibetan Buddhism can only be fully understood through its practices.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

Answers to this question were on the whole disappointing.

### Features of stronger responses:

- appreciated that the requirement of the question went beyond the confines of discussing mudra, mantra and mandala and referred to emphasis on visualisation; teachings of the two truths; role of tulkus and lamas; wisdom and compassion.

### Features of weaker responses:

- focused solely on the mudra, mantra and mandala, which was obviously appropriate and relevant, but did not fully answer the question set.
- descriptive in nature rather than evaluative i.e. describing the three practices of mudra, mantra and mandala without any reference to the actual question.

- Q.5 'Social engagement is a distraction on the path to Awakening.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

There were some very good answers to this question.

### Features of stronger responses:

- were able to formulate sound arguments and valid discussion, e.g. the work of Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai lama and Socially Engaged Buddhism, Joanne Macey, etc.
- made references to karma, metta, tanha as important Buddhist concepts when discussing social justice and awakening.
- provided arguments and counter arguments that were well balanced and key ideas were purposefully evaluated.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- failed to fully grasp the full meaning of social engagement within the context of the question, e.g., provided superficial references to people engaging in the workplace, at home, socially.
- provided a narrative relating to the work of Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama that was in the main descriptive, rather than evaluative. Made very few valid links to the actual question set.

**Q.6 ‘The teachings in the Mahayana Sutras are representative of reality.’  
Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

Generally, the answers to this question were disappointing.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to identify reality within Buddhist teachings and contemporary society and draw on these to formulate more successful viewpoints.
- provided a generalized overview of both the Sutras, focusing on features such as sunyata, being consistent with science. Pure Land, Bodhisattvas and how these teachings represent/don't represent reality.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- lacked an understanding of the concept of reality within Buddhism and in modern society.
- wrote extensively about the Parable of the Burning House, without making any links to the question set.

**Summary of key points**

- Candidates should focus on the question set and select information which is relevant to the issue being discussed.
- Section B questions are assessing the skills of analysis and evaluation, and whilst some AO1 content is expected, the focus needs to be on creating evaluative arguments and judgements.
- Evaluation questions at A Level do not necessarily entail simply agreeing or disagreeing. They expect an evaluation of the arguments presented.
- Scholarly quotations need to be correct, both in terms of wording and the scholar to whom they are attributed. They also need to be relevant to the issue being discussed.



**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**General Certificate of Education**  
**Summer 2023**  
**Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**  
**UNIT 3E: A STUDY OF HINDUISM**

**General Comments**

In Section A, the most popular question was Q2 (attempt% 71.3%), whilst Q4 was the most popular in Section B (attempt% 80.5%). The paper seemed to be accessible to the vast majority of candidates resulting in a range of marks that reflected the varying standard of the responses. There were some excellent answers which showed thorough knowledge and understanding at AO1 and critical analysis and perceptive evaluation at AO2. Overall there was evidence of an improvement in the quality of candidates' answers in both Sections A and Section B, and all concerned should be commended for this. Areas which have improved over the past few years include structuring answers (use of introduction, paragraphs etc.); use of key words and connectives to link information, viewpoints, arguments; better understanding of what 'evaluate' entails; arguments and counter arguments carefully structured and less 'for' and 'against' type of evaluation.

The Advance Information for this year's examination and there was evidence that this resulted in candidates having more in-depth and thorough knowledge and understanding of the various topics that arose on the question paper. This was often demonstrated through accurate and relevant knowledge, purposeful evidence and examples, a good range of scholarly views.

However, some candidates are simply not focusing on the question set and adopting a 'write all you know' approach. Whilst this approach will gain them some credit it will not enable them to attain the higher bands. Candidates should therefore be made aware that all the knowledge that they have at hand should be carefully selected when answering questions, and not attempt to fit everything they know into all their answers.

Candidates also need to be aware that Section B questions are analysis and evaluation questions and whilst some brief AO1 content is expected, the focus needs to be on creating evaluative arguments and judgements. Stronger candidates used their AO1 knowledge and understanding as examples and evidence in support of the arguments presented. Weaker candidates simply went off on a tangent and gave AO1 knowledge on topics that were loosely linked to the question set.

## Comments on individual questions/sections

### Section A

#### Q.1 Examine the influence of Vinoba Bhave on Hindu attitudes to wealth and poverty. [AO130]

##### Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated satisfactory to good understanding of the influence of Vinobe Bhave in the context of Hindu attitudes to wealth and poverty.
- included a general overview of traditional Hindu attitudes to wealth and poverty.
- referred to his relationship with Gandhi and the influence of that relationship on his work especially the concept of Sarvodaya.
- referred in detail to some of Vinobe Bhave's achievements such as the Bhoodan Movement and linked them to the question and how they influenced the attitudes of other Hindus.

##### Features of weaker responses:

- were not focused on the question set – instead they referred to the contribution of Gandhi with little reference to Vinobe Bhave.
- demonstrated only a basic knowledge and understanding of Vinobe Bhave's contributions and very little detail of his life's work.

#### Q.2 Examine traditional views on the roles of men and women in Hinduism. [AO1 30]

Generally, this was a well answered question.

##### Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated a very good knowledge and understanding of the historical background to the roles of men and women in Hinduism with references to the pre-Vedic era and how roles changed under Vedic influence.
- focused on the question and balanced in their discussion on the roles of men and women in Hinduism.
- made very good use of evidence and examples – reference to laws of manu and Stri Dharma.

##### Features of weaker responses:

- were not focused on the question set – and were imbalanced responses, which focused entirely on the roles of women. without referring or with little reference to the roles of men.
- focused only on the negative aspects of the role of women. e.g. sati without reference to the positive roles of women in Hinduism.

## Section B

- Q.3 'The Hindutva response is the only effective response to secularisation.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

Whilst this was not a popular question, the responses seen ranged from satisfactory to excellent for this question.

### **Features of stronger responses:**

- included a brief introduction on the meaning of 'secularisation' which gave the answer a clear focus.
- demonstrated a good understanding of different responses to secularisation such as the Hindutva response, the orthodox response and the universalist response.
- were able to discuss the situation in India and the response of the BJP and also different responses in non-Hindu countries and communities.
- provided a balanced evaluation of the effectiveness of different responses.

### **Features of weaker responses:**

- demonstrated a general lack of understanding of the meaning of secularisation and the Hindutva response.
- there was a tendency to describe rather than evaluate i.e. describing some of the actions of Hindu extremists in India rather than using the information at hand to facilitate their answer in a more evaluative context.
- provided either a basic or no conclusion.

- Q.4 'Hinduism has not lost its identity in Britain.'**  
**Evaluate this view.** [AO2 30]

This was a popular question, which was generally well answered.

### **Features of stronger responses:**

- included a discussion on the meaning of Hindu identity to second generation Hindus in the UK – are they Hindu, British Hindu or simply British?
- identified the main challenges to safeguarding Hindu identity in a non-Hindu country and in non-Hindu communities, and evaluated how effective Hindus have been in responding to those challenges.
- demonstrated a very good understanding of the debate whether segregation or integration is the best way to safeguard identity.
- provided specific evidence and examples given in support of the arguments presented.

### **Features of weaker responses**

- Listed reasons for and against the statement rather than selecting valid reasons and discussing them in depth.
- wrote extensively about a particular aspect, but within this discussion there was a general lack of focus, and often a great deal of irrelevance.

**Q.5 ‘Ramakrishna’s greatest success was promoting Hinduism as a world religion.’  
Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

Answers ranged from satisfactory to good with only a few excellent answers.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated a very clear understanding of Ramakrishna’s promotion of Hinduism.
- focused on the question and evaluated what his greatest success was with reference to his other contributions to Hinduism – development of Advaita Vedanta, influence on attitudes to caste and ‘idol-worship.’
- referred within the context of the question set to his influence on Vivekananda.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- demonstrated no real knowledge and understanding of the life and work of Ramakrishna.
- focused more on Vivekananda and his success in promoting Hinduism as a world religion with little reference to Ramakrishna.
- were descriptive in nature rather than evaluative.

**Q.6 ‘The path of bhakti is more practical than spiritual.’  
Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

This was generally a well answered question.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated a very good understanding of the relationship between the spiritual and the practical in Hinduism.
- understood the path of bhakti, its practical implications and the spiritual significance of the actions.
- made a balanced evaluative conclusion.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- lacked an understanding of the path of bhakti.
- provided responses that were descriptive in nature rather than evaluative.
- had no real understanding of the relationship between practical actions and spiritual significance.

**Summary of key points**

- Candidates need to focus on the question set and select information which is relevant to the issue being discussed.
- Section B questions are assessing the skills of analysis and evaluation, and whilst some AO1 content is expected, the focus needs to be on creating evaluative arguments and judgements.
- Evaluation questions at A Level do not necessarily entail agreeing or disagreeing. They expect an evaluation of the arguments presented.
- Scholarly quotations need to be correct in terms of wording and the scholar to whom they are attributed and also relevant to what is being discussed.
- Although the issue of handwriting was much better this year, there were a few scripts that were illegible in parts and candidates lost valuable marks simply because the examiner could not read what had been written. It is imperative that centres ensure that candidates with handwriting difficulties have appropriate provision made for them.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**General Certificate of Education**  
**Summer 2023**  
**Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**  
**UNIT 3F: A STUDY OF SIKHISM**

**General Comments**

Due to the low number of entries in this Option, only general comments can be provided.

In Section A, the most popular question was Q2 (attempt% 62.2%), whilst Q6 was the most popular in Section B (attempt% 94.6%).

The paper was very accessible to the vast majority of candidates and there some excellent answers which showed thorough knowledge and understanding at AO1 and critical analysis and perceptive evaluation at AO2. The answers generally were focused on the demands of the question set and as such could attain the higher bands, e.g., the answers to the question on Guru Arjan were completely focused on evaluating his greatest contribution to Sikhism without going off on a tangent to discuss whether the contribution of others was greater than that of Guru Arjan which would have been irrelevant.

Overall, there was evidence of improvement in the quality of candidate's answers in both Sections A and B, and all concerned should be commended for this. Areas which have improved over the past few years include structuring answers (use of introduction, paragraphs etc.); use of key words and connectives to link information, viewpoints, arguments; better understanding of what 'evaluate' entails; arguments and counter arguments carefully structured and less 'for' and 'against' type of evaluation.

The Advance Information for this year's examination and there was evidence that this resulted in candidates having more in-depth and thorough knowledge and understanding of the various topics that arose on the question paper. This was often demonstrated through accurate and relevant knowledge, purposeful evidence and examples, a good range of scholarly views.

Candidates also need to be aware that Section B questions are evaluation questions and whilst some AO1 content is expected the focus needs to be on creating evaluative arguments and judgements. Stronger candidates used their AO1 knowledge and understanding as examples and evidence in support of the arguments presented.

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

## General Certificate of Education

Summer 2023

### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

#### UNIT 4: A STUDY OF RELIGION AND ETHICS

#### General Comments

In Section A, the most popular question was Q1 (attempt% 68.7%), whilst Q5 was the most popular in Section B (attempt% 66.2%). Overall, the questions all seemed to elicit responses across the mark bands.

There were a number of excellent scripts seen this year and it is clear that the Advance Information has allowed candidates to prepare for the topics examined in depth. Candidates were able to make excellent use of specialist language and vocabulary in their answers in many cases.

Candidates had a better overall grasp this year of the specific AO1 and AO2 skills, which was a positive improvement, although responses to Section A were generally of a better quality than Section B, with weaker candidates relying on stock phrases and the wording of the question to extend their AO2 answers without engaging with the issues in detail.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Section A

#### Q.1 Explain different religious concepts of predestination with reference to St Augustine and John Calvin. [AO1 30]

This was the more popular Section A question and most candidates were well prepared.

##### Features of stronger responses:

- used and understood specialist vocabulary in context to explain Augustine's ideas.
- demonstrated the beliefs of Augustine and Calvin and supported these with reference to biblical teachings such as Ephesians 2.8. St. Paul's analogy of the potter and the clay, and Augustine's example of two balance pans were referenced in some strong answers.
- were aware of the Synod of Dort and could relate this to the question. The summary of Calvin's teachings was explained in detail.

##### Features of weaker responses:

- confused Augustine with either Pelagius or Arminius and could not identify his ideas specifically.
- either struggled to see any differences between Augustine and Calvin, or wrote a comparison essay as if rote learned, even though comparison was not specifically required.

- could outline the depraved nature of humanity with reference to Augustine, but did not discuss his views on salvation, atonement or grace.
- some stated that Calvin explained his ideas at the Synod of Dort, failing to grasp the chronology.

**Q.2 Explain different religious concepts of free will with reference to Pelagius and Arminius. [AO1 30]**

This question was not as popular as Q1 in Section A but, again, most candidates were well prepared for the content. Overall, the work of Pelagius was better understood than that of Arminius.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated a good understanding of Pelagius' views about original sin, often with a clear context about why these views developed. Understood the concept that sin is not inherited and in stronger responses were able to support this with biblical teachings.
- demonstrated a good understanding of Pelagius views about the role of grace in supporting humans to do good works and explained this effectively.
- demonstrated a good understanding of Arminius' views about original sin and prevenient grace, and developed these accurately with reference to the 5 articles of remonstrance.
- referred to the notions of providence, concurrence and middle knowledge to explain how free will could be reconciled with the sovereignty of God.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- conflated the views of Pelagius and Arminius with those of Augustine and/or Calvin.
- attempted to compare the two named scholars unnecessarily, often betraying a lack of understanding of either.
- struggled particularly with the views of Arminius and were often confused about how the concept of original sin could operate alongside free will in his thinking. This led to some convoluted but ultimately inaccurate explanations.
- wrote about Libertarian views with no reference to religious concepts of free will.

**Section B**

**Q.3 'There is no difference between ethical and non-ethical statements.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 30]**

This was not a popular question however, where candidates did understand that the question related to meta-ethics, some excellent responses were seen. Candidates who did not understand the concept of ethical and non-ethical statements struggled to respond effectively to the question.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- tended to define ethical and non-ethical statements with examples to illustrate, which then allowed them to address the question. Very good responses recognised that both types of statement vary and can be cognitive, non-cognitive etc.
- considered all three meta-ethical approaches studied in relation to the view in the question, while also recognising that there is scholarly diversity within each approach. Good use was made of the views of Moore, Bradley, Ayer etc.

- correctly argued that Naturalism would see ethical statements as cognitive and objective in the same way as many non-ethical statements.
- argued that intuitionists would see no difference in terms of the objective nature of ethical statements, but identified that there is a difference in how these statements are apprehended.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- rarely discussed Emotivist views in reference to this question, where these could have been used effectively. Intuitionism and Emotivism were often conflated.
- simply described the different meta-ethical theories with very little analysis or evaluation.
- did not seem to understand what was meant by an ethical and a non-ethical statement and sometimes interpreted this as ‘morally right’ or ‘morally wrong’. This was also the case for a small number of Welsh medium responses.
- did not really recognise that the question related to meta-ethics and discussed normative approaches.

**Q.4 ‘Moral terms can only be known through intuition.’**

**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

This was a popular question and in general terms, candidates had a sound grasp of intuitionism, and the views of G. E. Moore, Prichard and Ross were all used accurately. Again, this indicates that the Advance Information was of benefit to candidates.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- Naturalism was most commonly used to create a counter-argument to this statement, although a few excellent responses referencing Emotivism were seen.
- the views of scholars were well known, with some excellent responses debating the internal differences between intuitionist scholars and their approaches.
- Mackie and Warnock were used effectively to argue against Intuitionism alongside the issues stated in the specification.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- often failed to understand Moore’s views about the objective nature of intuition, describing it instead as ‘feelings’ or ‘emotions’.
- mixed up different meta-ethical approaches, with candidates unable to distinguish between Intuitionism and Emotivism.
- often misunderstood Moore’s comparison between ‘good’ and ‘yellow’ and this was then analysed inaccurately with inappropriate conclusions being drawn.
- the ‘is-ought’ problem and the naturalistic fallacy were sometimes mentioned in order to challenge Naturalism, but the implications of these problems were not really understood.



**Q.5 'Proportionalism has more weaknesses than strengths.'**  
**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

This was the most popular of the Section B questions and most candidates could identify key features of proportionalism and could state its strengths and weaknesses. It appeared to be an accessible question and responses were seen across the mark bands.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- demonstrated clear knowledge and understanding of the condemnation of Proportionalist thinking by the Magisterium.
- widely discussed the nature of the theory as viewing situations through a Roman Catholic lens.
- showed a good grasp of the technical language relating to the theory such as ontic evil and the distinction between a good act and a right act.
- compared Proportionalism with other ethical theories in order to highlight its relative strengths and weaknesses. This worked effectively when the focus remained on Proportionalism.
- could make links between Proportionalism and its roots in Aquinas' Natural Law, and discussed Double Effect and Aquinas' own Proportionalist examples.
- used relevant examples such as ectopic pregnancy to illustrate their analysis.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- often failed to understand the link between Proportionalism and Natural Law.
- confused Proportionalism with Situation Ethics and presented the two theories as identically based upon agape.
- few had a clear grasp on the guidance given by Hoose about what constitutes a proportionate reason to break a moral precept, with many stating that no guidance is given at all.
- some presented Natural Law as making absolute rules without showing awareness of Double Effect, just war theory or the nature of secondary precepts. The example of abortion was often used inaccurately in this context.
- some gave very inaccurate examples, such as arguing that Proportionalism would support genocide or rape.

**Q.6 'Soft determinism has more strengths than weaknesses.'**  
**Evaluate this view.**

**[AO2 30]**

This was not such a popular question and in general there was poor understanding of soft determinism in many scripts. However, it is evident that some centres have taught this extremely well, drawing on modern compatibilist scholars as well as the teachings of classical soft determinism.

**Features of stronger responses:**

- referred to some good analogies to explain soft determinism, such as Hobbes' example of the river and Ayer's example of the kleptomaniac. Schopenhauer's comment about what freedom entails was used to good effect.
- discussed the difference between a 'free will' and freedom to make choices and the implications of this distinction for our moral and legal frameworks.
- were able to explain why hard determinism may be more convincing, sometimes discussing whether the differences in language identified by Ayer had any real bearing on the nature of determinism.

- referred to philosophical, psychological or biological determinism and often argued that there was more evidence to support the hard determinist position, although excellent candidates recognised the issues that this position causes for moral and legal responsibility.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- had little grasp of soft determinism and showed no awareness of relevant scholars.
- defined soft determinism as ‘halfway between determinism and libertarianism’, but often then struggled to explain what this meant and would have benefitted from a more accurate definition to work from.
- simply listed arguments for and against hard determinism and did not recognise that soft determinism is not the same.

**Summary of key points**

- The use of specialist language and vocabulary to frame an answer is often a feature of good responses and a good knowledge of this vocabulary benefits all candidates.
- Candidates should avoid simply juxtaposing different viewpoints in AO2 answers and must focus on evaluating the different arguments presented. Candidates should be encouraged to draw on specific aspects of the theories under discussion rather than making very general points.
- Soft determinism was an area of weakness for a number of candidates this year.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### General Certificate of Education

Summer 2023

### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

## UNIT 5: A STUDY OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

### General Comments

In Section A, the most popular question was Q1 (attempt% 66.2%), whilst Q3 was the most popular in Section B (attempt% 67.3%).

There were a number of excellent scripts seen this year and it is clear that the Advance Information has allowed candidates to prepare for the topics examined in depth. There was evidence of continuity and progression from the Study of Philosophy of Religion at AS. Use of AS material to enhance understanding and answers at A level was a delight to read. Natural synoptic links are always a good sign of excellent use of the Specification. Wider reading which encompasses more than succinct revision summaries will allow candidates to develop learned material.

Some responses had the skeleton of an answer but lacked the detail to move up the Band descriptors. Most recognised the difference between the demands of AO1 and AO2, yet at AO2 there is still unnecessary stating of AO1 material. This resulted in some candidates running out of time, on occasion where it was very obvious that they knew far more than they had given themselves the time to write about.

### Comments on individual questions/sections

#### Section A

**Q.1 Examine the contrasting views of David Hume and Richard Swinburne on the possibility of miracles. [AO1 30]**

#### Features of stronger responses:

- did not just examine the views of the two scholars separately. The key word is 'contrasting', and stronger responses were able to present their answer in this way.
- responded with a style which suited the question. This does not necessarily mean that a view of Hume was then immediately followed by one of Swinburne (though stylistically this is exemplary.) Some did present a contrasting 'summary' throughout or at the end of the response.
- structured the response methodically. They started with the definitions of miracles and scaffolded the response so that it formed an order that made logical sense.
- referred to the possibility of miracles rather than just views on miracles.
- broke down the differences between the two scholars into their definitions, views concerning testimony and their overall analysis as to whether laws of nature can break.
- gave specific examples from the works of both of these scholars. This is one effective way of expanding the examination of the contrasting views and gives much more substance to the response.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- did just examine the views of the two scholars separately missing the key word 'contrasting' completely. This resulted in the two views of scholars on miracles being presented. While this obviously gains credit it did not show evidence of the higher order skill that the question demanded.
- had only a very basic knowledge and understanding of the views of both scholars with examination of Swinburne being rather weaker, especially when it came to his definition of a miracle and its ramifications.
- wrote a rather ad hoc explanation with very little structure, meaning it was hard to follow the argument. This was a knock-on effect of little knowledge and/or understanding of the views of both scholars.
- knew nothing about either scholar other than the very rudimentary summaries provided in textbooks and/or revision guides. These are all very useful, but reading should be more expansive. Some of Swinburne's papers for example, are digestible.

**Q.2 Explain religious language as analogical with reference to St. Thomas Aquinas and Ian Ramsey.****[AO1 30]****Features of stronger responses:**

- explained what an analogy is as well as what the term non-cognitive means.
- were able to explain how analogy lies mid-way between univocal and equivocal use of religious language and why St Aquinas deemed the latter two to be insufficient in talking about God.
- understood the idea of a causal link between God and creatures and were able to give examples.
- explained the difference between analogy of proportion and analogy of attribution.
- would be able to refer to the concepts of cause and effect and relate these to St Aquinas' ideas in the cosmological argument.
- were able to explain what it is about Ramsey's views that make them analogical concepts of religious language.
- explained that Ramsey, St Aquinas and indeed all analogical concepts of religious language, start with what we do know. This in Ramsey's case is the 'model.'
- understood what a 'qualifier' is and were able to explain this in terms of what we do know and were able to relate this to religious language.
- were able to refer to religious experience, disclosure and commitment, with understanding.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- often gave an overarching summary of St Aquinas' views with no specific terminology or understanding of the discrete parts to his analogical concept of religious language.
- where they were present, confused analogy of attribution and analogy of proportion.
- might have known what an analogy is but could not relate this to religious language. This meant that they were unable to say what this concept of religious language actually means for talk about God.
- provided little to no exemplification.
- paid lip service at best to Ramsey. They mentioned 'models and qualifiers', but had slender grasp of what these mean.
- were unable to show the use of 'models and qualifiers' in life, therefore not being able to explain why they allow 'the light to dawn.'

## Section B

**Q.3 'Jung's argument that religious belief is a product of the human mind is convincing.'** [AO2 30]

### Features of stronger responses:

- did not write extensive AO1 about Jung's views of religion. They referred to material, but only in order to then evaluate it.
- realised that there are issues raised about Jung's arguments from a psychological perspective, which could cast doubt on his argument that religious belief is a product of the human mind.
- suggested arguments both in favour of and against concepts such as the universal archetype but crucially, related all points to religious belief as a product of the human mind.
- evaluated the adequacy of arguments suggesting that religious belief is in fact an objective reality rather than a product of the human mind.
- gave pertinent examples to show how it could be argued that religious belief is a source of comfort. This can be used to both suggest that religious belief is a product of the mind as well as to suggest that this stems from an objective reality.
- referred to the views of Freud, by way of comparison, but only as one part of a larger evaluation.

### Features of weaker responses:

- made this into an AO1 question on Jung's views on religion. This limited the Band that was able to be awarded.
- specifically this means that candidates wrote about such things as archetypes and Psychology with no reference to any evaluation whatsoever.
- answered a question as to whether Jung's arguments are convincing, rather than his arguments about religious belief as a product of the human mind.
- wrote extensively about Freud's views of religion. This was either completely AO1 or contained a little evaluation in terms of suggesting that Freud's views are more convincing. This suggests that the candidates had revised Freud only or at least believed they were more competent in that area.
- showed no awareness that many religious believers would challenge Jung's views by saying that religion is a reality rather than a product of the human mind. Just because many of Jung's views can see religious belief in a positive light, does not mean that all religious believers will approve of his arguments.

**Q.4 'Understanding religious language as symbolic is an effective solution to the problems of religious language.'** [AO2 30]

### Features of stronger responses:

- referred to some of the problems of religious language, such as the challenge from Logical Positivism, but used the information only as a backdrop to the evaluation which the question asked for.
- suggested that symbolic language, as non-cognitive, solves the problems of religious language as this language has meaning outside of objective reality.
- some countered this by saying that religious language should be open to all of the same empirical tests as any other language.
- gave examples which introduced the views of scholars such as Tillich. Namely that symbols have a meaning which goes beyond what is seen at face value. Examples such as the Christian cross were used to good effect.
- also counter-argued that symbols do not have meaning for all people as well as saying that symbols change over time and many lose their meaning.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- wrote about symbolic religious language without engaging with the question.
- had little understanding of what this question was asking them to do.
- did not show awareness of what the problems of religious language are.
- did not show awareness of why symbolic religious language is suggested as a solution to the problems of religious language.
- only wrote AO1 material relating to Tillich or Randall.

**Q.5 'Different definitions of miracles are contradictory.'**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- were able to see some similarities and differences between the definitions of miracles studied. This was a good starting point for the evaluation which would ensue.
- realised that there is some complementary material between Holland's definition and Swinburne's. That is, some reference to significance or a sign.
- also realised that Holland's definition is very unlike the others studied in that his definition does not involve a break in the law of nature.
- suggested that those that do involve reference to a break in the law of nature were not contradictory in that sense.
- had sufficient understanding to state that there are similarities even between Hume's definition and Swinburne's, though could also point out where they differ.
- knew that all made some reference to divine agency.
- said that Aquinas' definition is complementary with regard to the other 'violation' miracles but his medieval language precluded one of the similarities being obvious.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- treated the question as an AO1 response and explained the various definitions of miracles that they had studied. Whilst credit is given for this, it is limited.
- where there was some evaluation present it tended to be evaluation as to whether miracles occur or not, rather than an evaluation of whether definitions of miracles can be complementary or contradictory.
- had not considered the definitions of miracles studied in relation to each other. Therefore, they were unable to pick out similarities or differences which would have helped them answer this question.
- evaluated whether miracles happen or not.

**Q.6 'Religious language can only be fully understood by those with religious beliefs.'**

**[AO2 30]**

**Features of stronger responses:**

- realised what the question was asking and were able to make evaluative points concerning it.
- commented that religious language can be understood by anyone, even if it is just due to the fact that they are sitting A Level Religious Studies without having a religious belief. To consolidate this, they used the argument that religious believers are immersed in many walks of life therefore it is invalid to suggest that different forms of life are isolated from each other.
- used Wittgenstein used to good effect both in favour of and against the statement.

- stated, with examples, key religious beliefs such as there is one God, Muhammad is his messenger and Jesus died for the sake of humanity. They used these to suggest that these can only truly be understood by those with a religious belief. Indeed, the true meaning lies within each individual religious tradition.

**Features of weaker responses:**

- struggled with this question greatly, producing responses that were very general with little or no reference to their A Level studies.
- where evaluation was present it was often of a different question, such as whether religious language is meaningless.
- did not engage with crucial elements such as whether religious language can be truly intelligible to those without a religious belief.
- gave no examples to illustrate any point that was attempted to be made.

**Summary of key points**

- Candidates need to carefully distinguish between the skills required for Sections A and B. 'Evaluate' might well need some initial 'explanation' or 'examination', but they should only be used as a basic backdrop to the 'evaluation' asked for. Do not waste time purely stating AO1 material in Section B.
- Where questions ask for more than one scholar to be referred to, try to give points of similar reference, for example in Q2.
- Where questions ask for more than one scholar to be contrasted, try to genuinely contrast them rather than simply describing one and then the other, for example in Q1.
- Cover all areas of the Specification, particularly noting the AO2 issues. The AO2 questions are primarily drawn from these and on occasion, questions that arise from AO1 material will be asked in an AO2 question. Many candidates seem to be unprepared for some of these issues and credit awarded between the two sections can differ markedly.
- Candidates should look at source material where possible. Revision summaries are just that, and candidates need to prepare in such a way that material can be tailored to the question set.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**General Certificate of Education**  
**Summer 2023**  
**Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**  
**UNIT 6: TEXTUAL STUDIES (NEW TESTAMENT)**

**General Comments**

Due to the low number of entries in this Unit, only general comments can be provided.

In Section A, the most popular question was Q1 (attempt% 75.0%), whilst Q3 was the most popular in Section B (attempt% 75.0%). The examination paper did not raise any concerns and so fulfilled its aim of setting appropriate questions in a fair and accessible manner. The full range of marks were employed to the responses provided.

Handwriting remains a concern for a number of scripts and centres need to be aware of their candidate's handwriting form and ability under exam conditions and, if necessary, make appropriate arrangements so that their work can be accessed by WJEC examiners.

Unnecessary introductions were frequently written for all questions stating what the candidates was intending to answer. Likewise, conclusions were often unnecessarily and inappropriately written for AO1.

Candidates should be reminded of the need for capital letters for key terminology, e.g., God, Jesus, Peter, Revelation and scholars' names.

**General comments on Section A**

**Features of stronger responses**

- wrote with fluidity e.g. giving Warrington's categories to a greater depth of what he is saying the purposes are and the one or two miracles to exemplify.
- considered the various possible purposes for I Peter with appropriate illustration.

**Features of weaker responses**

- provided responses written in the style of exam revision notes.
- reported that I Peter tells us stories about Jesus including the three denials and three times Jesus asking Peter if he loves him.
- stated that the purpose of I Peter is to show the love of Jesus but no illustration as to how this might be the purpose.



## General comments on Section B

### Features of stronger responses:

- made good use of scholars to support analysis and evaluation e.g. utilising Crossan's categories to frame an appropriate analysis and evaluation (Q3 and Q4).

### Features of weaker responses:

- demonstrated confusion between parables and miracles.
- misread/did not understand the area of the question e.g. Q3 parables being interpreted literally could produce an answer as to whether the Good Samaritan was in fact historical (i.e. literal).
- repeatedly delivered answers on the authorship of I Peter (Q5) *per se* with no or little mention about the letter's message (Q5).



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