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GCSE

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES A**

Paper 1 Judaism

Report on the Examination

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## General comments

It should be noted that examiners are aware of all the meticulous preparation that teachers put into preparing students for these new examinations. Schools and colleges are to be commended for their hard work and dedication.

Some students ran out of time on this paper, and presumably did this paper as their second paper in the examination session. It would be helpful for schools and colleges to ensure that their students are aware that they need to spend 50 minutes on each paper. Also, it would be helpful to ensure that students spend roughly 25 minutes on each question and that they are aware of the spread of marks. As AO2 is worth 50% of the marks on the paper, they should spend half the allocated time on these questions, and not waste time writing in too much detail for 1 or 2 mark questions.

Some students tended to confuse Christian and Jewish teachings and beliefs. For example, some students thought that Jews celebrated Pesach because Jesus did at the Last Supper. Christian ideas were sometimes attributed to Judaism, following all the mitzvot meant that Jews could get to heaven, for instance. Students also described Jewish ideas using Christian terminology, particularly on question 01.2 about life after death, for example, in references to heaven, hell and purgatory. Schools and colleges will want to note this for future examinations, and ensure that students have a solid knowledge base in both religions they study.

There were also sometimes some fundamental misunderstandings of denominations within Judaism, particularly when students attempted to discuss progressive Judaism. There were a number of generalisations about progressive Jews not following mitzvot at all, for instance. Schools and colleges might consider delivering a scheme of work, before starting the GCSE, on understanding different Jewish denominations, in order to ensure that students have a solid working understanding of the main similarities and differences if they feel this applies to their students.

The quality and accuracy of textual references was very marked across questions 01.4 and 02.4. Some responses demonstrated superb breadth of knowledge, and correctly employed textual references and quotes. Other responses correctly identified Jewish teachings and references. Some struggled to offer any teachings, particularly on 02.4 as it appeared they did not understand what Pesach was. It is recommended that schools and colleges consult the mark scheme on the AQA website which has references to relevant references. Mapping out key terms and textual references against the points of the specification may further help teachers and students.

The new AO2 marking criteria effectively differentiated. On question 01.5, 13.2% of responses scored a Level 4 of 10 marks and above; and on question 02.5, 12% scored a Level 4 of 10 marks or above. Specific issues we saw in relation to reaching the highest levels in AO2 questions included using religious teachings in a descriptive rather than evaluative fashion. Some students had good AO1 knowledge, and wanted to write what they knew, but failed to evaluate. Sometimes students failed to include religious teachings in a way that would specifically support their answers.

Some students had been trained in using writing frames that encouraged them to argue back and forth, evaluating whether the argument was weak or strong, but weaker responses tended to get muddled and failed to address the target of the question when they used such an approach. Some students confused the rubric with the Themes paper (Paper 2) and attempted to shoe-horn non-religious arguments into their essays when they were superfluous to the target of the question. The

bullet points provided in the 12 mark questions themselves provide good guidance for the responses.

## **Judaism: Beliefs**

### **Question 01.1**

The majority of students answered correctly that the term describing the quality of God was 'merciful'. Some students selected the answer 'mortal', presumably confusing this with the term immortal. Schools and colleges are advised to continue their good work in directing students to learn key vocabulary.

### **Question 01.2**

Many students identified correct ideas about Jewish beliefs about life after death, but described them in Christian terminology. This was creditworthy, but students need to distinguish between Christian and Jewish beliefs and have knowledge of their respective key terms. Many responses gained full marks.

### **Question 01.3**

This question asked students to explain two ways in which the Covenant with Abraham influences Jews today. In general, the question was not very well answered in comparison with other questions. A surprising number of responses confused Abraham with Moses. This suggested knowledge in this area was not as secure as other areas of the specification, as the question was straightforward provided they knew about the Covenant with Abraham. Stronger responses correctly identified and discussed circumcision, the Promised Land, and the idea of obeying God's commands to keep the Covenant in response. Weaker responses were unable to link the belief to the influence, and so ran out of steam quickly. Other responses went into some detail about Moses, the Ten Commandments and rule following, and therefore did not gain any marks.

### **Question 01.4**

This question asked students to explain two Jewish teachings about charity. There were very few clear references to sacred writings or other sources of Jewish belief and teaching apparent in responses. Stronger responses were able to discuss the idea of tzedakah, chesed, tithing and the principle of Tikkun Olam. Some students attempted to link giving to charity to getting to heaven, using Christian references such as Matthew 25:40 (whatever you did for one of my brothers you did for me) and Matthew 22:40 (Love thy neighbour) amongst other Christian teachings to demonstrate their line of argument. Just over one fifth of responses achieved full marks on this question, and just over three quarters of responses gained two or more marks.

### **Question 01.5**

Question 01.5 asked students to evaluate whether or not Jews had to follow all of the mitzvot (Jewish laws). Level 1 responses were easy to identify, as their quality of reasoning was very simple, and answers were often very short.

One factor that limited students to a Level 2 on this question was the simplicity of arguments offered and the lack of detail. Weaker responses demonstrated fundamental misunderstandings of

progressive Judaism on this question, and so attempted lines of argument indicating that progressive Jews do not follow any of the mitzvot, and Ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox Jews had to follow all of the mitzvot. Another factor limiting performance was descriptive use of religious material, so responses would embark on a line of discussion demonstrating knowledge of what some of the mitzvot were, without addressing the question of whether or not Jews needed to follow all of them. There were also a number of wordy introductions about positive and negative mitzvot, which wasted students' time.

At Level 3, students wrote responses showing clear knowledge and understanding and were able to include some evaluation. They were clearly aware that they needed to select religious material to exemplify their discussion, but sometimes the choice of material did not necessarily assist the argument. Another factor which prevented the response from reaching Level 4 was the lack of application of religious teachings to the target or insufficient evaluation.

The Level 4 responses to this question stood out because of the quality and sophistication of discussion presented. Stronger responses discussed how following the mitzvot would be challenging in modern society, particularly kashrut laws, Shabbat observance, and reference to mitzvot in relation to the Temple, gender and the cohenim. Stronger responses were also able to discuss literal and non-literal understanding of sources of authority, clearly linking back to different traditions in Judaism. Many thoughtful conclusions included reference to the role of free will, and carefully balanced the strongest clinching arguments from both sides.

Many responses gained full marks for Spelling Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG). It was clear that many schools and colleges had enlisted additional support for students who required it, with a small minority producing word-processed responses. We were very grateful that this support had been offered, as there were very few illegible scripts this year.

## **Judaism: Practices**

### **Question 02.1**

The vast majority of students were able to identify that Brit Milah was the Jewish birth ceremony for boys. However, 'mohel' and 'sandek' were equally as popular as each other for incorrect choices, which suggested that there was some confusion with some students knowing that these terms had something to do with the birth ceremony, but unable to correctly identify the term itself.

### **Question 02.2**

Some students appeared to not read the question carefully which asked for give two things that happen as part of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. Some responses started off correctly, mentioning reading the Torah scrolls, or wearing prayer items, but then began to discuss the significance, thus limiting the number of marks able to be awarded. Other responses, again indicating that the question had not been read carefully, described what happened in the Brit Milah or Bat Mitzvah ceremonies.

### **Question 02.3**

This question asked students to explain two contrasting ways in which Jews worship. A significant number of responses contrasted worship in the synagogue with worship at home with success. Others took the perspective of differences within Judaism, and went on to contrast Orthodox worship with progressive worship, again with success. Some responses took a different line,

contrasting liturgical and non-liturgical worship, again successfully. Students responded well to this question, with just over half of responses gaining full marks, and the vast majority gaining two or more marks.

#### **Question 02.4**

A significant minority of students did not attempt the question which asked for two reasons why Jews celebrate Pesach. This may suggest that some students didn't understand the term Pesach as Passover, and thus were unable to access 5 marks as a result. Pesach is the term used in the specification and therefore students should know this key word. This question required reference to an accurate sacred writing, belief or teaching. Few clear references were apparent in the responses. Suggested references have been included in the mark scheme.

Many students were able to correctly identify that Moses was involved, but some went on to link the Pesach celebration to the giving of the Ten Commandments which limited the marks which could be awarded as they were discussing the reasons for celebrating Shavuot. A significant number of responses understood the meanings of the foods on the Seder plate, but then failed to go on and explain a second reason why Jews celebrate Pesach. Just under two thirds of responses gained marks on this question. This would suggest that knowledge in this area of the specification was not as secure as other areas.

#### **Question 02.5**

This question required students to evaluate whether 'For Jews, Shabbat is more important than any festival'. A small number of students did not attempt to answer this question and it appeared that some students were running out of time at the end of the examination.

Some students appeared to have misread the question and so argued against the statement by discussing significant events in a Jewish person's life, especially rites of passage such as Brit Milah, Bar and Bat Mitzvah as well as marriage. Others ignored the 'For Jews' part of the statement, and discussed the importance of Easter, Christmas and so on.

Similar to the Level 1 responses on 01.5, Level 1 responses to this question were easy to identify. The quality of reasoning was very simple, and answers were often very short.

Lots of Level 2 responses were entirely descriptive of how the Shabbat is observed by Orthodox Jews so these responses were largely AO1, and there was little attempt to evaluate the question. This stood true of those who were able to correctly identify festivals such as Pesach or Yom Kippur, where they wrote about what Jews do to celebrate each festival but did not answer the question as to the relative importance of the festivals.

Level 3 responses included much correct knowledge and understanding but the quality of evaluation prevented the response reaching Level 4 with little reference to whether Shabbat was more important than festivals. In some responses, there was an attempt to evaluate, but they fell short because they did not include ideas about the significance of Shabbat to Jews. Responses described it as being a time to devote to spiritual and family togetherness, but failed to go much further in their explanation. Conclusions tended to be weak at this level, with reference to Jews making a personal choice about whether Shabbat or festivals were the most important; or vague and unsupported statements about them all being important in Judaism.

Again, Level 4 responses stood out because the quality and sophistication of discussion presented. Stronger responses were able to discuss the importance of Shabbat to Jews today, linking to the importance of family, collective worship, Jewish identity as well as linking to observance of the Shabbat to the coming of the Messianic Age. This was contrasted with arguments about difficulties observing Shabbat in the modern world, the importance of a Jew's relationship with God, particularly through Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, how Pesach linked the Jews to significant events in their own history, as well as other references to other Jewish festivals not on the specification, but of course creditable. Conclusions at this level were stronger, although not as strong as those seen in responses to question 01.5.

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

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