



GCSE

Religious Studies A

8062/16 Paper 1: Judaism

Report on the examination

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General

Centres deserve congratulations for their thorough preparation of students this year. Overall, students engaged well with the exam, with most attempting every question. It was evident that they had been well taught, and the majority managed their time effectively across the questions. Students took the exam seriously, clearly benefiting from teachers' guidance in using appropriate exam techniques that were supporting their answers.

The examining team considered the level of demand in this year's paper to be in line with the previous series. Students were able to access marks across the full range of questions, which were clear and straightforward. Students of all ability levels were able to do well; showing that the paper was accessible to everyone. The examining team remained consistent throughout the series and is to be congratulated for their continued commitment and timely delivery of the marking process.

1.1

This question asked students to identify the total number of mitzvot in Jewish Law. The vast majority responded correctly with '613,' offering a confident start to the paper. Over 90% of students answered this accurately. However, some students confused the total number of mitzvot with the separate figures for positive and negative commandments. The percentage of questions with no marks awarded was just above 5%.

1.2

Question 1.2 asked students to identify two Jewish beliefs about the Covenant at Sinai. I would suggest that this topic should be revisited by centres. Many students referred to the story of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt, and the majority successfully identified two relevant beliefs, for example, that the Covenant at Sinai forms the foundation of Jewish Law, or that it represents the covenant between God and Moses. Students frequently mentioned the Ten Commandments being inscribed on tablets of stone and the concept of the Jews as God's chosen people. However, only around 45% of students achieved full marks with just over 70% gaining at least one mark. It is also worth noting that some students incorrectly attributed the giving of the Ten Commandments to Abraham rather than Moses. Almost 25% of the answers received no marks.

1.3

Question 1.3 asked students to explain two ways in which belief in the sanctity of life influences Jews today. Students who correctly understood that this refers specifically to the sanctity of *human* life and not life in general (e.g. animals), generally performed well. Many were able to apply key concepts such as *Pikuach Nefesh* and *Tikkun Olam* to a range of scenarios, often stating that saving a life is considered the greatest mitzvah in Judaism. Relevant examples were frequently given, such as driving someone to hospital on Shabbat, working as a medical professional during Shabbat, or breaking kosher laws if life is at risk. These responses effectively demonstrated how the belief influences Jewish practice today. The mark distribution suggests that further teaching and reinforcement may be needed for this topic. Over 45% of students achieved the full four marks, while around 80% secured at least two marks. Less successful responses often neglected to focus on the influence of the

belief, instead discussing the sanctity of animals' life or straying off topic. As a result, these students lost marks due to less sophisticated exam techniques. Nevertheless, the majority were able to demonstrate some relevant subject knowledge and provide appropriate examples.

1.4

Question 1.4 asked students to explain two Jewish beliefs about the role of Moses. For many, this was a 'gift' of a question, as they had studied the key moral principles in detail and were able to explain the concept of *Tikkun Olam* (healing the world) with clear references to humankind's responsibility toward God's creation in various forms. This question was accessible for the majority of students; however, the examining team was surprised by the number of blank responses which reached over 5%. A common challenge remained in achieving the fifth mark, as many students omitted the required reference to a relevant source of authority. Based on the statistics, around 30% of students received full marks, whereas another nearly 30% did not include a named source of authority. While this reflects a more rigorous academic standard, it aligns with the published guidance for this question. Despite this, the question remained accessible, with more than 80% of students achieving at least two marks, showing that most were able to engage with the topic and demonstrate sound understanding.

1.5

Question 1.5 asked students to evaluate whether Jews should not fear God's judgment after they die. The question was accessible, provided students were able to construct well-reasoned responses using logical chains of reasoning. Overall, responses varied. A number of students appeared not to read the question carefully, resulting in many answers focusing on judgment during Yom Kippur. These responses did not fully address the question unless they made a clear link to judgment after death. More successful responses correctly focused on the afterlife judgment, referencing concepts such as *Sheol*, *Gehinnom*, *Gan Eden*, and reincarnation. The latter was sometimes described without a full understanding of the idea of transmigration of the soul in Judaism. The mark distribution was as follows: More than 10% of students achieved Level 4 or above. One notable observation was the continued use of writing frames, which, while helpful to some, occasionally limited students' ability to develop more nuanced arguments or led to confusion. The appraisal phrases "this is a strong argument because..." or "this is a weak argument because..." were used more effectively than in previous years. However, some students, particularly in the middle and lower ability ranges had struggled to appraise the strength of their own arguments clearly. In contrast, more able students generally thrived with this approach. More than 45% of students achieved Level 3 or higher and over 80% achieved Level 2 at least, indicating that overall performance on this question was fairly good.

1.5 Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG)

SPaG (Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar) marks were generally quite good this year. It is encouraging to see that more centres are making appropriate use of word processing for students who require it. However, a small number of illegible scripts were still encountered towards the end of the marking period. 45% of students achieved the full three marks for SPaG and 40% of students were awarded two marks, and just over 5% received one mark.

2.1

Question 2.1 asked students to identify which source is considered the Written Law in Judaism. Surprisingly, this proved to be a more challenging one-mark question, with about 40% of students not gaining any marks. It may be helpful to remind teachers of the importance of ensuring that less able students can clearly distinguish between the Torah and the Talmud. That said, 55% of students were able to select the correct answer.

2.2

Question 2.2 asked students to explain two reasons why Jews pray. This was widely regarded as a 'gift' question, and very few students lost marks. A broad range of responses was seen, including references to seeking forgiveness, comfort, guidance, and good judgment. There was some minor confusion around the concept of the *Shekhinah*; a few students mistakenly suggested that Jews pray in order to experience the *Shekhinah*, rather than understanding it as the presence of God that may result from prayer, not its sole purpose. In terms of mark distribution: more than 80% of students achieved the full two marks, and more than 90% gained at least one mark. Just over 2% of students did not score.

2.3

Question 2.3 asked students to explain two contrasting features of Jewish practices associated with the birth of a child. Nearly 4% of students did not attempt this question. However, most students found it accessible and responded well. A common approach was to describe the practices of *Brit Milah* and the Redemption of the Firstborn in Orthodox Judaism, or *Brit Bat* in Reform Judaism. Some students used Hebrew terms such as *Pidyon Haben* (redemption of the firstborn) and *Shalom Zachar* (a celebratory gathering for a newborn boy). It is worth noting that a frequent misconception was to mention baptism as a Jewish ceremony, which is incorrect. Centres should clarify this when teaching the specification. Another popular response was to reference the naming ceremony for girls in Reform Judaism, which can take place at any time after birth. Lower-scoring students struggled to develop their answers beyond presenting two facts and struggled to develop their answers fully, sometimes providing generalised responses such as "celebrating parties" without clearly linking them to Jewish tradition. Overall, around 35% of students gained full four marks, and 50% scored three marks or more. That being said, just over 18% of students did not score on this question, suggesting that additional focus on this topic may be beneficial for centres.

2.4

Question 2.4 asked students to give two reasons why the festival of Pesach is important to Jews. Several students appeared to find this question challenging, with around 10% not attempting it at all and almost 15% not giving any creditworthy answers. Among those who did respond, more than 60% gained two marks or more. However, only around 20% achieved the full five marks by including a reference to a source of authority— an element that would have been straightforward for students who were familiar with the story of Moses taken from the book of Exodus. A popular approach was to discuss the symbolism of the objects on the Seder plate, alongside key ideas such as freedom from slavery, the angel of death passing over the Israelites' houses, and Pesach as a family celebration. It was unfortunate that some students included relevant quotes but neglected to name the source of authority, thereby missing the fifth mark.

2.5

Question 2.5 asked students to evaluate whether the Ark is the most important feature of the synagogue. Lower-scoring students often became descriptive rather than evaluative, focusing heavily on AO1 material about various synagogue features instead of assessing their significance. Common responses mentioned the *Ner Tamid*, the *Bimah*, seating arrangements, the separation of men and women in Orthodox synagogues. Only a small portion of student responses reached Level 4 because many did not read the question carefully. Instead of evaluating the importance of the Ark, they wrote broadly about the significance of the Torah scrolls. Even when students presented arguments both for and against, this balanced but limited approach was capped at a maximum of Level 3 (eight marks), as it lacked deeper exploration of the Ark's significance. Of those who answered the question, around 10% achieved Level 4, just over 30% Level 3 or above, a further approximately 30% Level 2 or above, and just over 10 % Level 1, indicating that most students made a fair attempt. As with question 1.5, some students relied on writing frames that were sometimes unhelpful, though they may still serve as useful tools for less able students.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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