



GCSE

Religious Studies A

8062/2A Thematic Studies (excluding textual studies)

Report on the examination

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Introduction

Most students taking this subject were well prepared and made a serious attempt at answering all the questions for the four themes which they chose. The most popular themes as in previous years were: Theme B (Life), Theme A (Relationships), Theme D (War and Peace), Theme E (Crime and Punishment) followed by Theme F (Human Rights) and finally Theme C (Existence of God). Most students had a fair grasp of the subject matter and the religions they had studied as the foundation for their answers. It was clear that the religion studied was not a barrier in attempting to answer any question. A small minority broke the rubric and attempted to answer more sections than they are allowed.

It was noted that a few scripts were missing the answers to the multiple-choice questions. Students should be reminded that all answers need to be written in the answer books as only these are scanned and forwarded to examiners for marking.

Centres are reminded that the number of marks allocated for each question gives an indication of the sort of length of answer that is required. For the part .2s, worth two marks, a sentence for each point enough. However, a minority of students wrote more, often a short paragraph and occasionally far more.

This year the .3 question required explicit reference to the main religious tradition of Great Britain. Students therefore had to give a Christian response plus another response in their answers. Some students gave two responses, from, for example, Islam and lost marks as only one response could be credited. In Theme C, a Christian and a non-religious response was required and again marks were lost where students offered a Christian and another religious view.

On the .4 questions worth five marks, not naming the source of authority caps the answer at four marks. Students, for example, could write that in the Ten Commandments it says, 'Do not steal' or the Bible or Jesus says, 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. This would be sufficient for the mark, providing it was relevant. It is still the case that many students use the same few teachings, often without clear application to the topic in question. The best students use a wide range of appropriate teachings, for which they correctly name the source.

For some students this year, mis-understanding of key terms prevented marks being gained. For example, students' ability to write about polygamy, immanent, peace-making, and corporal punishment were affected. Centres are advised to encourage students to make full use of the key vocabulary available on the AQA website.

It is recommended that a broad range of teachings are taught to students. If only a small number of teachings is used, it is more difficult for students to apply these and make the teachings relevant to the actual question, without giving a lot of explanation, which is rarely done. This was often seen in responses to 1.5 where many students used 'Do not commit adultery' as part of their response to why religious believers should wait until they are married before they start a sexual relationship. Sex before marriage is not adultery and students often did not see the distinction or tried to apply the teaching in a roundabout way. Students who

employed alternative teachings such as 'Flee from sexual immorality' or 'Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit' were better able to argue their points of view.

Other commonly referenced teachings that were often misapplied included: "Love thy neighbour," the concept of free will, the belief that God forgives unconditionally, and the tendency to attribute all Biblical teachings to Jesus. Examples of these include the sanctity of life, "Go forth and multiply," and the account of creation.

As in previous years, atheists and humanists were often inaccurately written about. They were usually presented as selfish and amoral, e.g. in 2.5, the typical atheist view was presented as 'no afterlife, so do what you want'. Centres should teach that not believing in a religion does not mean a person does not seek what is best for all, or to comply with the law and so on. These groups were clearly being misrepresented.

Comments on individual Questions

Theme A: Relationships and Families

1.1

There were no issues with this question, with the vast majority choosing the correct option.

1.2

Most students understood the term and were able to give two simple reasons why polygamy is considered wrong. The most common reasons were from the Christian tradition – one flesh, Adam and Eve, one man: one woman; adultery/cheating. A small number misunderstood the term as being polytheism.

1.3

The focus was on relationships. There was some confusion with same-sex marriage, which at times affected credit – acceptance of relationships is quite widespread across religious believers, whilst marriage is not. As long as the idea of relationship could be seen, credit was given. Most answers contrasted Roman Catholic or Islamic beliefs with more liberal Christian groups, often Quaker.

1.4

Some students gave points appropriate for marriage, rather than family. The nature of the family, and its roles were all credited when given, but for example, points made about procreation are about marriage, not the family (procreation being what creates a family, rather than the family itself), and so were not credited.

1.5

Students could provide good arguments to agree with this statement but many found it difficult to give an alternative point of view. Many referred to non-religious believers, which was not relevant to the question – unless writing what they thought religious believers should do, such as keeping to their religious laws. Free will was a common argument to disagree, but wrongly used, so often for little credit. There was also the erroneous use of 'love thy

neighbour' to justify co-habiting (as opposed to in support of those who cohabit, which is different). Many students wrote about adultery in relation to Christians and sex-before-marriage, which is wrong (adultery being a relationship between people who are (one/both) married to other people). Many students did correctly point to New Testament teachings about sexual immorality. It was common to see students argue that 'Go forth and multiply' was applicable at any time – in or out of marriage – so it was used on both sides of the argument.

Theme B: Religion and Life

2.1

There were no issues with this question, with the vast majority choosing the correct option.

2.2

Most responses gained full marks as there was such a wide scope for options. Where students did not gain credit, it was almost always because they gave teachings about pollution / stewardship, rather than the required ways of reducing pollution.

2.3

Most students gained good marks for this question. The most common contrast was between two Christian views, which was easily able to get full marks. Most responses also used specific teachings to support their points, providing strong evidence for the attitudes they were explaining. Where it was less well answered students often quoted the legal position as religious teaching.

2.4

The question sought reasons why animal experimentation is considered wrong. Many students provided 'contrasting' views, not different views on the same side. No credit was given to the part of the responses that supported animal experimentation as it did not address the question. Some students wrote generally about stewardship and the planet / God's creation, which meant they did not demonstrate why animal experimentation was wrong. Credit was given but at a lower level. It is acceptable to use generic teachings, but these then must be applied to the specific topic if full marks are to be achieved.

2.5

This question could be approached in several ways – whether people should or should not care for the environment, whether there is an afterlife to be rewarded in, whether there are other ways to be rewarded. Different responses tackled this in different versions of those ways – all gaining credit. Most students were able to give a quite balanced answer in that they could give good arguments on both sides in terms of validity and depth of detail. Given the statement said 'people' and not 'religious people', there was more scope for a non-religious response than most students gave.

Theme C: The existence of God and revelation

3.1

Those students selecting the wrong answer selected all three of the distractors. B – suffering and evil – was the only option which could not be used to argue for God's existence.

3.2

Where students did not gain full marks, for this question, it was because they did not know the term immanence. These answers usually gave ideas about God, such as that God created the world.

3.3

Most students did well with this question, finding beliefs easy to explain both for and against miracles. Where students did not achieve full marks, it was usually because they gave two religious beliefs, either both Christian or Christian and Muslim. These responses could only gain marks for one Christian belief, because of the rubric.

3.4

This question sought views about the First Cause argument – whether it was a good or bad argument, strong or weak, whether it proved God's existence or not. An ideal response would have given a reason why the argument is believed to be strong, and one why it is believed to be weak. Where students knew about the First Cause argument, they usually wrote excellent answers. Many students were able to remember what the First cause argument said but then did not address the focus of 'views about', so were credited at the simple explanation level.

3.5

This was a straightforward essay question which elicited some excellent responses. Many students gave good reasons and arguments to agree with the statement and then found it easy to give several arguments against it. Most commonly, they wrote about the status and authenticity of holy books, then contrasted this with a variety from ideas of nature, special revelation, miracles, prayer, worship, pilgrimage, and religious leaders. The best answers were able to also write about the difficulty of reading holy books (illiteracy, inability to understand, the mystic nature of these books and so on), as a counter to their strength.

Theme D: Religion, peace and conflict

4.1

Most students selected the correct option.

4.2

Most students could give two points to show why religious believers see terrorism as wrong. Usually they were quite generic, and focused around the sanctity of life. A small number wrote about the bad publicity which terrorism gives to a religion when done in its name.

4.3

Many students wrote about using weapons of mass destruction (WMD), whereas the question is about having them (ie not use). These responses gained no marks. Religions are united in their condemnation of any use, given their indiscriminate and disproportionate nature. This extends to an absolutist stance that these weapons should neither exist nor be held – where that point was made, credit was given, even when it explained the impact of their use. It was very unusual to see responses about chemical or biological weapons, which would have been very easy to explain points against; almost every answer assumed nuclear. A small number of students referred to WMD are like hand-guns or knives, which can be carried around on one's person as a form of personal protection.

4.4

Where a student wrote about peace-making, they stood a good chance of gaining full marks. However, many students wrote about peace, or not war, or not violence. There was potentially some credit gained here dependent on what was said. 'Blessed are the peacemakers' was ubiquitously found – few answers did not use it, so that even if everything else in the response was not relevant, that quote (usually with its source of authority) was. Some explained how war was a form of peace-making – this was not credited as it is not a religious perspective.

4.5

This question, asking if 'holy' is an appropriate descriptor for war – where students realised this idea, they usually gained high marks. Whilst a number of students wrote about holy war, or Just War, or argued for / against war marks were awarded.. Many students gave clear arguments for why war could never be seen as holy – death, suffering and destruction being opposite to a loving God. It was often a Christian or multiple religion based argument. They used a good range of teachings to support this view. The alternative view was usually less well developed, though many references were made to holy war and lesser jihad, as well as Just War. Students overall agreed with the statement, and the strength of their arguments clearly showed that. Where students did argue about whether it is right or wrong to go to war, without referencing the idea of 'holy', they gained credit but at a lower level. It was the case that those students offering Buddhist perspectives wrote only in terms of a totally pacifistic / anti-war stance – this in spite of many examples of Buddhists taking up arms out of compassion, for justice and so on.

Theme E: Religion, crime and punishment

5.1

Most students selected the correct option.

5.2

Most students gained two marks for this question.

5.3

The best responses to this question were able to give good explanations why religious believers do and then do not support corporal punishment. Many wrote about different

contexts for corporal punishment, ie the justice system, for example in Shariah law, and in the home / pastoral setting ('Spare the rod, spoil the child'). The question did not specify the British legal system and so answers which wrote about using corporal punishment for breaking religious law, or the use of it to keep religious law were credited. Where students did not get full marks they often wrote about capital punishment or alternative punishment, which was not the question, and therefore gained no marks.

5.4

Most students were able to give good answers and gain high marks for this question. If a student did not gain full marks, it was usually because they wrote about forgiveness being not possible, which was almost always presented as a religious stance (rather than a personal stance in specified cases). It was clear that some students did not know a religion in enough detail to be able to argue effectively and theologically correctly about something being unforgivable. A number of students said that crimes such as murder are unforgivable in Islam, which is not correct (shirk is the only unforgivable sin). Interestingly, students did not explore mortal sins in Roman Catholicism, which would have lent weight to a view about some sins being unforgivable. Credit was given for answers which focused on forgiving those who broke religious law.

5.5

Many students found the agree point of view much easier to write about than the disagree side. They could write detailed and varied arguments about greed, supported by teachings. However, on the opposite side, arguments about hatred, jealousy, retaliation and revenge were often used, but in less depth. Many students wrote about greed without reference to committing a crime. There were a few arguments based around the Fall as evidence of greed, and in particular Eve as the culprit and when used, these were not well expressed.

Theme F: Religion, human rights and social justice

6.1

Most students selected the correct option.

6.2

Generally those students who understood the term 'people-trafficking' gained full marks for this question. Whilst many students focused on why people-trafficking itself is wrong (against equality etc), others explored the natural links to people-trafficking (i.e. modern slavery).

6.3

Many students explored this question well, almost always focusing on the use of material wealth. A few answers considered the abuse of wealth, ie its misuse through gambling, for example. Where students got limited / no marks, it was usually because they wrote about the accumulation of, or attitudes to wealth. A number of students understood the question to be asking for contrasting attitudes, so wrote about a good use versus a bad use. This did gain credit dependent upon the content. Also some thought the question sought good use versus hoarding / keeping for self (which is not the use of).

6.4

It was common to see students write about the roles of men and women, and how they were equal or different. Given that religions often have quite strict roles within marriage or family, which are seen as part of the faith, this was credited. Some students wrote entirely about equality, without touching on treatment, and so their marks were capped at the simple explanation level. Many answers simply gave 'rules' for women to follow, which distinguished them from men, e.g. hijab, must be silent in church, etc – this was inferring rather than explaining treatment (unfair in nature).

6.5

This question sought a focus on actions, rather than on teachings of equality, or prejudices – which separated the better answers from the rest. Since students tried to focus on the theology behind the actions, there were a lot of examples of equality teachings. Students found it easy to write about how discrimination is an issue which should be stopped but fared less well in how to stop it. Some students raised the question of whether it was desirable to stop all discrimination, arguing that positive discrimination could be seen as an effective way of supporting minority groups. Generally, students found it quite straightforward to argue that discrimination cannot be stopped, often through exploring those equality teachings, alongside teachings about compassion and justice. They found it less easy to then argue that it can be stopped, because their arguments were based around making everyone believe the same teachings.

Overall, most students found this a very accessible paper and made a serious attempt to do well.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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