



GCSE

Religious Studies B

8063/2Y Section A: Perspectives on faith (Judaism)

Report on the examination

Version: 1.0
June 2025

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General Comments

Students appear to have found the Jewish Beliefs and Teachings section accessible and attempted the majority of the questions. The Jewish Practices section was more challenging for students and led to many questions not being attempted. Students may not have attempted the questions (notably 2.3 and 2.5) possibly due to timing or struggling to interpret what was required within the response to the question.

As in previous years, marks were lost because the questions had not been read with sufficient care. Responses to AO1 questions were sometimes vague rather than specific or did not attribute the quotations to specific sources of authority in the 5-mark questions. AO2 responses at times lacked sufficient development of ideas to attain the higher levels.

It was noted in the AO2 questions that many students were able to formulate responses with greater logical chains of reasoning allowing their answers to be developed with explanation, evidence and exemplification. Students who missed out on achieving Level 3 in the 12-mark questions often did so because their answers contained insufficient development of points or were not focused on the specific nature of the question posed.

The standard of spelling, punctuation and grammar was consistent with previous series although there was slightly less range of specialist terms in the AO2 responses particularly, which impacted on the number of those achieving the high performance SPaG mark. Handwriting also proved to be an issue on occasion. Some students would have benefitted from having a scribe or using a laptop.

Question based comments

Beliefs

1.1

Most students were able to select the correct answer for this question. It was clear though, from the numerous crossings out that many students had either not read the question or the options thoroughly, likely in a rush to get the paper started.

1.2

The majority of students were able to identify what the Shekhinah was and provide two ways in which Jews had experienced it.

1.3

This question was answered well and confidently by the majority of students. Many students were able to recognise the precious gift of life from God and that everything should be done to preserve it. There was good reference to murder, abortion and euthanasia as examples of what is not accepted when considering the sanctity of life. The students relished in explaining the principle of Pikuach Nefesh and provided good examples of how life is more important than following the mitzvot.

A small, but significant number of students repeated ideas, lacked clear examples or confused the concept with the moral principles and general kindness towards others. A small minority misunderstood and referenced saving animal life and the environment rather than focusing on saving human life.

1.4

Many students understood the question and tailored their answer accordingly. Students were able to write confidently about God's loving and merciful nature with supporting examples and sources of authority. However, many struggled to develop their answers fully.

The stronger responses included clear beliefs such as 'God is loving because he gave the Jews the Torah' and 'God is merciful because he forgives sins on Yom Kippur.' Lower-level responses were vague (e.g. 'God is nice') indicating that many lower-level students did not understand the question.

Quite a few students wrote about God's other characteristics such as omnipotence and omniscience, therefore they were unable to secure any marks. Other students misunderstood the question and wrote about how Jews should be loving towards God. As in previous years, many students did not gain full marks because they did not state the source of authority for the quotations they had included in their answers.

1.5

The majority of students knew and understood this question. Most engaged with the evaluation of whether it is more important for Jews to focus on this life or the afterlife, though quality varied.

Stronger responses were clearly structured, presenting balanced arguments for and against the statement with supporting Jewish teachings and practices. For example, many referenced Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to support the idea that Jews focus on this life through repentance and fasting to secure a good year. This showed good understanding of how Jewish festivals relate to life on Earth. They also gave multiple counterarguments using the Ten Commandments, the mitzvot, and the Abrahamic covenant to support the view that Jews are motivated by a belief in life after death. These arguments were well explained and supported with accurate references, including a commandment ('Keep the Sabbath day holy') and the Brit Milah practice.

When students explored the existence of an afterlife, stronger answers mentioned that there is scant information in the Torah, earthly life was temporary, but the afterlife is expected to be eternal. These responses also explained ideas of Gan Eden and Sheol whereas in the less successful responses, these terms were mentioned without any explanation.

Less successful answers were often vague, repetitive, or lacked evaluation and explanation. The main discriminator was the ability to analyse and justify a conclusion linked to the question. Many of these less successful responses used a formulaic response, this is helpful as a guide however, restricted the more able students. Many students were not able to respond above a Level 2 answer due to not exploring the concepts in adequate detail, thereby lacking evidence of logical chains and reasoned consideration.

Practices

2.1

Most students were able to select the correct answer for this question. There were some who selected the incorrect answer, possibly due to misreading the options.

2.2

Majority of students answered this question correctly, giving clear reasons why Jews will visit the synagogue.

2.3

This question provided differentiation on the paper between those students who knew and understood what the Talmud was and those who did not. Many students could name the Mishnah and Gemara however, most answers indicated that students were unsure as to what the Talmud is.

Strong responses clearly explained that some Jews see the Talmud as important because it offers rabbinic commentary and helps to interpret the mitzvot, showing how to live according to God's will. For example, many students explored that it provides a commentary on the mitzvot and helps Jews to gain a better understanding. These approaches were often contrasted effectively with the views that the Talmud is less important because it is newer, or not directly from God leading to it being misinterpreted.

Low-level answers tended to confuse contrasting beliefs with simple descriptions such as saying the Talmud is spoken or used in synagogues which did not amount to differing views. Lower-level answers also focused on why the Torah is more important, but as this was not the focus of the question these points were unable to be credited. Some responses neglected to provide contrasting views, instead giving similar views limiting their answers to 2 marks.

2.4

Student performance on this question varied in quality. Many responses showed a basic understanding of Shabbat rituals at home, but only some were able to clearly identify two distinct ways with developed explanations. A common strength was recognising the importance of family and rest; several students mentioned sharing a meal, lighting candles, or resting from work, which are accurate descriptions of the home-based Shabbat experience. For example, some students explained that lighting candles marks the start of Shabbat and is a way of keeping the commandment to remember and keep the Sabbath day holy. In this way, they linked practice with belief. However, some answers simply listed activities without explaining their importance. The requirement for a source to gain the 5th mark was often missed. Stronger responses used the commandment from Exodus; "Keep the Sabbath day holy" and directly related this to home observance.

2.5

Students found this question the most challenging. The majority of students did not focus on the Jewish marriage ceremony and the rituals within it, which meant that their answers neglected to answer the set question. For example, many responses focused on the differences

between Jewish and Christian marriages, resulting in their answers being centred around the Betrothal and Yichud, which occur before and after the marriage ceremony itself so were not related to the question focus. A large proportion of responses were also very general in their arguments, such as referring to ethical issues of cost, venue, same-sex marriage and relevance of marriage generally, therefore being more suited to the Themes paper rather than Jewish practices. Many responses that were able to refer to Jewish rituals during the marriage ceremony unfortunately lacked reasoned consideration, logical chains and evaluation, and many did not include Jewish teachings clear reference to religion. Many were one sided with vague generalisations such as ‘people don’t do this anymore’ leading to Level 1 and Level 2 responses.

Students who were more successful were able to refer to rituals and features of the Jewish marriage ceremony such as the Ketubah, Chuppah, wedding vows, smashing of the glass, unveiling of the bride, and circling of the husband by the wife. They provided good evaluative chains of logical reasoning as to why Orthodox Jews still continue these and the importance of valuing tradition. These arguments were often contrasted to Reform and secular Jewish perspectives regarding why they may be outdated. For example, many were confidently able to explore the Ketubah as a spiritual contract outlining the hopes of the couple and the adaptation of it to allow for modern views on divorce. The stronger responses also combined the symbolism of the historical and traditional aspects of the ceremony with a more modern aspect, for example, the smashing of the glass representing the hardships of marriage, not just the destruction of the temple.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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