



GCSE (Short Course)

Religious Studies

8061/5 Thematic Studies

Report on the examination

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Introduction

Once again, this year, I am delighted to report that entry numbers for the specification, at around 17,500, are higher than in the previous year. There were many outstanding scripts written by clearly very able students and it was obvious that, across the board, students had worked hard in preparing for the examination. Personally, I am delighted that by its very existence, this course is allowing a significant number of students the opportunity to gain a worthwhile qualification in Religious Studies, that they may not otherwise have had. Centres should be applauded for providing their students with this opportunity.

The request in 2024 regarding the submission of word-processed scripts seemed to have a positive effect. There appeared to be more of these scripts submitted, with each of the three units printed on separate pieces of paper as I requested. This was helpful and made the marking process easier. Thank you to all centres who did this.

Unless pressurised by lack of time, students are well advised to at least attempt to answer questions that they think they cannot do, rather than leaving them blank. Many appeared to not understand the term 'polygamy' on 01.2 but some clearly had a guess at the answer and may have earned a mark or two, whilst others left it blank and thus forfeited the chance of any marks. Adopting the policy of at least having a go at answering the 12-mark AO2 questions is likely to result in at least a level 1 answer, rather than level 0.

As in previous years, a number of students neglected to attempt any part of question 2 – 'Religion, Peace and Conflict'. In some cases, this may be due to poor time management but in most cases, it seems not to be. Not attempting the multiple-choice question 02.1 is hard to understand, as was not attempting 02.2 on religious beliefs that show terrorism is wrong. Fewer made this error than previously, but it is too costly an omission to ignore.

Assessment Objective 1

- As remarks on the specific questions will show, the multiple-choice questions were very well done. The large majority got both correct.
- Part 2 (the 'Give two') questions allowed students to show knowledge of polygamy and terrorism. Both were quite well done, although the technical terms in the questions were problematic for some.
- Responses to the 'contrasting beliefs' question in part 3 were less successful, especially 02.3. Providing detail was a problem for some. Please note, that from 2026, the word 'contrasting' in the question will be replaced by 'different'.
- AQA has made great efforts to ensure students are aware that in the part 4 question, the **source** of the reference to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching **must** be identified. Without the source, no mark can be given. Most gave the

source in their answer, but too many did not. A few “quotes” were loose paraphrases and on occasions, students appeared to make them up. From 2026, this question will become a 6-mark question with the extra mark given for establishing a clear link to apply the “quote” back to the topic in the question.

- The religions that can be used in AO1 are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Students should be aware that in AO1, references to Atheism, Paganism and Humanism will not receive marks.
- Some students used a small number of beliefs and teachings repeatedly in answers, even where they were not relevant, without attempting to justify the inclusion.

Assessment Objective 2

- The general standard of many of the AO2 answers was slightly lacking. The 12-mark AO2 question requires students to **‘Analyse and evaluate aspects of religion and belief, including their significance and influence.’** Too many students treated this as another opportunity to display assessment objective 1 as their answers were knowledge heavy but light on analysis and evaluative reasoning. To achieve higher levels, reasoning needs to be developed to support different points of view, including the students’ own, and applied to the statement in an evaluative way.
- Whilst writing frames, acronyms or ‘formulae’ can be helpful to students who struggle with the structure of what is required in an AO2 question, they tend to focus on AO1 rather than AO2. Thus, they can restrict the marks a student can receive. It is evident that some students who used them could possibly have written a better answer without relying on them.
- As most statements in the AO2 question have religion built into them, clearly there needs to be clear references to religion strongly applied to the statement.
- The guidance under the statement on the question paper includes ‘may refer to non-religious arguments’ alongside four bullets beginning with ‘should’. It was difficult, but not impossible to justify including atheism or any other non-religious arguments in either answer due to the religious focus of the statements and it was not a requirement. Most non-religious references were lacking substance and did not properly address the statements about whether religious believers should have sex before marriage, or whether war could ever be described as holy.

01.1 and 02.1

Both of these questions were very well answered.

01.2 and 02.2

The purpose of these questions is to give two simple correct pieces of information with no further detail required. Providing this was not a problem for many, but some struggled with the meaning of polygamy, despite it featuring in a different question in 2024. In 02.2, a small number tried to give two contrasting beliefs which were not required. From 2025, this question will change to requiring just one piece of information to be given for one mark.

01.3 and 02.3

It was important that, to achieve the full four marks, one of the contrasting religious beliefs needed to come from Christianity - the main religious tradition of Great Britain. This style of questioning is not used every year, but most students had no problem with this although a proportion did not refer to any religion at all, referring to 'some people' and 'other people'. This restricted their mark to a maximum of 2 for an answer containing information that could be said to come from an identifiable religion.

Many contrasted the beliefs of any two from the Catholic Church, the Church of England or the Quakers. Many of these answers lacked precision with the focus being on 'one believes one thing so the other believes the opposite'. Islam was also used widely along with Christianity in both questions.

Pleasingly, very few answers displayed insensitivity over same sex relationships in 01.3, despite many using Leviticus 18:22 in their detail for the belief against. 'Love your neighbour' was widely used in support, although the interpretation of 'love' was not always used as intended.

02.3 proved a little problematic for many. The question asked for two contrasting beliefs about having weapons of mass destruction. Many students interpreted this as 'using' rather than 'having' so their responses were seen as not answering the question. If answers included both 'having' and 'using', only the relevant material was given credit.

01.4 and 02.4

In 01.4, the nature of the family was interpreted quite widely, including plenty of references to a nuclear family and an extended family. Along with procreation, loving, cherishing, supporting, teaching and raising children in a faith were all widely used as the role of the parents in the family. This was seen as correctly relevant to the nature of the family. Exodus 20:22 was regularly used with the source usually being the Bible or the Ten Commandments.

02.4 was also interpreted quite widely and Quakers were often cited as a pacifist Christian denomination. Matthew 5:9 was the most used source of authority. The most successful answers fully addressed peace making as in the question with some less successful ones focusing more on peace rather than peace making.

01.5 and 02.5

In addition to the comments about AO2 above, many students were too broad in their interpretation of the statements, introducing material that was outside the parameters of what was required.

In 01.5, a large proportion used too much of their answer writing about sex outside marriage rather than sex before marriage making use of teachings on adultery, the transmission of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy leading to abortion. This did not answer the question. The inclusion of the phrase 'Religious believers' at the beginning of the statement was widely overlooked seemingly removing the need to include references to religion in their answer. This was an error.

The need to procreate was given as a reason for marriage but it was portrayed as the sole purpose of a sexual relationship. Ideas such as unity between two people, sex providing pleasure, showing love and consummating a marriage were widely omitted.

In 02.5, the idea of a just war became mixed up with holy war. Whilst some justified the inclusion of just war, many did not, so it was judged not to be answering the question. Answers tended to be quite generalised and focused more on whether war is right or wrong. The idea that it could be holy was often overlooked. Jihad was correctly included as part of an Islamic response and this usually enhanced answers because it is directly focused on holy war.

Level 4 answers are usually a pleasure to read, there were some excellent answers to both questions. These students tended to score highly on the AO1 questions as well and will richly deserve the grades they have been awarded.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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