

## WORLD RELIGIONS

### Overall grade boundaries

#### Standard level

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 13	14 - 25	26 - 39	40 - 49	50 - 59	60 - 69	70 - 100

### Standard level internal assessment

#### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 4	5 - 8	9 - 11	12 - 14	15 - 18	19 - 21	22 - 30

### General comments

This year was the first cohort that was not piloted and the new numbers (449 candidates this year compared to 238 in May 2012) meant that student performance that was more normative and less dependent on the vagaries of small cohorts. The IA paper remains innovative and the assessment and the approach required to successfully complete the paper is a better preparation for the rigours of university learning than more standard examination and essay formats, although these have a part to play.

### The range and suitability of the work submitted

Once again the range and suitability of the work submitted was excellent. Although there is a full range of marks, even weaker students indicate that they enjoy the possibility to own their research projects and choose their topics of research. There are a number of pitfalls in carrying out this kind of research and teachers are required to provide appropriate guidance to enable their students the best opportunities for success. As stated last year, research projects usually produce better results when the research title is framed as a question rather than as a statement. Even questions should be formulated in a way that avoids the possibility of answering 'yes' or 'no'. It is strongly recommended that teachers draw upon the command terms used in Paper One and Two and guide students accordingly. Good teaching will also help students to find appropriate sources and evaluate them. Websites on religion are rarely objective and therefore cannot be used as hard evidence or as places to discover 'facts'. This is also true of interviewing believers, who tend to be subjective but present themselves as objective. In this kind of project, basic 'triangulation' skills are required to produce excellent work.

To reiterate another point made last year, students need to evaluate sources, with a balance struck between empirical research (interviews, web searches, visits, periodicals or books produced by religious communities) and secondary scholarly reading. Students need to be told that comparing the two different kinds of sources seeking similarities and differences is the way to tackle this kind of assessment. Library resources on religion may be sparse and students need to be taught how to find scholarly sources online.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

The students and teachers were more familiar with the requirements of the task and there were no examples this year of students suffering because they were not aware of the criteria. The highest performers achieve a level of work that would compare well with university level performance. On the whole this remains a highly successful assessment that students embrace and seek highly original research titles that often reflect their own concerns with attempting to understand controversies in the religious arena. As a general comment, students are advised to avoid their own religious allegiance. This is something I will return to as a generic point for all assessment.

## Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- Provide advice to students on compiling a research question so that it encourages evaluation and reflection rather than descriptive answers.
- Encourage candidates to research a religion that is not their own to avoid subjectivity and common knowledge responses.
- Ensure candidates are taught the basic processes of compare and contrast as a method study.
- Ensure candidates are made aware that website data on religion is rarely 'factual' and requires evaluation, as does interview material.

## Standard level paper one

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 6	7 - 12	13 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 30	31 - 35	36 - 50

### The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Although students were able to describe the basic beliefs and practices of the discrete world religions, they were not always able to focus these on the questions in such a way to identify the key beliefs and practices relevant to the task. This would suggest that they were attempting to rote learn as examination practice. The Islam question suffered badly from this, where students seemed to have universally learned the five pillars and tried to apply it to the question. As in last year's paper, they were very good at answering the Taoism question but generally weaker on Islam, Judaism and Christianity. It may be that where a religion is totally unfamiliar to the teacher and the students, a factual approach is taken to learning and teaching, whereas when students are familiar with a religion, they attempt to answer the question based upon common knowledge understandings gleaned from family and mosque/church/synagogue attendance. It is absolutely essential that teachers instruct students in the difference between practising a religion and studying a religion. It is also important that students are directed towards appropriate secondary sources rather than religion orientated websites.

### The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Generally speaking students did as expected in the examination process. The spread of marks was normative, replacing the rather distorted statistical graph of last year, where the very small numbers and the impact of two excellent schools affected the overall shape. As commented above students were generally strong on the basic beliefs and practices of a world religion, although less so on practice and more so on doctrine. This probably reflects the text books used in schools and the knowledge base/approach of teachers. Paper 1 is a formulaic paper in which students need to find their 3 points in answer A and 7 points in answer B. Most students did not repeat information in B, however, some wrote in a more essay style response that overlooked that they needed to find seven points for the examiners.

### The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Generally, students were stronger on Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism than Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Too many of the weaker responses tried to deal with the latter by answering the religion to which they were affiliated. In such cases the answers were often culturally idiosyncratic or lacking the appropriate knowledge and understanding. The Islam

question was dealt with very superficially. As in Paper 2 students were too attached to the 'five pillars' approach to understanding Islam and this may reflect the teaching method or the texts being used.

## Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- Students need to be advised concerning appropriate resources
- Paper 1 is a formulaic exercise and students would be helped considerably if they were advised on how to handle the examination. They need to write answers that ensure that they have 3 points and 7 points for the examiners to score. If they write in a narrative short essay style, they need to ensure that they give themselves a chance to score as close to 10 as possible by counting the points that they are making. Examiners will not score for elaborating a point.

## Standard level paper two

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 16	17 - 20	21 - 23	24 - 27	28 - 40

### The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

In general students performed across a normative range of grades, answering a numbering of challenging questions on various world religions. As with paper 1 students who attempted to 'blag' answers based on their common knowledge understanding of their own religion tended to do poorly. Generally speaking knowledge gleaned from church/mosque/temple based on confessional approaches to teaching a religion are inadequate to respond to questions in the study of religion. It was clear that a number of students opted to answer the question on their own religion as an 'easy' route. It generally produced disappointing outcomes.

### The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Students on the whole appeared to have been taught well on the essentials of the religion, a kind of common core of doctrine and practice that seemed to be the basic elements of the faith. Consequently they were able to deal with questions effectively to a point. Teachers were clearly getting to grips with teaching a number of world faiths and directing students to the appropriate challenges set by a number of world religions. Students were able to memorize or even internalize such knowledge. Paper 2 is far more about problematizing various issues in the study of a religion and only a small minority were able to do this successfully. Those that did and were graded appropriately did so at a high level of attainment.

### The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Surprisingly students avoided questions that in the mind of the examiners were less difficult, for example, the Hindu and Sikh questions. This may have reflected on the ability of teachers to operate inside a 'comfort zone' with Indian religions. A number of Sikh students attempted one of the Sikh questions and generally succeeded in spite of the general trend to do badly at one's own religion. Here the 'failing' was to acknowledge any other Sikh text and its significance as a comparison. Indeed the failure to compare and contrast was noticeable and is generally implicit in most questions.

This was equally true of the Hindu questions where the necessity to organise and structure based on academic categories was often lacking except from the very best students. Many students chose Judaic-Christian questions, probably feeling on safer ground, however, it was clear that their knowledge of doctrine was stronger than their awareness of practices. The

awareness of Jewish marriage customs or the contribution of monastics to Christianity was not very high.

The question on creationism was a popular choice, and one that many students (especially from North America) thought that they knew something about the creationist/evolution dichotomy. They did, to some varying extent, but it was too polarised. Most Christians generally accept a version of 'Intelligent Design' theory, a compromise that the students seemed not to be aware of.

The problem of 'regional' religion was common in the Buddhist answers also. The question on the significance of meditation in Buddhism far too often received answers that made Buddhism into a 'New Age' western version of itself and far from the everyday practice of millions of Asian Buddhists. On the other hand, students were generally more aware of the diversity within Buddhism than other religions.

The question on Islam was not dealt with well. Very few students realized that the question was about the legitimacy of Sufism in Islam in spite of the quotation used. Generally the question was answered from the perspective of 'normative' Sunni Islam, where love of Allah is considered fundamental to the religion, and dhikr (remembrance of Allah) is construed through the practice of the five pillars. Consequently the weaker students wrote about the five pillars and the stronger ones wrote how the five pillars lead to love of Allah. Few candidates even mentioned Sufism or were aware of its existence. This once again is probably cultural. Sufism, as a variety of Islamic practice, is not normative in the USA where young American Arabs have little knowledge of it. Those who successfully answered the question tended to be South Asian Muslims where Sufism remains a dominant mode of practice.