

WORLD RELIGIONS

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-13	14-25	26-40	41-49	50-60	61-69	70-100

Standard level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

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

General comments

This year again saw an increase in candidature (644 candidates this year compared to 449 in May 2013) thereby increasing the reliability of the statistics. 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

The IA in world religions offers the scope for candidates to engage with questions of deep and urgent interest to them and this keeps the subject alive and relevant. Sometimes, however, it may be that students, teachers, or both are new to the multi-disciplinary approach that characterizes the study of religions, and getting used to the specific demands of this assignment can take time. The depth and significance of the best student work is evidence that the effort is worth it, however.

While students at the top of the range scored very high marks and really excelled, reaching a standard acceptable at university level, those at the lower levels showed progressively limited range of reference. Some schools were ill-advised to apply a formulaic approach, assuming the assignment to be in essence one of comparison. In fact, where students compared their own traditions with someone else's (and these were usually comparisons between Christianity and another religion) the assignment tended to evidence a lack of comprehension of both, their task being too complex for the assignment unless applied to highly specific examples. Comparative analysis works when it is highly focused and widely informed.

Some schools were ill-advised to apply a formulaic approach, assuming the assignment to be in essence one of comparison. In fact where students compared their own traditions with others (and these were usually comparisons between Christianity and another religion) and the assignment tended to evidence a lack of comprehension of both; the task being too complex for a paper of this length, unless applied to highly specific examples. Comparative analysis works when it is highly focused and widely informed.

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.

Overall, the submissions showed a broad range of achievement and a good degree of candidate engagement and development.

Candidate performance against each criterion

In sections A and B where there were often signs that candidates had not spent enough quality time on their chosen area to develop the right question through reading and research specific to this vital preliminary stage. A majority of marks lost were finally down to problems with the scope of the assignment: the very best papers showing bold, genuine interest and initiative on the part of the student along with careful guidance from the teacher, particularly in these early stages of framing a suitably focused research question.

Again there was a full range of marks in evidence and a broad range of ability in research and argument under sections C and D. In all cases, however, the search for a diverse range of sources of academic rigour and integrity was a decisive factor in the quality of the assignments overall.

In general, candidates seemed to have understood the formatting requirements of the task so as to avoid losing marks on section E.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

The imaginative task of sharing another's religious experience sympathetically and reflectively is not always an easy one and requires open-mindedness from the student for which most will need help from the teacher. This is a key factor and applies equally to those without a religious background as to those coming from a particular religious tradition. More often than not, instances where a candidate lost interest or the topic became unwieldy were actually down to a shortfall in this regard.

Teachers are advised to guide students through the assignment in two distinct stages, 1) the preliminary research phase, resulting in the development of a tightly articulated, interesting research focus, and then 2) a presentation of in depth research and analysis leading to reflection on findings, methodology and future possibilities.

Students may be encouraged to include a comparative element and to make specific comparisons of doctrine, belief and practice. However, teachers must be on their guard against giving free rein to generalized, partial or judgmental comparisons which are more likely to occur when the student is relying on experience, and not necessarily detailed knowledge, of their own religious background.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	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 there were few rubric infringements many candidates lost marks due to not meeting the demands of the question. This was evident in two specific ways: firstly, by the lack of recognition of the command terms. This was particularly evident in (b) questions when candidates often gave outlines or bullet points to questions that had asked them to 'explain'; secondly, candidates lost marks when they failed to answer the specifics of the question. This was particularly evident in Question 6(b) when many candidates gave a very comprehensive outline of the Five Pillars of Islam but failed to explain the importance of salat and zakat in helping Muslims 'not to stray from the right path.' Some candidates failed to understand that question (a) related to the set passage. This often resulted in responses which were outside of the remit of the question.

Answers to Judaism were generally weaker than for any other religious tradition. This was usually because the answers related to a Christian interpretation of this religion rather than of Judaism as a distinct and living tradition. A common misconception was that Judaism was 'of the old' and had been superseded by Christianity. There was also a common incorrect perception that Judaism is a religion of rules and severe punishments for breaking of the rules.

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

Candidates understand the rubrics of the exam paper with few examples of candidates answering all questions. Similarly there were few examples of candidates failing to complete the required number of sections.

There was little confusion of terms between the traditions. The vast majority of candidates were able to use a high level vocabulary relevant to the specific religious tradition they were writing about. This was reflected in their ability to more successfully 'outline' and 'identify' than to 'explain.'

The answers on Taoism generally showed a greater understanding of key concepts and an ability to explain their impact on daily life. Many responses showed analogies they had learnt to help them understand key concepts.

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

Question 1

(a) This question was usually well answered although a minority of students failed to relate their answers to the specific suggestions of Krishna, as required in the question.

(b) The question asked for the relationship between the teachings in the passage and yoga as a path to moksha. For many candidates the wording of the question was not fully recognised. This resulted in some responses failing to mention yoga at all and many responses describing varnashramadharma, which wasn't mentioned in the passage.

Question 2

(a) Many candidates were able to explain the central teaching of the passage with particular reference to the link between burning and craving.

(b) There were some excellent answers but for a minority of candidates there was constant repetition of the points made in 2(a). There was some excellent use of specific religious language.

Question 3

(a) Few candidates answered question 3 but for those that did many repeated core concepts of Hinduism and reincarnation/transmigration instead of refining answers to Sikhism

(b) Generally well answered with understanding shown regarding the importance of union with God.

Question 4

(a) It was obvious that many candidates were aware of the importance of this passage although there were many responses in both parts (a) and (b) to a Christian interpretation rather than the importance to Judaism.

(b) Again there were references to the importance of the Chosen People through a Christian interpretation. The answer resulted in many lists of laws/duties but little explanation.

Question 5

(a) Generally well answered with candidates usually showing an understanding of the Trinity and the concept of salvation in Christianity.

(b) Again this was usually well answered showing an understanding of key Christian concepts. The most effective answers were able to give relevant explanations using language specific to Christianity.

Question 6

(a) Usually well answered with candidates being able to refer to at least three different ways.

(b) Some candidates lost marks when they gave a generic outline of the Five Pillars of Islam rather than limiting the answer to how salat and zakat help Muslims not to stray from the right path.

Question 7

(a) Well answered with many responses showing an understanding of key concepts of Taoism and the confidence to apply them.

(b) Usually well answered although some candidates lost marks as they gave a generic explanation of Taoism rather than the specifics referred to in the question of – 'living simply'.

Question 8

(a) and (b) Fewer candidates responded to part (a) and (b). There seemed to be a wider divergence in answers with some showing a clear understanding of Jainism and others trying to answer the question from their understanding of Hinduism.

Question 9

(a) Generally well answered. Many candidates were able to identify the important features of the soul from the passage. It was noticeable that the underscoring of relevant parts of the passage by the candidate had helped some formulate a clear answer.

(b) Again generally well answered with many candidates being able to explain teachings about the soul rather than merely outlining.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- Students need to be advised concerning appropriate resources.
- Engage in activities which allow candidates to try to explain what they have learnt.
- Work on a portrayal of Judaism as a living world religion, and not a Christian interpretation of the religion.

- Provide adequate support on how to approach the examination such as highlighting key words in questions, etc.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-5	6-10	11-17	18-20	21-24	25-27	28-40

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

In general students performed well across a normative range of grades, answering some very challenging questions on various world religions. As was observed in 2013 in both papers, students who attempted to answer based simply on their common knowledge and understanding of their own religion tended to do poorly and the information was often incorrect. Knowledge gleaned from church/mosque/temple almost inevitably based on confessional approaches to teaching a religion are generally quite inadequate to respond to questions in the study of religion.

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 religions on which they answered. They were able to deal with questions effectively to a point. Both students and teachers are 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. This has shown consistent improvement over the last two years. Paper 2 is far more concerned with analysis and evaluation but generally these skills also seem to be improving and there were some excellent responses to a range of questions.

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

Candidates attempted a good range of questions with very varied results. A check on the two textbooks most commonly referred to in answers as sources of authority explains some reason for this. The books cover a great range of religions with very little on each. There are some very surprising omissions, generalisations and inaccuracies. These were clearly reflected in some students' answers. For example: all who gave an account of the construction of the Guru Granth Sahib said that it included the writings of Guru Gobind Singh; there was no mention at all of the Doctrine of Double Effect in relation to Roman Catholicism and abortion; it was assumed that all Hindu men became forest ascetics; there was very little knowledge about the practices and beliefs associated with Shabbat, and answers on the status of women in Indian religions were very muddled indeed with students claiming that they were equal to, inferior to and superior to men in each of the religions.

In relation to the question on meditation there was a good deal of waffle about getting a warm cosy feeling. Different types of Buddhism were discussed but there was very little about different types of meditation. The relevance of the Five Precepts for the contemporary world produced a lot on alcohol and sexual misconduct drawing the conclusion that the Precepts were out of date. There was very minimal Buddhism comment – mostly it was a sociological exercise.

The question on the Sikh Gurus and religious experience of the divine was very unpopular and generally very poorly answered. No students seemed to actually understand the question and some managed to answer it without mentioning the Gurus at all.

Very few students knew any detail about different Jewish teachings and practices in relation to conversion. Almost all stated that Orthodox Jews would never perform conversions. Only one mentioned the mikveh. One said that an adult male convert would have to be circumcised exactly as a baby by a mohel and a rabbi. Another said that if someone was already circumcised then at the Beth Din they would be given a needle to prick the scar and draw blood.

The question on how personal revelation, through experience of God, has led some people to convert to Christianity was again poorly answered. Most students appeared to know nothing at all about personal revelation and simply wrote that people often converted when they had experienced a tragedy.

The question on Christian pacifism was popular. Many students responded that Jesus came to earth to correct the bad practices found in Judaism. There were some answers about the crusades and one mentioned the Spanish Inquisition. Only one student mentioned Quakers.

The Islam question on prohibitions with reference to individual moral conduct and the greater good of the community of Muslim believers (umma) was the most popular in Section B. However, there were very few good answers. Many mentioned zakat. However, although some said it was 2.5% - they, without exception, wrote that this was of total income, not surplus and most, incorrectly, explained it as charity which people gave to the poor. There were some who wrote competently about the possible effects of alcohol abuse but most did not use the term umma even though it was in the question.

The question on the purposes of creation was popular but there was very little engagement with the topic and little use of the quotes. Some answers were less than a page in length.