

May 2015 subject reports

World religions

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-12 | 13-25 | 26-41 | 42-51 | 52-62 | 63-74 | 75-100 |

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 |

Recommendations for IB procedures, instructions and forms.

The procedures are working well and all assessments were received in time.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The range of topics selected is wide and demonstrates the enthusiasm of the candidates for this component. The more ambitious topics (originality) are handled well by strong candidates, but it is certainly a good idea for teachers to carefully advise weaker candidates to cover safer well-trod ground as more unusual areas of religion may be difficult to research for the less able candidate.

Candidate performance against each criterion

A Rational and preliminary research

This could be improved by many candidates. The key here is to show the sources of preliminary research and development that has taken place in knowledge and understanding through the process of preliminary research.

B Plan for study

The more ambitious topics (originality) are handled well by strong candidates, but, as mentioned above, it would be a good idea for teachers to carefully advise weaker candidates to cover safer well-trodden ground as more unusual areas of religion may be difficult to research for the less able candidate. Candidates should be advised to select research topics that are well-resourced in primary and secondary sources.

C Summary of significant findings

Interviews need to be supported by literature searches rather than be presented alone. Successful candidates will compare and contrast literature and interview results in their key findings and reflect on the difference in the critical reflection.

D Critical reflection and evaluation

Strong candidates handle this well, but weaker candidates often provide summaries of the research as though they were writing conclusions to an essay. It would be useful for teachers to remind candidates of the criteria for the critical reflection section, focusing on what needs to be included. Overall candidates need to be reminded that this is a challenging but innovative assessment in that it tests the candidate's ability to research a project rather than writing up the results of the research (essay, etc). Candidates are marked on their research skills.

E References and compliance with format

Many candidates need to improve their referencing and should be encouraged to use one standard system throughout their work. Also it would help if teachers gave weaker candidates more assistance with following the format as presented in the study guide.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

The main recommendations for future teaching are given in the previous section, in particular criterion D.

Further comments

The IA is working well in world religions and aids the candidates to demonstrate different skills than those found on the examination papers. The assignments covered a very wide range of topics and showed some interesting research. Teachers now need to help candidates hone their skills.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-7 | 8-14 | 15-21 | 22-27 | 28-33 | 34-39 | 40-50 |

General comments

The paper differentiated well with a wide range of responses in each specific religion as well as across the whole exam paper. In some responses candidates expressed some knowledge but little understanding, which often resulted in candidates' inability to give expanded answers.

The paper requires candidates to answer five two-part questions which relate to a textual reference. In some questions candidates are expected to directly relate their answer to the passage. Some candidates showed their understanding of this requirement by underlining key words in the passage or in the trigger question. Unfortunately some candidates failed to address the specific nature of the question at all and responses did not develop any further than a general description about the teachings of a particular religion.

Candidates are required to answer from five different traditions. There were few instances of candidates confusing the traditions. Even in the most basic answers there was recognition of distinctive features or teaching.

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

Questions requiring an analysis of beliefs about an afterlife caused difficulties for some candidates. A common misconception was the similarity between Christian and Jewish views. As such, some candidates used Christian terminology and teaching about Olam Ha-Ba with no recognition of the substantial differences between Jewish and Christian beliefs. There were also many examples of candidates spending time giving lengthy descriptions of figurative beliefs about Heaven and Hell with little theological under-pinning.

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

There were some excellent answers through which candidates showed an understanding of the key concepts of the religious tradition. This was particularly evident in Hinduism, Christianity and Taoism. In the latter, it was evident that understanding had been supported by the study of analogies associated with Taoist beliefs regarding 'non-violence'.

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

Question 1a and b - Hinduism

Generally well answered with candidates usually able to select key concepts. In 1 b some candidates failed to follow the instructions to 'deduce from the passage' and answers given made no reference at all to the passage.

Question 2a and b - Buddhism

Some very good answers which analysed the key concepts of Buddhism using specific religious language. There were a few instances where candidates did not refer their answer in b to the path to Enlightenment.

Question 3a and b - Sikhism

There were few responses to this question. Answers tended to be either very detailed or minimalistic. In some answers there was confusion with Hinduism.

Question 4a and b - Judaism

There were some very weak answers in which candidates attempted to apply beliefs about Christianity. In 'part a' many candidates lost marks for failing to refer to the passage.

Question 5a and b - Christianity

There were some excellent answers in which the teaching regarding the three parts of the question (heaven, hell and purgatory) were explained. Some responses gave a very literal interpretation of what they believed hell or heaven was without reference to actual Christian teaching. A common misconception was that purgatory is a place of judgement.

Question 6a and b - Islam

Generally, this was well answered with candidates making reference to the passage for the teachings. The majority of answers explained relevant doctrines regarding life after death although, as with Christianity, some descriptions were given of the benefits candidates assumed awaited them in Paradise.

Question 7a and b - Taoism

Candidates' responses were often more confident when referring to Taoism. Many used allegories to explain key concepts. There was a level of understanding often exhibited in such answers which was superior to their responses to other religions.

Question 8a and b - Jainism

There were few responses to this question. In a few cases candidates applied their explanation of karma to their understanding within Hinduism, not as related to the passage given.

Question 9a and b - Baha'i

Most responses were able to explain key features of the passage. It was rare to find a response that recognised that every child is considered pure and holy.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should practice underlining key trigger words in exam questions.

Candidates should practice reading and analysing text before responding to questions.

Teachers should deploy strategies to ensure candidates understand and can apply their learning.

When candidates are writing from their own religious tradition attention should be paid to the representation of the integrity of the religious tradition as a whole.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-4 | 5-9 | 10-17 | 18-21 | 22-24 | 25-29 | 30-40 |

General comments

There was a general improvement in the standard of work submitted for this session over the previous year. Many candidates seemed to have a more detailed understanding of the areas covered. There were also indications that some had read around the subject areas. However, there still appears to be a lack of confidence on the part of some showing a lack of in-depth knowledge. Evaluation also showed improvement though there is still work to be done here in order for candidates to produce balanced arguments and not simply rely on facts and personal opinion.

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

Candidates were weakest on the Christianity, Islam and Judaism questions, particularly Judaism. However, there was a problem with Christianity for which many answers were confessional and failed to evaluate the questions.

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

The best answers were probably the Hinduism ones. The weakest were Sikhism which was generally misunderstood.

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

Many answers were no longer than half a page. There was often no real evaluation and seldom very much. Candidates would appear to need more assistance and training in what is required for this paper.

Section A

The most popular questions were 1, 3, 4, & 7.

Hinduism

1. Discuss the significance of the Vedas in Hindu belief and practice.

This tended to produce some very general answers with too much emphasis on belief and too little on practice.

2. Examine the relationship between God (Brahman) and self (atman) in Hindu thought.

This was not a popular question although there were some good attempts.

Buddhism

3. Assess the importance of the Three Jewels to lay Buddhists.

This was the most popular of the two Buddhism questions. Most candidates were able to make a good attempt at this although some seemed confused as to the meaning of dhamma (dharma) and many missed the reference to 'lay', and so wrote about monastic life.

4. Examine the meaning and importance of the principle of karma within Buddhist ethics.

The major problem with this question was that many candidates ignored the word 'ethics' and so wrote very generally about karma and Buddhism.

Sikhism

5. Examine the link between Sikh ritual life and Khalsa membership.

There were very few answers. There seemed to be considerable confusion about the Principles followed by Khalsa Sikhs as opposed to non-Khalsa Sikhs. This needs to be studied in more depth.

6. Assess the degree to which the emphasis on family life (kirat karni and vand ke chakna) forms the foundation of Sikh ethics.

There were very few attempts at this question. Some candidates seemed generally unaware of the difference between kirat karni and vand ke chakna which need to be clarified.

Open-ended question

7. With reference to one religion, either Hinduism or Buddhism or Sikhism, discuss the importance of overcoming clinging to the "self".

This was very popular. Some answers tended to be very vague and generalised with little religion-specific detail. Candidates need to be clear about the concept of 'self' in the religion they are studying.

SECTION B

The most popular questions were 11, 13 & 14.

Judaism

8. To what extent do you agree with the statement that “Judaism teaches that abortion is always wrong”?

Many answers were very weak and no candidates appeared to know what Judaism actually teaches about abortion. Often answers were general ‘sanctity of life’ responses which could have applied to any religion.

9. “The Torah, both written and oral, is the word of God; so to seek to interpret it for the 21st century is to call its authority into doubt.” Assess the accuracy of this statement.

This was very unpopular and the responses were generally weak. Again, candidates did not appear to understand fully the difference between the written and oral Torahs, their status and the importance accorded to them by different denominations.

Christianity

10. Compare and contrast Christian daily private devotions and communal prayer.

There were some good answers but, once again, there were too many that were generalised and non-specific.

11. Examine the Christian belief that Christ is Redeemer.

There were some very good responses although a surprising number did not link their answers to the idea of redemption from Original Sin and wrote instead about Christ as a teacher and miracle worker. It appeared both here and in Q.10 that candidates were writing from personal belief and experience rather than objective study.

Islam

12. Discuss how communal ritual prayer (salat) by Muslim women is affected by gender.

Responses were almost all very weak. Candidates simply did not have the knowledge to address the question and need more preparation in the practice of Islam.

13. Examine how hajj can be a unique communal and personal religious experience.

Answers tended to focus on the ‘experience’ idea. However, many had surprisingly little knowledge of the observances of Hajj and therefore their responses often made little sense. Many of the answers were simply about feeling close together. Also in the sense of ‘communal’ there should have been reference to the ummah.

Open-ended question

14. With reference to one religion, either Judaism or Christianity or Islam, assess the origins and authority of its sacred texts.

There were some good responses but many had little understanding of what was meant by sacred texts. Strangely though interestingly some long passages on the Apocrypha of the Bible

appeared which showed wider study. Many candidates omitted Hadith from Islam and others thought that the Jewish texts were simply the first five books of the Tenakh.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

The questions are fair and accessible within the remit of the study guide. Candidates appear to need more detailed study of the religions and topics with a range of texts rather than relying on overview texts which is what many answers suggest. Some of the texts which candidates cite in their responses are both inadequate and inappropriate. It would certainly improve responses if they used dedicated texts for the religions which they are studying.