

May 2017 subject reports

WORLD RELIGIONS

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

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|--------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0 - 13 | 14 - 28 | 29 - 43 | 44 - 54 | 55 - 65 | 66 - 75 | 76 - 100 |

Standard level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

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

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The range of work is extraordinary and demonstrates the interest that candidates have in religion. Very often students are driven by their own personal issues or insider interests (confessional issues) in their own religion and some candidates do not fully understand how to take these personal interests to create an appropriate research question that can be resolved in a scholarly manner. In general, however the work submitted is suitable although teachers could help by advising students on how to narrow their research interests from broad topics to a more focused question that can be researched through the appropriate sources and methods. It is clear from the rationales that students are benefitting from undertaking world religions courses in other religions than their own. This often generates their research interest but not all candidates are able to make the appropriate decisions to develop their projects from personal interest to a more academic approach. Sometimes they are not sure about the appropriate methods to investigate their chosen titles.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A very often begins with a rationale that is personal. There is no problem with this approach as it generates the high level of enthusiasm that candidates demonstrate in the

internal assessment task. All too often candidates do not move the rationale forward by investigating an appropriate selection of preliminary research sources that should be listed or mentioned, and that show their development towards a scholarly research question. Development is a crucial part of the mark criteria for this part of the task. The rationale is not an introduction as in an essay. Examiners are looking for the candidates' ability to develop a project. The top mark (7-8) would require candidates to show a wide range of sources in their development of the rationale. Criterion B is generally achieved successfully by candidates with many scoring the top marks. The research question must be clearly stated and the research plan needs to be explicit and appropriate to the question. The sources need to go beyond the preliminary research. Criterion C is also usually completed successfully with candidates generally able to manage a successful write up of their significant findings. Criterion D is an area that needs improvement. Too many students are not scoring the high marks here. This is because they all too often write conclusions based on significant findings, or repeat or add new significant findings. They need to pay attention to the processes of research. How has the research process moved them on from preconceptions at the time of the rationale or even when undertaking the preliminary findings? How successful was their chosen method of study? Were there misconceptions that were eradicated by their study method? What might they have done differently? What prior biases may have influenced the results? What future research might arise from the findings? If the final findings are much the same as the preliminary findings they need to reflect on their process. Was there a possible shortcoming in their research methods? Criterion E is usually undertaken successfully, but students could score more highly if they paid attention to appropriate and recognised citation systems, maintained alphabetical order, listed a sub-heading for interviews and websites. Most, however, do achieve this and score full marks.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- Teachers can help with good advice on managing project titles. As a rule of thumb candidates should look at their final research question and avoid questions that could be answered as 'yes' or 'no'. For example, 'Is karma significant in the daily practices of Buddhism?' This is easily resolved by using 'To what extent'. The command terms used in examination questions may be usefully applied, for example 'an analysis of...'; 'An evaluation of...'; 'an examination of...'; 'an investigation of...'; 'a comparison between...'. The key is to create research questions in a manner that avoids description and problematizes the issue. 'What' does not function well as a research question. 'To what degree' or 'compare and contrast' or 'how' questions are more successful. Research questions need to be more narrow in focus. For example, 'Is abortion acceptable in Christianity?' is too broad in scope. Christianity is vast and varied.
- Teachers need to remind students to draw upon appropriate secondary sources to support interviews or other primary source material. One interview, for example, is not going to produce an average and family members are best avoided. Interviews are good, but one source such as the local priest or minister cannot be used to generalise. Students need to be encouraged to undertake field work but they need to be critical of their findings. Varied sources of evidence achieve better significant findings.
- More time needs to be spent on helping students reflect upon their research processes and methodology as opposed to the 'knowledge and understanding' elements required

in essay writing or answering examination questions. Only Criterion C relates to knowledge and understanding. A good text on undergraduate study of religions would help. Teachers operating in cultures where students are used to religion being taught from a confessional point of view need to give some assistance on etic/emic (insider/outsider) differences.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

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|--------------------|-------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0 - 8 | 9 - 16 | 17 - 22 | 23 - 27 | 28 - 32 | 33 - 37 | 38 - 45 |

The range and suitability of the work submitted

This paper requires candidates to answer questions from five religious traditions out of a choice of nine. Each question is divided into two parts with different weightings. Each part requires different skills from the candidate. It was evident that there was a range of quality of responses depending upon which religions they were responding to and which part of the question.

This year there were more rubric infringements with candidates appearing unaware that for each of their selected religions they needed to answer each of the two parts. Some candidates employed a 'pick and mix' economy where they selected eight questions to respond to, sometimes from eight different religious traditions.

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

The (a) questions for each of the religious traditions are based upon a key passage. As evidenced by triggers in each question the answers are meant to come from that passage, e.g. 1a 'Identify three teachings in the passage'. A mark is given for each response which may be a paraphrase of parts of the passage. References to teachings and practices not related to the text cannot be credited.

The (b) questions require a well - developed explanation that incorporates relevant language and examples. This tests the candidates understanding of a specific concept in relation to a systematic religious tradition.

Hinduism

Question 1

- (a) This was generally well answered with candidates selecting three significant features.
- (b) Many candidates gave developed explanations regarding the importance of moksha to Hindu beliefs and practices. Some candidates included details not specifically related to moksha and discussed more generically Hindu beliefs and practices. Although many candidates found this question accessible, many could have gained further credit by using a wider range of religious terms in their explanations.

Buddhism

Question 2

- (a) Although this was a short passage there are at least five different responses that could have been given. Sometimes candidates wrote generally about Buddhist teachings rather than interrogating the short passage.
- (b) There were some excellent responses to this question which focused on the human condition showing a holistic understanding of Buddhism. The more successful answers used a range of Buddhist terms to frame their answer as opposed to just 'dropping' them into an answer with no further unpacking.

Sikhism

Question 3

- (a) and (b) Few candidates chose to write about Sikhism. The quality of answers was more polarised than most of the other religious traditions. Sometimes candidates showed a thorough understanding of Sikhism and were able to express the importance of sewa. Other times the candidates couched their answers in their understanding of Hinduism.

Judaism

Question 4

- (a) Many candidates were able to select three beliefs from the passage and make explicit reference to yetzer ha tov and yetzer ha ra.
- (b) Responses showed a greater understanding of Judaism as distinctive from Christianity than in the previous year. Many candidates used their understanding of yetzer ha ra and yetzer ha tov as a frame for their answers. There were some responses which still linked Jewish beliefs with a Christian Messiah showing basic misconceptions about Judaism as a religion.

Christianity

Question 5

- (a) This was a popular option and the majority of candidates were able to successfully outline three points in the passage.
- (b) It was evident from the answers that many candidates were using their own personal faith commitment and experiences to support their answer to the question. Some answers were well-developed using a range of religious terms and teachings. Some candidates from Christian backgrounds perceived the question as an opportunity to write about their own faith commitments and their own understanding of heaven and hell.

Islam

Question 6

- (a) This was well-answered with most candidates successfully selecting three teachings from the passage.
- (b) There were some excellent answers to this question. Unfortunately, some high-level candidates gave lengthy figurative descriptions of their perceptions of heaven and hell. These were not specific teachings from the Qu'ran and were not evidenced to specific Islamic authorities. Some candidates failed to focus on the demands of the question and gave lengthy descriptions of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Taoism

Question 7

- (a) This was a very short passage but there were at least five different responses which were credit-worthy. Many candidates failed to interrogate the passage and outlined teachings about Taoism which did not pertain to the passage.
- (b) Candidates responses usually gave a clear understanding of the general principles of Taoism. Their understanding was explicit and they were usually able to incorporate relevant examples or details. Responses were often more confident reflecting their understanding of key concepts. This was different to their responses to other religious traditions, which can sometimes appear as learned banks of knowledge with little holistic understanding of the religious tradition.

Jainism

Question 8

- (a) and (b) Few candidates chose to write about Jainism. The quality of answers was more polarised than the other religious traditions. Sometimes the candidates seemed to have selected Jainism because they say the words 'moksha' and 'nirvana' and thought this was an opportunity to express their understanding of those concepts in the Hindu tradition.

Bahai

Question 9

- (a) and (b) Few candidates chose to write about Bahai. The answers were often non-specific with a heavy reliance on the passage to try and answer the second part of the question.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Understanding the rubrics - There was an increase in candidates answering more questions than required.
- Aims of each type of response - Candidates should be aware of the demands of the command terms used in each question.
- Coherent understanding of religious structure – Candidates often have a bank of knowledge about a particular religious concept, but are unable to frame this within a broader holistic recognition of the schema of the tradition.
- Distinctive nature of religious tradition – There are some misconceptions regarding the nature and relationship between religious traditions. The distinctive nature of each religious tradition should be understood. This is particularly the case with Judaism which is sometimes expressed as Old Testament Christianity.
- Understanding of key concepts - it is evident that the analogies used in the teaching of Taoism engage candidates to support their understanding.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------|-------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0 - 3 | 4 - 7 | 8 - 13 | 14 - 16 | 17 - 19 | 20 - 22 | 23 - 30 |

General comments

The standard this session was slightly improved on that of May 2016. Regrettably however, there is still a lack of in-depth knowledge. Many responses were again superficial. Evaluation and analysis remain an issue, and many candidates do not attempt to produce balanced arguments, instead relying on just telling the examiner everything they know, or basing their conclusion solely on personal opinions. It is good to see that at the top end these skills are improving.

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

This session, candidates were weakest in Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. Once again, there is a recurrent issue with the treatment of Christianity questions for which many responses were confessional in nature and failed to address the questions objectively.

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

The best responses were generally those on Hinduism and Islam.

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

There are still many short responses with candidates writing no more than half a page. Many candidates do not appear to be ready to write essay-style answers. This session most candidates answered two questions which is a great improvement. Only a handful wrote one answer or nothing at all.

Section A

The most popular questions were 2 and 3.

Hinduism

- 1) Discuss how female deities in religious scripture and festivals may offer role models for Hindu women.

This was potentially a very interesting question but there were very few attempts at answering it. A few candidates did produce some fair responses but still wrote far more on female deities and tended to ignore ‘... may offer role models for Hindu women.’

- 2) Discuss how the concept of samsara (cycle of life, death and rebirth) is central to Hindu beliefs.

Most candidates attempted this question. Some wrote some very good responses. However, there were many weak responses. It is not enough to simply write about samsara and not consider its connections with many other key concepts in Hinduism. In weaker responses, the most commonly mentioned concept was ahimsa. There were some attempts at explaining karma but in a very simplistic manner. Most these candidates did not mention dharma. There were attempts to discuss caste and jati but the information presented was largely incorrect. Some tried to focus their answer entirely on the ashramas and there were far too many references to sati as a norm.

Buddhism

- 3) To what extent are the Four Noble Truths the most important statement of Buddhist belief?

A very popular question. There were some excellent responses showing good depth of knowledge and understanding, and correct terminology. On the other hand, some candidates did not know what the Four Noble Truths were and answered instead on the Four Signs. Some tried to bring in everything they knew including the Three Jewels and the Three Poisons which were said to be more important. Many stopped with magga, the path leading to cessation. They generally mentioned the Noble Eightfold Path but very few unpacked it in any way, merely saying that it meant Buddhists should live properly.

- 4) To what extent is veneration of the Buddha the most important part of Buddhist ritual?

This was very unpopular. Students did not seem to understand ‘veneration’ although it is clearly in the subject guide. Unfortunately, most who attempted the question therefore wrote about worshipping the Buddha with some saying he was the Buddhists’ god.

Sikhism

- 5) Compare and contrast the importance of the different Sikh sacred texts.

This was marginally more popular than question 6 for those responding on Sikhism. Good answers addressed the question well, stressing the importance of The Guru Granth Sahib and being clear about its contents and composition. These responses also generally mentioned the Dasam Granth and some to the Rahit Nama. Weaker answers generally focused on the Guru Granth Sahib and many on the Rahit Maryada. These answers tended to gain very little credit as (a) the Rahit Maryada is not regarded as a sacred text

and (b) most of the details of the content and compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib were wrong.

6) To what extent is Sikhism a religion based on equality?

The difficulty for many candidates here was that they appeared to have read the question as 'To what extent does Sikhism practise equality?'. If this had indeed been the question, then many would have fared much better. Generally, there seemed to be very little knowledge of the Gurus' teachings on equality. The use of the langar was usually mentioned but the separate seating arrangements for women were heavily stressed as was the 'fact' that women cannot become granthi.

Open-ended question

7) With reference to one religion, either Hinduism or Buddhism or Sikhism, discuss how the principal sacred texts were composed and how they are used today.

As always question 7 is a popular choice. The open-ended questions seem to attract candidates as an easy option. However, many did not find this one easy and would probably have done better on one of the others. With few exceptions, answers on Hinduism tended to be very confused with little mention of the different types of texts. Most concentrated on the Vedas and did not mention the Upanishads or the epics. They knew very little of the composition and, regrettably, almost nothing about their use. Buddhism fared a little better but there was almost no depth of knowledge here. Comments on Sikhism would be the same as those for question 5.

Section B

The most popular questions were 11, 12 and 13.

Judaism

8) "The Torah is the only source of authority for Jews." Discuss.

There was the usual confusion about the Torah and Tenakh although some good responses did explain that the name 'Torah' is used in different ways. There were almost no references to the Talmud. Many candidates seemed very unsure about the contents of the Torah and therefore answers relied on very general statements about it being the Word of God. There was little evaluation or analysis.

9) Examine Jewish teachings about the nature of God.

This question was also very poorly addressed. Views about the nature of God were almost entirely Christian ones, which suggested that candidates had studied Judaism from a Christian perspective. Common statements were that the god of the Jews was unfair, cruel and demanded blind obedience. A great deal was made of disasters and killings. This was then countered by the presentation of a kind, loving Christian god.

Christianity

- 10) Discuss the ways in which the Old Testament and New Testament Canons were compiled.

Although this topic is included in the syllabus of the subject guide, most of the candidates attempting it (which were not many), appeared to know almost nothing about the compilation of the two Canons.

- 11) Discuss the importance of the sacraments in different denominations.

Far too many candidates ignored the phrase 'in different denominations'. The tendency, therefore was to give a description of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. Some responses attempted to compare this with Lutheran teaching though with very little accuracy. A significant number of answers said that *all* Christians observed the sacraments, thereby ignoring the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) amongst others. A few good responses mentioned several denominations including the Orthodox Church with good accuracy.

Islam

- 12) Discuss how rituals are an expression of the umma (worldwide community of Muslims).

This was the more popular of the two questions on Islam. Most candidates were clear about the nature of the umma. Average answers tended to be a description of the Five Pillars and an attempt at an explanation of how each supported the umma. There were too many references to zakat describing it as free will charity giving. Most answers concentrated on hajj though with a lot of confusion about the rules and regulations attached to it.

- 13) "The Qur'an is only the Qur'an if it is written in Arabic." Discuss.

Many attempted this question. There were some very well-balanced responses. However, although most candidates knew the teaching behind the idea, there were some very odd interpretations of how this affected many Muslims. Some appeared to believe that the Qur'an had never been translated and that this was putting off Muslims in countries where the majority did not speak Arabic. Very little was said about learning Arabic to read it in the original.

Open-ended question

- 14) With reference to one religion, **either** Judaism **or** Christianity **or** Islam, discuss beliefs about eschatology.

All three religions were attempted though unfortunately some candidates missed the 'either ... or' and so wrote about all three. Christianity produced the best answers. However, although some candidates offered modern interpretations of the afterlife, there were many literal interpretations of devils with pitchforks which appeared largely confessional. Purgatory was too often misunderstood and seen as a place of judgement rather than purification. Answers on Islam were generally correct though lacking in detail and correct terminology; they often lacked any explanation. Responses on Judaism were the worst as

most candidates appeared to know nothing apart from the idea of a Messianic Age when 'Christ' would return and forgive the Jews. There was also general misunderstanding over the idea of reincarnation.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Teachers must ensure candidates know the command terms as defined in the subject guide and in particular, train them to read questions carefully to determine what exactly is being asked and what they are required to do. As mentioned above there were several occasions when questions were misread and therefore led to very low marks.
- Teachers must also emphasize the need for deeper, well-argued treatment of the questions where candidates demonstrate their abilities in analysis, evaluation and synthesis.
- Teachers are reminded to share and discuss the markbands and markschemes with the candidates as a good understanding of these will help them provide strong responses that address all aspects of the assessment instruments. The new markbands should help to make this task easier.
- Once again it is necessary to ask teachers to guide students away from the farthest edges of the internet which seem to be used. In particular, students need to be advised to use resources from the faith groups not the often-biased comments on websites of other religions.