

GCE Examiners' Report

Religious Studies

GCE

Summer 2025

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Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	<p>Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade.</p> <p>For unitted specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level.</p> <p>For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.</p>	For unitted specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner WJEC

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WJEC AS Executive Summary

There were 1,117 entries this series, reflecting a small increase from 1,049 in 2023, and 1,095 in 2024. 17s remain the majority entry at 86.7%, with 11.0% 18s and a small proportion of 16s and over 18s. Of the 17s, 79.0% are female, 96.7% from Wales, and 79.9% from secondary centres. 83.3% of candidates are sitting through the medium of English.

The proportion of candidates in the top 3 deciles is ~2.5% higher than last year, indicating this may be a slightly stronger cohort.

Positive aspects of candidates' examination responses this year:

- many candidates demonstrated thorough knowledge of religious concepts, scholars, texts, and terminology across all units.
- high-scoring responses made excellent use of scripture, scholarly views, historical examples, and religious language to support arguments and evaluations.
- good candidates provided balanced AO2 responses, considering alternative views and reaching reasoned conclusions, showing clear analytical and evaluative skills.
- candidates showed awareness of the diversity within religions (e.g., denominational perspectives in Judaism, different schools in Buddhism and Hinduism) and covered a broad range of relevant material.

Issues for centres to consider:

- handwriting was sometimes illegible and this is an increasing concern for examiners. Centres need to be aware of their candidates handwriting under exam conditions and make appropriate arrangements if their work is unreadable.
- many candidates wrote general essays or listed knowledge and understanding without addressing the specific demands of the question, missing key phrases or focusing on irrelevant content.
- some responses were overly descriptive or listed arguments without critical analysis or evaluation in part (b) questions.
- frequent errors included misquoting scripture, misunderstanding doctrines (e.g., Trinity, atonement), or confusing concepts and scholars (e.g., Anselm vs Descartes, Sunni vs Shi'a).
- some responses lacked clear structure, failed to link points back to the question, or repeated irrelevant information.

WJEC A level Executive Summary

There were 751 entries this series, up from 744 in 2023, and 704 in 2024. 18s are the majority entry at 93.3% with 5.3% 19s. Of the 18s, 78.5% are female, 97.4% from Wales, and 79.0% from secondary centres. 83.0% of candidates are sitting through the medium of English. The proportion of candidates in the top 3 deciles is ~1% lower than last year.

Positive aspects of candidates' examination responses:

- many candidates showed strong knowledge and understanding, particularly in high-band responses that demonstrated depth, breadth, and use of appropriate evidence, quotations, and scholars across all units.
- there were good examples of accurate use of specialist language and terminology, and of integrating different schools of thought and diverse perspectives effectively in answers.
- successful candidates focused on the specific demands of questions, identifying key terms and applied their knowledge and understanding in an analytical and evaluative way in responses to AO2 Section B questions rather than narratively.
- candidates who succeeded in AO2 Section B questions (analysis & evaluation) crafted well-structured arguments, often with clear judgments, balanced conclusions, and insightful critiques of arguments.

Issues for centres to consider:

- issues with handwriting, structure, and clarity of responses persisted, making some hard to assess.
- some candidates confused AO1 and AO2, providing descriptive narratives or generic introductions rather than focused analysis and evaluation where required.
- some candidates failed to fully understand or use key concepts, terms, and scholarly views (e.g., misunderstanding terms like 'pluralism', misusing quotations, or overlooking key evidence).
- weak responses often lacked a structured conclusion to AO2 responses.
- others relied on rote-learned material, or applied AO1 knowledge and understanding without adapting it to the AO2 question's focus.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1A: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the qualification were tested in this examination?

- Q.1** Theme 2A. Religious concepts – the nature of God
- Q.2** Theme 2C. Religious concepts – the Atonement
- Q.3** Theme 1C. The Bible as a source of wisdom and authority in daily life
- Q.4** Theme 3B. Religious life – the community of believers
- Q.5** Theme 5A. Religious identity through diversity in baptism.

Positive features of responses:

- higher scoring candidates had a sound grasp of the scholars tested in the examination e.g. Bultmann and Wright (Q.3) and Zwingli (Q.4).
- good candidates used relevant and accurate scriptural passages as well as modern theories to support their AO2 arguments e.g. Situation Ethics (Q.2a).
- higher scoring candidates were able to demonstrate the diversity that exists within Christianity (e.g. Q5.a).

Issues for centres to consider:

- candidates need to focus on the question set, select relevant information and not just write all they know about a topic. They need to identify and highlight key phrases from the question and focus attention on these.
- if a question is referring to two specific areas then candidates need to ensure they refer to both areas in their response.
- when attempting AO2 part (b) questions candidates need to carefully select arguments to demonstrate analysis and evaluation skills (AO2) rather than providing just a list of under-developed arguments.
- candidates need to pay attention to the question set and not the theme / area of study within which the question sits e.g. Q2a Ransom theory was irrelevant but frequently written about (Q.2b appropriately so). Q.5a did not ask for any criticism or counter view to infant baptism whereas candidates often included this irrelevant material.
- candidates should aim to provide balanced analysis and evaluation in their AO2 responses by offering alternative views or critiques of statements, rather than just one-sided perspectives.
- handwriting remains a concern for a number of scripts and centres need to be aware of their candidate's handwriting style and ability *under exam conditions* and, if necessary, make appropriate arrangements so that their work can be accessed by WJEC examiners. It is not possible to award material that cannot be read.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- 'set the scene' in terms of looking at God's 'omni' natures without making this the answer per se. They also used the Auschwitz hanging of the Jewish boy as accurate scene setting for Moltmann's view.
- examined Moltmann's view and how he arrived at it via accurate scriptural references, doctrine of the Trinity and doctrine of the incarnation.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- provided no or inaccurate scripture references e.g. 'Jesus wept' was at Lazarus' tomb (a sign of emotional suffering) not while Jesus was on the cross.
- provided an inaccurate version of the doctrine of the Trinity – God does not change into different forms depending on the moment. Jesus is not half God and half man, but rather fully God and fully man at the same time.
- the above were used in reference to Jesus' incarnation, which was not always accurately utilised.
- other scholars, generalised responses about God and suffering as well as AO2 critique are all irrelevant here.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- understood the challenge of the question with a sense of what is at stake if God suffers, and rose to it with a variety of well supported arguments involving analysis and evaluation. This included a review of God's 'omni' natures with occasional excellent analysis and evaluation on whether immutability challenges God's omnipotence i.e. if God cannot change then is God omnipotent?
- made good use of other material e.g. Irenaeus saying it is important for us to suffer in order to grow, but there is no need for God to grow and therefore, why suffer?

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- some candidates tried to answer a different question on theodicy – whether God should stop or prevent suffering.
- candidates who simply provided a general review of God's nature.

Q.2 This was the least popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- those who read the question and understood the subject matter and therefore answered the question – without the Ransom / Christus Victor theories of the Atonement.
- recognised that providing an 'explanation' is more than just an 'outline' and these candidates achieved this level on the two theories set in the question, and in a balanced way.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- simply wrote whatever they knew about atonement without addressing the question set.
- entered into AO2 type evaluation which is irrelevant here.
- demonstrated a lack of understanding of what Jesus was a substitute for – this would have lifted many candidates' responses e.g. substitute sacrificial lamb – Lamb of God or a substitute for humanity.
- too frequently ignored the moral example of Jesus going to the cross in love and willingly - 'greater love have no man than to lay down his life for another' - and rather considered that just because Jesus went to the cross we would all be more moral which is the consequent part.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- addressed the question directly i.e. via the atonement theories, including those that were not relevant in Q.2a which could now be utilised.
- could challenge some of the atonement theories to engage in the question of whether God is a God of love or otherwise.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- went into a general consideration of whether God is love or not.
- were too descriptive of atonement theories (even those that should have been utilised in Q.2(a)).
- compared atonement theories rather than addressing the question of whether they portray a God of love – or otherwise.
- gave one-sided answers.

Section B

Q.3 This was the second most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- recognised that the command word 'Explain' required a breadth of material.
- used the wording of the question as a structured essay plan and utilised it, thereby covering all four aspects of the question.
- utilised biblical quotes to support each aspect.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- entered into a general discussion of the Bible and furthermore its authority rather than addressing the question set.
- wrote generally about the Bible in the hope the examiner would tease out aspects to match the question set wherever possible.
- entered into AO2 evaluation which is not relevant here.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- recognised what the Book of Psalms are, where they are located in the Bible and had read the set Psalms (or even more e.g. Psalm 23).
- the above provided the necessary platform with which to address the question set and consequently appropriate analysis and evaluation could commence.
- could quote from the Psalms from which they could then analyse and evaluate the question set.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- misplaced the Psalms from the Old Testament into the New Testament and had an overall misunderstanding that they were contemporaneous to Jesus or, even, that Jesus was the author as they were his sayings, or, that the Psalms were another Gospel.
- would generally evaluate the role of the Bible in providing guidance.

Q.4 This was the least popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to refer to the set text in Acts and utilised it along with other appropriate Biblical quotes.
- provided a clear explanation of what the passage meant and then effectively did the same with an examination of it as a model for today's churches.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- know (all) four aspects of the Acts text.
- develop and understanding of the four aspects of the work of the early Church AND how these could be seen as a model for today's churches.
- link the work modern churches are to the work of the Early Church in a relevant way and not use examples such as climate change.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- considered the aspect of religious teaching and did so in its various forms e.g. sermons, bible study, personal reading, Sunday School, catechism, baptism and wedding preparation, which added to the scope of their answer.
- considered other aspects of Jesus' ministry in addition to his own teaching and provided counter considerations, e.g. helping the poor, the sick, comforting those bereaved and in need.
- considered other aspects of church life e.g. the sacraments and especially where Jesus taught on them – Baptism ('Go baptise') Eucharist ('Do this in remembrance of me') Marriage (attended Cana wedding).

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- be less descriptive e.g. referring to the teaching on Good Samaritan – 'love neighbour', but without moving into analysis and evaluation.
- go beyond providing just one sided responses.

Q.5 This was the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on and addressed the question set.
- made reference to biblical passages and the Early Church Fathers.
- also referred to scholarly views (Zwingli in particular).

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- gain a clear understanding of what 'to make a case' means.
- do not make irrelevant reference to views opposing the question set, which often led to irrelevant evaluation.
- don't treat the question as an 'examine' question and refer to all the procedures and practices around baptism and how it is conducted, which is not what the question required.
- do not mistakenly portray the current teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that the unbaptised infant / child will go to purgatory / hell / limbo.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- appreciated this was the opportunity to put the case for both sides of the debate and focussed on the skills of analysis and evaluation.
- referred to alternative biblical quotes, the Reformers, the Anabaptists and Barth all illustrating the place of commitment.
- provided a balanced rather than a one-sided response.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- failed to focus on the key phrase 'an expression of commitment' within the question set.
- gain a clear understanding of the fact that the Anabaptists, advocate adult baptism only as an expression of personal commitment.
- gain a clear understanding of the fact that Barth considered infant baptism as 'clouded' not invalid.
- gain a clear understanding that Jesus was not baptised as an adult because of his sins (Christians believe he was sinless) as an adult (with or without mention of commitment which for Jesus would be to identify with sinful humanity through sharing baptism while unnecessary for him).

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1B: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ISLAM

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates' **AO1** skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2** skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the qualification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 Theme 2D: Salah (prayer) and other forms of prayer

Q.2 Theme 2F: The five categories of ethical action as exemplifying the key moral principles for Islam and a framework for Muslim living

Q.3 Theme 4B: The role of festivals in shaping religious identity, with reference to: Ashura

Q.4 Theme 1C: The Qur'an as a source of wisdom and authority – its use and treatment in Islam

Q.5 Theme 2B: Muslim beliefs about nabi (prophets), rasul (messenger), nadir (warner) and risalah (the message)

Comments on individual questions/sections

Positive features of responses:

- provided a broad range of details/ evidence and examples, showing good breadth of coverage of topics and the specification overall.
- provided relevant quotations or referred to a scholar or scholarly tradition, either modern or from the history of the Islamic tradition.
- used precise terminology and gave clear definitions as relevant to the specific question being answered.

Issues for centres to consider:

- ensure candidates address the precise wording of the question to ensure the response is well focused.
- ensure candidates improve their AO2 part (b) question conclusions by clearly linking them back to the statement.
- when candidates provide AO2 arguments, they need to support them with an example, reasoning or evidence, to demonstrate the strength of the argument being made.

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- included a broad range of aspects of Jummah prayers, such as the sermon, social mixing and unity in devotional practice.
- made sure each point made about Jummah was linked to how it affected the Ummah.
- were clear about the distinctive role of Jummah – how it differs from other prayers which might be said individually.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- ensure answers are not merely descriptions of Jummah prayers, but explain their importance for the Ummah.
- ensure the details of Jummah prayers are linked in every paragraph to the worldwide fellowship or brotherhood of Muslims, the Ummah.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- compared the importance of Jummah with the five daily prayers or with other prayers such as du'a prayers.
- argued successfully that the Jummah prayers were required to be completed as a group (complying with the sunna), distinctive from other prayers which might be individual.
- brought out the importance of strengthening others through communal worship.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- write using clear paragraphing, each paragraph should be focused around a main point in the argument.
- develop each paragraph with evidence to justify the statement rather than going on to a different point.
- draw together answers with a clear conclusion at the end, including an overall judgment.

Q.2 This was by far the least popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- defined the five categories using correct terminology.
- gave examples including those about general moral principles.
- included quotations or key references such as quotes about caring for orphans and the poor as fard, or compulsory, in given situations, such as when a Muslim has sufficient wealth to pay zakah.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- refer to a wider range of examples besides religious observance.
- include examples from the middle categories besides fard (compulsory) and haram (forbidden).
- draw out points of moral principle from the categories besides details of rulings.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- pointed out the difficulty of understanding rulings composed hundreds of years ago in a modern context.
- highlighted the fact that modern Muslims live mostly under secular law, not shari'a.
- balanced these points by discussing how clarity could be gained from scholarly interpretation.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- link each point made by showing how each either supports confusion or clarity.
- give consideration or examples of where putting categories into practice might be difficult.
- clearly link concluding paragraphs back to the statement.

Section B

Q.3 This was the second most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- provided clear accounts of the historical background of the martyrdoms which are marked at this time, especially by remembering the martyrdom of Husayn at Kerbala, which they see as a wrong doing against both the person and the righteous cause.
- brought out the importance of marking truth and righteous claims, which stems from the historical account for Shi'a Muslims.
- clearly focused accounts of the Shi'a perspective.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- do not mix up Sunni and Shi'a reasons for marking Ashura, e.g. the Sunni account of the exodus of Musa.
- add more detail to the accounts of the background to the festival, such as the martyrdoms.
- ensure points of description are followed by explanation about why this is marked or celebrated.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- considered several different aspects of Shi'a identity, such as real or symbolic self-flagellation at Ashura; passion plays; visits to tombs of important historical figures such as Imam Ali, and general Islamic prayers which are similar to those of Sunni Muslims with some small differences.
- made comparisons between them and brought out aspects which showed that identity most clearly.
- included reference to Ramadan and the Five Pillars as other possible manifestations of identity, in common with Sunnis.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- considered other aspects besides Ashura for Shi'a identity.
- discuss how far self-harm brought out sympathy for those wronged and their cause.
- address conclusions clearly towards the given statement.

Q.4 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- included wider aspects of the Qur'an's guidance: from religious observance to family matters to community cohesion.
- focused broadly on guidance for humanity and human relations in society.
- gave relevant quotations relating to guidance and the Day of Judgment, linked to heeding that guidance.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- focus on wider guidance, including morality, such as treatment of orphans and the poor, and the importance of telling the truth and not cheating in trade.
- explore how the Qur'an might guide society and societal relations as a whole.
- add relevant quotations or references to specific Qur'anic teachings of guidance.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- considered a broad range of issues covered by the Qur'an, from beliefs to social issues.
- included reference to language and modern-day lack of understanding of classical Arabic by many.
- explored how the text of the Qur'an might be made relevant with scholarly interpretation for the modern day.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- when making a point in discussion, give a supporting piece of evidence or example.
- start with a general statement, such as change in society, and then follow up with a specific issue, such as responses to sexuality.
- draw the discussion clearly together in a concluding paragraph or statement.

Q.5 This was the least popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- they covered both roles equally.
- referred broadly to several prophets, such as Ibrahim, Musa and Isa, and explained their roles.
- mentioned the challenge of warning people against idolatry and explained the warning related to destination in the afterlife.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- add more about the role of nadir (warner).
- explain aspects of the warnings given, such as implications for judgment.
- give details about the warnings, which might be further elaborated to include warnings against idolatry and immoral practices, giving examples.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- provided a mature reasoning and 'if' statements: if Muhammad did not warn then... this shows evidence of mature evaluation.
- were able to refer to several aspects, especially the Muslim belief that he was the perfect person and therefore best model to follow, by reading the Hadith and copying the examples (sunna) found within them.
- focused on Muhammad's actions and responses to the time.
- covered different aspects of Muhammad's role including both messenger and warner.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- focus on Muhammad's response, rather than the problems of the time.
- include the role of messenger, and warner.
- ensure a judgment related to the statement is given at the end.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1C: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF JUDAISM

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed ?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates' **AO1** skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2** skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the qualification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 Theme 4B: The role of festivals in shaping religious identity - Pesach

Q.2 Theme 4C: The role of festivals in shaping religious identity - Yom Kippur

Q.3 Theme 2A: Beliefs about the nature of God / concept of God

Q.4 Theme 3B: Jewish teachings about tefillah (prayer)

Q.5 Theme 1B: Moses and the establishment of the covenant of law

Due to the low number of entries it is only possible to provide the following summary for this option:

Positive features of responses:

- the written tone and style of responses this year was particularly pleasing. It is clear candidates understand the differences between the command words (e.g., explain, examine, outline, evaluate) and adapt their style and tone accordingly. This is a credit to the hard work of centres, who are not only teaching their candidates content, but how to accurately express their understanding and interpretation of that content.
- the breadth of accurate references used to exemplify points were diverse and interesting, including references to the Talmud, Elie Wiesel, the Board of Deputies, and prominent rabbis.
- candidates did well to capture the diversity of beliefs and practices in Judaism, considering most issues from a variety of denominational perspectives (Orthodox, Hasidic, Progressive). The acknowledgement of the diversity of Judaism and Jewish identities enriches candidates' exploration and evaluation of the content tested.

Issues for centres to consider:

- candidates need to be mindful when repeating content across the paper. For example, some candidates who answered Q.2 and Q.5, repeated the story of Moses across both questions. Whilst candidates may repeat some content (for example, to provide brief context or explanation) this should always be relevant to the target of the question. Repeating unnecessary descriptive details should be avoided.
- candidates should feel confident to interrogate the statement in their AO2 part (b) responses. For example, if asked about the effectiveness, or meaningfulness, of a belief or practice they may wish to question effective *how*, or meaningful *to whom*? Critical questioning of the statement itself encourages deeper evaluation to emerge.
- candidates should be reminded to refer back to the question periodically in their response. This will help candidates to ensure they are holding all parts of the question in their working memory and responding accordingly. If the question is asking candidates to discuss two things (e.g. kavod **and** shekinah, seder plate **and** Haggadah), referring back to the question regularly will serve as a reminder to discuss both areas.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1D: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF BUDDHISM

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates' **AO1** skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2** skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the qualification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 Theme 1A: Accounts of the birth of the historical Buddha and the Four Sights

Q.2 Theme 1C: Buddhist texts as sources of wisdom and authority

Q.3 Theme 2C: Arhat and bodhisattva

Q.4 Theme 4B: Meditation

Q.5 Theme 3A: The Four Noble Truths

Positive features of responses:

- candidates had a sound grasp of Buddhist concepts and teachings.
- many candidates showed excellent knowledge and understanding of religion and belief (AO1 skills) and were able to offer engaging analytical and evaluative responses (AO2 skills).
- many made relevant use of religious language and key terminology. The use of such language enhanced candidate responses.

Issues for centres to consider:

- candidates need to read the questions carefully before committing a response to paper as some failed to address the specific focus of the questions.
- the part (b) AO2 responses varied in quality with some candidates listing points rather than evaluating or analysing in response.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- accurately linked the lakshanas to the relevant sights.
- explored the wider teachings of the Buddha. For example, when referring to anatta, some candidates were able to draw on other key concept such as the skandhas and rebirth.
- were able to give a detailed description of dukkha. By doing so, they showed depth of knowledge and understanding of the Buddha's dharma.
- made effective use of religious language and terminology.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- focus less on re-telling the story of the Four Sights - engage with the question set and concentrate on explaining the meaning and significance of the sights in light of the lakshanas.
- address all aspects of the question set, some failed to refer to anatta in their responses whilst this aspect was often less developed than dukkha and anicca.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to make reference to several other life events and offer an effective evaluation on their impact on the Buddha's life. Many included the Buddha's renunciation, the Awakening, the Buddha's decision to teach and his birth.
- made effective use of evaluative language, relevant religious terminology and key terms. Many linked back to the statement throughout their responses.
- were able to give detailed reasoning and counter argue effectively.
- were able to reach a final judgement and offer a conclusion.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- must ensure that they engage fully with the statement and keep focus on the question set. For example, some weaker candidates gave descriptive accounts of specific events in the Buddha's life without evaluating their impact on the Buddha's life.
- should avoid broadening their responses to evaluating the impact of the Sights on Buddhism as a whole.
- should develop their lines of enquiry in order to avoid simply listing their ideas.
- should avoid lengthy introductions in AO2 as they tend to be more descriptive than evaluative.

Q.2 This was by far the least popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to identify and explain the parajikas fully. Many were able to locate them within the Pattimokkha and refer to their importance for the Theravada monastic sangha.
- were able to explain their seriousness and offer further appropriate examples to show depth of knowledge and understanding.
- linked the parajikas to the panca / dasa sila. This demonstrated further knowledge and understanding of Buddhist teachings.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- do not simply list the parajikas, but rather demonstrate knowledge and understanding of them.
- consider the wider implications of keeping the parajikas.
- should ensure that they make better use of religious language and terminology.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to evaluate the statement effectively and address the issues raised by the question.
- identified the diversity within Buddhism and were able to explain how members of the lay community and some traditions within Mahayana Buddhism consider the impracticality of following the parajikas today.
- made good use of religious language and terminology.
- were able to offer various lines of enquiry and draw appropriate conclusions.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- must engage with the question and offer alternative views rather than repeating AO1 information that does not contribute to an evaluation.
- should offer a balanced response to the statement and make better use of evaluative language throughout.

Section B

Q.3 This was the second most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to successfully identify the four stages to becoming an arhat. Many organised their responses accordingly and gave a detailed explanation of the how each step leads to enlightenment.
- successfully described the characteristics of an arhat and emphasised the importance of following the eightfold path and removing the fetters / hinderances.
- correctly identified the Pali terms of sotapanna, sakadagamin, anagamin, arhat as the stages of enlightenment.
- made good use of religious terminology and key terms.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- must offer a detailed examination of the arhat and avoid generic comments on achieving enlightenment.
- should focus on the specific demands of the question – simply offering AO1 information is not an appropriate way of answering an AO2 (analysis and evaluation) type question.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- included a variety of arguments in favour of the arhat as an essential feature of Buddhism. These were supported with clear reasoning or evidence.
- were able to counter argue from a variety of sources which included Mahayana's preferred method of following the bodhisattva path. This showed good understanding and awareness of the diversity within Buddhism.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- must ensure that they engage fully with the statement and keep focus on the question set.
- must select their lines of enquiry carefully and not include all aspects of Buddhism as 'essential' features.

Q.4 This was the least popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to show a clear understanding of the importance of meditation and how various practices could aid a person on their journey to enlightenment. Many referred to meditation as a way of calming the 'monkey mind' and as a way to gain focus and insight.
- were able to refer to the historical Buddha's own practice and his awakening whilst meditating under the Bodhi tree.
- were able to identify the importance of meditation and draw on the various types such as samatha, vipassana, metta bhavana and zazen to exemplify their answers.
- were able to draw on wider Buddhist teachings such as magga and the Eightfold Path.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- aim to address all areas of the question by focussing on the importance of meditation instead of simply describing meditation practices.
- offer a detailed explanation of the importance of meditation in Buddhism and avoid generic comments on how Buddhists meditate.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to identify the key differences between samatha and vipassana meditation in order to produce an effective evaluation on which form of meditation was most important.
- recognised the use of Samatha meditation within a secular context.
- made effective use of evaluative language, relevant religious terminology and key terms. Many linked back to the statement throughout their responses.
- were able to reach a final judgement and offer a conclusion.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- ensure that they engage fully with the statement and keep focus on the question set.
- offer alternative views rather than offering AO1 information, which is not an appropriate way of answering an AO2 (analysis and evaluation) type question.
- should ensure that they make better use of religious language and terminology.

Q.5. This was the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding of magga as a way of overcoming tanha.
- made effective use of religious terminology and key terms.
- offered detailed explanations of the three trainings as well as referencing magga as the middle way.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- should focus on 'magga' and address the question, rather than examine the Four Noble Truths as a whole.
- need to focus on how 'magga' relates to the middle way. Some candidates limited their responses with an examination of 'the path' as referred to in the Eightfold Path.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- were able to identify a variety of issues and address them successfully.
- were able to identify the Four Noble truths as the Buddha's first teachings after his Awakening under the Bodhi tree.
- offered counter arguments from a variety of sources which included meditation, the lakshanas and bodhisattva path as being more essential.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- offer alternative views rather than offering AO1 information, which is not an appropriate way of answering an AO2 (analysis and evaluation) type question.
- ensure that they engage fully with the statement and keep focus on the question set.
- should offer a conclusion at the end of their response.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1E: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF HINDUISM

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates' **AO1** skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2** skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Q.1 Theme 2B: Trimurti

Q.2 Theme 2A: Brahman and atman

Q.3 Theme 4A: Puja in the home and the mandir

Q.4 Theme 3C: Key moral principle – the concept of ahimsa

Q.5 Theme 1B: Krishna and Arjuna

Positive features of responses:

- responses which completely focused on the question set at AO1 and AO2
- demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding at AO1 and confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issue at AO2
- made excellent use of a wide range of evidence and examples in support at both AO1 and AO2 including quotations although this is not a requirement at AS.

Issues for centres to consider:

- one of the main weaknesses by some candidates was a lack of focus on the question set. Candidates need to take time to read the question to fully understand its demands – for example Q.1 there were a number of response who simply dealt with the characteristics of the Trimurti and made no link whatsoever to the Hindu understanding of God.
- in order to help candidates focus on the question set it is good practice, especially in AO2 to refer to the question throughout the answer.
- any points made both at AO1 and AO2 need to be supported by relevant evidence and examples.
- candidates need to ensure that they clearly and correctly note the question that they are answering. There were a number of candidates who after answering the (a) part of the question went on to answer the (b) part as if it were part of the (a) answer. This made it difficult at times to know where one answer finished and the other started.
- conclusions should be a summary of the points made or arguments presented and not a presentation of a completely new point or argument.
- handwriting is still an issue with a number of candidates' responses being very close to being illegible.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the question set and made the link between the Trimurti and Saguna Brahman.
- were able to show how the characteristics of the Trimurti demonstrated Hindu beliefs about Saguna Brahman.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- need to focus on the question set – a number of responses simply described the Trimurti with little or no reference at all to Saguna Brahman.
- need to give detailed and relevant information which shows a clear understanding of the status and role of the Trimurti within Hinduism.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- completely focused on the question showing a clear understanding of its demands – the strengths and weaknesses of belief in Nirguna or Saguna Brahman.
- any arguments and counter arguments were well supported by evidence and examples.
- were well structured and showing a clear development in the arguments presented.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- need to understand key terminology in the question such as the word 'impersonal'. Focusing on the demands of the question before beginning to write would be beneficial to a number of candidates.
- do not provide AO1 type material without using it to evaluate the issue in the question set.

Q.2 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- presented detailed, accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding of the views of Shankara and Madhva.
- focused on their views about Brahman and atman and avoided giving long biographical descriptions.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- need to be specific and a number confused the views of Shankara and Madhva, Advaita and Dvaita Vedanta and Nirguna and Saguna Brahman.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- completely focused on the issue in the question set – the existence of the atman without Brahman.
- gave valid, relevant arguments presented and well supported by evidence and examples.
- AO1 knowledge and understanding used effectively as a basis for the AO2 arguments presented.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- do not provide AO1 type material without using it to evaluate the issue in the question set, e.g. knowledge and understanding of the views of Shankara and Madhva mainly without any attempt to use that information to form relevant evaluative arguments.
- need to recognise the need for both analysis and evaluation in their responses.

Q.3 This was the least popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- provided detailed, accurate and relevant explanation of two of the three practices of congregational puja in the mandir and of their importance in that context.
- demonstrated excellent use of the Sanskrit terms for each practice and their literal meaning, giving an insight into their importance.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- need to focus on the command word in the sentence and not simply describe the practices in basic terms.
- need to provide an explanation of their importance within congregational puja or to individual Hindus especially on Darshan.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- provided balanced answers which were able to analyse and evaluate holistically Hindu worship and refer to some of the advantages/disadvantages of congregational and home puja.
- strongly supported their arguments by using relevant evidence and examples.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- do not provide just one-sided answers that argued for one form of puja over the other without any kind of balanced overview.
- provide reasoned analysis and evaluation of the issue, along with relevant evidence or examples.
- provide a reasoned conclusion focusing on the question set.

Q.4 This was the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the demand of the question – the practicality of the concept of ahimsa.
- referred to Gandhi’s use of the concept as an example of its practicality.
- referred to it being the basis of any diplomatic resolving of conflicts.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- need to focus on the question set – don’t ignore the word ‘practicality’ and just instead a general description or an explanation of ahimsa.
- demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding of the area being assessed.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the key words in the question set – ‘relevant’ and ‘ideal’ which resulted in clear arguments well supported by reasoning, evidence and examples.
- compared the relevance of the concept in an ideal world and the real world analysing and evaluating whether such a context would be needed in an ideal world.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- take time to carefully consider the question and any key words within it. It is these words that act as a guide for the focus of the candidate’s response.
- Don’t focus on the importance of the concept but rather than as the question stated its ‘relevance’.

Q.5 This was the second most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the teaching on dharma and referred to different examples within the Mahabharata.
- referred to Krishna and Arjuna and the four human goals.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- do not simply describe the story of Krishna and Arjuna without explaining its teaching on dharma.
- make use of specific examples from the text.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focussed on the key word ‘text’.
- evaluated and analysed the importance of the Ramayana in comparison to other Hindu texts such as the Vedas.
- provided arguments that were well supported by evidence and examples.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- identify the key words and not just gave a general answer which considered other things apart from text that are important in Hinduism.
- don’t just describe the content of the Ramayana but explain its importance instead.
- support any arguments made with relevant evidence and examples.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1F: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF SIKHISM

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates' **AO1** skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' **AO2** skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the qualification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 Theme 3C: The concepts of Sant Sipahi (saint-soldier)/Dharam Yudh (just war):

Q.2 Theme 3B: Kirat Karo and Vand Chhako

Q.3 Theme 1A: The life and teachings of Guru Nanak

Q.4 Theme 3B: Kirat Karo: the soul

Q.5 Theme 4C: Vaisakhi

Due to the low number of entries, it is only possible to provide the following summary for this option:

Positive features of responses:

- successful responses completely focused on the question set at both AO1 and AO2.
- good responses demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding at AO1 and confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issue at AO2.
- good responses made excellent use of a wide range of evidence and examples in support at both AO1 and AO2 including quotations (although not a requirement at AS).

Issues for centres to consider:

- one of the main weaknesses was a lack of focus on the question set. Candidates need to take time to read the question to fully understand its demands – for example Q1. There were a number of responses which simply dealt with the characteristics of the Khalsa and made no link to the Sikh principle of Dharam Yudh.
- in order to help candidates focus on the question set it is good practice, especially in AO2 responses to refer to the question throughout the answer.
- points made both at AO1 and AO2 need to be supported by relevant evidence and examples.
- candidates need to ensure that they clearly and correctly note the question that they are answering. There were a number of candidates who after answering the (a) part of the question went on to answer the (b) part as if it were part of the (a) answer. This made it difficult at times to know where one answer finished and the other started.
- conclusions should be a summary of the points made or arguments presented and not a presentation of a completely new point or argument.
- handwriting is still an issue with a number of candidates being very close to being illegible.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 2A: AN INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION AND ETHICS

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed ?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the qualification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 Theme 4C: Utilitarianism: application of the theories (Act and Rule)

Q.2 Theme 2C: Aquinas' Natural Law: application of the theory

Positive features of responses:

- good responses to the AO1 part (a) questions were able to balance explanation of their chosen ethical approach with application to the issue in the question.
- skills of analysis and evaluation were clearly evident in the AO2 part (b) questions with better responses presenting AO1 content merely as evidence to support their reasoning.

Issues for centres to consider:

- don't focus solely on explaining the ethical approach at the expense of application of the theory.
- don't make very general points about the application issue without linking this to the specific details of the theory.
- take a systematic approach to application questions, working through different aspects of the theory and applying these in detail, including examples, to the ethical issue in the question.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the least popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- clearly identified which of the Utilitarian thinkers they would be using in their response and had an accurate grasp how each thinker viewed the status of animals.
- applied aspects of the theory e.g. the hedonic calculus systematically to the issue of animal testing.
- recognised diversity within the application of either Act or Rule Utilitarianism.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- concentrating on one Utilitarian theory instead of trying to cover both would have led to improvements in many weaker responses,
- learn accurate definitions for the criteria of the hedonic calculus as this would help candidates to apply the theory more effectively.
- aim to explain how Utilitarianism connects morality with pleasure and pain and recognise that both need to be taken into account when applying the theory.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- used evidence from Bentham and/or Mill's theories to demonstrate why pleasure is an intrinsic good.
- used other ethical theories to support arguments for alternative intrinsic goods.
- used clear examples to illustrate the inadequacy of pleasure as a measure of morality.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- learn key terms used in the specification such as 'intrinsic', so that responses can be focused clearly on the question set.
- try to recognise that application of Act Utilitarianism needs to go beyond 'extent' and that other factors of the hedonic calculus are equally important when weighing up moral decisions.

Q.2 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- precepts, acts and virtues were applied systematically to abortion with accurate examples used to illustrate.
- the principle of double effect was used clearly and accurately, with appropriate examples to illustrate exceptions to the general approach to abortion.
- the work of more recent scholars such as Kainz were used to discuss the complexity of applying Natural Law to abortion in the modern world.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- give more detailed explanations of how each aspect of Natural Law applies to abortion possibly using examples to help.
- remember to state that Natural Law is not the same as Divine Law and that reason is important in the application of Natural Law.
- focus on application of Natural Law, rather than making more general points about Christian approaches to abortion.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- raised points specifically related to the precise question such as the overlap between existing human law and Natural Law principles.
- identified the issues relating to the use of a religious theory in a diverse and increasingly secular society giving clear examples to illustrate this.
- provided logical conclusions directly related to the question, which followed clearly from the reasoning in the answer as a whole.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- responses need to move beyond simply identifying and stating relevant issues on different sides of the debate, and aim to develop these with reasoning and evidence, before analysing and evaluating how well they support the view in the question.
- AO1 content from part (a) should not simply be repeated in part (b) as part (b) questions are testing different skills (analysis and evaluation).
- a wider range of issues beyond abortion are included in human laws and these should be considered.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 2B: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed?

Part (a) of each question tests candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Part (b) of each question tests candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the qualification were tested in this examination?

Q.3 Theme 3B: Religious responses to the problem of evil: Augustinian-Type Theodicy

Q.4 Theme 2B: Deductive arguments - developments of the ontological argument

Positive features of responses:

- the majority of candidates were able to access the questions on the paper, with some excellent responses being seen. Both questions in Section B produced responses which were rewarded across the full range of bands and marks available.
- many candidates had a firm grasp of the material needed to answer the questions set. There were examples of excellent teaching and learning being provided with regards to the specification.
- there were pleasing levels of both AO1 and AO2 skills being demonstrated.

Issues for centres to consider:

- some candidates were not fully prepared for the questions set, which was reflected in the responses seen. For example, a lot of responses to Q.4 showed little understanding of both Malcolm and Descartes' developments of the ontological argument.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section B

Q.3 This was by far the least popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated very thorough knowledge and understanding of Augustine's Theodicy. Accurately explained the key features such as evil as a consequence of sin, privation, The Fall and Felix Culpa, etc.
- sources of wisdom were used effectively to support the points made, such as references from Genesis and the examples Augustine used himself.
- each explanation of the key features of the theodicy were clearly presented and communicated.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- some 'outlined' the Theodicy rather than explaining each feature in detail. More depth was required in the response to make the meaning clear. They appeared more like a list rather than being explained. More examples/evidence could have improved these responses.
- demonstrated confusion with Irenaeus' Theodicy in places. Some strayed from the question by writing material regarding the problem of evil in general rather than Augustine's Theodicy itself.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- effectively evaluated the relevance of the theodicy by providing a confident and critical analysis.
- used points used to support the theodicy being relevant/irrelevant were fully explained, evaluated and linked back to the statement effectively.
- referred to the theodicy having a moral contradiction, together with it not being compatible with our modern understanding of science, etc.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- need to be more focused on Augustine's Theodicy. Some responses included arguments from William Rowe and Gregory S. Paul without explaining how their views would argue Augustine's Theodicy is not relevant.
- accurate points were given that could be used to argue both for the relevance/irrelevance of the Theodicy. However, there was a lack of justification on how this would be the case which needed further development.
- a wider range of lines of reasoning were needed as many responses had very few points to make. This limited these responses to the lower marking bands.

Q.4 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

(a) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated sufficient breadth and depth of both Descartes and Malcolm's views, with the correct definitions for 'God given' for both.
- made excellent use of examples to support Descartes' argument and correct terminology such as 'necessary being and 'unlimited being' when referring to Malcolm.
- were able to use Descartes' analogies effectively to explain how existence is considered a predicate of God.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- need to explain the views of both Descartes or Malcolm and not just one or the other with limited detail.
- need to focus on the question set and avoid giving too much irrelevant material on Anselm.
- mixed up some analogies and matched to the wrong scholar which limited the clarity of the explanations., e.g. Gaunilo's Perfect Island being referenced with Descartes.

(b) What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the 'effectiveness of the challenges' stated in the question successfully.
- were able to use the views of both Gaunilo and Kant together with their examples/analogies in order to back up/support the lines of reasoning used.
- made reference to different strengths of the ontological argument to show that the challenges are not entirely effective. For example, the effectiveness of an *a priori* argument/ deductive reasoning.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- focus on the question set and not produce a pre-learnt response to a more general question. Many gave information on general challenges to the ontological argument without connecting them to whether they are effective or not.
- do not just provide a lot of AO1 information relating to Gaunilo and Kant views without linking this to the statement, to show whether their challenges were effective or not.
- gain a clear understanding of both Gaunilo and Kant's views.
- demonstrate a secure knowledge and understanding of different strengths of the ontological argument, which could render the challenges ineffective.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 3A: A STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Section A questions test candidates' **AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding** of religion and belief.

Section B questions test candidates' **AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation**, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 Theme 1B: Religious Figures and Sacred texts - The early church (in Acts of the Apostles).

Q.2 Theme 3C: The relationship between religion and society: religion, equality and discrimination - Feminist theology and the changing role of men and women.

Q.3 Theme 1C: Two views of Jesus.

Q.4 Theme 2C: The relationship between religion and society: respect and recognition and the ways that religious traditions view other religions and non-religious worldviews and their truth claims - challenges from pluralism and diversity within a tradition.

Q.5 Theme 3A: Attitudes towards wealth.

Q.6 Theme 4C: Religious identity through responses to poverty and injustice.

Positive features of responses:

- candidates who chose Q.1 and understood C.H. Dodd's six elements showed confidence and depth of knowledge and understanding.
- many candidates demonstrated a strong grasp of Mary Daly's work in Q.2, with some providing breadth and depth by explaining key aspects like her 'noun-verb' thesis and 'unholy trinity'.
- successful responses to AO2 questions (particularly Q.4 & Q.5) showed excellent analytical and evaluative skills, using biblical texts and theological arguments (e.g., Rahner, Hick, and concepts of wealth) effectively to argue both sides.

Issues for centres to consider:

- handwriting remains a concern for a number of scripts and centres need to be aware of their candidate's handwriting form and ability under *exam conditions* and, if necessary, make appropriate arrangements so that their work can be accessed by WJEC examiners.
- unnecessary introductions were frequently written for many AO1 questions stating what the candidates were intending to answer rather than actually answering the question. Conclusions were often unnecessarily and inappropriately written for AO1.
- candidates should be reminded of the need for capital letters for key terminology, e.g., **God, Jesus, Christian**.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- understood the question and could provide a brief introduction to illustrate their confidence in the same.
- knew and understood the work of C.H. Dodd and in AO1 style were able to confidently address his six main elements.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- develop a successful understanding of C.H. Dodd's six main elements into higher band 'A detailed' or 'An extensive and relevant response' answers.
- need to evaluate within the answer and not bring in other scholars that the question does not ask for unless a clear connection is made to the question set.

Q.2 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- read and understood the question and so committed their answer to Mary Daley.
- were able to illustrate both a breadth and a depth of Mary Daley's work e.g. detailing the three aspects of Mary Daley's 'noun – verb' thesis.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- only partly focussed on Mary Daley but then (without an appropriate reference) wrote about other feminist theologians and their work, which is not what the question required.
- need to understand the main aspects of Mary Daley's work in greater depth e.g. people should not use nouns for God, but verbs and then illustrating this e.g. God as noun – example – God as verb – example – statement as to what difference does Mary Daley propose this makes.
- the same could be said for her ideas on 'the unholy trinity' and the 'sexual caste system'.
- need to be aware Mary Daley died before the appointment of the first Anglican woman bishop and therefore she could not have a personal comment on it (whereas more successful answers state this could be seen as a posthumous contribution of Mary Daley).

Section B

Q.3 This was the third most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- understood the concept of critical realism (N.T. Wright) and were able to explain it.
- understood John Dominic Crossan's approach and who often primarily, but not exclusively used it as a counter evaluation to the statement in the question.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need to provide specific detail about critical realism, rather than supply general information about biblical / redaction / Bultmann critical approaches.
- approach this question using an analytical and evaluative style, rather than slipping into an AO1 style writing.

Q.4 This was the second most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- confidently understood the question and provided throughout an analytical and evaluative answer using various approaches.
- made relevant use of Biblical texts accurately for both sides of their arguments.
- used the view of Karl Rahner and John Hick appropriately and successfully in their approaches to the question.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- use whole biblical quotations rather than using incomplete ones which undermine the point being made, e.g. Jesus saying – 'I am the way, the truth and the life' without the rest of the quotation which changes the meaning 'no one comes to the Father except through me.'
- need to understand what the term 'exclusivism' as used in the specification means, and not erroneously write about inspiration of the Bible or minority rights.

Q.5 This was the most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- possessed an evident grasp of the two potential sides of the argument. They framed it via seemingly contradictory biblical quotes or more general arguments and conducted a well-structured answer to the question set.
- broadened their analysis and evaluation and introduced the concept of not focussing simply of material wealth, but also physical, familial, health aspects of wealth as a sense of God's blessing.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need to know what the term 'prosperity gospel' means and unpack the ideology behind this term.
- make better use of Biblical quotes that were under or only partly used e.g. it is harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to pass through eye of needle – to which disciples exclaimed – who then can be saved? – as wealth was naturally seen as a blessing from God

Q.6 This was the least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- had a clear understanding of the history and ideology of Liberation Theology and could utilise these as a structure with which to analyse and evaluate any cultural challenge to the Roman Catholic Church.
- accurately appreciated the different concerns of the last three Popes and ultimately Pope Francis' welcome of the figureheads, if not all the theology, as a result of him coming from Latin America.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- need to understand that the World Council of Churches was not founded (in 1948) as a result of Liberation Theology (which began in the 1960s).
- need to understand that Liberation Theology is broader than just 'minority rights'.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

3B: A STUDY OF ISLAM

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Section A questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Section B questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 - Theme 4C: Ethical debate about crime and punishment (including arguments posed by scholars from within and outside the Islamic tradition)

Q.2 - Theme 2B: The challenges to Islam from scientific views about the origins of the universe

Q.3 - Theme 3C: The possibility of assimilation into a secular society for Muslims in Britain

Q.4 - Theme.1A: The extent to which human interpretation may impair understanding of Shari'a

Q.5 - Theme 2C: Whether or not Islam is accurately represented in Britain today

Q.6 - Theme 3A: Whether or not there is a coherent approach to conversion in Islam

Due to the low number of entries for this option it is only possible to provide the following summary:

Positive features of responses:

- provided clear, brief introductions where needed - defining words or terms in the question/ statement.
- in Section A, addressed the demands of the question by giving specific details, terms and explanations with precision.
- gave clear judgements for Section B, which might be at the beginning or end in a conclusion, and were consistent with the argument made.
- fine-tuned arguments by offering critiques of them.
- well-structured in paragraphs which included a clear focus, such as a main point stated in the first line or two, supported by detail or information, and explained showing good understanding.
- demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of different schools of thought or positions in Islam which helped them explain different views towards topics. These included the reformist, modern movement and the Qur'anists who reject the Hadith as a source.
- referred to scholars or scholarly positions which, where relevant supported their arguments.

Issues for centres to consider:

- there are some aspects of the specification which might be better understood by candidates, particularly:
 - crime and punishment and the views of a scholar outside the Islamic tradition.
 - the variety of approaches to conversion in Islam.
 - the concept of secularism might be better understood: most candidates had a general idea only.
- some candidates gave a very narrow representation of Islam in Britain today focusing only on issues such as prayer and halal food, this could be much wider.
- some candidates made little or no reference to scholarly views, which are a requirement of A level.
- whilst structured writing frames may help some weaker candidates, they can lead to formulaic I agree/ I disagree responses, with little analysis or evaluation. Centres might try to develop writing frames which ensure candidates support the points being made with evidence and/or reasoning.
- where appropriate, centres may also help candidates to develop more relevant responses by telling them to define the key terms in the question at the start of their responses.
- careful peer-reviewing AO2 responses using the Band criteria and mark scheme, might help some candidates focus their response on the statement given or question asked.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

3C: A STUDY OF JUDAISM

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Section A questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Section B questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 - Theme 1C: Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) and Moses Maimonides

Q.2 - Theme 4B: Philosophical understandings of the nature of God and religious experience found in Kabbalah

Q.3 - Theme 1B: Midrash in Judaism: the distinction between Halakhah and Aggadah

Q.4 - Theme 2B: The challenge of science

Q.5 - Theme 3A: The development of Reform Judaism and Jewish attitudes to pluralism

Q.6 - Theme 3B: Judaism and migration - the challenges of being a religious and ethnic minority in Britain with reference to key features of aspects of Jewish life

Due to the low number of entries it is only possible to provide the following summary for this option:

Positive features of responses:

- good responses used the views of scholars appropriately and in context as a matter of course especially in response to Q.1 and Q.4.
- showed a good understanding of the various viewpoints that are held within different Jewish denominations.
- there were a number of responses to questions in Section B which demonstrated confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issues raised.
- made accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary, which demonstrated that candidates had a full understanding of the areas of the specification that were assessed.

Issues for centres to consider:

- some candidates confused the Section A AO1 requirements with that of the Section B AO2 requirements and vice versa. For example, in response to Q.1 some candidates embarked upon an AO2-type discussion of Rashi's importance versus Maimonides' importance in the history of Talmudic study; likewise in Section B there was sometimes a tendency to embark upon AO1-type narratives/background information with insufficient analysis and evaluation.
- responses which rely on phrases such as "this is a strong/weak point" but which do not have any accompanying analysis and evaluation are still evident.
- the inability to understand specialist vocabulary such as 'Kabbalah', 'Aggadah' and 'pluralism' meant that some candidates gave responses that were, on the whole, inaccurate.
- whilst there were fewer issues in relation to poor handwriting this year it is still a cause for concern. It is to be hoped that candidates who struggle to write legibly can be identified in order that access arrangements can be made for them so that they have additional support during the examination.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 3D: A STUDY OF BUDDHISM

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Section A questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Section B questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

- Q.1 - Theme 2C: Responses to the challenges from secularisation
- Q.2 - Theme 3A: Responses to the challenges of pluralism and diversity
- Q.3 - Theme 3B: Historical development of Buddhism in Britain
- Q.4 - Theme 4B: The Mindfulness Movement
- Q.5 - Theme 1A: The Pali Canon: its role in Buddhism as a whole
- Q.6 - Theme 1B: The main themes and concepts in two Mahayana texts

Positive features of responses:

- successful responses demonstrated a wide range of relevant evidence, examples, and direct quotations from Buddhist texts, showing a depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding.
- the best responses were clearly focused on the question set, effectively used AO1 knowledge in evaluative AO2 arguments, and included well-constructed conclusions that brought the arguments together coherently.

Issues for centres to consider:

- candidates should spend more time carefully reading the question in both sections before rushing in to responding. They need to focus on the question set. Centres should continue to encourage candidates to break down a question, looking for keywords and command words to help focus on what the question requires. Examples of key words from this year which some candidates failed to appreciate in their answers: Q3 'significantly different'; Q5 'main textual source'; Q6 'Buddhism's diversity'.
- centres need to encourage candidates to make a broader and more extensive range of the views of scholars, which enhances their responses and provide a greater insight to the topic being discussed.
- candidates also need to remember the importance of a structured conclusion in response to Section B questions. They should be encouraged to conclude their responses in a more structured manner with the use of key words e.g. finally; to sum up; all things considered; in light of this information/analysis, overall, etc.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This question was slightly more popular than Q.2.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the question with relevant responses answering the specific demands of the question set.
- used a wide range of relevant evidence and examples to support the points made in the answer, including quotations.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- focus on the key words in the question set – it is imperative therefore candidates take time to read the question carefully and underline key words. The key word here was 'responses' which a number of candidates chose to ignore.
- any point made should be supported by relevant examples or evidence and any quotation used must be relevant to its context.

Q.2 This question was slightly less popular than Q.1.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the question set.
- were able to refer to concepts and texts beyond those that are usually associated with the issue in the question set and refer to ekayana, the notion of compassion and non-violence. A few candidates also referred to Nichiren's argument that other traditions apart from Buddhists would spend time in hell which exemplified the diversity within Buddhism.

The main areas of improvement for less successful responses:

- needed to refer to a wide range of evidence and examples to support Buddhist views since there is no one specific teaching on the issue.
- a number of answers only focused on the Kalama Sutta and for this reason their answers were lacking in depth and breadth.

Section B

Q.3 This question was by far the most popular in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the question set and identified the key words.
- demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the nature and history of Buddhism in Britain in their arguments. There were also appropriate references to Buddhist groups in Wales especially the Kalpa Bhadra Kadampa Buddhist Centre in Llandudno with their occasional use of the Welsh language as part of their activities, and the Kadampa Meditation Centre in Springfield House, Swansea.
- exemplified their arguments and there was also evidence of purposeful analysis of the contrast with Asian forms which were supported by examples such as the alms round, clothing and festivals.
- provided a well-constructed conclusion bringing all the strands of the answer together.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- read the question carefully and identify the key words – here it was ‘differences’.
- knowledge and understanding needs to be framed as an argument in response to the issue in the question set and not simply presented as AO1.
- lines of argument need to be supported by clear, relevant evidence and examples.

Q.4 This question was the least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the question set.
- were aware of ‘mindfulness’ and its main practitioners within a religious and secular context.
- only used AO1 material as a basis for AO2 arguments.
- supported their arguments with a wide range of evidence and examples - reference to the Eightfold path, Thich Nat Hanh, Jon Kabat Zinn and secular mindfulness, Brazier and the ‘watering down’ of Buddhism, and Zlavoj Zizek’s arguments on mindfulness and capitalism.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- identifying the issues raised by the question set and avoid providing a narrow response in terms of evidence and examples used.
- only use AO1 material as a basis for AO2 arguments.
- link the arguments presented to the question set. This can be done by referring to the question throughout the answer - and how the practices either contradict or support Buddhist teachings.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 3D: A STUDY OF HINDUISM

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Section A questions test candidates' AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding of religion and belief.

Section B questions test candidates' AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

- Q.1 - Theme 4B: Philosophical understandings of the nature of reality and religious experience found in Samkhya yoga and Advaita Vedanta
- Q.2 - Theme 2A: The reasons for the development and growth of ISKCON
- Q.3 - Theme 4A: The Bhakti movement
- Q.4 - Theme 3C: The changing roles of men and women in Hinduism (including different views within the religion)
- Q.5 - Theme 2C: Hindu liberationist thinking as defending the poor and oppressed:
- Q.6 - Theme 1C: Shri Paramahansa Ramakrishna

Positive features of responses:

- there were some excellent, high-band responses which clearly focussed on the question set, and made effective use of evidence and examples (e.g., on Q.2, Q.3, Q.4, and Q.6).
- successful Section B AO2 responses often showed balanced analysis and evaluation, supported by Hindu texts, teachings, scholars, and a structured conclusion using appropriate language.

Issues for centres to consider:

- candidates need to focus on the question set. Continue to encourage candidates to break down a question following a simple guide, such as looking for keywords to help focus on what the question is asking. Examples of key words from this year which some candidates failed to appreciate in their answers: Q.3 'Bhakti movement'; Q.5 'attitudes'; Q.6 'Vivekananda' and 'world religion'. The AO2 questions also very often contain words and phrases that try to help or guide candidates - 'relevant', 'practical' or 'important'. It is imperative that candidates pick up on these phrase if they are to attain the higher bands.
- provide a broader and extensive range of referencing and views of scholars which enhances the answers and gives a more meaningful insight to the topic being discussed.
- the importance of a structured conclusion. Candidates can be encouraged to conclude their AO2 responses in a more structured manner with the use of key words e.g. finally; to sum up; all things considered; in light of this information/analysis, etc.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focussed on the question set.
- wrote confidently about Shankara and his three stages of reality demonstrating thorough knowledge and understanding.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- it is imperative that candidates read the question fully and carefully to understand its demands. Many responses were more focused on writing about beliefs about Brahman and with only a few sweeping remarks about Advaita Vedanta.
- candidates need to be certain of the meaning of key terms – there was confusion over the terms monism and dualism.

Q.2 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the demands of the question.
- were able to effectively link Prabhupada's work to the culture of the 60s the appeal of the lifestyle of ISKCON at the time
- with some referencing more recent converts and the continuing work of the movement in the UK to show his lasting effect.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- need to present their knowledge and understanding within the context of the question set. the demands of the question sets the framework for the answer.
- avoid simply writing everything they know about Prabhupada.

Section B

Q.3 This was by far the least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the question set.
- provided balanced in analysis and evaluation in terms of arguments and counter arguments. Supported their arguments by using evidence and examples from Hindu texts, teachings and scholars.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- only use AO1 material as a basis for AO2 arguments.
- focus on the key words in the question the 'Bhakti movement'.

Q.4 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the question set.
- balanced responses which referred to Hindu beliefs, teachings and practices that reflect the diversity of views within Hinduism towards the issue in the question set.
- included relevant evidence and examples.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- avoid one-sided answers that tend to give the impression that Hinduism has only one view on a certain issue.
- avoid making general sweeping statements without any real or specific evidence in support. For example, some candidates seem to be under the impression that sati is still occurring on a regular basis in India, despite the last documented case being in 1987. There is also a tendency to focus on negative references to women in Hindu scripture such as Manusmriti and more positive references in scripture are often over-looked.

Q5. This was the second least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the question set.
- balanced arguments focusing on the contribution of Vinoba Bhave and on the evaluation of whether he had an influence on Hindu attitudes.
- provided a balanced conclusion.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- arguments need to be based on sound knowledge and understanding.
- focus on key words in the question - 'Vinoba Bhave', 'little influence' and 'Hindu attitudes to wealth and poverty' and address this issue. Remember that the question was about Bhave and whilst Gandhi's contribution was a valid reference, it should not be the main focus of a candidate's response.

Q6. This was the second least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- focused on the key words in the question set – Vivekananda and world religion.
- supported their arguments by using a wide range of evidence and examples.
- provided a balanced conclusion based on the arguments presented.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- all statements/arguments presented need to be supported by specific evidence and examples.
- key words in a question need to be identified as this gives clear focus to the issues that need to be discussed in the question set.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 3F: A STUDY OF SIKHISM

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Section A questions test candidates' **AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding** of religion and belief.

Section B questions test candidates' **AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation**, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 - Theme 1C: Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the founding of the Sikh Empire

Q.2 - Theme 2A: The aspiration for Khalistan

Q.3 - Theme: 4A The status and importance of the Rahit Maryada and Rahit Namas

Q.4 - Theme: 3A The challenges to Sikhism from science and its responses to secularisation

Q.5 - Theme 1A: Role and significance of the texts of Mul Mantra and the Japji of Guru Nanak

Q.6 - Theme 2C: Difference between diversity and pluralism

Due to the low number of entries, it is only possible to provide the following summary for this option:

Positive features of responses:

- focussed on the question set fulfilling its demands.
- in AO1 and AO2 responses statements and arguments were fully supported by relevant evidence and examples.
- good responses made excellent use of scholarly views and quotations.
- in the AO2 responses provided a balanced conclusion based on the arguments presented.

Issues for centres to consider:

- focus on the question set. Continue to encourage candidates to break down a question following a simple guide such as looking for keywords to help focus on what the question is asking. Example of key words which candidates failed to appreciate in their answers: Q.6 'Sikh worship'; Q.5 'most important'; Q.4 'very effective'.
- candidates need to provide a broader and extensive range of referencing and views of scholars which enhances their response and provides a more meaningful insight to the topic being discussed.
- stress the importance of a structured conclusion for AO2 responses.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 4 - A STUDY OF RELIGION AND ETHICS

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Section A questions test candidates' **AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding** of religion and belief.

Section B questions test candidates' **AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation**, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 - Theme 1A: Meta-ethical approaches: Naturalism

Q.2 - Theme 2B: Bernard Hoose's overview of the Proportionalist debate

Q.3 - Theme 2A: John Finnis' development of Natural Law

Q.4 - Theme 3B: Concepts of determinism

Q.5 - Theme 4A: Religious concepts of free will

Q.6 - Theme 4B: Concepts of libertarianism

Positive features of responses:

- good responses demonstrated clear knowledge and understanding of both Proportionalism and Naturalism in Section A.
- were able to draw on a range of scholarship to support their explanations.
- in Section B there were some excellent, insightful responses were seen to all questions, with those candidates who had made a positive decision to tackle Q.6 showing some particularly strong understanding of Sartre.
- candidates who began their AO2 responses setting out a clear thesis or line of reasoning tended to follow this through very effectively, gaining good marks in this section.

Issues for centres to consider

- in AO2 responses candidates should avoid writing lengthy AO1 introductions and instead aim to identify the issues raised by the statement in the question.
- for Section B questions there is a tendency, particularly with questions drawn from Themes 3 and 4, for candidates to simply explain contrasting views. They should be encouraged to draw out analytical and evaluative points from the AO1 content rather than simply juxtaposing views.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated a clear understanding of the difference between meta and normative ethics.
- correctly recognised key features of Naturalism and selected good examples to exemplify the theory.
- provided accurate information on the views of scholars such as Bradley or examples of normative theories with a Naturalist approach such as Mill's Utilitarianism were examined in detail, showing clear understanding.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- recognise that 'examine' is an AO1 trigger word and requires knowledge and understanding rather than evaluation.
- some candidates would have benefitted from spending more time on the theory itself and less time on the criticisms of Naturalism which were not relevant.
- a clear focus on the specific theory required by the question would help rather than including discussions of alternative approaches.

Q.2 This was by far the least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- recognised that the Proportionalist approach has its roots in Natural Law theory and were able to exemplify this.
- clearly understood different terminology such as 'right', 'good', 'ontic evil' etc. and were able to use this accurately in context.
- referenced the question throughout, exploring which aspects of Proportionalism could be seen as a 'hybrid'.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- focus on the question set - whilst using examples is often good, spending time applying the theory to immigration and the death penalty was not required in this question.
- remember that Proportionalism is based on Aquinas' Natural Law rather than Finnis' version.

Section B

Q.3 This was the least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- evaluated the effectiveness of this theory well.
- provided specific examples such as same sex marriage to illustrate some of the problems with the theory.
- drew comparisons with other forms of Natural Law, but used these effectively to evaluate Finnis' version, keeping a clear focus on the question.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- remember the AO2 questions test analysis and evaluation not application – examples of application can be used to illustrate evaluative points, but the whole essay should not be devoted to application of the theory.
- if using another theory to contrast, such as Proportionalism, make sure that the main focus of the essay remains on the scholar required by the question.

Q.4 This was the second most popular question in this section.

- recognised that this question was related to free will and determinism and drew on a range of scholarly views including Locke and Sartre to support their lines of reasoning.
- drew on religious and secular approaches, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of the debate, and made these clearly relevant to the specific wording of the question.
- made thoughtful reference to compatibilist perspectives to support evaluations.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- aim to analyse and evaluate the views of scholars rather than simply explaining different points of view – why is one perspective more convincing than another?
- avoid describing in detail examples such as Pavlov or Sirigu's experiments as this takes away time needed to analyse and evaluate what these experiments can tell us about moral responsibility.

Q.5 This was the most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated clear understanding of how different scholars viewed free will in order to evaluate effectively.
- drew on content from other components, for example referring to different purposes of prayer in various traditions, in order to explore the relationship between prayer and free will.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- spend a few minutes thinking about what the question is asking and selecting relevant arguments for this specific question. This will lead to more focused answers.
- for questions where there is no specific scholar mentioned, candidates should be reminded to draw on the theories they have studied, such as the work of Pelagius and Arminius in this particular case.

Q.6 This was the second least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- excellent understanding of Sartre's Libertarianism with stronger responses working through different aspects of his thought systematically to create clear arguments which were then countered with the work of a range of other scholars.
- engaged with the word 'inevitably' in the question and drew out the implications of this, often focusing on the different responses atheists and believers may have to Sartre's Libertarianism.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- rather than lengthy AO1 introductions, candidates should be encouraged to engage with the issues in the question from the start of the response.
- candidates should discuss the reasons why people may or may not accept Sartre's views on Libertarianism rather than simply describing his philosophy.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 5: A STUDY OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Section A questions test candidates' **AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding** of religion and belief.

Section B questions test candidates' **AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation**, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

Q.1 - Theme 4C: Religious language as non-cognitive and symbolic.

Q.2 - Theme 1C: Issues relating to the rejection of religion - Atheism.

Q.3 - Theme 2B: Miracles - the definitions of.

Q.4 - Themes 1A/B: Religious belief as a product of the human mind-Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

Q.5 - Theme 4A: Religious language as non-cognitive and symbolic.

Q.6 - Theme 3C: Religious language non-cognitive and analogical.

Positive features of responses:

- incorporated source material and displayed a wide range of relevant examples and support.
- effectively differentiated between AO1 (knowledge and understanding) and AO2 (analysis and evaluation) requirements.
- made insightful connections across topics, including links to AS content.
- incorporated relevant source material and a wide range of evidence to support arguments.

Issues for centres to consider:

- less successful responses generally did not cover all areas of the Specification, particularly noting the AO2 issues. In some areas candidates seemed unfamiliar with the AO2 issue.
- analytical and evaluative skills need to be evident in Section B responses. Where AO1 information is provided it must be *used* rather than merely cited. This would allow candidates to access the higher bands in Section B questions.
- references to the specific concept of religious language being assessed are important in order to avoid generic responses that limit the Bands that candidates can access.
- the use of exemplification would enhance responses. Not only would this allow for a more detailed response, but it also highlights and confirms understanding.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 This was by far the most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated in detail, what religious language as a language game is using key terminology and an explanation of this.
- understood that seeing religious language as a language game is a non-cognitive approach and that religious language need not subscribe to the rules of literal language.
- used analogies with reference to other areas of life in order to explain how religious language can be considered to be a language game.
- made reference to the coherence theory of truth, with an understanding of the connection of this theory to religious language as a language game.
- understood the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and how Wittgenstein's view developed from his earlier allegiance to Logical Positivism.
- meaningfully used quotations from Wittgenstein, such as 'form of life' and 'don't ask for its meaning; ask for its use'.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- connect religious language as a language game to any explanation of games in everyday life and the fact that such games have rules.
- provide context for the quotations from Wittgenstein which demonstrate understanding of his ideas.
- demonstrate understanding of either the coherence theory of truth or to the term non-cognitive.

Q.2 This was by far the least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- gave a comprehensive set of explanations regarding New Atheism's rejection of religion, and were not restricted to merely generic atheistic arguments but rather, they fully engaged with the question set.
- discussed the claim of New Atheism that religion is non-thinking and were able to give effective examples, linked to the views of scholars connected to New Atheism.
- discussed the claim of New Atheism that religion has an infantile worldview and were able to give effective examples, linked to the views of scholars connected to New Atheism.
- discussed the claim of New Atheism that religion impedes scientific progress and were able to give effective examples, linked to the views of scholars connected to New Atheism.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- go beyond simply describing what atheism is.
- focus on the question set and not just focus on Freud or Ayer and general criticisms of religious belief.
- be aware of the useful pointers given in the specification such as New Atheism's claims that religion is non-thinking, infantile and something that impedes scientific progress.
- do not just state that religion is non-thinking, infantile and/or something that impedes scientific progress, but develop these ideas.
- refer to relevant scholars in depth. Scholars that are not New Atheists should be avoided.

Q.3 This was the most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- used any brief AO1 material that was necessary and devoted the majority of the answer to evaluation.
- covered a range of the scholars on the specification, namely St. Thomas Aquinas, David Hume, Roy F. Holland and Richard Swinburne.
- for each of the scholars suggested they described their definition of miracle. They then proceeded to evaluate the adequacy of that definition. This was done in a logical and coherent fashion.
- with regard to St. Aquinas they used his definition of miracle and evaluated the adequacy of its component parts, namely the intervention from God and the interruption of the normal course of nature. This was often combined with his three types of miracle.
- Hume and Swinburne were often compared and contrasted and this was used to good effect in relation to the adequacy of their definitions of miracle.
- Holland's contingency miracle was understood well and this gave a good platform for evaluation. Many concluded that they believed that as this definition does not include the breaking of a law of nature, then it is an inadequate definition of miracle.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- focus on the question set and not turn this into a question on 'do miracles occur?'
- AO1 material should only serve as a backdrop to the analysis and evaluation (AO2 skills) which should be the focus of this question.
- definitions should be included as a means by which the question could be answered.
- be aware of what the term 'adequacy' means in order to access the true intention of the question.
- be aware of, and clearly understand all the scholars in the specification so they can refer to them in their response and refer to the specifics of their views.

Q.4 This was the least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- briefly introduced Freud and Jung’s ideas before focusing on analysis and evaluation.
- explored each scholar’s views in turn, resulting in clear, coherent responses.
- compared Freud and Jung, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses to stay focused on the question. They stated that Freud saw religious belief as an illusion and a neurosis, something that is harmful to people but they were also aware that he did see some positives with regard to beliefs about God. Some used the same material to suggest it as being both positive and negative which showed reasoning skill.
- with regard to Jung they mentioned that he saw religion as a source of comfort and it promotes a positive mindset. It was also recognised though that his view is reductionist which might affect the reliability of Jung’s views.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- AO1 material on Freud and Jung should only serve as a backdrop to the analysis and evaluation (AO2 skills) which should be the focus of this question.
- do not just the views of Freud and Jung in relation to God without any in depth analysis and evaluation.
- go beyond reproducing material learnt through rote learning and/or undue reliance on brief revision notes.
- do not present one-sided arguments agreeing with the statement, many were unaware of any positive aspects of Freud’s beliefs about God.

Q.5 This was the second most popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- briefly explained symbolic language as context for symbolic religious language.
- identified symbolic religious language as non-cognitive, supporting analysis and evaluation.
- the term ‘meaningful’ was recognised, prompting analysis and evaluation of Logical Positivism.
- symbolic religious language was understood and illustrated, aiding analysis and evaluation.
- Randall and Tillich were analysed and evaluated in light of Logical Positivism, showing depth beyond AO1.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- don’t place too much focus was on symbolic language generally, with minimal reference to symbolic religious language.
- AO1 material on Randall and Tillich should only serve as a backdrop to the analysis and evaluation (AO2 skills) which should be the focus of this question.
- don’t overlook the significance of the term “meaningful” in the question. Candidates failed to engage with the challenge posed by Logical Positivism.

Q.6 This was the second least popular question in this section.

What worked well – characteristics of successful responses:

- demonstrated a deep grasp of analogy, applying it well beyond everyday usage to religious discourse.
- recognized analogy as a *non-cognitive* approach—suggesting it conveys meaning differently than literal language.
- by demonstrating deep understanding this enabled critical analysis of analogy’s role in religious language, especially in light of Logical Positivism’s critiques.
- outlined Aquinas’ analogies of *proportion* and *attribution* with sufficient detail to support further evaluation.
- the effectiveness of analogy in conveying anything meaningful about God was scrutinised, considering whether it merely offers approximations.
- Ramsey’s concepts of *models and qualifiers* were included to assess analogy’s potential to disclose divine reality - which were also critically examined.

The main areas of improvement needed for less successful responses:

- focus on the question set. There was limited understanding of analogy, and few linked it to religious language. References to religious language lacked discussion of analogical forms.
- understand the connection between religious analogy and Logical Positivism, so that evaluations are not superficial and detached from the issue of meaning in religious language.
- AO1 material on Aquinas’ analogy of proportion and attribution should only serve as a backdrop to the analysis and evaluation (AO2 skills) which should be the focus of this question.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 6: TEXTUAL STUDIES (NEW TESTAMENT)

Overview of the Unit

Which Assessment Objectives are being assessed in this examination?

Section A questions test candidates' **AO1 skills - knowledge and understanding** of religion and belief.

Section B questions test candidates' **AO2 skills - analysis and evaluation**, with regards to aspects of and approaches to religion and belief.

Which aspects of the specification were tested in this examination?

- Q.1 - Theme 1B: Parables – purposes and interpretations
- Q.2 - Theme 2C: Close study of New Testament texts (miracles)
- Q.3 - Theme 1C: Close study of New Testament texts (parables)
- Q.4 - Theme 2A: Miracles – types and characteristics
- Q.5 - Theme 3B: The Letters (1 Peter) – purpose and place in the New Testament
- Q.6 - Theme 4A: Apocalyptic literature – definitions and characteristics

Due to the low number of entries, it is only possible to provide the following summary for this option:

Positive features of responses:

- In Q1, 'told the parable of the Prodigal Son' through the 'example' (John Dominic Crossan).
- In Q1, saw the parable of the Prodigal Son as a potential 'Attack' and / or 'Challenge' parable and correctly examined why. Some compared to better examples of the same to illustrate this is primarily an 'Example' parable.
- when responding to the AO2 questions focused using a 'debate' style considering the issues of each question. Q4 was particularly well dealt with.

Issues for centres to consider with regards to some candidates:

- some candidates incorrectly determined the Prodigal Son is a 'Riddle' parable.
- others just essentially re-told the parable perhaps with passing attention to the question set.
- some AO2 responses gave lengthy and unnecessary introductions, time would be better employed on a (longer and more evaluative) conclusion.
- some candidates responded to AO2 questions by simply stating one side of the debate and then the other, this is not effective analysis and evaluation.
- other candidates simply offered AO1 information when answering AO2 questions.
- Q4 was often treated as a debate concerning modern day belief of miracles *per se*.
- the regular omission of slavery from Q5 was disappointing.

Supporting you

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