

## **GCSE**

### **Religious Studies B (Philosophy and Applied Ethics)**

General Certificate of Education **GCSE J621**

General Certificate of Education (Short Course) **GCSE J121**

## **OCR Report to Centres June 2016**

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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**Religious Studies B (Philosophy and Applied Ethics) (J621)**

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## **B601 Philosophy 1 (deity, religious and spiritual experience, end of life)**

### **General Comments**

The paper was accessible, producing a full range of responses. The vast majority answered a combination of the Christianity questions, the most popular being Questions 2 and 14. There was a noticeable decline in the number of scripts seen from other religions other than Christianity. Those that were seen were predominantly Islam and Hinduism papers. However, a feature of this year's papers, reported by many examiners, was far more candidates answering on split religions. A popular combination was Christianity in Section A and Hinduism in Section C.

Overall centres prepared candidates well for this exam and there is a marked improvement in the level of effort by the candidates to answer all the questions. Candidates, on the whole, are answering the questions in sequence, thus aiding thinking and application of knowledge and understanding to the questions. Many candidates offered clear and concise responses to the questions in parts (a) to (c) of each section where short answers or even a one word response was required. Some candidates gave unnecessarily extended responses to these sections however, especially to part (c) of the question. This is likely to have affected their overall time management. There was still some Centres preparing candidates to answer questions in pairs, starting with the long discursive questions, i.e. Q2(e) and Q14(e), followed by Q2(d) and Q14(d) and so on. This is a questionable technique, and can lead to muddled thinking and also time problems.

There were far less rubric errors, especially those of attempting all three sections, and less candidates running out of time.

Centres appeared to have prepared candidates for the different kinds of questions well and there was a marked improvement in the quality of responses to (d) type questions where knowledge and understanding have to be evident to reach the higher levels. In all three sections, whichever religion, candidates were able to use good religious studies knowledge to demonstrate their understanding of the religion studied. Just a few limited their chances to score highly by offering their opinions and evaluations to an issue. This is not required in (d) type questions.

Another positive development was that many students structured their (e) questions well. There was the use of a formulaic approach which did help students to structure their thoughts. The use of 'linking' language was quite sophisticated and enabled many students to show engagement in their writing, thereby achieving the top levels. Where there was evidence of candidates failing to reach to highest levels in (e) type questions it was sometimes due to candidates applying 'practised' questions, or prepared answers. Some candidates lost marks due to failure of reading the question carefully enough.

There were some excellent responses to the (e) questions, although reaching the full marks for this part is a challenge. Responses from many candidates consisted of well presented arguments on either side of the debate and clear evidence of a personal viewpoint. Sometimes, the personal viewpoint was offered as a distinct section but often it did not relate to what had been said earlier in the response. The best personal responses were those that wove throughout the discussion, weighing the various arguments as a whole. Also examiners saw an increase in knowledge from a different religion being incorporated into the answer. However, it could only be credited if it was adding to the argument with a different point of view. Other candidates offered more general religious responses, sometimes repeating the same religious teaching to support different issues which limited the value of their response. A few candidates

failed to offer any religious content at all, whilst some developed an argument for one side of the issue but with no consideration of alternative views or shades of opinion. These latter sorts of responses, along with those which did not offer any personal comment, could not be given much credit.

The paper provided a comprehensive coverage of the syllabus affording candidates ample scope for effective differentiation. It was very rare that pupils were unable to make any comments at all for a particular question.

Finally, as the scripts are scanned now for marking online, it is to be encouraged that candidates do consider the quality of handwriting, as well as spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some handwriting was so small as to render responses almost illegible. Whilst on-screen software allows examiners to enlarge scanned images, this can detract from the flow of the response given by the candidate.

## Comments on Individual Questions

### Section A: Belief about Deity Q1-6

- (a) Candidates answering this question from a Buddhist or Hindu response were accurate. In Buddhism most common answers were supernatural beings who are worshipped and deities. In Hinduism either “the three gods” or the names of the Trimurti were the most common answers. In the other religions the majority gained a mark for this question but there were many wrong answers. Some students had not grasped this concept at all - loving/benevolent being the favoured answer. The mark scheme allowed many candidates who put loving or omni-benevolent first to gain the mark only when they followed it with caring, kind or understanding. Some excellent answers dealt with the empathy God shows to his creation. Weak answers took guesses at “passionate” and “companion”.
- (b) In Buddhism there was evidence of good teaching here; the role of the bodhisattvas in helping people reaching enlightenment and providing role models for compassionate behaviour was well understood. The use of the words ‘two ways’ in the other (b) part questions required candidates to distinguish two separate ways of influence and this proved difficult for weaker candidates. Candidates were able to write about the influence of the Holy Spirit. Popular responses were: guiding moral behaviour and the increase in faith and belief. Miracles and spiritual phenomena were also mentioned. In Hinduism candidates wrote of the role models of Rama as a husband or son; in Islam popular responses were guiding moral behaviour and the increase in faith and belief, and in Judaism morals and teachings were stressed.
- (c) With a ‘**describe**’ question that is points marked, there are several ways to gain three marks. It can be three separate statements of knowledge or a statement with development and or exemplification. However some common errors were where candidates focused on explaining the concept of a miracle rather than describing an example. Another common mistake was to describe miracles in general - giving no example. The question asked for a specific example for each religion. Most candidates got 2-3 marks for this question, though it was clear that some were very muddled about various biblical miracles.
- (d) In Buddhism, this was generally well answered, with good responses looking at the Buddha as a role model and at the effect his key teachings have on Buddhists. With the other religions this question allowed candidates to show their extensive knowledge and understanding of reasons for the existence of God. The majority explained the classical arguments for the existence of God - cosmological, teleological, ontological and moral. Some candidates focused upon family upbringing or the existence of holy books as reasons for the existence of God. There was a lots of reference made to miracles and religious experience.

- (e) Candidates who carefully considered the statement produced excellent responses. Some candidates struggled with the meaning of value and wrote much more generally about the existence of God. Better candidates wrote with reference to historical changes, science, the importance of belief in the next life, moral values and guidance. But some responses were somewhat waffled and candidates seemed to find it easier to find reasons why there was no value than why there was value to believing in God.

### **Section B: Religious and Spiritual Experience Q7-12**

- (a) In all religions candidates nearly all gained a mark for this question. Where a mark was not awarded was for rites of passage such as marriages or baptisms. This was not answering the question.
- (b) Most gained the marks, though some did not know what symbols were or how they were used. Some simply stated two symbols without giving a use. Some successfully gave two uses to one symbol. There were a number of generic uses but they were religion appropriate, e.g. to 'represent' something, to 'remind' people of something....
- (c) This was well answered with prayer being the most popular, followed by meditation and study of holy books, such as the Bible or The Qur'an. Most candidates got the full three marks, some only two for a statement and one development.
- (d) Some candidates who described 'prayer' in question (c) tended to just repeat material, but most had a secure understanding of not only the types of prayer but the value of prayer to a believer. There were very few Level 1 answers and a larger than usual number of Level 3 answers.
- (e) Many candidates in this section got to Level 4 and a few to full marks. Good answers focussed on the value of church, mosque/ mandir, etc., for the community, expressing faith, learning and worship and also why a follower of a certain religion might worship at home. The weaker responses were those which showed little knowledge of different liturgical and sacramental traditions, or denominational differences. Some got distracted into discussing decorations in churches or not and liturgy or not - again some answers showed they had practised previous questions, revised them and used them without taking into account the wording of a different question.

### **Section C: End of Life Q13-18**

- (a) This posed no difficulty for candidates from any religion. Candidates could either define the word or give the religious meaning of the word to gain 1 mark.
- (b) In Buddhism the Buddha's teachings and the cycle of Samsara were mentioned. Only one candidate described the skandas. Candidates had to think carefully of two actions or words said at a funeral that showed there was a belief in life after death. Merely stating 'eulogy' or 'candles' did not answer the question and so were not credited with any marks. Candles and flowers were popular, and some did manage to link this with belief about the life in heaven and the soul rising. Better answers quoted specific and relevant biblical texts or the words of the committal and commendation, or looked at burial in terms of the resurrection of the dead or the separation of the soul. In religions other than Christianity, this was answered better. The splitting of the skull, the swift cremation and scattering in the Ganges were the most quoted for Hindus; the washing of the body and burial rather than cremation were the most offered examples in Islam, and Kaddish and burial not cremation were the most popular responses for Jews.

- (c) In Buddhism this was well understood and most gained full marks. In Christianity the description of heaven ranged from golden gates and fluffy clouds with angels to very detailed statements that looked at literalist and symbolic views. Candidates often wrote a lot on this, far more than was required for three marks. Some responses were very simplistic such as heaven is a place where you can have everything you missed out on earth. In Hinduism, providing that candidates knew what Moksha was, and did not confuse it with Samsara, this was very well answered, with the stress on union with Brahman, freedom from the cycle of rebirth and the Ultimate Reality was also quoted and clearly understood as the ultimate goal. Many Muslim responses included the expected points from Qur'an, with levels of hell and the details of endless torture being popular. In Judaism, the question was different. If the candidates did not describe the connection between the body and the soul they gained little or no marks. A few focused on the gift of soul being from God and separating us from animals, and the breath of God.
- (d) In Buddhism some answers stayed in the top of Level 2 but others gained Level 3, being well aware in many cases of differences between Hindu and Buddhist theology. In Christianity candidates were usually able to get well into Level 2, with descriptions of separation of body and soul, judgement and final destination. Purgatory as a cleansing place for the soul was frequently mentioned, though there are still misconceptions about purgatory. Some candidates wrote about Plato and Aristotle's views on the soul, some of which was not linked in any way to Christian belief. In Hinduism some reused some material from 15(b) and 15(c) but developed it by giving a good explanation of the Law of Karma and the effect on the atman. In Islam, again as with other b/c questions, some of the material used in c was repeated. This was the only Islamic question that didn't produce very high quality answers. In Judaism, most answers acknowledged the diversity of Jewish belief on this and the concept of judgement and destination. This was well answered by candidates.
- (e) This was well answered from a Buddhist perspective, contrasting Abrahamic perspectives in terms of re birth and the linear view of salvation. Nearly all candidates did attempt to answer Q2(e) and the better answers were focused on the fact that no Christian wants to go to hell, but: a) God is forgiving, and there is always purgatory, b) God knows why we want to do good things and does not reward doing good for selfish reasons, and c) Christians, and people of other faiths and no faith, do good for reasons other than fear. Some clearly wrote everything they knew whether or not it related to the issue and others started well and then went off at a tangent and discussed a different question. There were nuanced answers on what it was that Hindus might "fear" about the afterlife and the importance of dharma and moral behaviour, as well as the effect of this on caste and rebirth. In Judaism there were a variety of responses, given the different Jewish beliefs on the topic, but candidates made cases based on the secular Jewish tradition, being Jewish but not observant, especially post Holocaust, and more Orthodox beliefs of heaven, hell and resurrection.

## **B602 Philosophy 2 (good and evil, revelation, science)**

### **General Comments**

In the main examiners felt that the paper was accessible and offered an appropriate level of challenge to students. Questions differentiated as they were intended to.

The standardisation process raised a concern about the layout of the question paper, which differed markedly from previous years in that section B was spread across three pages. Examiners were concerned that this would disadvantage less able candidates; these papers have a complex rubric and are intimidating to candidates at first sight. If schools have familiarised candidates with them using past papers then a substantial change to the layout has the potential to throw some candidates unfairly. Some examiners reiterated this concern in reporting on the component. Certainly this section was unpopular, but not more so than it has been in previous years. It was also poorly answered in the main but this seems unlikely to be attributable to the difference in layout as most candidates answering this section chose question 8, which as the second question in the section was on the same page number as it has been in previous years.

There were no reports of any particular section of any question being commonly left unattempted, and most candidates attempted all parts of the question they had chosen. There were very wholly blank scripts, and few rubric errors. Examiners reported an increase in candidates mis-numbering the questions they have attempted.

All religions were represented, with a noticeably larger number of Buddhism scripts and also of candidates choosing to answer each question from a different religious perspective. Sikhism remains the least popular choice and Christianity the most popular, although examiners' impressions are that this is by a smaller margin than in previous years. As in previous years, sections A and C remain the most common choices; Section B seemed in the main to be the choice of less able or less well prepared candidates.

Many candidates continue to write far more than is required for their answers to (b) and (c) parts, consequently reducing the time available for (d) and (e) part responses. However most candidates were able to finish both questions they had chosen. There is also a significant number of candidates who appear to not be reading questions b and c sufficiently carefully or lacking awareness of the difference between some of the key terms, for example a teaching and a response.

Responses to (e) part questions remain heavily knowledge focussed with the tendency towards formulaic answers which was noted last year increasing. Candidates seem to have been encouraged to include more viewpoints, but most presented these only as additional knowledge rather than engaging with them discursively or critiquing them in ways which would enable access to the higher range of marks. Knowledge heavy responses are generally restricted in the available marks since they tend to take the form of blocks of knowledge which are discursive only in the implication that they relate to differing perspectives on the statement. Candidates therefore struggle to achieve the 'justified arguments' and 'discussion' elements of the higher levels. Another emerging tendency is for candidates to close each paragraph of a response with a sentence that begins 'This is a strong/weak argument because...'. However most candidates utilising this approach lacked the critical thinking skills to actually give a reason and instead either repeated the material already given or judged an argument strong or weak based on how much they liked it. The best responses continue to be those which avoid this kind of formulaic approach and present a thoughtful and engaged consideration of the statements given in the

question. Some strong responses do explicitly identified points of weakness or strength in a view before offering an alternative, while others presented the arguments as more of a back-and-forth conversation.

It was also reported that candidates appear to have been drilled to include a conclusion, but that this is often simply a repetition of previously used material, contributing nothing to the question and taking up time which could have been better spent on adding depth to the response.

There are still a larger than expected number of candidates who do not include any material specific to the religion on which they were answering in their response, and thus some otherwise high calibre responses were restricted to the lower levels.

## Comments on Individual Questions

### Section A : Questions 1-6

Part a: Very few candidates failed to gain this mark. Those who did so generally chose an example of a human being who has been responsible for moral evil rather than an entity which could be described as a symbolic representation of the concept.

Part b: This question was generally well answered, with most candidates giving clear examples of occasions when suffering might be experienced. The decision at standardisation was that general responses such as physical, bodily or emotional suffering should be creditable as the term 'ways' used in the question is very broad, but most candidates opted for more specific examples such as 'grief' or 'pain'. However candidates who offered causes or types of evil such as 'natural' and 'moral' were not answering the question adequately; this was the most common error.

Part c: Most candidates who attempted this question were able to identify a way, such as prayer or charity. However many either stopped there, or then identified a second way. In both cases they denied themselves access to the full range of marks. The command word was 'describe' which means that they needed to offer development and/or identification of the method they had selected. 'Way' was again understood broadly, so acceptable responses ranged from offering comfort by bringing the sufferer to God to practical action to address specific problems such as starvation. However a minority of candidates thought they were being asked about teachings rather than actions; they did not identify an action a religious person might take and so could not gain the marks. Some candidates drew on material from the Ethics sections of the specification, offering examples such as euthanasia or protesting social injustices. Another interesting but uncommon response related to choice of work or occupation. These response were credited.

Part d: Questions 1 and 3 had a differently structured (d) part to the other questions in the section, because the way those two religions deal with concepts of good and evil rendered the question chosen for the other religion inappropriate. Examiners were not concerned regarding the comparability of these questions and reported that they differentiated as expected. Most candidates were able to identify the question as relating to the so-called 'problem of evil' and although many turned this into a generic response about evil in the world others were able to clearly set out the knowledge they had about ways in which philosophers and religious practitioners have attempted to solve that. Some candidates demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of theodicy well above that required, while others focussed more generally on the relationship of the religious person with God/G-d/Allah/Waheguru. It was not necessary to set out the problem of evil in order to adequately respond to the question and candidates who did so often distracted themselves from actually answering the question set. Most candidates had a good range of relevant knowledge, and approached the question from the perspective of range rather than depth. The levels of response allow for this and it did not disadvantage those candidates. Candidates who did not achieve the higher levels did so mainly because their responses were wholly descriptive, while the command word and the levels of response required explanation.

With specific reference to 2d many examiners expressed concern about the number of candidates arguing for evil present in the pre-existing matter from which God may have formed the earth; this was agreed not to be creditable at standardisation, after extensive consideration by the senior team and that decision did not prove controversial to the panel. However examiners report a significant minority of candidates using this idea. Another large minority of candidates attempted to solve the problem by limiting either God's goodness or God's power, having previously stated that neither of these things was subject to limit.

Part e: Most candidates had strong personal views on this question, and were able to offer real life examples in opposition to the statement. However in terms of arguing in support of wanting to be good some candidates were unable to move beyond statements of opinion and into discursive argument. While many candidates recognised that one can have good intentions, and a desire for good outcomes these may not materialise but overall understanding of the nature or quality of good and evil was simplistic.

Many responses were repetitive rather than discursive, and focussed wholly on the issue of life after death and punishment or reward. Weaker responses said only that some people are good and some people aren't and religious people believe they will be judged on those choices. Some examiners reported that candidates who had responded from the Islamic perspective were more likely to offer this kind of answer.

The strongest responses engaged with the term 'want', exploring whether doing something because you are afraid of the consequences if you do not amounts to wanting to do that thing. Others reflected on the relative nature of good, and considering whether people who do things that appear to an outsider to be wrong or bad would describe themselves as doing evil. A lot of candidates did not bring religious specific material into their discussion however, and so restricted the marks available for their response.

## **Section B : Questions 7-12**

Part a: Generally answered poorly. Some candidates gave too general a definition such as 'special', which it was agreed at standardisation is too broad to function as a synonym in this context. Others seemed to be wholly unfamiliar with the word. It was clearly misread by some as 'scared', others as 'scarred' and still others as 'secret'. While some such misreading can be anticipated, its prevalence was more than might be expected. Most candidates who did gain the mark did so with the synonym 'holy' or by qualifying terms such as 'special' or 'precious' with a connection to God.

Part b: While most candidates were able to access the first of these marks, a large minority failed to gain the second. This was indicative of a broader confusion around the concept of revelation which emerged in part (e) as well (see comments below). Creditable responses for the second mark ranged from the naming of appropriate scripture to the term 'general revelation', with religious specific responses such as 'God's birth in human form' for Christianity also being creditable. It was agreed at standardisation that the structure and wording of the question precludes 'special revelation' being a creditable response.

Part c: Most candidates who attempted this question described near death experiences. A few chose to focus on the act of prayer and God answering prayer. This was generally the best answered section of these questions. The only common error was giving a list of different ways to experience God/the divine/Allah/G-d/Waheguru when the question asks for a description of one. The Buddhism question was different from the other (c) parts in the section; very few candidates studying Buddhism seem to have chosen this section but those who did responded as expected to this question.

Part d: This was the section most likely to be left unanswered across the paper, and many candidates who attempted it failed to grasp what it was asking them for. Most candidates responded to this question with a description of different types of religious experience; very few attempted to set out what constitutes a mystical experience and most appeared not to have noticed that the question was asking about the role of such experiences rather than their nature.

Part e: This question was poorly answered in the main. Many candidates seemed from the way they approached the question to be unfamiliar with the concept of revelation, which is surprising given that they chose to answer in this area. The most common responses talked about God being literally visible in a personal sense within the world. Responses which did this limited themselves through their misunderstanding of a key religious concept within the topic; it is not that 'reveal' does not have a generic English meaning, but that applying only that understanding to the term limits the candidates ability to reflectively respond to the question.

Another large minority gave a response that would be more appropriate to question (c) by focussing wholly on the question of the origins of the world.

Some examiners felt the issues were caused by higher ability candidates over thinking or trying to apply high level knowledge that was either irrelevant or poorly understood for example trying to examine whether the world was a propositional or non-propositional revelation.

### **Section C: Questions 13-18**

Part a: Almost all candidates were able to offer a creditable example and so gained this mark. Medical and cosmetic testing were the most common responses.

Part b: Most candidates correctly identified ways in which people demonstrate care for the environment, and the range of creditable responses was broad. It was agreed at standardisation that the environment was not synonymous with animal rights and/or welfare (the specification also separates these issues), and therefore for responses focussing on animals to be creditable they had to relate more broadly to habitat and preservation of species in the wild. This was the most common way in which candidate failed to gain a mark, talking about caring for pets or building zoos.

Part c: This question was also about the environment, and a large number of candidates elected to answer it by referring solely to animal rights. Other candidates wrote only about Dominion rather than stewardship, which was disappointing when their (e) part responses often demonstrated that they did know the difference. Another common error was to expand on their responses to part (b) by describing more things religious people might do rather than identifying a relevant religious teaching. Overall the response produced a surprising range of answers.

Some candidates seem to have felt that 'teaching' meant a scriptural reference was required, and this resulted in attempts to make a scriptural quotation which they knew fit the issue of environmental concern. Most such attempts were unsuccessful; only a minority of candidates were familiar with scriptural quotations that actually address this issue and a sizeable number of candidates appeared to have wholly invented the phrases they wrote inside quote marks.

One of the more common attempts at making scriptural stories relevant was the story of Noah's Ark as an environmental teaching; some argued that it showed the need to manage rivers and waterways properly and some focussed on the need to care for animals, these were not creditable responses.

Part d: In general candidates dealt well with this question, and although a small number were still determined to write more about animal rights they were more careful about relating it to the question in this instance than in parts (b) and (c). Most candidates focussed on the origins of the world and of life, and were able to set out at least the most extreme positions religious people

might take on the issue. The weakest answers simply set out the opposing views with a statement that there was no relationship. However many candidates showed insight into the more subtle means of combining apparently contradictory views, or challenged the perception that the two perspectives are actually contradictory at all. Some candidates also used material from the Medical Ethics section of the Ethics component to consider how religious views might impact on research. Overall the question was well and thoughtfully answered.

Part e: This question elicited strong personal responses from many candidates, but again many were more concerned with writing extended answers about animal rights and/or welfare than they were with actually answering the question. As with part (d) and, to an extent (c), it is not that the issue of animals is wholly irrelevant but rather than candidates were distracted by the ethical question of the status of animals and discussed that rather than making a consideration of animals relevant to the question asked. However unlike other (e) parts candidates did deploy a range of religious specific material in response to this question.

Some candidates copied their part (c) response word for word as a section of their answer, but many others showed far better understanding of the distinction between stewardship and dominion and of religious views on caring for the world than in the earlier sections.

# **B603 Ethics 1 (Relationships, Medical Ethics, Poverty and Wealth)**

## **General Comments**

The paper proved accessible to most candidates and the vast majority were able to fulfil the demands of the paper within the allocated time. There were few rubric infringements reported by examiners. There was some evidence of candidates failing to address the questions as set. Key words seemed to trigger a response to a similar question which had not been asked. Whilst the principles of salvage and positive awarding are always applied, some of these responses could be given little, if any credit.

Many candidates offered clear and appropriate responses to the questions in parts a) to c) of each section where short answers or even a one word response are required. Some candidates gave unnecessarily extended responses to these sections however, especially to part c) of the question. This is likely to have affected their overall time management. Some candidates offered several responses where one or two were required. Centres should be aware that responses will be credited in the order in which they are written, hence when only one is required, only the first response will be marked and any other responses even if they are correct, will be ignored.

In part d), where candidates are required to demonstrate their understanding of an issue, candidates offered responses which demonstrated a sound grasp of the significance of the issue for the religion of their choice. Candidates who supported their understanding with useful references to accurate religious teaching or offered support from religious texts and / or the life and attitudes of key figures within the religion, fared best. A few candidates limited the value of their response by offering a discussion of the topic, including their own opinion along the lines of a part e) response.

There were some excellent responses to the e) part of each question which consisted of well presented arguments on either side of the debate and clear evidence of a personal viewpoint. The personal viewpoint was often offered as a distinct section of the response. Many of the best responses however, showed the personal response as series of comments, weighing the various arguments and woven into the discussion as a whole, demonstrating engagement with the issue in the stimulus. Many candidates, as required by the rubric, considered the issue in the stimulus with clear reference to the religion of their choice. On occasions the candidate's knowledge unfortunately dominated the response to the detriment of the argument and the response had more the character of a response to part d) rather than a discussion or evaluation. There was also some evidence of candidates starting well with a good focus on the issue in the stimulus but then veering off in a different direction within the same topic and coming to a conclusion which had little to do with the original discussion.

## **Comments on Individual Questions**

### **Section A: Religion and Human Relationships**

- a) The majority of candidates offered an appropriate response to this very accessible question.
- b) This question also proved accessible. However a few candidates gave examples of 'approved' methods of contraception rather than reasons to approve of contraception.

- c) The use of bold to highlight that a description of only **one** belief was required, was intended to help candidates to restrict their responses, as only 3 marks are available for this part of the question. Some candidates wrote at much greater length than required. Candidates offering more than one attitude were marked on the first attitude they expressed. Centres might find it helpful to stress to candidates that these questions are effectively point marked, according to this instruction: 'Marks should be awarded for a statement supported by any combination of development and exemplification.'. Some responses were more about divorce than remarriage and could be awarded few if any marks.
- d) Although many responses focused effectively on roles within family life and the underpinning religious attitudes, some responses failed to link these attitudes to roles within family life in any significant way. Some referred to a very general traditional and/or modern view of the roles with no or limited religious support. Others concentrated on the role of men and women, often for example, within the Church or other religious areas. These latter responses sometimes had good textual support without significant reference to roles within family life and seemed to have been written with no reference to the final three words of the question - '..in family life.'
- e) The stimulus provoked many excellent well argued responses which considered several aspects of the issue and a personal response in relation to the religion chosen. Many pointed out that as sex could lead to pregnancy; marriage was therefore the best and most stable situation for the upbringing of children and therefore the right place for sex. This was often given appropriate religious support and then contrasted with the observation that good parenting did not necessarily have to happen only within a marriage. Marriage as a secure place for the depth of commitment and emotional bond which comes from sexual relationships was also discussed, often with very mature and sensible observations about the changes in cultural and religious attitudes towards premarital sex and sexual relationships generally.

## Section B: Religion and Medical Ethics

- a) The majority of responses correctly referred to duplication or the creation of an identical animal.
- b) Examiners reported that some candidates missed the word '**not**' in the question despite it being emboldened, and others that candidates offered teaching about abortion rather than occasions when abortion might not be acceptable. Most candidates did offer acceptable occasions such as when a couple failed to take any contraceptive precautions.
- c) The use of bold to highlight that only **one** response was required was intended to help candidates to restrict their responses, as only 3 marks are available for this part of the question. Candidates offering more than one reason were marked on the first reason they described. The comment above concerning part c) in section A is appropriate here as well.
- d) Responses to this question tended to be either satisfactory or good. Most candidates were able to explain different beliefs and how they affect attitudes to abortion. Some responses focused only on knowledge of the attitudes and failed to demonstrate understanding of the beliefs behind them.

- e) The title of this section of the specification is Religion and Medical Ethics. In setting the stimulus the intention was to allow candidates to express views about whether religion, which encompasses religious belief, teachings and attitudes, is the best guide to the ethical issues which arise from medical practice, some of which are the featured of this section of the specification. Candidates who understood the issue in the stimulus offered some excellent discussions which showed a mature of understanding of the dilemmas progress in medical science can present to religious believers. Some responses however showed little understanding of the meaning of the term 'medical ethics' whilst others took 'medical ethics' to be about the use of animals in medical research. Some candidates seemed to consider the Bible to be a medical text book and veered off into a discussion about the reliability of such an ancient text for modern medical practice. Although examiners are able to give appropriate credit for responses which stem from a valid interpretation of the stimulus, many of these responses could only be judged as limited (Level 2).

### **Section C: Religion, Poverty and Wealth**

- a) Almost all candidates offered an appropriate response to this part of the question.
- b) Many candidates offered two good examples of how being wealthy can present problems for religious believers. Sometimes these were accompanied by references to appropriate religious teaching. The temptation to make wealth the master of one's life rather than God was a common example backed up with Jesus teaching that a man cannot serve two masters. Some responses, which could gain no credit, consisted of a biblical example or even the title of a parable without explanation.
- c) The majority of responses linked a teaching with an explanation. 'Love thy neighbour' and the 'Golden Rule' were frequent responses which were developed appropriately. As noted in comments above about part c), a few responses showed a failure to take notice of 'one' and gave several teachings. Only the first teaching and any development could be credited.
- d) There were some excellent responses provoked by this question. Most responses recognised that a believer would see that money could be used for good or ill and that it therefore mattered how it was used. The religious outlook would shape a person's approach to the way in which money, especially spare money, should be spent.
- e) The stimulus for this part evoked some excellent responses which got to the heart of the issue of whether an occupation could be totally immoral. Many responses recognised the fact that a seemingly totally immoral occupation might, in the opinion of some religious people, have a good outcome and therefore not be totally immoral after all.

There was a tendency in some responses only to discuss the issue of moral and immoral occupations and it seemed as if the word 'totally' in the stimulus had been missed by the candidates.

Some candidates offered a different reading of the stimulus, taking it to mean that having no occupation is totally immoral. As was noted in reference to part e) in section B, examiners are able to give appropriate credit for responses which stem from a valid interpretation of the stimulus. This was accepted as a valid interpretation but as they often lacked any religious perspective on the issue many of the responses could not be awarded marks at the higher levels.

## **B604 Ethics 2 (Peace and Justice, Equality, Media)**

### **General Comments**

In general candidates performed well on this paper and a good level of differentiation was achieved. The full range of marks was used throughout the paper although section C produced fewer level 4 responses to part (e) than other sections. There has been a steep decline in the number of rubric errors over the last few years, and this year was no exception with very few rubric violations in evidence. Where rubric errors did occur it was generally because candidates had answered all three sections. In a minority of cases there was evidence that this approach had been recommended by Centres, presumably in an attempt to maximise the marks of their candidates. This is a very bad policy as it invariably results in rushed responses, which are lacking in depth and development. Since the majority of marks for each question come from parts (d) and (e), which are marked using level descriptors, this almost always leads to candidates receiving fewer marks than they would otherwise have done.

Another tactic that a significant number of candidates are employing is to answer the questions 'in reverse' (that is from part e to part a). It is clear that they are doing this in order to devote more time to the parts of the paper where most marks are available, however there is no evidence that candidates who do this achieve better marks than those who answer the paper in the order that it is printed. Many candidates who do this actually achieve lower marks overall as they run out of time and do not answer all question parts. Other candidates add to the (d) and (e) 'piecemeal' as ideas occur to them resulting in a 'bitty' response that does not 'flow' well.

Most candidates were able to complete the paper in the time allowed. Where this was not the case, it was generally because the candidate had written more for parts a-c than was required to gain the marks. This continues to be an issue, and teachers should be aware that extended writing is only required in parts (d) and (e). The level descriptors give a good idea of the length and depth of response required in parts (d) and (e) in order to reach the top levels.

While the great majority of responses are still on the Christian questions (2, 8 and 14) there is a large minority of around 20% of Islamic responses. Other religions are much rarer but there was a very noticeable increase this year in Buddhist and Hindu responses on at least one of the questions attempted. Very few candidates indeed attempted the paper from a Sikh perspective. An increasing number of candidates are choosing to answer one question from Christianity and another from a different religion.

As usual most candidates answered sections A and B although more than in previous years attempted section C. C is generally the weakest section although candidates are starting to engage with the religious knowledge required for this section in a more effective way. And there have been some very good responses in this section this year. Very few candidates had left the paper blank and almost all had made a serious attempt at the paper within their ability suggesting that candidates value the subject and the examination. This is a significant change from the situation a few years ago and is very encouraging.

Where candidates performed less well it was often because of generic or descriptive responses to part (e) or (d) questions. In part (d) it was common for responses to be descriptive and not clearly focussed on the question.

Some candidates seem to be approaching part (e) questions using a writing frame. Often this prompts them to suggest that 'this is a strong argument because...'. While this can be helpful, it is clear that many students do not really understand the point of this and the 'because' is not always relevant, often amounting to little more than 'because I agree with it.' Other candidates have been trained to give a Christian response, a response from another religion, an agnostic/atheist response and a personal response. Again, this can be very helpful, but is not relevant to every question and responses from a second religion are credited only where they genuinely contribute something new to the discussion. A new phenomenon this year appears to be that candidates are finishing with a 'conclusion' that merely repeats what has been said previously in the response and so wastes a considerable amount of time. It is important to remember that part (e) questions must include a personal response and genuine religious knowledge in order to achieve a good mark. It is always disappointing to see 'sociological' responses that show good analytical skills but do not demonstrate religious knowledge. None of this, however, distracts from the many excellent responses seen by examiners.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### Section A: War Peace and Justice. Question No. 1-6

- a) Almost all candidates gained the mark for this question. A small number answered 'death sentence' which was not deemed to be synonymous with 'death penalty' and was not credited. 'Execution' was also credited, although 'assassination' was not.
- b) Most were able to gain the marks here with no difficulty, and there were a very wide variety of acceptable responses. Most candidates suggested that most Christians think violence is wrong, but that it can be justified under certain circumstances. Where candidates failed to receive the mark it was usually because their responses were linked to Just War Theory and could not be clearly linked to the specific topic of violence. Some candidates responded with two Biblical quotations and where these were clearly linked to the issue of violence they were credited. Some weaker comments gave only one response.
- c) Most candidates experienced no difficulty with this question. Anything that could be clearly seen to be an aim of the prison system was credited. The most common responses that were not credited were 'repentance', 'revenge' and 'reparation'. Some candidates misread the question and gave three forms of punishment instead.
- d) Many responses explained why religious people might be opposed to social injustice but did not progress far beyond this. Some candidates suggested that some religious groups might support social injustice. Examples given included religious attitudes which candidates perceived as sexist such as the fact that women are not able to become priests in the Roman Catholic Church. Responses such as this were not credited, as such attitudes are not perceived by the bodies that hold them as 'social injustice'. A worrying number of candidates did not appear to be familiar with the term 'social injustice', although it appears as a section in the specification. These candidates built their responses around criminal injustice and so gained few, if any marks. The best responses to this question explored the different ways in which religious people might respond to social justice. These included civil disobedience, non-violent protest and, in the case of Christianity, Liberation Theology.
- e) Most candidates were able to give a sound response to this question, presenting differing religious perspectives on the use of war. Many included a section on atheist views. This was not generally well done, with a worrying number of candidates suggesting that atheists might think X because the Bible says Y. Perhaps even more worrying was the suggestion that atheists would support the use of war, effectively because they do not care about the value of human life. There was a general lack of understanding here that needs to be addressed. Some candidates have clearly been taught that they must include an atheist

perspective (which is not always relevant or helpful, although when done well it can be) without having any idea that on a single issue there is very unlikely to be a single 'atheist' view point. Only a few candidates were able to suggest that an atheist would be likely to be led by their conscience on this issue and that their concerns might be broadly similar to those of Christians. It is disappointing that so many candidates are still citing the case of Jesus driving the merchants out of the temple as Biblical evidence for the use of war. While the Quaker response to war is well understood, Roman Catholicism is often not, with most candidates merely using it as an opposite view to that of the Quakers.

The strongest responses took the wording of the question seriously and examined critically the case for absolute pacifism.

### **Section B: Religion and Equality Question No. 7-12**

- a) Almost all candidates were able to gain the mark for this question.
- b) There were some excellent responses to this question, however, it did seem to cause an issue for some candidates who simply defined the terms 'pluralist' and 'exclusivist' rather than suggesting how a Christian (for example) might respond to a person of a different faith.
- c) This was well answered by many candidates. Responses that interpreted 'society' in terms of the society of a faith group (the most common being the Roman Catholic Church as related to the ordination of women) were credited. Responses did, however, have to directly address the role played by women in a society so responses relating to issues such as the pay gap were not credited. Some gave more than one 'way' and so were not credited for all of the response they had written. The best responses looked at changes in the roles of Christian women following and resulting from changes in wider society.
- d) The question specifically referred to the way that equality is promoted, and so responses suggesting that some religious groups promote inequality were not credited, as they did not respond to the question as it was asked. Some candidates gave Christian teachings that promote equality but did not go beyond this to explain their relevance or use in religious life. The best responses explained how religious teaching is central to the work of religious groups in promoting equality.
- e) There were some excellent responses to this question. The best responses discussed the positive value of race in terms of identity and culture diversity as a part of the divine plan. Some argued, quite subtly, that while race is important, racism is unacceptable. It was encouraging to see that many picked up on the wording of the question, which was intended to facilitate this sort of debate. The most common problem that candidates encountered was to conflate the ideas of race and religion, basing much of their response on the issue of religion rather than race and so severely limiting the marks they could receive. Many struggled to see an alternative viewpoint to that raised by the question. Successful attempts to do so discussed the value of race in positive terms, or talked about racism within religion such as the KKK and the Dutch Reform Church. Some considered the idea that slavery is not condemned in the Bible, but failed to appreciate that slavery in a Biblical context was not predicated upon race. Some responses seemed to lack focus, discussing equality in general terms including issues of gender and sexuality and so making little reference to the question.

**Section C: War Peace and Justice. Question No. 13-18**

- a) Most were able to respond with 'censorship'. Other variations of this word were credited. A few who did not know the answer merely repeated the question "banning something from the media.' And so received no mark.
- b) Most were able to do this successfully, although a few just gave the name of anyone currently in the news such as 'Donald Trump.' Responses such as 'The Queen' (in her capacity of the Head of the Church of England) were credited as was 'God' due to portrayals in films such as 'Bruce Almighty'. Due to the wording of the question, religious figures from any religion were credited. In order to be credited the figure had to be non-fictional and be an acknowledged spokesperson of the religion rather than merely being a celebrity adherent.
- c) Some candidates misunderstood the question and gave an example of sex appearing in the media that a religious person might object to. Many of these candidates concentrated on the watershed. Most candidates, however, were able to gain the marks, most usually by suggesting that a Christian or Muslim character in a soap opera might display sexual ethics in keeping with their religion.
- d) Some candidates gave a generalised view of the way religion might be well or badly depicted in the media. The best responses, however, focussed on the key word 'unfairly' in the question and talked about media bias and misrepresentation. This led to some very good responses, particularly in Islam where many candidates discussed systematic Islamophobia in the media.
- e) Many candidates produced a fairly basic response to this question but good responses were disappointingly few. Many, if not most candidates did not focus on the key idea of 'needing' the media and instead produced a simple account of good and bad ways in which the media portrays religion. Compared with other part (e) questions on the paper there seemed to be little attempt at evaluation and discussion.

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