

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/03 Summer 2023 series

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Paper 3 series overview	4
Question 1 (a)	6
Question 1 (b)	7
Question 1 (c)	8
Question 1 (d)	10
Question 1 (e)	11
Question 2 (a)	12
Question 2 (b)	13
Question 2 (c)	13
Question 2 (d)	15
Question 2 (e)*	17

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

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.

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Paper 3 series overview

J625/03 is a one-hour paper which includes two 30 mark questions, each broken down into five parts. There are three questions worth 3 marks, followed by a 6 mark and a 15 mark question. All the assessment objectives are assessed during the paper. The 3 mark and 6 mark questions target AO1. On the 15 mark questions, both AO1 and AO2 are assessed. There are no optional questions and hence no rubric errors. Extra marks are given for spelling, punctuation, and grammar on Question 1 (e).

Because of the assessment objectives, candidates need to have a good knowledge and understanding of Jewish beliefs, teachings and practices. Candidates must also be able to analyse and evaluate the issues that these aspects of the faith might raise. In doing so, candidates should refer to sources of wisdom and authority. Candidates are not penalised for misspelling words transliterated from the Hebrew.

The time spent on questions should be dictated by the number of marks available. It is crucial that candidates devote adequate time and effort to part (e) responses, as these constitute half of the marks available. The space available in the answer booklet is indicative of how much a candidate should write for each question, although extra space is provided at the back of the booklet and examiners are careful to check for use of this. Time-consuming and complicated essay planning is rarely of benefit although a few brief notes and some acronyms can be of help. Essay structure need not be especially complicated in order to reach the highest levels. Part (d) questions primarily deal with knowledge and understanding. Examiners have no expectation of seeing any evaluative answers in response to part (d) questions. Part (e) questions primarily deal with analysis and evaluation. Up to 3 marks are always given for knowledge and understanding and these were often apparent. It is important for candidates to make reference to sources of wisdom and authority. Candidates are no longer required to overtly present their own opinion. One of the main challenges for candidates following this specification is to address two assessment objectives in the space of one part (e) question. A top level AO2 response will also normally incorporate good knowledge and understanding of the topic at hand, although candidates do not always receive the same levels for AO1 and AO2 in these questions.

As is always the case on this Judaism paper, there were very many examples of good knowledge, understanding, analysis and evaluation. Many candidates performed at a very high standard. Centres and candidates are to be roundly congratulated. Different effective revision and examination strategies were apparent and exemplary teaching was, once again, evident in the way candidates approached the questions. Many candidates made good use of the available time. Sources of wisdom and authority were utilised to good effect. Occasionally handwriting can be difficult to decipher. Marks cannot be given where responses are completely illegible.

On certain questions, some candidates confused Judaism with other world faiths, especially Christianity and Islam. Sometimes this might just have been a slip of the pen, or it may be due to having recently been examined on another faith. On other occasions, candidates are still referencing Christian sources of wisdom and authority on the Judaism paper.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• had mastered key sources of wisdom and authority• expended time, relative to the number of marks available• recognised and understood the main subject matter for each question• made effective use of subject specific terminology• read questions carefully before answering• accurately represented the views of different Jewish groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• confused key terminology• confused Jewish beliefs with those of another faith, especially Christianity• did not attempt specific questions• made inefficient use of the time available.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Describe why Jews have a belief in G-d's concern for humanity.

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..... [3]

The wording of this question was based on the specification. Interestingly it was interpreted by some candidates as referring to G-d's 'worries' about humanity, rather than his having an interest in humanity. Examiners rewarded the different types of response equally. Candidates were able to make of good use of ideas like 'the image of G-d', sanctity and Pikuach Nefesh. Candidates were rewarded whether they focused on G-d's concern with the Jews, or humanity more generally.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Give **Three** Jewish beliefs about the consumption of animals.

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2

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[3]

Most candidates were well prepared for this question. Good knowledge about the laws pertaining to the consumption of animals was evident. Candidates understood laws about chewing the cud and the cloven hoof, the consumption of blood, kosher poultry, fish with fins and scales and so on. Marks were not given if a candidate only identified 'cloven hoof' or 'chewing the cud'. The same applied to responses about fins and scales. There was sometimes confusion over whether these features were required or prohibited. A few candidates interpreted the question as being about the merits of vegetarianism or veganism.

Exemplar 2

(c) Give **Three** Jewish beliefs about the consumption of animals.

1 Jews must not eat animal meat which has blood on it, as blood contains the animals' life or soul

2 Jews must not eat dairy products along with animal meat, in the same sitting

3 Animals must chew the cud and have split hooves, for example cows

[3]

In the example above, we can see a response that achieved full marks. The candidate has identified three correct points about the consumption of animals in Judaism. The prohibition on mixing meat and milk, the need for the animal to chew the cud and have cloven hooves and the need to remove blood are all valid and deserving of marks.


Question 1 (e)

(e) 'All Mitzvot are equally important.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Judaism.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

This question was generally very well answered. Candidates seemed to find the topic an accessible one. They were able to put forward many arguments, for and against. Candidates made good use of the Orthodox and Progressive positions. In the past, this has been an area of weakness, but not here. Some debated the merits of ritual and ethical mitzvot. Some candidates argued that all mitzvot, as they originate with G-d, are equally important as people should not question what G-d has decreed. Others argued that the Ten Commandments are paramount and that Pikuach Nefesh demonstrates that some, but not all, mitzvot can be set aside in order to preserve human life. Some maintained that mitzvot relating to the Temple are no longer relevant. The question gave candidates ample scope to demonstrate knowledge of sources of wisdom and authority.

Assessment for learning



It has been good to see more accurate references made to Orthodox and Progressive Judaism, in several questions on the paper. It is worth noting that candidates can still achieve marks by representing different viewpoints more generally. Their understanding does not always have to be rooted in the beliefs and practices of the main Jewish groups.

Question 2 (a)

2 (a) Describe Jewish beliefs about Gan Eden.

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..... [3]

The expectation was that candidates would identify Gan Eden with Jewish beliefs about the afterlife. This was often apparent and involved development referring to it being a spiritual paradise, a place of reward in the presence of G-d. Other candidates stated that Jewish beliefs about the afterlife are not always very clear. Examiners did give marks to those candidates who described the Garden of Eden story, although there was also confusion between this and the Promised Land.

Misconception



There were a number of candidates who were unclear about the nature of the Talmud. This might have been more significant on a 6- or 15- mark question.

Exemplar 3

(d) Outline the importance of birth rituals for the Jewish community.

Birth Rituals are important as a religion who do not actively encourage conversion, it is the welcoming of the next generation of Jews. The most important is the Brit Milah, the circumcision of a baby boy, 8 days after birth by a trained mohel, on the knee of his Sandek. By removing the foreskin and drawing blood, the Jews are aligning with the Abrahamic Covenant and labelling him a proud Jew. Additionally he will be formally named and many of the witnesses may throw sweets at his father saying "Mazel Tov!". In Reform tradition, there has also been an emphasis on welcoming a baby girl through the ritual Brit Bat, to show their belief in gender equality. She will be brought to synagogue in the next service in a white dress, demonstrating her connection to the community and will also be publically blessed and named, [6] perhaps even having her feet washed in the mikveh.

The example above is a good response that achieved full marks. The candidate has shown an understanding of the question and provided a good selection of material, alongside references to the covenant in the Torah. They have considered rituals for boys and girls and differentiated between Orthodox and Progressive practices, although spelling is not perfect. There is reference to the significance of the ceremonies for the individual and the community.

Question 2 (e)*

(e)* 'Pesach is the most important Jewish festival.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Judaism.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

This proved to be another accessible question that enabled candidates to demonstrate their ability to analyse and evaluate. One area of concern was, however, the tendency of some candidates to confuse Pesach with other festivals, most commonly Sukkot. Ignorance of Pesach obviously significantly impacted on the number of marks given. This was not a question where reference to Progressive and Orthodox Judaism proved to be especially helpful. That said, most candidates had little problem structuring a response. Normally this saw them weighing up the importance of other festivals against Pesach. The most commonly cited were Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This approach led to interesting and detailed discussions that helped candidates achieve well for both AO1 and AO2. Once again, candidates were often able to provide teachings from the Torah to back up their arguments.

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