

Examiners' report

GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in
Religious Studies

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/07 Summer 2025 series

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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 responses 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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper 7 series overview

Overall, the standard was like last year for question responses, but more candidates responded to all the questions, leading to a higher standard overall. Teachers have evidently covered the full breadth of the specification in detail, enabling candidates to approach all questions and attempt a response, including those of all abilities.

Areas of the specification previously considered challenging and less successfully responded to by students, such as comparisons of Islam with humanism and atheism, were this time more successfully responded to by many candidates including those of all abilities. At the same time there is still work to be done on definitions, so that candidates are clear on what humanism is and the similarities and differences between humanism, humanists and atheists.

Question 4 was less successful for candidates. There were slightly fewer responses found at both the lowest and the higher end, with more around the middle. Reference to sources of wisdom and authority was good although not consistently maintained in all four questions with many candidates starting well then forgetting to include them in Question 4, especially Question 4 (d).

In Question 4 (b), the question common to the religious studies papers on different religions, candidates found it difficult to get above Level 1.

Work had evidently been done to improve candidates' attention to recognising different perspectives, required in several questions this year, and many made the effort to refer to different named figures in Question 2 (b) for example.

In part (d) of questions, in less successful responses, candidates tried to come up with different points of view but did not always reach any judgement of their own, so restricted the level they were able to attain.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- referred to different perspectives where required by the question, making sure at least two different views or examples to show this were clearly given - gave clear definitions of any key words in questions or statements, especially in part (d) questions. This helped to focus the response - referred to sources of wisdom and authority in all questions where there is a requirement to do so and did so in all part (d) questions, referring to more than one source - made reference back to the statement at ends of part (d) responses with a clear personal judgement given - attempted all of the questions and wrote something, even where they were not completely sure.	- referred to only one perspective for questions asking candidates to give different perspectives - were unclear on key words, terms or concepts such as humanism and just society - missed referring to sources of wisdom and authority in some questions where required to do so - for part (d) questions, gave agree and disagree points but no hint of an overall judgement of their own - missed out some questions, especially in Question 4, or gave brief responses to questions in this question.

Question 1 (a)

1 Relationships and families

(a) State **three** roles of women in Muslim communities.

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- 2
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- 3
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[3]

Different roles were found and many candidates gained three marks for this question, performing successfully. Family roles, such as mother, carer in the household and provider of lessons in Islam for children, sometimes written as first teachers of Islam, were very common responses. Others mentioned jobs such as women's marriage guidance, social work, nursing and counselling, possibly as a general role or possibly in support of the Muslim community linked to services provided by a mosque.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Describe ways in which culture influences Muslim attitudes towards equality.

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[6]

There were some successful responses which gave examples of cultural influence, such as cultural desires to marry within an extended family unit or a particular ethnic group. Note that the question was about attitudes and that different Muslims might take different attitudes, such as some seeing cultural influences as integral to their religious identity and others seeing culture as superfluous to revealed commandments, never to be allowed too much influence lest culture watered down attitudes towards Islamic commands.

Assessment for learning



This question was successfully responded to, but candidates might improve their responses by checking and practising how far they support their descriptions by referring to sources of wisdom and authority, with specific evidence and examples. This might be practised and checked by students in pairs, focusing on looking up a piece of evidence to support the claim. Cultural evidence might come from attitudes of elders, Imams' teaching and cultural traditions, in addition to valued specific quotes and habits in a community, so a wide range of creditable sources may be drawn on.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Explain the significance of Muslim teachings about cohabitation.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer.

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..... [6]

Many candidates explained that Muslims were prohibited from living together as unmarried couples in relationships and that sexual contact outside of marriage was considered zina, a sin. The most successful responses included the implications of this for the way Muslims lived their daily lives with a degree of separation socially between the sexes for fear of transgressing Allah's commands and falling into a relationship which might be considered forbidden. Further significance of this related to how Muslims find partners for marriage.

Question 1 (d)

(d) 'Islamic teachings do not restrict Muslims from marrying who they want.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam
- explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. [15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

This was very successfully responded to. In agreement with the statement, evidence was cited that Muslims had to give their free consent in front of witnesses before a marriage could legally be agreed in Islam. However, in disagreement candidates mentioned that Muslim women were expected to marry Muslim men only, and that gay couples were prohibited from marriage by all except the most progressive Imams. The most successful candidates clearly rounded off their response with a personal judgement or concluding paragraph containing that at the end.

Question 2 (a)

2 The existence of God

(a) State **three** examples of Allah's actions which Muslims believe show Allah is good.

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- 2
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- 3
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[3]

Some candidates listed attributes or names of Allah: all-merciful, all-powerful, judge and so on. These were names rather than actions. Others gave actions such as created the beautiful world. The more the candidates focused on actions, as required by the question, the more successful they were in gaining 3 marks. Candidates did not have to write much or even fill every line, as long as they focused specifically on the requirements of the question.

Misconception

Candidates confused actions and qualities. For actions, candidates were expected to refer to things Muslims regard Allah as having done. For example, Allah created the beautiful world. Some candidates described the qualities of Allah, such as by giving the name 'All-powerful', and wrote nothing else. If they only added or wrote Allah does powerful things like make the world, then they would have satisfied the word 'actions' in the question.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Outline different Muslim teachings about Allah's relationship with the world.

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..... [6]

Different teachings might include Allah as creator, controller of destiny or, alternatively, giver of freedom and the tester of free will, on which Muslims are accountable on the Day of Judgement. A few successful responses considered questions such as how could Allah be considered compassionate when suffering existed in the world, and attempted to respond to this by suggesting Allah had a testing relationship but had already designed the outcome as balancing out as just.

Exemplar 1

He is the Creator. Allah made our world and us. In the Quran, it says "Allah made the earth and heaven in 6 and everything between in six days". This proves his omnipotence as he made where we live and where we will go. Also, he has made it specifically for us. In the Quran it says "Allah made the green and beautiful Earth. God has made us his stewards over it." He has ordered us to protect the Earth he made, and take care of Earth. It is described in the Quran, "Look at the trees and the birds, isn't it beautiful? It is only Allah who keeps them up." This shows he has indeed made everything. It is also one of his 99 names: "Al-Halim."

Many candidates gave successful responses to this question and were able to identify two views, thereby satisfying the plural in the question phrasing 'different Muslim teachings', clearly required by the word 'different'. Nevertheless, many responses gained Level 2 and could be improved to gain Level 3.

This response did achieve Level 3. A quotation supports the first point that Allah is the creator of the world, explained with reference to omnipotence, showing good understanding of the attributes of God in Islam.

This is developed by taking a different view referring to Muslims as stewards. A quotation is given, further supporting knowledge shown. Strong knowledge is further proved by reference to a third quotation this time from the Qur'an, with a name of Allah at the end of the paragraph.

Different views have been requested and for 6 marks, the distinct role of Allah as granter of free will to humans and instructor of the role of steward might be drawn out a little more, to show the relationship between Allah and people in the world, as required by the question.

The response was given Level 3, 5/6.

Question 2 (c)

(c) Explain how figures from Muslim history can help Muslims understand more about Allah.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer.

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This question was successfully responded to. Less successful responses only referred to figures in general, but more successful responses named two or more prophets or other scholars or well-known Muslims from Islamic history. Candidates were well versed in events from the lives of prophets and how they taught people about the oneness of Allah and destroyed idols, beginning with Ibrahim who was said to have cleared the Kaaba of idols. Imams and Sufis were also acceptable as other figures from Islamic traditions who could teach Muslims about Allah in their sermons (khutbah).

Question 2 (d)

(d) 'The world gives Muslims all they need to gain a sense of purpose.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam
- explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. [15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

Intriguingly, candidates offered different explanations based on what they referred to as the world, because they chose different aspects of what was in the world to refer to. Successful responses mentioned the world as Allah's creation, predestined in destiny and so must be complete in showing Muslims all they need. Some quoted a tradition from a Hadith qudsi, to suggest that Allah made the world so that He could be known in all His beauty, as a hidden treasure. Some referred to a sense of purpose being to operate in the world according to Allah's commands on which they would be judged in the afterlife, thereby clearly explaining their responses.

Assessment for learning



It might be worth highlighting words in statements to check candidates have noticed them and respond to them in their response – highlighting then explaining those words is one strategy which might be applied. In this sentence most candidates picked up on the words 'the world', but many missed the small word 'all', yet this was pivotal because it helped to focus discussion intentionally. Those who noticed it could argue that the world gave some sense of purpose but not all, because the direct revelations of Allah in the Qur'an were considered clearer and less prone to divergent, individual thought and interpretation.

Question 3 (a)

3 Religion, peace and conflict

(a) State **three** conditions which apply to Lesser Jihad.

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- 2
- 3

[3]

Most candidates successfully responded to this question although less successful responses could have been more precise in what they were referring to. Some responses were 'don't harm any buildings' which was not quite accurate, whereas others referred specifically to places of worship. Many responses were that women and children should not be harmed, and crops and trees should be protected, as well as means to resolve dispute should be tried peacefully first, making lesser Jihad a defensive campaign of last resort.

Question 3 (b)

(b) Describe how Muslims work for peace and justice in different situations.

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This was quite successfully responded to, and candidates were able to think of many different situations. Some mentioning working for justice in society against people not allowed to practice their religion or take breaks for prayer, or wear headscarves. Some mentioned making peace by organising making up sessions before going on the Hajj pilgrimage, which is a tradition or even condition, according to many, to resolve disputes and forgive others before going to Mecca.

Misconception



Many candidates assumed working for peace meant only in a war situation, such as negotiating a ceasefire and inclining towards peace with the enemy. Some quoted traditions about lesser Jihad. However, peace and justice can apply at an individual level, such as with friends a Muslims has fallen out with. It can apply in a community, such as justice for someone who has been unfairly dismissed or discriminated against on grounds of religion. One excellent response referred to the 'Tell Mama' campaign which some Muslims supported, to help gain justice against 'Islamophobic' discrimination.

Question 3 (c)

(c) Explain why many Muslims do not agree with absolute pacifism.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer.

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Most candidates described Muslim beliefs about pacifism or rather Muslim conditions for lesser Jihad as relevant to conditional pacifism, without naming conditional pacifism. More successful responses made the logical link that if Muslims were taught, they could fight for justice as a last resort, then they must oppose absolute pacifism because it conflicts with the teachings and examples of Muhammad, who did fight to defend his faith.

Misconception



Some candidates assumed pacifism was one concept and did not recognise any difference between absolute and conditional pacifism. This led to misconceptions about the position of many Muslims. Most might support conditional pacifism, on the grounds that in limited, defensive circumstances and as a last resort, the conditions of lesser Jihad may permit a conflict to take place. Absolute pacifism objects to all forms of violence, regardless of circumstance, so is opposed by most Muslims.

Question 3 (d)*

(d)* 'For Muslims, a just society is an unrealistic ideal.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam
- explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. **[15]**

A few candidates attempted to define a just society, in which matters were fairly decided and people treated equitably, and in which those who suffered injustice were able to get justice fairly through the support of the society. A few candidates responded to the word ideal, seeing it as a future desirable goal because the example (sunnah) of Muhammad was provided as a model for Muslims and since Muhammad was considered the perfect person, following his directions on society might produce a just society in the end. A few candidates mentioned different theological positions such as the Mu'tazilah for whom reasoned logic meant justice would be meted out in the end, be it in this society or in the afterlife.

Exemplar 2

A just society is a place where everyone is treated equally and fairly and ~~are punished~~ ~~accordingly~~ those who commit evil are punished accordingly and fairly. Many Muslims strive for a just society as it helps promote peace and leads to less conflict. Muslims believe Allah is just ~~and~~ as he "does not burden a soul more than it can bear" highlighting his ~~adulat~~ ~~and many muslims try and incorporate Islamic teachings~~. However, ~~muslim~~ despite this Muslims might believe that striving for justice is getting harder and harder as the world is falling under oppression and society is becoming patriarchal.

Some Muslims might agree with this statement as they believe no matter what they do injustice and conflict will always be found everywhere and eliminates. For example terrorism is the deliberate cause of terror and suffering in people and goes against all Islamic teachings and beliefs. To "not kill" as killing one person is like killing all of mankind. For example the ~~Islam~~ terrorist group ISIS ~~to~~ completely distorts Allah's command and hurts innocent civilians. Furthermore there are also many genocides happening in the world where people

are using apocalyptic warfare to cause mass harm and suffering in innocent people and civilians rather than targeting military forces. For most Muslims not matter what they do they cannot fully restore justice in society as there is too much unstoppable conflict going on around us.

On the other hand some Muslims might disagree as they believe just like Allah they should strive for peace and justice within society. For example, Muslims can show social justice by organising food banks and giving to the poor. Many Muslims incorporate Islamic teachings to the way they live and challenge injustice. Furthermore, some Muslims believe in just war where the reasons of war are acceptable and they do not cause mass suffering within individuals as ^{Quran} Allah says "fight in the name of Allah but do not transgress as Allah does not like transgressors". Muslims believe they can restore justice by challenging evil and fighting for the more weak in society that can't fight for themselves.

In conclusion, Muslims follow the teachings of the prophet and ~~still~~ look up to Allah's example to become just and challenge injustice. Muslims try to punish wrongdoings appropriately and ^{are encouraged to} forgive people who are regretful and ask for forgiveness. However despite this ~~now~~ due to the ~~tragic~~ ~~massive~~ huge amount of injustice happening in the world some Muslims may be discouraged ^{and think} that it is ~~unrealistic~~ ~~to~~ to strive for justice in a world where innocent people are murdered.

Many candidates were less successful with this question, but this exemplar was one of the more successful responses. The candidate understood the statement and responded to it, although at the same time the response could be improved to reach AO2 Level 4.

The response begins with a definition of just society which is clear, although it could be more detailed. Islamic sources of authority are referred to with the quotation regarding Allah's justice and technical terminology, showing strong AO1 knowledge in the first paragraph.

Further quotations about not killing add to details taken from sources of wisdom and authority in the second paragraph, which considers agree points. The paragraph is reasonably strong although more focus could be given by linking the reality, which is described, to possible ideal.

The third paragraph considers disagree points. The poor are mentioned as well as war and suffering, which has some relevance but is somewhat skewed towards the topic of war, which may be taken as a means to getting to the just society.

A concluding paragraph neatly rounds off the evaluation. Examiners look for a judgement and this is not particularly clear, although it may be inferred as the final comment beginning 'however', as this qualifies what has been said before. A bold statement would have made for a more convincing argument, and the candidate could have been given Level 4. This could be achieved by stating that Muslims try their best but the ideal may not be reached – adding this qualifier falls into line more clearly then with the last two sentences.

For AO1, the response was given Level 3, 3/3.

For AO2, the response was given Level 3, 8/12.

Question 4 (a)

4 Dialogue between religious and non-religious beliefs and attitudes

(a) Describe what is meant by the term **inclusivism** for Muslims.

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Many candidates provided less successful responses to this question and said the term might include Christians, Jews and, in the Qur'anic tradition, Sabians, as monotheists who might achieve everlasting life in paradise as this possibility is included in Islamic teachings. This is developed in the teaching that there may be some intermarriage between Muslim men and women of monotheistic background. Some confused the term to mean including converts from different racial backgrounds.

Misconception



Some candidates thought that inclusivism meant accepting converts/reverts to Islam of different ethnic backgrounds or including everyone in Eid festivals regardless of their wealth and social position. The term refers to a specific theological term about entry into paradise in the afterlife and who might be considered eligible according to God's judgement. For Muslims, that generally means including monotheistic believers amongst those who might be able to enter, based on Qur'anic teachings, according to the qualification of God's judgement.

Question 4 (b)

(b) Describe the role of Christianity in public holidays and key events in Britain today.

In your response you must consider that religious traditions in Great Britain are diverse, but mainly Christian.

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Most candidates made simple statements about holidays being based on Christian festivals, with a few developing their responses by giving examples. A few added detail about how Christianity may be involved in school celebrations for Christmas which provide an inclusive setting for Muslims to learn about the Christian faith, or how some Muslims volunteer to help charitable activities at Christmas, joining with Christians in providing food for the homeless and those in need, following both Christian traditions as well as Islamic teachings about compassion.

Question 4 (c)

(c) Explain different Muslim attitudes towards humanism.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer.

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..... [6]

This was a less successful question for candidates, many of whom wrote a response to what would have been a different question: Muslim attitudes towards atheism. Humanism was identified by some, who then could further improve their responses by remembering to refer to sources of wisdom and authority, which only a handful did. Muhammad's compassion and humanism to orphans was a relevant example (sunnah) referred to by some. A different attitude could be to differentiate attitudes according to what was being considered, as Muslim attitudes towards crime and punishment or practice of alternative lifestyles might be areas in contrast to humanism.

Exemplar 3

Explain different Muslim attitudes towards humanism. → belief in Scientific Science
→ ~~No~~ God doesn't exist.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer.

~~Some~~ ^{Most} Muslims disagree with humanism because they believe that there is a God who created the whole universe. This is mentioned in the Qur'an as "It is he who created the heavens and the earth". This quote shows that God created everything including the heavens and the earth.

However, other Muslims may say it is okay for others to believe in humanism because they believe that it is their thoughts and opinions. The Qur'an says "To you be your religion and me my religion". This quote shows that Muslims would prefer to keep peace between them and those who believe in humanism rather than starting a fight.

Humanism was not well understood by many candidates, and several missed this question or wrote that humanism was wrong because it denied belief in God.

This response begins by making a definition of humanism or humanists as people who believe in creation without a God. While there is some truth in this, it would be more accurate to write that it is the perspective of considering the world from the point of view of humanity and compassion towards the suffering of fellow human beings. While many humanists are atheists the definitions of the two are not the same.

The result of this is to add some relevant material but not to directly respond to the question about attitudes to humanism in the first paragraph.

The second paragraph of this exemplar contains a relevant Qur'anic quote about mutual respect for those holding different beliefs which is relevant here and is a good way to develop this response. That means that one Muslim attitude has been clearly developed.

It would be advantageous to be clear in differentiating humanists from humanism, because the second paragraph addresses attitudes to people, humanists, who hold humanist positions, rather than the position themselves.

A convincing development of the response would be to follow up the idea that Muslims might be favourable towards humanism on grounds of compassion for humanity but be unconvinced by humanism due to the lack of a God and God's instructions in ordering compassionate behaviour.

The response was given Level 2, 3/6.

Question 4 (d)*

(d)* 'Muslims do not have any values in common with atheists.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam
- explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. **[15]**

Many candidates mistook beliefs for values and wrote that Muslims did not have any common beliefs with atheists because of the difference in positions held about God. Those who understood values broadly in terms of freedom, quality and justice in society, found several areas of common ground such as fairness against discrimination, as well as differences regarding the origins of those values. Muslims naturally sought to justify their values using direct revelatory text in the Qur'an, as opposed to logical reasoning without acceptance of a controlling divine power by atheists.

Assessment for learning



Candidates might practice writing clear responses which give a definition of clear terms, in this case defining values as opposed to beliefs, and defining the position of atheists on both. Assessment for learning might be used to practice introductory paragraphs and check how direct candidates are in making their definitions and how concise and to the point their writing style is. One technique is to then write a conclusion, without writing the whole essay, so the focus can be checked and redrafts written to improve focus directly on the statement given.

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