

**Examiners' report**

**GCSE**

# **RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

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

**J625**

For first teaching in 2016

**J625/05 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 5 series overview

GCSE Religious Studies Paper 5 is the Hinduism: Beliefs and teachings & Practices question paper. It assesses knowledge and understanding of key elements that are part of Hinduism as it is practised in the contemporary world along with the ability to discuss and evaluate the significance and impact of these on different groups of Hindus.

All questions on this question paper are compulsory. Across the entry there were a lot of questions which had no responses to them, but no clear pattern of a single question being left out by many candidates.

More successful candidates demonstrated strong examination skills, including careful reading of the questions, the selection of relevant knowledge and the application of that knowledge to the specific question that had been asked.

Less successful candidates showed less knowledge of Hinduism-specific terms and concepts and often wrote generally where specificity was necessary. An example is Question 2 (a) where responses often gave broad descriptions of the law of karma in place of the focused description of kriyamana karma required by the question.

Less successful responses were also more restricted in their discursive extended responses to part (e) questions, usually demonstrating relevant knowledge and some ability to organise it into opposing views but without progressing from there to discussion and/or analysis.

It might be useful to note that the (e) part questions do not require opposite views, but only different ones. However, the identification of distinct viewpoints does not automatically amount to a discursive engagement sufficient for the higher level marks. Knowledge deployed in ways that allows for justification, critique, counterargument and/or the relationship of different views to one another better enabled candidates to demonstrate the skills of evaluation and analysis necessary for the highest level marks.

| Candidates who did well on this paper generally:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrated a focus on the questions asked with the application of selected knowledge to the specific question</li> <li>recognised that English words (such as 'detachment') have specific meanings in a Hindu context and showed understanding of this through developed response to the question asked</li> <li>showed a clear knowledge and understanding of the complexity and diversity of core Hindu concepts such as karma.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gave descriptive responses where discursive ones were required by the question</li> <li>showed a simplistic understanding of core concepts such as karma and Brahman which limited the depth and development of responses</li> <li>responded to specific questions – parts (a), (b) and (c) in general terms that did not focus on the precise question asked.</li> </ul> |

## Question 1 (a)

1

(a) Outline what is meant by the term **trigunas**.

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..... [3]

This is a 'point-marked' question, meaning marks can be given for discrete points of correct, relevant knowledge, points of development of that knowledge and/or relevant exemplification up the total available marks.

This question asks explicitly for the meaning of a term and so a definition of that term had to form part of a creditable response. Responses that did not include this did not answer the question and so gained no marks. Naming the gunas does not constitute a definition of the term, although the names were creditable as part of development or exemplification.

Creditable responses identified the trigunas as being the name given to the elements/attributes or aspects of the material world with some connections being made between these elements and the ways in which matter is formed or changes.

While connections can certainly be made between each of the trigunas and the three deities of the Trimurti it should be noted that this does not make the two terms synonyms. Responses that treated them as such were common but were not credited. Another common and, unfortunately, erroneous response was to link the trigunas to the mahayuga, or to describe them as evolutionary stages experienced by a single entity.

## Question 1 (b)

(b) Outline the concept of Nirguna Brahman.

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..... [3]

This is a points-marked question of the same kind as Question 1 (a). Marks were given for knowledge, development and/or exemplification.

This question does not explicitly require a definition of the key term but many responses chose to open by providing one, usually that it was a description of Brahman without qualities, and this was creditable as the first point. Credit was also given for responses which developed that either by expanding on what this means Brahman does not have (a body, limitations as to time and space, the ability to form personal relationships) or by expanding on the nature of Nirguna Brahman by relating it to concepts such as Saguna Brahman or relevant paths to liberation.

It is perhaps worth noting that there were responses which did not demonstrate knowledge of the meaning of the term 'gunas' for Question 1 (a) but which explicitly translated that term in response to this question. The same thing was not observed in reverse.

## Question 1 (c)

(c) Outline **one** custom associated with Diwali.

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..... [3]

This is a point-marked question with a different demand than the previous questions. In this case the question specifies 'one custom' and that means that in order to be credited any material given must be related to the first custom identified in the response (this is according to the 'short answer' rules that can be found at the front of the mark scheme).

A broad range of responses was creditable here, with customs from any Hindu tradition or geographical location being acceptable. Most responses focused on the lighting of diya lamps but credit was also given for making rangoli patterns, cleaning the house and setting off fireworks.

Many responses opened by identifying Diwali as a festival of light and it is worth noting that, while this is correct, it does not in itself address the question. Some responses did then connect this to the custom and where this happened it was credited as development but without this connection it was disregarded as irrelevant to the question asked.

The throwing of coloured powders associated with Holi was a common error seen with this question.

## Question 1 (d)

(d) Describe how detachment might lead to freedom from samsara.

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..... [6]

This question is marked according to the levels of response given in the mark scheme; the response is read as a whole and a best-fit with the level descriptors is determined.

The question uses the term 'detachment' as this is the term given in the specification, along with the Sanskrit term 'samsara'. Candidates showed greater confidence with the latter term; most showed clear understanding of samsara as the ending of the cycle of death and rebirth and used other technical terminology such as moksha in their expansion of this. 'Detachment' appeared a more challenging term with many not clearly setting out what it is that Hindus might be seeking to be detached from.

The highest level responses were able to connect detachment with either the material world and Maya or with karma, and sometimes with both. Responses that addressed these ideas without necessarily having the terminology to do so clearly were common and achieved some marks; exemplar 1 shows a response of this kind.

The most common approach expanded on the need to detach from the illusory reality of the material world to realise the absolute truth of the self, although the further developmental step to explicitly address how such knowledge would result in liberation was often missing.

Some responses focused on karma and were able to explain how being attached to the fruits of action would mean karma continuing to be created. However, these responses rarely went beyond that and very few explained the karma marga as a complete path. The terms nishkam and sakam karma appeared very rarely and, as has been the case previously, many responses included the erroneous assumption that it is good karma, rather than freedom from karma, which is necessary for liberation.

Lower level responses were still able to explain 'freedom from samsara' but addressed detachment in very general terms of not worrying or not caring about things.

### Misconception



The accumulation of karma is what drives the cycle of samsara (rebirth); good/positive karma can lead to rebirth in a heavenly realm, but this is still rebirth within samsara. Liberation cannot be achieved while karma of any kind is still being accumulated.

Nishkam (selfless) karma is a term given to the path for removing karma altogether; no karma results from actions performed without an attachment to the results of them and it is this removal of karma that ultimately results in liberation, according to the karma marga.

## Exemplar 1

One way detachment might lead to freedom from Samsara is by getting closer to Brahman. This means you can look past the material world to fully understand Brahman.

Another way is through ~~not~~ ignoring Maya. Maya is an adwaita belief that the world is an illusion and made as a distraction from Brahman, so a detachment would ~~pre~~ prevent you getting distracted from this.

Another way detachment might lead to moksha is through ~~reaching~~ <sup>reaching</sup> ~~for~~ <sup>margas</sup> ~~prayer~~. If you have detachment then you can pray with no distractions. [6]

This is an exemplar of a response which did not explicitly expand on the technical terms in Question 1 (d) but which was still able to deploy some correct and relevant knowledge. Understanding of liberation is implicit in the examples chosen – reaching a true understanding of Brahman and seeing through the Maya – and both things do also relate to detachment. However, the connection is left implicit and undeveloped with the precise way in which those achievements link to liberation not being made explicit. The final paragraph of the response does not add any correct material nor demonstrate a thorough understanding of the concept of detachment. Nevertheless the response meets the criteria sufficiently well for a mark in Level 2 but lacks the depth and development necessary for the top of the level.

## Question 1 (e)

(e) 'Men and women are equal according to Hindu teachings.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Hinduism
- refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

The part (e) questions are marked using two sets of levels; one addresses the three marks available for AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) and the other the twelve marks available for AO2 (Analysis and Evaluation). Responses to these questions require a discussion of the issue given in the stimulus and the higher levels also require that a judgement be made on that issue.

Most candidates approached this question with confidence and successfully responded to it. A wide variety of knowledge relating to men and women and their roles and duties was seen, with many responses drawing in material from other questions on the paper, such as Sewa International's work on women's rights or the true nature of the atman as neither male nor female.

Reference to the presence and significance of goddesses in Hinduism was common and the higher level responses were able to consider the implications of this in some depth, addressing the complex relationship between male and female deity, the concepts of shakti (divine power) and Shakti (the divine feminine) and/or the question of whether goddesses can have anything directly in common with human women. Lower level responses tended to elide any differences between divine beings and human beings and presented the existence of female deity as a clear and simple proof of the equality of men and women.

Some responses considered dharma as having both universal and gender specific applications and some also brought in the ashramas, although usually from a simplified perspective suggesting that these are and have always been an ideal applied equally to men and women.

Most responses compared blocks of knowledge, presented as contrasting views, but without significant comment or comparison. Most responses did have an attempt at judgement on the issue but very few established a conclusion based on consideration of the arguments that preceded it.

While a discussion does begin with identifying and justifying differing views on an issue, the level descriptors against which these responses are marked require more than this for the higher levels. For this question responses often needed to move beyond detailed description related to justifying a view into a more critical reflection on that position. Different views were generally given, (few responses gave only one) but they were rarely presented as being in dialogue with one another.

Some responses were structured around a clear framework of making a point, giving some support or justification for it and then concluding the paragraph with a statement beginning 'this is a strong/weak argument because...' This is clearly intended to make the response somewhat more than pure description, but the reasons given were often underdeveloped or consisted of repetition of the justification previously offered. This approach also does not necessitate comparing views with one another in a way that would lead to an evaluative conclusion.

Higher level evaluative extended responses compared different views, identified how one view emerges from gaps or weaknesses in another or gave a reflective conclusion considering the different ways one view might be chosen as preferable to another.

## Assessment for learning



Opening with a view or a point and then requiring an explicit counter to that point can be a useful tool for developing a more discursive approach to these responses that moves beyond blocks of knowledge, each relating to a single view.

Counterpoints can take different forms; it is by connecting them to the preceding point that a discussion is built up.

For example, a viewpoint might be 'Hinduism clearly views women as equal to men because there are many Hindu goddesses who are worshipped just as often and in the same ways as the gods'. Counterpoints to this view might be:

- A challenge to the justification given; for example, observing that goddesses are more commonly worshipped as part of a pair with their consorts than they are alone
- A consideration of the wider context; for example, the fact that the status of a deity is very different from that of a human being so the comparison is, at best, imperfect
- A direct challenge to the view or the supporting evidence; for example, that Hindu gods are more prominently seen in popular culture, even in Hindu contexts.

## Question 2 (a)

2

(a) Describe what kriyamana karma is.

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..... [3]

This is a points-marked question and credit was given for discrete points of knowledge, development of that knowledge and/or exemplification.

This question asks about a specific sub-category of karma which is named on the specification. Credit was given for responses which expanded on the idea of karma that is being created in the present and/or that will be expressed in the future. Detailed description of the overall operation of karma was not necessary and often led candidates away from a focus on the question. Many responses simply described the law of karma in general terms and this was potentially creditable; however, both positive and negative karma needed to be referenced in such a description for it to be sufficiently relevant to the question asked to gain the mark.

Exemplar 2 shows a generalised response that was broadly relevant and correct but that did not address the specific question.

## Misconception



Karma is a complex and multi-faceted concept. The term itself means actions, but it is used to refer to the consequences of actions in a spiritual or ethical sense rather than consequences in sense of immediate and directly traceable outcomes of actions taking place in the current lifetime. For example, being tried for a crime committed in the current lifetime is not a karmic consequence but a material one; any karmic result will be part of the situation of future births.

The karma of an individual atman includes karma that has been built up over all previous lives which will be expressed in future births, the karma that has contributed to the current birth and the karma that is being created during this lifetime. The karma marga or karma yoga is a path to removing karma through non-attachment to the consequences of one's actions.

### Exemplar 2

.....kiryamana..... karma..... is the karma.....  
 .....you recieve..... after your actions. If you.....  
 .....have..... done good actions..... in your life, karma.....  
 .....will be good..... like rebirth..... into a human or.....  
 .....even moksha..... or if you have done bad actions, you.....  
 .....will recieve..... bad karma..... like rebirth..... into an insect[3]

This response writes in general terms about positive consequences for good actions and negative consequences for bad one. Understanding that karma means consequences is implied in the first sentence describing karma as what is created by actions. The response as a whole is a general description of the law of karma and, as such, it is not irrelevant. However, the question is explicitly about kiryamana karma and the response includes no material relating to that specific element of the whole concept and therefore only one of the available three marks could be given.

## Question 2 (b)

**(b)** Describe the work of Sewa International (Sewa UK).

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..... [3]

This is another points-marked question, of the same structure as Question 2 (a). This question is concerned with the work of the charity Sewa International and therefore responses describing the concept of sewa or service were not creditable responses.

The charity works across a range of fields and any of them were creditable responses; the majority of responses focused on their work in relation to women's rights and opportunities.

## Question 2 (c)

**(c)** Describe the role of a murti in worship.

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..... [3]

This question was successfully responded to with many candidates going into greater depth and/or detail than necessary for the three marks. As with Question 2 (a) and Question 2 (b), responses were given marks for discrete points of correct knowledge, development of that knowledge and/or relevant exemplification.

Most candidates approached this question with confidence and deployed a good range of knowledge about murti puja. Creditable responses took different forms, some focusing on the murti as a living presence, taking an active part in worship and others describing the ways in which the worshipper might seek to interact or show respect.

## Question 2 (d)

(d) Describe how the different Hindu margas use sources of wisdom and authority.

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**[6]**

This question is marked according to the same levels of response as Question 1 (d). The response is read as a whole and a best-fit with the level descriptors is determined.

This proved to be a challenging question for candidates. The difficulty appears to lie in the phrase 'sources of wisdom and authority'. Many responses were able to clearly identify at least some of the margas. Many candidates seemed to struggle to relate the idea of sources of wisdom to practices or to everyday living, being perhaps more familiar with it in the solely academic context of supporting an argument or justifying a point of view.

## Question 2 (e)\*

(e)\* 'Ahimsa is the most important virtue for Hindus.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Hinduism
- refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

**[15]**

The part (e) questions are marked using two sets of levels; one addresses the three marks available for AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) and the other the twelve marks available for AO2 (Analysis and Evaluation). Answering these questions requires a discussion of the issue given in the stimulus and the higher levels also require that a judgement be made on that issue.

Most candidates demonstrated clear knowledge of Ahimsa but less clear knowledge of the term or concept of 'virtue'. The importance of Ahimsa was commonly compared to that of other Hindu concepts, most commonly karma and dharma, rather than to the other virtues, or yamas which are on the specification. These responses were able to gain some credit as they did include relevant material, but they were unlikely to gain the top levels because they did not directly address what had been asked in the question.

AO2 was addressed in similar style, and with similar results, to Question 1 (e), with the focus on description rather than analysis and evaluation limiting higher level marks. Exemplar 3 illustrates this approach.

## Exemplar 3

~~at~~ Ahimsa is the harmlessness and non-violence this is seen as quite important due to violence never being an option throughout society.

Ahimsa can be seen as the most important due to the belief that everyone has an atman in every living being. There is an atman, so if you're hurting a person you are really hurting atman. Also ~~in~~ <sup>non-</sup>violent schools they believe that atman and Brahman are identical.

monist  
believe

This can mean that atman is atman & there also have Brahman so if you ~~hurt both of them~~ hurt someone you're hurting both of them. Also ahimsa also ties in the belief that if you do something bad you gain back harm, which also supports the idea that ahimsa is the most important.

However, many Hindus may also see something ~~else~~ <sup>more important</sup> such as fulfilling dharma or moksha due to it perhaps bringing them ~~closer~~ <sup>closer</sup> to

The supreme spirit, like gaining moksha to is very important in hinduism due to it escaping samsara which most hindu's want.

Hinduism is a set of diverse beliefs and teachings, which is supported by the Jains belief that Hinduism is like a 'cloud of flies'. This can give the conclusion that it yes Ahimsa is extremely important but there is more important and many hindu believe different teachings.

Exemplar 3 demonstrates some correct and relevant knowledge that has been organised into two separate positions, but which does not then go on to develop into a discussion of the issue.

It opens with a correct definition of Ahimsa as both harmlessness and non-violence and says that this is a positive thing as violence is 'never being an option' in society. This does constitute an attempt at a judgement on the issue, since it purportedly agrees with the statement, and this means that marks for AO2 can move out of level one if there is reason to do so.

The response goes on to connect not being violent with the divine nature of the atman that is present in all living things and, briefly, with the idea of karma. This gives one view, in favour of the statement, with some justification in the form of reasons why violence might be considered bad or wrong.

There is then an attempt at another viewpoint, through the identification of other Hindu concepts that might be considered important. Neither of the two concepts identified is unambiguously a virtue in the sense that Ahimsa is and, although dharma does incorporate the broad concept of righteousness, there is no expansion on how the candidate believes it is related to the question. The response simply states that these things might be important with the implication that they are connected to liberation – again, understanding is not fully demonstrated as moksha (which is liberation) is included alongside dharma.

The final paragraph gives another view – that no single answer is possible – and supports it with the description of the diversity of Hinduism.

Each of these views is given with some descriptive support and an attempt to link it to the question; this is stating views with some development, but it is not the 'reasoned argument' required by the descriptors for level three and up. The conclusion sentence simply says that while Ahimsa is important so are other things, which does summarise what the response has said overall but which does not add any analysis, critique or evaluation.

Overall, the response gained two of the available marks for AO1 but the lack of development in relation to other virtues and their relative importance prevented it moving higher. AO2 was placed in Level 2 and it was judged to meet all the requirements of that level, stating different views with limited development, analysis and/or evaluation, so it gained all the marks available in the level. It is worth noting that the viewpoint given first is far more developed and clearer than the others and that the level descriptors do not require all views to be addressed in similar depth, if the descriptors are met by the response.

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