

Examiners' report

GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/03 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.

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Paper 3 series overview

J625/03 is a one hour question 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 (AO) are assessed during the question paper. The 3 mark and 6 mark questions target AO1. In the 15 mark questions both AO1 and AO2 are assessed. There are no optional questions and hence no rubric errors. Extra marks are available for spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The marks are only given explicitly on Question 1 (e).

As is always the case on this question paper, 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 on the question paper is indicative of approximately 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 this. Time consuming and complicated essay planning is rarely of benefit although a few brief notes and some acronyms can be of help.

Part (d) questions 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 available for knowledge and understanding and these were often given, although this depended on whether the stimulus had been understood correctly. It is important for candidates to refer to sources of wisdom and authority. This can be in the form of a quotation, but more implicit references are also credited. Essay structure for part (e) questions does not need to be especially complicated to reach the highest levels. Constant restatements of 'This is a strong argument because....' or 'This is a weak argument because....' rarely proves to be time well spent. Candidates are no longer required to overtly present their own opinion in these responses, although doing so is by no means discouraged. One of the main challenges for candidates following this specification is to address two AOs 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 question paper, there were very many good examples of knowledge, understanding, analysis and evaluation. Many candidates performed at a very high standard. As in previous years, 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. Candidates often referenced and quoted with remarkable accuracy. Occasionally handwriting can be difficult to read. Marks cannot be given where responses are completely illegible.

As will be apparent from the commentary on the individual questions, there were some gaps in knowledge which impacted on the marks achieved. It also appeared that some candidates had been encouraged to persistently contrast Orthodox and Progressive attitudes to different beliefs and practices. Where relevant, and when backed by accurate understanding, this works well. Sometimes this is not the case, and candidates are left inventing differences between the groups that do not exist, when trying to represent different points of view. They would be better served by referring to 'some Jews' and 'other Jews', unless they are confident that they are not misrepresenting the denominations.

A small number of candidates confuse Judaism with other world faiths, particularly Christianity and Islam. This may be a slip of the pen, following on from a question paper on a different faith. Some

candidates use quotations from the New Testament and refer to Jesus or Muhammad. That said, this is rare and most candidates are clearly able to differentiate.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• took time to read the questions carefully • made effective use of the time available • understood the AOs • were familiar with sources of wisdom and authority • correctly identified the key beliefs and practices on this paper – Pikuach Nefesh, the Shema, Hanukkah and the Promised Land.	• did not attempt certain questions • misidentified the key beliefs and practices examined on this paper • wasted time trying to compare Orthodox and Progressive Judaism, without sufficient information or understanding • spent too long on a particular question and ran out of time • confused Jewish beliefs and practices with those of a different faith.

Question 1 (a)

1

(a) Describe what Jews mean by the term **Kosher**.

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..... [3]

Most candidates responded to this question successfully. They were able to identify that the question was mainly asking about food laws. They were often able to define 'Kosher' as 'fit' or 'appropriate'. Occasionally they wrote that it meant 'forbidden'. Many then gave good examples of the food laws, sometimes providing quotes to back this up. There was occasional confusion over whether animals should chew the cud or have a cloven hoof. Some were able to describe the approach to slaughter, the removal of blood and the impact on kitchens, restaurants and so on. Very few candidates did not attempt this question.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Describe the Jewish belief in G-d being everywhere.

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..... [3]

This question was accessible for most candidates. Many were able to use the term 'omnipresent' and then go on to explain the idea that G-d is both immanent and transcendent for many Jews. They sometimes introduced the concept of Shekinah with occasional success. The most successful responses were able to describe the impact that belief in an omnipresent god might have on the individual or community, for example the sense that you are being watched and looked after.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Name the **three** parts of the Tenakh.

- 1
 - 2
 - 3
- [3]**

Examiners were keen to credit both Hebrew and English terminology on this question, as well as a combination of the two. They were not too prescriptive about the spelling of Neviim or Ketuvim. Many candidates were able to identify the Torah, even if they were struggling to recall the other two components. Some candidates suggested specific books of the Torah. This was one of the points on the question paper where examiners reported references to the New Testament, or the books that it contains.

Exemplar 1

- 1 *Torah*
 - 2 *Nevi'im*
 - 3 *Ketuvim*
- [3]**

This is a successful response using correct Hebrew terminology and was given full marks.

Assessment for learning



Examiners accepted both English and Hebrew terminology.

Question 1 (d)

(d) Outline the importance of Pikuach Nefesh for many Jews.

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..... [6]

Many candidates had been very well prepared for this question. The main problem appeared to be confusing Pikuach Nefesh with Pesach, which led to detailed descriptions of the seder plate and so on. This may well have simply been the result of misreading the question. The most successful responses explained the reasons for a belief in the sanctity of life, often supported by references to the Tenakh or the Talmud, before focusing directly on the implications of Pikuach Nefesh. Occasionally candidates did not develop the explanation beyond the sanctity of human life. Many candidates made excellent use of examples of how the belief might be applied, often citing the food laws or the laws about Shabbat observance. It was impressive to see candidates explaining the mitzvot that cannot be set aside to save a life. Detailed explorations of differences between Orthodox and Progressive interpretations generally added little to the quality of the response.

Exemplar 2

Pikuh Nefesh is one of the most important celebration in Judaism. This is because it is known as a moment of the year to fast and pay their respects to their God. This is one of the most important festivals in Judaism because it is mentioned in the ~~law~~ torah. Many Jews, most importantly orthodox jews follow it more stricter because they follow their religion, Judaism more stricter.

This exemplar demonstrates the tendency of some candidates to confuse Pikuach Nefesh with a festival.

Question 1 (e)

(e) 'The Shema is the most important Jewish prayer.'

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]

Most candidates attempted to produce balanced and relevant responses that included sources of wisdom and authority. It is not necessary to include a personal opinion at the end of the response, but many candidates did so, to good effect. The main barrier to achieving the higher levels was ignorance of the nature of the Shema. Even if a candidate provided well informed counter arguments, this obviously had a significant impact on the marks achieved. More successful responses included references to monotheism, the mezuzah and ritual dress, and the education of children. Many candidates were able to quote from the prayer. Good use was made of other prayers mentioned in the specification, especially the Amidah. In addition, candidates also discussed the merits of personal prayers, sometimes prompting themselves with acronyms. Those candidates who structured their responses around supposed differences between Orthodox and Progressive Jews sometimes lost sight of the question and produced generalised and inaccurate responses.

Assessment for learning



Candidates who did not correctly identify the Shema struggled to achieve either of the higher levels.

Misconception



Not all stimulus questions lend themselves to contrasting Orthodox and Progressive beliefs and practices.

Question 2 (a)

2

(a) Give **three** of the Ten Commandments about behaviour towards G-d.

1

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2

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3

.....

[3]

Most candidates were able to respond to this question successfully. They usually provided the expected responses of 'No gods before me', 'Do not worship false idols' and so on. Occasionally candidates cited the same commandment but phrased differently. Sometimes it appeared that candidates had not carefully read the question as they listed commandments that were ethical in nature. Occasionally candidates left the question blank or provided teachings from the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Describe how Jews might use the Torah in the synagogue.

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..... [3]

This was another question on which candidates generally performed very well. Examiners were quite flexible in their acceptance of responses. Candidates were credited for describing where the Sefer Torah is kept, how it is treated, how it is dressed, how it is read and so on. In addition, they were rewarded for describing specific occasions where the Torah is used, especially during Bar/Bat Mitzvah and certain festivals. There was good knowledge and understanding of the Ark, Bimah and yad. Some candidates went into more detail than was required.

Question 2 (c)

(c) Describe why Divine Providence is an important belief for some Jews.

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.....

..... [3]

It seemed that some candidates were unfamiliar with the concept of Divine Providence as it was not uncommon for candidates to leave this question blank. Other candidates made appropriate use of ideas explored earlier in the question paper, such as immanence, transcendence and the Shekinah. There were some excellent responses that provided examples of G-d intervening in the world. Some went on to describe how the idea of Divine Providence might make Jews feel about their faith, while others raised the issue of free will to good effect. Good examples, such as the stories of Jonah and Job, were often cited.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Outline the importance of Hanukkah for many Jews.

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..... [6]

Where candidates were able correctly identify the festival, they produced thoughtful responses that showed an understanding of the original story and the way that Jews celebrate the festival today. Candidates were aware of the role of the Maccabees and the significance of the miracle in the Temple. They were able to explain about the lighting of the candles in Jewish homes and traditions regarding fried food, dreidels and the giving of gifts. Less successful responses tended to provide generalised statements about families, worship and so on. Some candidates did not identify the festival and wrote – sometimes in great detail – about Pesach, Rosh Hashanah and so on. It was not necessary for candidates to differentiate between Orthodox or Progressive attitudes towards Hanukkah. It was key for candidates to focus on the importance of the festival and not simply provide a description of ritual.

Exemplar 3

Outline the importance of Hanukkah for many Jews.

Hanukkah^{, festival of lights,} celebrates the ^{rededication} ~~rededication~~ of the temple in Jerusalem after the Macabee brothers took it back from the Romans. The temple had to be purified before ~~the~~ use, but the Israelites only had enough oil for a lamp to last one day. Miraculously, it burned for eight days and nights, representing God's presence, ~~and~~ allowing the temple to be rebuilt. Today, ^{to celebrate,} Jews eat food like donuts which are fried in oil to remember the oil lamps. They light Hanukkahs, 9-branched menoras - one candle for each day the lamp burned, and an extra to light the others. Children spin dreidels, which have letters to form the words "a great miracle happened here". First hebrew letter of each word. Some Jews worry Hanukkah has become too commercialised in the West due to falling close to Christmas. [6]

The most successful responses showed awareness of the military victory over the Greeks, the miracle in the Temple and the way these events are commemorated today. These elements are shown in this exemplar response.

Question 2 (e)*

(e)* 'The Promised Land should be important for all Jews.'

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]

Candidates were generally more successful on this stimulus question. Most were familiar with the concept of the Promised Land however, there were some areas of confusion. There was, once again, a tendency to stereotype the views of Orthodox and Progressive Jews. Some candidates were unaware of the connection between beliefs about the Promised Land and the current State of Israel. Where they were able to make the link, responses tended to be more detailed and successful. Some candidates confused the Promised Land with Jewish beliefs about the afterlife. Sometimes candidates were able to make good use of thinking about the Messianic Age, although occasionally they did not progress beyond this. Many candidates were able to refer to sources of wisdom and authority, especially when discussing the covenants with Abraham and Moses. Overly intricate essay structures sometimes limited the quality of what was produced, but many candidates were able to develop detailed, balanced and informed responses. These candidates had clearly made effective use of the time available. References to the current political situation were always made appropriately.

Misconception



The Promised Land is not the same as Gan Eden.

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