

Examiners' report

GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES (SHORT COURSE)

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

J125

For first teaching in 2016

J125/01 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 1 series overview

This is the Short Course GCSE in Religious Studies. The question paper has three sections. Each section contains three questions, one on Christianity, one on Islam and one on Judaism.

In section A candidates are required to respond to any two questions. Questions in section A have five parts. Parts (a) to (c) are short response AO1 questions marked out of 3, requiring knowledge and understanding. Part (d) is an extended response, level marked AO1 question, requiring more detailed knowledge and explanation. Part (e) is an extended response assessed on both AO1 and AO2. Candidates are asked to respond to a stimulus statement and are required to refer to sources of wisdom and authority and to explain different opinions within the religion to move out of Level 1. SPaG is given out of 3 marks on both part (e) questions in section A. In Section A, all the candidates in this session responded to Questions 1 (Christianity) and 2 (Islam). As there were very few responses to Question 3, no commentary on Question 3 has been provided in this report.

In Section B candidates are required to respond to one question out of the three (addressing one of the religions answered in section A). Questions in section B have four parts. Part (a) is a short response question marked out of 3 and requiring knowledge and understanding. Part (b) is an extended response, level marked AO1 question requiring more detailed knowledge and explanation. Part (c) is an extended response question, marked according to AO2 levels. It requires explanation and analysis. Part (d) is an extended response question assessed on both AO1 and AO2. Candidates are asked to respond to a stimulus statement and are required to refer to sources of wisdom and authority and to explain different opinions within the religion.

In Section C candidates are required to respond to one question out of the three (addressing the same religion chosen for section B). Questions in section C have four parts. Part (a) is a short response question marked out of 3 and requiring knowledge and understanding. Part (b) is an extended response, level marked AO1 question requiring more detailed knowledge and explanation. In section C the part (b) question is common to all three questions and is concerned with the special status of Christianity in Britain as the established religion. Part (c) is an extended response question, marked according to AO2 levels. It requires explanation and analysis. Part (d) is an extended response question assessed on both AO1 and AO2. Candidates are asked to respond to a stimulus statement and are required to refer to sources of wisdom and authority and to explain different opinions within the religion.

In section B there were very few responses on Judaism. The few responses that there were, were due to rubric error and were very short and so no commentary on these questions has been provided in this report. Very few candidates responded to the Islamic Questions (5 and 8) and so while some commentary has been provided, this is brief, and all parts of the question are considered together. The report is focused almost exclusively on the Christian questions in sections B and C.

The question paper was accessible, and candidates generally responded successfully. The standard of religious knowledge was good, except in section C where knowledge of the topics was less successful. Detailed advice for ways in which performance could be improved is provided in the body of the report.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• read the question carefully and responded to the specific instructions given • compared and contrasted the arguments they used in evaluation questions, using genuine evaluation, rather than just stating different points of view • were able to accurately compare different points of view/denominations within Christianity and Islam • understood and used technical terms effectively • had detailed and accurate knowledge of all parts of the specification.	• responded to the general topic rather than reading the question carefully • gave multiple responses to questions that specifically required only one • used phrases such as 'this is a strong argument' or 'this is a weak argument' in evaluation questions without genuinely explaining why this might be the case • showed superficial or inaccurate understanding of the different denominations or traditions within Christianity or Islam • did not show understanding of the technical subject-specific vocabulary on the specification.

Section A overview

In this section candidates are required to respond to any two out of the three available questions. All candidates responded to Questions 1 and 2 (Christianity and Islam) and so no commentary on Judaism (Question 3) has been provided. Candidates gave more successful responses to Question 1 than Question 2, although responses to Question 1 (e) were less successful than Question 2 (e). The questions were accessible. It is important that candidates read the question carefully though and respond to the particular question asked.

Question 1 (a)

1 Christianity

(a) State **three** Christian beliefs about judgement. [3]

Most candidates gained the full 3 marks for this question. Popular responses were: that God/Jesus would judge all humans at the end of time, or on a Day of Judgement; that people would be judged according to their deeds; and that God's judgement is absolutely fair. Some gave the example of the parable of the sheep and the goats. Another acceptable response was that humans should not judge other humans. Where candidates did not gain all 3 marks it was usually because they had not made three separate and clearly distinguishable points.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Describe what Christians mean when they say Jesus is the Son of God. [3]

Candidates generally displayed good knowledge on this question, with a good command of specialist language. Most gained either 2 or 3 marks. Most explained that Jesus was the second person of the Trinity. Another popular response was that Jesus was the incarnation of God. Many described Jesus being 'sent' to represent God.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Describe the role of Christ in salvation. [3]

Candidates again displayed a good command of both knowledge and technical language in this question. Successful candidates explained the doctrine of atonement, with the death of Jesus as a sin offering that saved people from their sin and allowed them to enter heaven. Some made the extra point that Jesus' teachings showed people how to please God and so enter heaven. This approach rarely gained 3 marks on its own, but as development to descriptions of the crucifixion as an act of atonement it was given. Most candidates gained 2 or 3 marks.

Question 1 (d)

(d) Describe different Christian beliefs about purgatory.

[6]

Most candidates were less successful in their response to this question with many failing to gain any marks. Many candidates were aware that purgatory was an afterlife belief and that it was most closely linked with Roman Catholicism. However, many thought that it was a 'waiting room' where God decided if a person would go to heaven or hell. Some thought that purgatory and hell were the same thing. The question asks for different Christian beliefs. Many candidates said that Protestant Christians did not believe in purgatory. The strongest responses were aware that purgatory was a place of purging or cleansing, and that Protestants reject this as the atonement of Christ is sufficient so that no further cleansing was necessary, and in this way, they made the connection with part (c). Less successful responses were often confused, with some thinking that purgatory was purely a place of punishment and contrasting this with a belief that it was a waiting room.

Exemplar 1

1	d	One Christian belief about purgatory is that of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church believes that when people die, they are not pure enough to enter into the presence of God, therefore they have to undergo purgatory (purification) in order to be pure enough to enter
		God's presence. Additionally, Catholics believe purgatory can be sent through prayer.
		However, other Christian denominations do not believe in purgatory. Other Christian denominations would argue that if a believer has repented for their sins, Jesus' death will be a sufficient payment for the person to enter into God's presence.

This is an example of a response that gained full marks. The candidate understands that purgatory is a place of cleansing and not merely a place to wait for judgement. They also explain why some Christians do not accept the existence of purgatory. There is more detail that could have been included in the response, but the candidate's understanding of purgatory is firm.

Question 1 (e)

(e) 'The Holy Spirit is the most important part of the Trinity.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

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

[15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

Part (e) is given two separate marks. The first is for AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) and is out of three. The second, AO2, (Analysis and Evaluation) is out of 12. Most candidates gained 2 or 3 marks for AO1. They were able to describe the different parts of the Trinity and their roles. Many were aware that some Christians do not accept the Trinity. On AO2 the most common marks were the top of Level 2, at 6 marks, or the bottom of Level 3 at 7 marks. Less successful responses described each part of the Trinity, often concentrating on the Father and the Son and then named one as the most important with little extra argument. While many ascribed a role to the Holy Spirit in creation, 'Hovering over the face of the waters', very few discussed the prominence of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalist forms of Christianity. Where candidates were able to correctly discuss the views of different denominations, they generally talked about Unitarian and Christadelphian rejection of the Trinity. Many candidates described different ideas about the most important part of the Trinity but could not accurately link these to different denominations.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should understand the teachings of different Christian denominations about the issues on the specification.

Question 2 (a)

2 Islam

(a) Describe the significance of holy books for Sunni Muslims.

[3]

While most candidates gained 3 marks on this question, there was an even distribution across every mark point. Candidates were able to name holy books, but as the question was about their significance, this on its own was not worth any marks. Popular responses included that holy books are one of the six articles of faith, and that they are the exact words of Allah, giving instructions and guidance to Muslims. Some said that their significance lies in that they were revealed by the angel Jibril, showing that they came directly from Allah. Some mentioned the relative importance of the Qur'an and Christian and Jewish scriptures.

Assessment for learning



It is very important to respond to the question exactly as it is written. This question does not ask for general information about holy books, but about the reasons they are significant to Muslims.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Outline the meaning of Tawhid.

[3]

Most candidates gained 2 or 3 marks here. Almost all candidates knew that Tawhid referred to the oneness of Allah, and that he is the only God. Many candidates went on to explain that worshipping anything other than Allah, or ascribing partners to him is shirk, the only unforgivable sin.

Question 2 (c)

(c) State **three** Islamic beliefs about Adam.

[3]

Most candidates gained 3 marks, but there were some who gained 1 or 2. Where candidates did not gain any marks it was because they did not know who Adam was, identifying him with a different prophet, or suggesting that 'Adam' referred to a sacred text or an angel. Some candidates did not gain all 3 marks because they gave incorrect information, often confusing Adam with a different prophet. Others gave information that would be correct for Christianity, but was not correct for Islam, such as that Adam was responsible for original sin.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Describe why Isa is important to Muslims.

[6]

Many candidates did not gain any marks at all here, often because they did not know who Isa was, assuming him to be an angel. Others knew that Isa is also known as Jesus, but did not gain any marks because they gave information that was correct for Christian beliefs about Jesus but not for Muslim beliefs about Isa. For example, some said that Jesus was the son of God. Many candidates knew that Isa was a prophet, and said he was important because he was a prophet, but gave no information specific to Isa. These responses were placed in Level 1. Successful responses talked about Isa being the penultimate prophet who foretold the coming of Muhammad (PBUH). Some knew of a belief that he would return before the Day of Judgement to wage a war on the enemies of Islam. Some knew that he was given a sacred text, although this had become corrupted.

Assessment for learning



Although Islam and Christianity have some texts and important figures in common, it is important that candidates have a strong understanding of the key differences between them. The same figures may be understood in very different ways.

Exemplar 2

2	D	Isa was the penultimate prophet, before Muhammad. Isa was known to speak in the cradle and as well perform miracles. Muslims believe that Isa is in heaven and when the Day of Judgement is announced by Izrafil Isa will return to Earth. Joined with other Muslims Isa will fight until there are only Muslims left and no other religion. There will be a war, and Isa will show that Islam is the only correct religion. This deed is known as Martyrdom and shows commitment to faith. This is important to Muslims to show his love and commitment to the faith and what he will do for Allah. Muslims learn from these actions and take them on for themselves, incorporating Isa's actions.
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This response was given Level 3, 5 marks. The conclusion is a little unfocused, but the majority of the response shows detailed knowledge of teachings about Isa in a specifically Islamic context without confusing this with Christian beliefs about Jesus.

Question 2 (e)

(e) 'Predestination (al-Qad'r) means that humans cannot be judged for their actions.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

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

[15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

There were some very successful responses to this question that showed detailed knowledge. Some discussed the complex philosophical discussions about predestination and free will very well, showing nuanced understanding and offering reasoned conclusions. Less successful responses were aware that the issue at the centre of the question was free will, but they could not clearly identify different lines of argument leading to confused and often contradictory responses. Those responses that gained 3 marks for AO1 often associated different views accurately with different Islamic denominations, and even with different traditions within Sunni Islam. Some were aware of Al-Ashari and Mu'tazilite schools of thought. Most candidates could not do this and so gained only 2 marks. These candidates either made mistakes about which Muslims believed what or simply distinguished between 'some Muslims' and 'other Muslims'. The most common mark for AO2 was the top of Level 2 at 6 marks, although a few responses were in Level 4, meaning that they could critically assess the different arguments.

Section B overview

Section B contains three questions of which candidates are required to respond to one (choosing one of the religions that was answered in Section A). All three questions are very similar to each other, but refer to different religions, so candidates who responded to more than one question in this section due to a rubric error effectively repeated much of the same material. Almost all the candidates chose to respond to Question 4 on Christianity. This section was generally successfully responded to and was often the section where candidates were most successful. The questions were accessible although the most successful candidates were those who read the question carefully and tailored their response to the exact wording of the question. This was particularly important in parts (c) and (d).

Question 4 (a)

4 Christianity

(a) Describe **one** purpose of marriage for Christians. [3]

The most popular response was 'to have children', with many developing this with the Biblical command to 'Be fruitful and multiply'. Some further explained that since having children should only happen in the security of a family, sex was also restricted to marriage. This was given as development of the purpose of procreation, although it could also be given as a purpose in its own right. The question asks for one purpose only, and where candidates did not gain all 3 marks it was usually because they moved on to a second 'purpose'.

Assessment for learning



Where a part a question asks for **one** belief, or, as here, **one** purpose of marriage, only the first purpose will be given marks. If a candidate moves on to a second point it will not be given marks.

Question 4 (b)

(b) Describe different Christian teachings about gender equality. [6]

Most responses were in Level 2, although a good proportion were into Level 3. The question was generally well responded to, and knowledge was good, with many candidates able to give Bible quotes in support of the different positions. Most candidates did give different approaches to gender equality, although they often assumed that Roman Catholics would not accept gender equality whereas Protestants always would. The positions given most often were complementarianism and egalitarianism, which was almost always associated with Protestantism. More successful responses linked Roman Catholic complementarianism to the specific issue of the priesthood and roles within the Church. Very few candidates discussed attitudes in some evangelical churches, which sometimes interpret Biblical teachings in a way that restricts the role of women to the home.

Question 4 (c)

(c) Explain why Christians might have different views about divorce.

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

[6]

Candidates were less successful in part (c) than in part (b). This is because most did not follow the requirements of the question. Most candidates could describe different views about divorce well and correctly ascribed them to the correct denominations. However, the question asks about the reasons why different views exist, and most candidates did not address this specific issue and so did not move beyond Level 2. The more successful responses in Level 3 discussed the fact that some teachings can be interpreted differently, or that Christians might give different importance to different Biblical passages. Some talked about whether or not marriage was regarded as a sacrament and so about the theological possibility of separating a married couple. A possible approach that was not used was to talk about the importance of Church tradition and law compared to the authority of the Bible.

Question 4 (d)*

(d)* 'Raising children as Christians is the most important purpose of a Christian family.'

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 Christianity
- explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Christianity.

[15]

Many candidates interpreted this question as asking about whether having children was the most important thing a family could do, rather than raising them as Christian. This led to a different discussion, and limited the level that the response could achieve. Many candidates were less successful in arguing against the statement and simply assumed that it was important to raise children as Christians, without really considering whether this was the **most** important thing. Some responses discussed various reasons why raising children as Christians was important, and this was a valid approach. Most candidates gained marks in Level 2 both for AO1 and AO2. Candidates were less successful in discussing the opinions of different denominations and traditions within Christianity.

Question 5 (a), (b), (c) and (d)*

5 Islam

(a) Describe **one** purpose of marriage for Muslims. [3]

(b) Describe different Muslim teachings about gender equality. [6]

(c) Explain why Muslims might have different views about divorce.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer. [6]

(d)* 'Raising children as Muslims is the most important purpose of a Muslim family.'

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]

Only a small number of candidates attempted Question 5. Some of these were rubric errors where candidates attempted every question and responses tended to be brief with some parts of the question not attempted. Responses to parts (a), (b) and (c) tended to be most detailed, and where candidates gained most marks. Detailed subject knowledge of Islam was not strong, with few candidates able to accurately use sources of wisdom and authority. Many gave similar responses to those in Question 4, gaining some marks because some similarities exist between the religions rather than because they had demonstrated a genuine understanding of Islam. Some candidates gained marks in Level 2 in parts (b), (c) and (d), but there were no responses in Level 3, as responses tended to be generic.

Section C overview

Section C contains three questions of which candidates are required to respond to one. All three questions are very similar to each other, but refer to different religions, so candidates who responded to more than one question in this section due to a rubric error effectively repeated much of the same material. The question chosen must be the same religion that was attempted in section B. Candidates were less successful with section C relative to the other two sections as in previous sessions. Mostly this was due to the lack of a sound understanding of the technical vocabulary in this part of the specification, specifically secularism, pluralism, self-determination and humanism. Candidates consistently achieved lower marks in this section than in sections A and B.

Question 7 (a)

7 Christianity

(a) Describe what is meant by the term **secularism**. [3]

This question less successfully responded to. Candidates often confused secularism with secularisation. Among these, some included a line about the state being separate from religion or not supporting any one religion and these gained 1 mark. Some candidates omitted this question entirely and few gained full marks.

Question 7 (b)

(b) Describe the different attitudes Christians might have towards pluralism.

In your response you must consider that religious traditions in Great Britain are diverse but mainly Christian. [6]

Again, this question was less successfully responded to, but candidates did better than on part (a), with a significant number in Level 2 at 2 or 3 marks. Many candidates did not know what pluralism is in the context of religious studies. Those that did, often compared exclusivist ideas, often associated with Catholicism, with pluralist ideas that were often associated with Quakers. These were sometimes supported with appropriate Biblical quotations for both positions, often contrasting 'No-one comes to the Father, except by me' with, 'In my father's house are many mansions'. These were the most successful responses, however very few got to Level 3 as they did not follow the rubric which required them to address both religious diversity and the primacy of Christianity in Britain. Some candidates equated pluralism with religious tolerance in general. Some of these did suggest that pluralism was needed due to the religious diversity in the UK and where this was well expressed it could gain a mark in Level 1.

Question 7 (c)

(c) Compare secular and Christian attitudes to self-determination.

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

[6]

This question was less successfully responded to, and many candidates did not attempt it. Of those that did, many did not gain a mark, and very few achieved Level 2. Most candidates did not know what is meant by self-determination. Some suggested that it had to do with being determined to succeed, suggesting that a Christian would be motivated by God and the hope of heaven while an atheist would be self-motivated. Some considered ideas connected to predestination, and the degree to which a person believes they have control over their life, and where this was done well it did gain some marks.

Question 7 (d)

(d) 'The rise of humanism is the greatest challenge for Christians today.'

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 Christianity
- explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Christianity.

[15]

This was responded to more successfully than the other parts of Question 7, with most candidates gaining 2 marks on AO1 and either 5 or 6 in Level 2 at AO2. However, many did not have a very clear understanding of humanism, either as a philosophy or as a movement. Many simply equated it with a decline in religiosity or a rise in belief and confidence in science. This often resulted in a discussion based around whether or not scientific theories about the world or the universe disproved miracle stories or whether Biblical accounts of creation were accurate. While this did gain some marks, it was not really on the topic of the question and did not gain the higher levels. Some candidates avoided the specific issue of humanism and instead argued for things that could be seen as a greater threat to Christianity such as the rise of Islam or the increase in secularisation. Arguments against the statement in the question were often quite general, for example the idea that Christians should love everyone, including humanists. The most successful responses were aware of the opposition of humanism to faith schools and to the presence of bishops in the House of Lords and focused on this as a direct challenge.

Exemplar 3

		Some people may agree with this statement.
		This is because there is a correlation between
		the rises of Humanism and the decline of Christ
		ianity in Britain. Also these people would
		agree that Humanist do campaign agains against
		religion. For example they have put up bus advert
		isement saying "I don't worry there is probably a most
		likely no God" and in on their websites one
		of their goals is to destablish the church of England.
		"Destablishing the church of England is should
		be the main minimum see goal of every modern
		British" - said by the leader of the national secular
		Society. This is a clear attack on the
		power of the church and therefore Christians

This paragraph demonstrates clear understanding of the reasons why humanism might be considered a challenge to Christians, and, by implication, an understanding of what humanism is. The response gained Level 3 for both AO1 And AO2, with 3 and 9 marks respectively.

Question 8 (a), (b), (c) and (d)

8 Islam

(a) Describe what is meant by the term **secularism**. [3]

(b) Describe the different attitudes Muslims might have towards pluralism.

In your response you must consider that religious traditions in Great Britain are diverse but mainly Christian. [6]

(c) Compare secular and Muslim attitudes to self-determination.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer. [6]

(d) 'The rise of humanism is the greatest challenge for Muslims today.'

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]

There were very few attempts for Question 8, and those that did attempt it often did so in error, having attempted every question. Parts of the question were often omitted. Responses were often very similar to those given in Question 7 with no specific knowledge of Islam shown. Candidates that had also attempted Question 7 often gave the same responses, but often briefer and with less detail. Marks were typically lower with most candidates failing to gain any marks on any part, and those that did were in Level 1.

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