



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Religious Studies (9RS0)
Paper 4E

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Summer 2024

Publications Code 9RS0_4E_2406_ER

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Introduction

Overall, the standard was good with examples of good quality, competent and outstanding work. Candidates rose to these challenges ably. For example, many candidates used the Anthology passage in Q03a in a successful manner. The synoptic question Q04 attracted full and well-informed answers with intelligent use of links.

Where it was applicable, candidates made good use of the context of the topic under consideration eg Q03(b) ‘...the different emphases between Maimonides and Moses Mendelssohn’. Work in response to Q02 was good in terms of the range of material offered by many candidates. Generally, candidates were proficient in their use of technical vocabulary. This was seen in answers to Q03(a) showing a good analysis and understanding of the text. There were many examples of good practice in creating high quality work in introductions and conclusions. Some developed effective skills in working on evaluative skills for AO2, often seen in Q04.

Centres and candidates are reminded to check the meanings of the five command words used in the A level papers found in Appendix 1 of the A level Spec. The weightings of AO1 are 40% and AO2 has 60%.

Q01 Explore the distinctive features of Orthodox Judaism. (8)

This was a very well answered question by the vast majority of the candidates. Many of the responses offered some or even all of the following in their answers; that Orthodox Jews are required to live in accordance with the commandments and Jewish Law and observe strictly the three Mitzvohs (Shabbat, Kashrut and Taharat Hamishpacha), and the 610 other laws; that the Torah and Mishna are authoritative as a divine work of God for Orthodox Jews and remain fixed regarding Jewish doctrine and that Orthodox Judaism places great importance on the literal interpretation of the Torah and the preservation of distinctive customs. Most answers identified that Orthodox Jews have distinctive practices and customs, which include daily ritual, defined gender roles, strict gender dress codes and dietary rules. However, some very good answers pointed out that Orthodox Judaism does not support gender equality and this distinguishes Orthodox Judaism from the beliefs and practices of, for example, Reform Judaism.

Q02 Assess the Jewish response to the challenge of secularisation. (12)

Many responses engaged with the idea that secularisation was often seen to be the removal of religious influences from Jewish society with the argument that Jewish practices and beliefs could often be side lined in a secular society; many gave the

example of a more relaxed approach to Sabbath observance as an example of the secularisation of some Jewish practices.

Very good answers explored the influence of the diaspora as a contributing factor to the influence of secularism and this was contrasted with the view that Orthodox criticisms of secularism; as well as the changing attitudes of Reform were considered important because they tended to incorporate some secular thinking and modes of secular living into their practices.

A small number of candidates argued that in some cases, the impact of secularism may be critical because it pointed to the decline of traditional Judaism.

A feature of weaker responses showed vague and generalised understanding of what secularisation is.

Q03a Clarify the ideas illustrated in this passage about the beliefs of Moses Mendelssohn. (10)

It was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates, clearly have grasped the requirement to 'clarify' rather than merely identify (as a few weaker answers did). Many responses focused on Mendelssohn's loyalty to the ancient Jewish tradition, which was a natural religion founded on reason and his efforts to forge links with German culture and language through German-Jewish education. Most candidates referred to Mendelssohn's long term approach that influenced Haskalah.

Some good answers pointed out that Mendelssohn combined the idea of the Jews as 'a light unto the nations' with an assimilation of Judaism into Enlightenment thought and sought to fuse loyalty to the natural roots of Judaism along with the evolution of Jewish belief and practice. However, some argued that Mendelssohn's approach contained the seeds of controversy and division within Judaism.

Weaker answers presented narrative material on Mendelssohn.

Q03b Analyse the different emphases between Maimonides and Moses Mendelssohn. (20)

Good candidates identified relevant emphases and offered examples that provided a context to Maimonides and his key writings; clarified the roles of revelation and reason, noting the primary importance of revelation noting that for Maimonides that there is no contradiction between what God has revealed and the investigations of the human mind.

Emphases in respect of Mendelssohn identified clear accounts of the beginnings of assimilation and Reform and the role of Mendelssohn in these areas; this included Mendelssohn's views about Haskalah. Very good answers compared and contrasted Mendelssohn with Maimonides; effective evaluative material was provided by candidates that engaged with the critical debates arising from critiques across different Jewish traditions. Higher evaluative standards were seen in answers that fully addressed the demands of the question with a comprehensive appraisal of the evidence.

Weaker answers presented narrative material and/or biographical material at the expense of significant analysis.

Q04 Evaluate the significance of the Holocaust for Jewish beliefs. (30)

The question requires candidates to evaluate the significance of the Holocaust, and this attracted a number of very good answers.

Higher levels of work were seen in the standard of understanding given to the context of the Holocaust. Some debates engaged with exclusivist strands within Judaism. Good candidates selected some relevant historical context such as the Wannsee Conference together with Nazi ideas based on Aryan supremacy.

Some candidates based their responses on topics such as theodicies including the free-will defence, punishment and the death of God. In other cases, candidates referred to contributors such as Fackenheim, Kaplan, Rubenstein, Jonathan Sacks and Wiesel. In these cases, most candidates evaluated their key ideas and emphases with some insight. Another popular strategy was to draw on Orthodox and Reform stances regarding the Holocaust.

Synoptic links included testing truth claims as seen for example in Philosophy (problem of evil & suffering), Situation ethics (the morals surrounding the Holocaust) etc. Candidates at the higher levels made effective use of reasoning coupled with convincing conclusions.

A feature of lower-level responses showed vague and generalised references to various Jewish understanding of the consequences drawn from the Holocaust.

