



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In Religious Studies B
Paper 1: Area of Study 1 – Religion and Ethics
Option 1E – Hinduism

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Introduction

This was the second examination series since the introduction of the revised mark scheme for **d** type questions. Centres are advised that there are extensive resources to support teachers in preparing their candidates for **d** type questions on the Pearson Edexcel website.

a type questions require that the candidate give three pieces of information in response to the question. It is important that the candidate not simply give a list of items, but that each piece of information conveyed is presented either in its own sentence, or at least in its own clause within a sentence.

b type questions require that the candidate should be able to present two pieces of information; typically two reasons for something, two attitudes to something, two ways for something. To gain full marks on this question, the candidate should aim to develop each of those reasons, attitudes or ways. This can be done by adding additional relevant information, by giving an example or by citing a religious source. The number of reasons/ways etc. is limited to 2 and so candidates are not able to access a third mark by giving a third reason/way.

c type questions are answered similarly to **b** questions, except that here the candidate has the potential to gain an additional development mark from the use of a source of wisdom and authority that is relevant both to the question asked and to the point that they are making. The use of a source of wisdom and authority on its own does not automatically gain the additional mark but is a means for the candidate to gain a further mark where they have already given a developed response. On the basis (outlined above for **b** questions) that a source of wisdom and authority can be used as a means of developing a response, candidates can use two, relevant, sources of wisdom and authority in a **c** question to access the third mark for that particular explanation or reason. Centres are reminded that the Source of Wisdom and Authority has to *do* something; contribute to the point being made, develop the point being made and not just be appended to the answer, or be dropped in without context.

d type questions allow candidates to give reasons for and against a particular proposition, whilst coming to a justified conclusion. The response needs to show evidence of appraisal if it is to access the higher levels available, and this appraisal should not be superficial – simply stating that an argument is strong (or weak), or supporting it with an additional reason, rather than an appraisal of the argument. Importantly, appraisal is not the only factor in accessing Levels 3 and 4, but one of several. An answer may show good appraisal, but be full of disparate, undeveloped, ideas that fail to make connections and so be a better fit for the lower levels of the mark scheme. A significant number of candidates use additional answer sheets, particularly for their **d** questions. In only a few cases did the additional answer sheets result in the candidate accessing a higher level on the mark scheme. Candidates are advised that their time is probably best spent planning their answers and ensuring their coherence and consistency.

SPaG is assessed in half of the **d** questions. Whilst there are relatively few marks available for SPaG, there are candidates who will have been awarded a lower grade because of marks that were dropped here. Time spent reminding candidates of the importance of punctuation would be well spent, as would time on key spellings.

Overall, the most successful candidates tended to understand key terms from the specification - and whilst 'keywords' are not assessed on this paper, it became apparent that some candidates had benefited from being taught them. Successful candidates were able to develop their responses, however simply, and were able successfully to deploy a range of sources of wisdom and authority to support and develop their responses. In **d** answers, the most successful candidates considered the various merits of the

arguments they were presenting by, for example, appraising the **relative** authority of different sacred texts or the **comparative** validity of secular or scientific arguments in an integrated manner which showed the capacity to link connected ideas. In future examination series, this latter capacity would seem likely to be key to accessing the highest grades.

Question 1a

This question was answered well by almost all candidates, since it allowed for crediting varnas, ashramas and dharma in a more general sense.

Question 1b

For those candidates who read the question accurately, this question presented little challenge since Saguna Brahman is a well-known concept. Unfortunately, some candidates did not pick up on the wording about how Hindus *show* belief and so answered more generally, giving beliefs about Saguna Brahman.

Question 1c

The concept of Brahman as spirit was well-known and understood by candidates. Since most of the ideas about Brahman as spirit have a scriptural basis, it was possible for most candidates to access the marks. For some, the challenge lay in accessing the 5th mark for the Source of Wisdom and Authority as many had exhausted their scriptural references in their initial point and development.

Question 1d

It was pleasing that so many candidates saw beyond the superficial levels of the question and understood what was being implied in it. As such, there were some truly good discussions of maya and the nature of the material world, contrasting it with spiritual reality.

Question 2a

A range of responses was credited in this question, but it bears mentioning that a considerable number of candidates did not appear to understand what *family planning* is in this context. Centres are advised that this is the term that is used on the Specification and will therefore be the term that is used in any questions.

Question 2b

This question was consistently well answered. In a very few cases candidates gave answers that could not be applied to *the family* and these could not be credited. Once again, it bears repeating that candidates need to read the questions carefully if they are to be able to access all of the marks available.

Question 2c

The question on gender prejudice and discrimination was answered well by the majority of candidates.

Question 2d

The most challenging part of this question turned out to be providing a coherent and logical counter-argument. More than any other question this year, this tended to be the one where the opposing view was composed of a string of disparate ideas.

Question 3a

There were very many successful answers to this question, with the vast majority of candidates able to give three places where Hindus worship.

Question 3b

Having had questions in previous years about the Ganges, it was perhaps not surprising that there were candidates who mistook Vrindavana for Varanasi. As ever, even if we suspect that they are not talking about the right place, if the candidate says something that may be applicable to Vrindavana, the response is credited.

Question 3c

The vast majority of candidates recognised the phrase 'space of the heart' and its associations with Antaryami and so were able to access the question. A good many candidates however, found it challenging to find, and use appropriately, a source of wisdom and authority to go with this question.

Question 3d

The majority of candidates were able to present good arguments about the merits of physical acts of worship and meditation. Some of the better candidates were able to access the upper band on the mark scheme through effective use of texts from the Bhagavad Gita about the respective merits of different acts of worship. Still others were able to exploit the fact that some acts of worship fit in both camps to great effect.

Question 4a

Hindu teachings on the sanctity of life are sufficiently well-known that this question did not pose much of a challenge for most candidates.

Question 4b

The specification draws a distinction between the origins of the universe (4.1 on the Specification) and the origins of human life (4.3 on the Specification). For this reason, it is important that candidates are primed to read the question carefully and ensure that their response addresses the correct element. In this case, there were a good many candidates who, understandably, made reference to evolution and the avatars of Vishnu, but these sadly could not be credited.

Question 4c

The overwhelming majority of candidates produced very good answers to this question, with many of them able to remember – and use appropriately – a Source of Wisdom and Authority.

Question 4d

The wording of this question was lifted from the Specification, and it was apparent that some candidates were familiar with the language of the Specification and therefore able to access the question with little difficulty. Some failed to recognise that there was a third bullet point in the question (refer to non-religious views) which meant that they were not able to go beyond Level 2 in the mark scheme.

Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Any technical vocabulary used in the question paper will also be in the Specification. Check your understanding of this vocabulary, especially where there are similar looking words with different meanings (*arti* and *artha*, *karma* and *kama*). It would also seem to be a worthwhile exercise to make sure that you understand some of the technical terms in the Specification that are not subject specific for example, is the difference between 'three beliefs about **the nature of** Brahman' and 'three beliefs about Brahman'?

Allow yourself enough time to both read *and* understand the questions. Make sure that you explain things that require explaining and that you are in fact answering the question that has been set. If you don't address the specific question asked, you will lose valuable time in the exam, writing an answer that can only access some of the marks.

The Specification gives some key texts for each section of the exam. Take time to learn some of these. When you use the quote in your exam, make sure that it is 'doing something' in your answer and not just dropped in as an afterthought. The quote will gain marks only if it is developing one of the points you've made – rather than being appended to the answer (often in a discrete paragraph) saying "A source of wisdom and authority to support this is...".

Read the bullet points in part **d** questions carefully and make sure that you cover them - if you are asked to provide non-religious reasons, make sure you do. If non-religious reasons are not asked for, you can save yourself time in the exam by not giving them. Remember that reasons from another religion are not *non-religious* and will not be considered as such.

d questions require you to say how effective or 'strong' the elements of the argument you are giving are - but do not limit yourself to saying that x is a strong argument; tell the examiner why x is stronger than y. Is it supported by a more authoritative text for example? Answers where every paragraph ends either 'This is a strong argument because it is supported by scripture' or 'This is a weak argument because it is just an opinion' are always going to seem a little superficial.

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar are marked in 1d and 3d. Re-read your answer, after you have written it. Does it have capital letters and full stops? Does it have commas? If an upper case letter is used in the question (for example, the Divine or Brahman), did you also use an upper case letter?