



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2025

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

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Introduction

Religious Studies B Paper 1F: Area of study 1

The paper contributes to 50% of the overall award. The assessment consists of four questions and candidates must answer all questions. The details of the assessment content are provided in the specification. This area of study comprises a study in-depth of Judaism as a lived religion in the United Kingdom and throughout the world.

There are four sections:

- Jewish Beliefs
- Marriage and the family
- Living the Jewish Life
- Matters of Life and Death

Question 1a

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Jewish Beliefs bullet point 1.1 The nature of the Almighty.

The question asked was: 'Outline three ways the nature of the Almighty can be seen in the Torah.'

Many took the approach of the places in the Torah where the nature can be seen, for example, during Creation and on top of Mount Sinai. A number wrote about how the Torah shows the Almighty to be the Law-Giver and the Judge. Others outlined his omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence.

The majority of candidates were given all 3 marks. Where candidates lost marks it was generally because they wrote their answer in list form, or as one sentence with three ways in it.

Examiner advice: Candidates need to write three separate sentences with a separate way in each sentence to get 3 marks.

Question 1b

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Jewish Beliefs bullet point 1.4 The Covenant with Abraham and his descendants.

The question asked was: 'Explain two reasons why the history of the Covenant with Abraham is important.'

Most candidates were able give two reasons why the history of the Covenant with Abraham is important. Most wrote about the introduction of monotheism, about circumcision, and about the Promised Land. Where candidates did not get all 4 marks, it was often because they wrote lots of different reasons but did not develop them. A few candidates confused Abraham with Moses and wrote about the Decalogue.

Examiner advice: Candidates are asked to 'Explain two' on (b) items. Therefore, two different reasons (or ways, beliefs, teachings) are required, and both need to be developed to be awarded 4 marks. Development consists of a piece of extra information, a reference to a source of wisdom, quotes or examples. The development must be of the reason given and to the question asked.

Question 1c

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Jewish Beliefs bullet point 1:5 The Covenant at Sinai.

The question asked was: 'Explain two teachings from the Covenant at Sinai.'

Most candidates were able to identify two different teachings from the Covenant with Moses: they wrote about the Ten Commandments, the reinforcement of the belief in monotheism that began with Abraham, the 613 mitzvot, the references to the land promised to Abraham. Where candidates did not get all the marks, it was mostly because they wrote one long teaching with a quote, rather than separating it into two. Some candidates did not get the mark for the reference to a source of wisdom and authority as their quote did not match the point they were making.

Examiner Advice: The candidate does not have to reference a quote or quote it word for word. The source of wisdom can be given as a recognisable paraphrase.

Question 1d

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Jewish Beliefs bullet point 1:2 The nature and importance of Shekhinah.

The question asked was: "The Almighty is best understood as Shekhinah."

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you must:

- refer to Jewish teachings
- reach a justified conclusion

(d) items are marked using levels and awarding is carried out using 'best fit' according to the level descriptors.

In response to this question many candidates were aware of the different understandings of how the Almighty can be seen in Judaism, for example, as Law-Giver, as Creator and as Judge as well as Shekhinah, and therefore, started to consider arguments for and against the given statement. Stronger candidates made specific reference to Jewish teachings such as the Creation and the giving of the mitzvot. Some wrote well about the importance of the Western Wall, and others about Shekhinah as the female aspect of the Almighty. They used these to help them develop logical chains of reasoning whilst weaker candidates commented more generally.

Examiner Advice: Candidates are reminded they are evaluating the given statement therefore they should use the arguments for and against to help them form a conclusion referencing the given statement. A justified conclusion goes beyond saying which view they agree with, or which is the stronger / weaker argument; it needs to be 'justified' through evidence and or reasoning. Formulas and writing frames often restrict the flow of the arguments and hinder the candidate progressing to the high levels.

Question 2a

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Marriage and the Family bullet point 2.4 Support for the family in the Jewish community.

The question asked was: 'Outline three ways the community supports the family.'

Many candidates correctly identified three Jewish ways the community supports families, mostly concentrating on support from the synagogue, such as classes for Bar and Bat Mitzvah, playgroups and counselling sessions.

Examiner advice: Candidates are advised to read the question carefully to ensure they answer the question asked.

Question 2b

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Marriage and the Family bullet point 2.7 Jewish teachings and attitudes about the equality of men and women in the family.

The question asked was: 'Explain two Jewish beliefs about the equality of men and women in the family.'

A significant number of candidates wrote that Orthodox Judaism teaches that men are superior to women and that the Torah teaches that women must stay at home; this is not accurate, and these responses were not given all the marks available. The best answers spoke of equality as parents teaching their children, with reference to the Shema and the different roles at Shabbat.

Examiner advice Candidates should be familiar with all the terms and phrases used in the specification, as the specification forms the basis for the setting of questions.

Question 2c

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Marriage and the family bullet point 2:6 Jewish teachings and attitudes towards divorce and remarriage.

The question asked was: 'Explain two Jewish teachings about divorce.'

Most candidates were able to identify at least one teaching about divorce, often that divorce is allowed as marriage is a contract and therefore it can be broken. Some candidates wrote about Maimonides saying that men could divorce their wives if they did not wear a veil. A number of candidates wrote incorrectly that divorce is banned in Orthodox Judaism.

Examiner Advice: Candidates do not get the marks for the source of wisdom and authority if they say 'in the Torah it says...', for example, and it is in the Mishnah. Candidates are advised to say Jewish scriptures if they are unsure.

Question 2d

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Jewish Beliefs bullet point 2.5 Jewish teaching about family planning and regulation of births.

The question asked was: "Jews should accept the use of contraception."

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you should:

- refer to Jewish teachings
- Refer to different Jewish points of view
- reach a justified conclusion

In response to this question some candidates did not know/understand the term contraception and confused it with abortion, therefore finding it difficult to go beyond the lower levels; often just giving isolated information. Many candidates could give developed arguments about the importance of having children in Judaism and why some Jews would oppose contraception but did not use these arguments to evaluate the given statement. A number of candidates knew the story of Onan but did not really understand what Jewish teaching comes from this, some believing that all contraception is therefore banned in Judaism, and this is incorrect.

Examiner Advice: In questions that give a third bullet point, in this case 'refer to different Jewish points of view', candidates cannot go beyond level 2 unless they do so.

Question 3a

Candidates were assessed on Section Three: Living the Jewish Life bullet point 3.4 The nature and importance of the Shema and the Amidah (the standing prayer).

The question asked was: 'Outline three reasons why the Amidah may be said.'

Many candidates were able to give three reasons why the Amidah may be said, for example as part of a synagogue service, to ask for mercy and to thank the Almighty. Where candidates lost marks, it was almost entirely because they did not know what the Amidah is, or what is in the Amidah.

Examiner advice: Candidates should be familiar with all the terms and phrases used in the specification, as the specification forms the basis for the setting of questions.

Question 3b

Candidates were assessed on Section Three: Living the Jewish Life bullet point 3.2 The Tenakh and the Talmud.

The question asked was: 'Explain two reasons why the Talmud is important.'

This question was answered reasonably well. Most candidates knew what the Talmud is and were able to write at least one reason why it is important, although many found it difficult to write two developed reasons. The best answers given were very specific, for example, the Talmud is important because it explains the food laws, and this means that Jews know what they can and cannot eat.

Examiner advice: (b) questions required candidates to give two developed reason/ways - any further reasons or ways cannot be credited; candidates should not waste time in the examination writing more than is required.

Question 3c

Candidates were assessed on Section Three: Living the Jewish Life bullet point 3.5 The importance of ritual for Jews today.

The question asked was: 'Explain two reasons why a Bar Mitzvah may be important.'

Most candidates were able to identify two reasons why a Bar Mitzvah may be important, giving reasons such as taking responsibility for one's faith and being able to take an adult role in the synagogue such as being part of a minyan. A significant number of candidates did not refer to a source of wisdom and authority in their response.

Examiner Advice: Centres struggling to find sources of wisdom and authority should refer to the specification and/or previous mark schemes.

Question 3d

Candidates were assessed on Section Three: Living the Jewish Life bullet point 3.8 Features of the synagogue.

The question asked was: "All Jews need a synagogue."
Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you must:

- refer to Jewish teachings
- reach a justified conclusion

Many candidates knew the main reasons why a synagogue is important for a community and wrote about the importance of education, worship and community groups. A significant number of candidates did not go beyond giving arguments why all communities should have a synagogue, then giving arguments against, usually by referring to distance or work commitments, then stating which they think is the most important reason without justifying their conclusion. A number of candidates wrote incorrectly that Orthodox Jews need synagogues whereas Reform Jews do not. The candidates who were awarded the high levels focussed their response on keeping the faith alive and relevant in the modern world, the need for a minyan for certain prayers and funerals and made comparisons with other parts of Jewish life which are more personal, one's relationship with the Almighty and showed logical chains of reasoning. This led them to analyse the statement given and to a justified conclusion using their knowledge and understanding.

Examiner Advice: (d) questions require candidates to underpin their arguments with knowledge and understanding outlined in the specification.

Question 4a

Candidates were assessed on Section Four: Matters of Life and Death bullet point 4.2 Jewish teachings about the value of life.

The question asked was: 'Outline three Jewish beliefs about the value of life.'

Most candidates were able to identify Jewish beliefs about the value of life in Judaism coming from the Creation by the Almighty, the gift given to humanity, the sanctity of life meaning preserving life is priority and only the Almighty being able to end life.

Examiner advice: Candidates should use Jewish terms and phrases in their answers.

Question 4b

Candidates were assessed on Section Four: Matters of Life and Death bullet point 4.4 Implications of the value and sanctity of life for the issue of abortion.

The question asked was: 'Explain two Jewish beliefs about abortion.'

The question was answered reasonably well with most candidates getting at least half the marks available. However, many candidates wrote that abortion is banned in Orthodox Judaism, and that the sanctity of life means that the foetus is considered as an equal to the mother, which is incorrect in Judaism.

Examiner advice: Candidates can use their knowledge and understanding from other sections of the specification to answer questions.

Question 4c

Candidates were assessed on Section Four: Matters of Life and Death bullet point 4.8 Jewish responses to issues in the natural world.

The question asked was: 'Explain two reasons why Jews should care for the environment.'

Most candidates were able to identify at least one Jewish reason why Jews should care for the environment, usually based on Genesis and the Creation of the world by the Almighty. Some candidates wrote about stewardship, and some wrote excellent responses about the concepts of bal tashchit (do not destroy) and tikkun olam.

Examiner Advice: Candidates are advised to learn and know two teachings about the given topics.

Question 4d

Candidates were assessed on Section Four: Matters of Life and Death bullet point 4.3 Jewish responses to scientific and non-religious explanations about the origins of human life.

The question asked was: "The Almighty must have created human life."

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you should:

- refer to Jewish teachings
- refer to non-religious points of view
- reach a justified conclusion

Candidates engaged well with this question and were able to give arguments for and against using Jewish teachings and most offered a non-religious point of view. Those who were awarded the higher levels analysed the statement by focusing on the term 'must have' in the statement, then underpinned the response with understanding of the issue of how life began from different points of view, such as evolution. Where candidates did not get the higher levels, it was often because their response was one-sided, and that they did not write arguments for and against.

Examiner Advice: 'Point(s) of view' always means arguments for and against the statement.

Summary

- Candidates should write three sentences in 'outline' (a) questions. Each sentence should contain one piece of information. There is no need for development. Incorrect words or sentences should be crossed out.
- The 'explain' questions (b) and (c) require two developed points. For (c) items an additional mark is given for a reference to a source of wisdom, which does not need to be referenced and can be paraphrased.
- Candidates should be directed to the specification and other published resources to learn key terms and sources of wisdom.
- The (d) items are level marked and assess A02 not A01; responses should be underpinned by an understanding of religion and belief as outlined in the specification. Centres are advised to refer to the appropriate training material about 'd' items that has been published by Pearson.