



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In Religious Studies B
Paper 2: Area of Study 2 – Religion, Peace and
Conflict
Option 2F – Judaism

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Introduction

Religious Studies B Paper 2F: Area of study 2

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
- Crime and Punishment
- Living the Jewish Life
- Peace and Conflict

Question 1a

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Jewish Beliefs bullet point 1.2 The nature and importance of Shekhinah.

The question asked was: 'Outline three times the divine presence is seen in the Torah.'

This question was answered well with many candidates correctly identifying three correct times that the divine presence is seen in the Torah, such as the Burning Bush, at the top of Mount Sinai, and as cloud/smoke/fire. Where candidates did not get the marks, it was mostly because they did not understand the term 'divine presence.'

Examiner advice: Candidates need to know and understand the subject specific terms given in the specification.

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 Abraham is important for Jews.'

Most candidates were able to identify two reasons why Abraham is important to Jews. The majority wrote about the Covenant between Abraham and the Almighty and the introduction of monotheism, circumcision and Abraham being given land. Where candidates did not get all 4 marks, it was generally because they wrote many reasons and did not develop them. A few candidates confused Abraham with Moses.

Examiner advice: Candidates are asked to 'Explain two' on (b) items. Therefore, two different reasons 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 1:8 Jewish beliefs about life after death.

The question asked was: 'Explain two beliefs about life after death for Orthodox Jews.'

While many candidates were able to identify two different beliefs about life after death in Orthodox Judaism, a number found it difficult to develop these beliefs to access all the marks available. Too many candidates wrote that there is little about life after death in the Torah so Jews do not dwell on the afterlife as some other religions do, and while that may be true, it is not answering the question. Similarly, candidates cannot get marks for saying what Jews do not believe, such as Jews do not believe in purgatory.

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 1:7 Moral principles and the mitzvot.

The question asked was: 'Keeping the mitzvot makes a person Jewish.'

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 significance of the covenant between the Almighty and Moses and could refer to relevant Jewish teachings about the mitzvot setting the Jews apart, making them the Almighty's Chosen People. Most compared/contrasted this with the belief of Reform Judaism, that the Torah is inspired by the Almighty but written by men, and that therefore the mitzvot have different significance. Some candidates wrote about Pikuach Nefesh, and how the primacy of life was more important, and others wrote about Jewish culture not being limited to faith in the Almighty. The better responses developed chains of reasoning using their knowledge and understanding of the different covenants to argue the point being made.

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 statement. A justified conclusion goes beyond saying which view they agree with or 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 higher levels.

Question 2a

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Crime and Punishment bullet point 2.7 Jewish teachings about the treatment of criminals.

The question asked was: 'Outline three Jewish teachings about the treatment of criminals.'

Many candidates correctly identified three Jewish teachings about how criminals should be treated although a significant number lost a mark by saying that Jews should forgive criminals. Some wrote about showing mercy, others wrote about harsh punishments seen in the Torah. A wide variety of answers was accepted here.

Examiner advice: Candidates are advised to write three separate sentences in response to (a) questions, starting a new line for each point made.

Question 2b

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Crime and Punishment bullet point 2.6 Jewish teachings about forgiveness.

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

Some candidates found this question challenging, with a considerable number not knowing what restorative justice is, and therefore not being able to answer the question correctly. Others wrote detailed answers about how it gives justice to both the criminal and the victim, it works in reducing crime as it confronts those who have done wrong with the consequences for the victim.

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: Crime and Punishment bullet 2.3 Jewish teachings about good, evil and suffering.

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

Most candidates were able to identify at least one Jewish teaching about good actions, such as the teaching in the Shema that the Almighty will reward Jews if they obey his commandments, and the Decalogue telling Jews to honour their parents as this is a good action. There were some really great answers about gemilut hasadim (acts of loving kindness) and tikkun olam.

Examiner Advice: The bullet points in the specification give sources of wisdom and authority that can be used to answer the questions.

Question 2d

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Crime and Punishment bullet point 2.8 Jewish attitudes towards the death penalty.

The question asked was: "Everyone should support the death penalty."
Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you must:

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

This was answered well by many candidates who know many of the arguments for and against the death penalty and have strong opinions on both sides of the debate. Where some did not get into level 3 and 4, it was mostly because although their arguments were passionate, they had not linked them to any Jewish teaching and therefore this limited them. There were some very good answers using the Decalogue, the teaching in Exodus that 'the penalty shall be life for life' (Exodus 21:23), teachings about forgiveness and rehabilitation of offenders, and the cost of high security prisons. These candidates used specific arguments in logical chains of reasoning and gave a justified conclusion.

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

Question 3a

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

The question asked was: 'Outline three objects which may be used in a synagogue.'

Most candidates were able to outline three objects which may be used in a synagogue, with a yad, a menorah, a Torah scroll and a yarmulka being the most common answers. Bimah and ark was accepted as the definition of 'object' is broad.

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

Question 3b

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

The question asked was: 'Explain two features of birth ceremonies in Judaism.'

The majority of candidates were able to get half the marks on this question by writing about circumcision. However, a number of candidates did not appear to know about being blessed on the first Shabbat, the naming for girls or redeeming of the first born.

Examiner advice (b) questions required candidates to give only two reasons/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 3.4 The nature and importance of the Shema and the Amidah.

The question asked was: 'Explain two reasons why the Amidah is an important prayer for Jews.'

Most candidates knew what the Amidah is and could say it was the Standing prayer, but the question is why it is important, and this was more difficult for some. Those candidates who had been given parts of the Amidah to learn were able to give detailed reasons why the blessings are important and were able to get the mark for the source of wisdom. Weaker candidates gave superficial answers about prayer in general.

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 3.7 Jewish festivals.

The question asked was: "Shavuot is the most important Jewish festival."

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you should:

- refer to Jewish teachings
- reach a justified conclusion

Many candidates knew the main features of Shavuot, but some candidates confused it with Pesach or certain elements of it. A significant number of candidates did not go beyond giving arguments why Shavuot is seen as the most important festival, then giving arguments against, usually by referring to another festival, then stating which they think is the most important festival without justifying their conclusion. Some candidates did not even write about Shavuot, they just referred to other festivals and, as a result, did not answer the question. The candidates who were awarded the higher levels focussed their response on Shavuot and made comparisons with other festivals showing logical chains of reasoning. This led them to analyse the statement and provide justified conclusions using their knowledge and understanding.

Examiner Advice: The focus of the candidate response should be the statement given; they should refer to it in their answer to ensure they are answering the question set.

Question 4a

Candidates were assessed on Section Four: Peace and Conflict bullet point 4.2 the role of Jews in peace-making.

The question asked was: 'Outline three Jewish beliefs about reconciliation in peacemaking.'

Most candidates were able to identify Jewish beliefs about reconciliation in peacemaking. Some wrote about justice, that Jewish teaching is that only the victim can offer reconciliation and that reconciliation brings peace.

Examiner advice: It is important that candidates understand terms like reconciliation, justice, forgiveness and peace within the context of Judaism.

Question 4b

Candidates were assessed on Section Four: Peace and Conflict bullet point 4.8 Jewish attitudes to issues surrounding conflict.

The question asked was: 'Explain two ways Jews have worked to overcome the problem of conflict.'

Several candidates confused Jews with Israel here and wrote about the actions of the Israeli government. It is important that candidates understand the difference between Jews and Israelis. Those candidates who wrote full mark answers included Jews working for charities, Rabbis offering counselling to married couples and the belief that peace is the aim of Judaism.

Examiner advice: The bullet points in the specification give sources of wisdom and authority that can be used to develop answers.

Question 4c

Candidates were assessed on Section Four: Peace and Conflict bullet point 4.6; Jewish attitudes to Holy war.

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

Most candidates were able to identify at least one Jewish teaching about war. Some candidates wrote about Holy War and used the example of Joshua. Others wrote about Just War theory, and defensive wars. There were some really good answers which included the teaching of Maimonides that spiritual matters are more important than wars.

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

Question 4d

Candidates were assessed on Section Four: Peace and Conflict bullet point 4.5 Jewish attitudes to the Just War theory.

The question asked was: "There is no such thing as a Just War."

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you must:

- refer to Jewish teachings
- refer to relevant ethical arguments
- reach a justified conclusion

Some candidates engaged well with this question and were able to give arguments for and against, but a significant number of responses were very general about conflict/war and lacked analysis of Just War theory. Many confused Just War and Holy War arguing it must be just if it is holy. There were several candidates who wrote about the Jews being

murdered in the Holocaust because they did not have an army, which showed a serious lack of understanding. Others wrote about the current situation in Israel/Palestine as a Holy War. The use of ethical theories was much better this year, with most candidates trying to use one, although these were sometimes confused.

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.