



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In Religious Studies (4RS1) Paper 01

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Introduction

This question paper is based on the Specification first published in 2016 for teaching from September 2016. 4RS1 is a linear qualification with both Paper 1 and Paper 2 examined at the end of a two-year course of study.

Paper 1 aims to test knowledge, understanding and analytical and evaluative skills concerned with Beliefs and Values, whilst Paper 2 focuses on the Religious Community.

On Paper 1, candidates can base responses on one or more of the six major world religions covered in the mark scheme. They may also be asked to consider the beliefs and opinions of non-religious people, as required by the Specification.

Paper 1 is marked out of 100 marks comprising one full question, parts a to d inclusive, from a choice of two, in each of the four sections. It provides 60% of the weighting for the examination.

Paper 2 is marked out of 60 marks comprising three questions, parts a to c inclusive from each of three sections. The choice in this case is provided by the religion rather than by a choice of question within the religion. It provides 40% of the weighting for the examination.

Paper 1, Beliefs and Values, is divided into four sections:

1. The Universe, Creation and the Place of Human Beings
2. Life and Death
3. Peace and Conflict
4. Rights, Equality and Social Justice.

In each section, candidates are required to choose one of two questions. Each question has the same structure though the content varies:

An (a) question (A01). These questions are worth up to 3 marks for three simple answers, and which can often be gained with single word or short phrase responses. The (a) questions are point marked.

A (b) question (A01/A02). These questions are worth up to 4 marks, 2 each for two developed responses. The command word is always 'Outline', though it is important to look for the further indicator of what is being requested. Some questions, for example, ask for candidates to choose one religion, and sometimes to provide non-religious responses. The key requirement for gaining full marks is development. In each case the response must be developed in a way that furthers the understanding of the response given, and which responds to the question. The (b) questions are point marked.

A (c) question (A01/A02). These 'explain' questions are worth up to 6 marks, and the marks are awarded in accordance with two Levels: Level 1 being worth up to 3 marks, and Level 2 from 4 to 6 marks. The requirements for these levels can be found in the current Mark Scheme, and they do not change from one series to the next. In order to gain marks in the higher Level 2, candidates must demonstrate the ability to develop their responses (for 4 marks) and furthermore to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the topic (for 5 or 6 marks). On c) questions, candidates may sometimes be asked to focus on the beliefs of one religion, or answer from a non-religious perspective. These questions are Levels marked.

A (d) question (A01/A02.) These questions are worth up to 12 marks, and the marks are awarded in accordance with four Levels: Level 1 being worth up to 3 marks, and Level 2 from 4 to 6 marks, Level 3 allocates 7 to 9 marks, and Level 4 allocates 9 to 12 marks. The requirements for these levels can be found in the current Mark Scheme, and they do not change from one series to the next. In order to gain marks in the higher Levels 3 and 4, candidates must demonstrate the ability to develop their responses, demonstrate a deeper understanding of the topic, and also the ability to evaluate two points of view and arrive at a justified conclusion. It is a requirement that answers to d) questions include reference to at least one religion.

The number of candidate entries remained stable in 2024. Most candidates answered from the perspective of Christianity, Judaism or Islam though the number of Buddhism entries showed a marked increase.

SECTION 1: The Universe, Creation and the Place of Human Beings

Question 1 (a) Identify **three** beliefs about free will.

Specification 1.4

Almost 70% of all candidates chose to do question 1. Those who did suggested ideas such as 'We have no free will' or 'God gave us free will.' A number also mentioned genetic determinism. There was no requirement to include a religious perspective nor any more than the briefest answers.

(b) Outline **two** non-religious beliefs about the causes of suffering.

Specification 1.7

Candidates now have a very good understanding of what constitutes a developed reason. Most candidates gained full marks in b questions. The most common response was to suggest poverty as a cause of suffering. Many also suggested natural disasters as a cause of suffering. Very few candidates misread the question so there were few religious responses.

(c) Explain why some religious people believe there is only one God.

Specification 1.5

The most common suggestions were based on scripture, often mentioning the creation story and the claim of Jesus to be the son of God. Some candidates felt the need to explain why others believe in multiple gods, however this was not creditworthy. The best responses offered a range of suggestions as to why some believe in monotheism, supported by a variety of examples, often invoking the cosmological and design arguments.

(d) "Humans will always sin."

Specification 1.3

Evaluate this statement, showing you have considered different points of view.
In your answer you should refer to at least one religion.

This statement generated some interesting discussions on the relative merits of original sin versus salvation through grace, and the impacts these were likely to have on a person's propensity to sin. Several candidates considered historical evidence going back as far as the survival of the fittest and encompassing the world wars, to make the case that humans will always sin. Others suggested that sin was often the result of circumstance, so a person in poverty may steal to survive, and if the root causes of social injustice could be dealt with people would no longer be required to sin.

More of the candidates gave well developed chains of reasoning contributing to the higher marks across the paper. On occasion one very good chain of reasoning was in contrast to a very simple reason. This limited the potential for appraisal and thus limited the marks that could be achieved.

It was pleasing to note this year that many centres have encouraged candidates to make judgements of the quality of their arguments. Many still use the 'strong argument', 'weak argument' method. This exposed the usual drawbacks. All too often all the arguments were judged to be strong and, as such, contributed little to any sense of evaluation. Even when there was a genuine attempt to make judgements of the quality of the evidence offered, this was rarely used in any meaningful sense to produce an evaluative conclusion. Many conclusions remained a statement of personal opinion.

2 (a) Identify **three** religious beliefs about the nature of an ultimate reality.

Specification 1.5

This was perhaps the least well answered question on the paper, with many candidates choosing to interpret ultimate reality as a destination for the afterlife. Many candidates suggested heaven,

hell and nirvana. Few suggested characteristics linked to the nature of God. Those who did most commonly mentioned God as creator, and God's omniscience and omnipotence.

b) Outline **two** non-religious beliefs about human selfishness.

Specification 1.3

Few candidates offered religious beliefs though some still believe that you have to mention religious views in every question whether they will be credited or not.

Most candidates suggested human nature was the driving force behind selfishness, linking this to evolution and the survival of the fittest. A number also suggested it was a consumer society, and the need to be seen to be doing as well as one's neighbours that contribute to human selfishness.

(c) Explain why most religious people believe God is the cause of the universe.

Specification 1.6

Whilst the question clearly references God as the cause of the universe, many candidates majored on the design argument. Some managed to make this relevant to a question about causation, many did not. Those who addressed the question, frequently gave an account of the causation argument and why the creation of the universe may prove the existence of God.

(d) "God determines a person's fate."

Evaluate this statement, showing you have considered different points of view.

In your answer you should refer to at least one religion.

Specification 1.4

This provoked serious consideration of whether a life could be said to be predetermined either genetically or by God. Many candidates focused on the idea that a loving God could not condemn people to hell if they had no choice in the judgement. Many also discussed Calvin, and the elect and the reprobates, again pointing to the contrast between eternal damnation and the merciful God people choose to worship.

Most used the quotation from Jeremiah 1:5, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you', to propose that our destiny is already known and therefore already decided. This was contrasted with the words of St Paul, 'By grace you are saved', to suggest that individuals always have a choice, to accept or reject God's grace. There was limited evidence of judgement of the quality of the arguments. This caused a particular issue for those who put scriptural quotes in one argument and used this as their justification for the 'better' argument. Sadly, it more often revealed a lack of scriptural awareness rather than proving the intended point.

SECTION 2: Life and Death

3 (a) Identify **three** non-religious beliefs about the value of human life.

Specification 2.3.

Candidates often seem less comfortable with non-religious views. In this case the most often suggested beliefs were that human life has no inherent value, the value of a life is determined by what a person does with this life and that human life has the same value as animal life.

(b) Choose **one** religion. Outline **two** attitudes to remarriage.

Specification 2.6.

Rather than answering the question, many candidates focused on religious attitudes to divorce. From this perspective it was difficult to score full marks. Many also discussed annulment, which had even less relevance to the question. Of those who attempted to answer the question most suggested some denominations did not allow remarriage since it breaks the marriage vows made before God, and some do, based on the principle of agape.

(c) Explain how religious people may respond to same-sex relationships.

Specification 2.4

Candidates have very clear views on same-sex relationships which clearly reflect the prevailing attitudes as stated by the two largest Christian denominations. Islam and Judaism candidates were more fixed in their views. Many used the quote from Leviticus 18:22, 'You shall not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination'. This was effectively contrasted with the more liberal approach taken by some denominations that accept that there is a genetic component.

(d) "Religious people should adopt children."

Evaluate this statement, showing you have considered different points of view.

In your answer you should refer to at least one religion.

Specification 2.8

Most candidates discussed this from the perspective of adopting contrasted with having your own biological children. Clearly adopting a child shows love and also comes at no additional environmental cost. Some considered that the quote from Genesis 1:28, 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it' overrides these virtues of adopting by fulfilling a direct command from the Almighty.

Some candidates suggested that religious families could both have biological children and adopt, the two weren't mutually exclusive. A number raised the question of the benefits for infertile

couples. It was even suggested that if giving birth was not in God's plan for a person, adoption may be.

4 (a) Identify **three** reasons why marriage may be important to religious people.

Specification 2.5

A straightforward question. Candidates suggested reasons such as to be united before God, to demonstrate your love and commitment before the congregation, and to create a secure family in order to have children.

(b) Outline two ways religious people may respond to family breakdown.

Specification 2.6

Candidates approached this from two distinct angles. Some provided ways concerning the couple involved in the breakdown, others suggested ways from a community or wider family perspective. They also suggested both spiritual ways, like prayer, and more practical approaches such as looking after any children. Most candidates were able to give two well developed ways.

(c) Choose **one** religion. Explain its teachings about the meaning and purpose of life.

Specification 2.2

This was carefully considered by many candidates with a range of fully developed responses. The most common suggestions were to seek God and live by his will, to have children to grow the kingdom of God, and to fulfil humanity's role as guardians and protectors of the world.

Unlike some of the other (c) questions there were a number of very well-developed responses that focused only on a single teaching, often expanding this to include other aspects of religious life.

(d) "This life is all there is."

Evaluate this statement, showing you have considered different points of view.

In your answer you should refer to at least one religion.

Specification: 2.1

This statement produced some fascinating responses as students grappled with the religious understanding of life after death, sharply contrasted with an atheist/humanist view. Many struggled with the lack of evidence argument, finding faith in the unseen and unknowable a poor substitute for empirical evidence. Scripture was also frequently dismissed as a reliable source of evidence for a life after death.

Candidates did suggest that the resurrection of Jesus offered evidence of a more concrete nature, whilst accepting there is little historical evidence to confirm the New Testament claims. These ideas often generated some detailed chains of reasoning and this question achieved some of the highest marks on the paper.

More candidates found paranormal activity and near-death experiences harder to explain, and suggested that this, without further evidence, suggested that this life cannot be all there is. Many, in the end, came to the conclusion that no-one will know beyond a shadow of a doubt until they die, and then it will be too late.

SECTION 3: Peace and Conflict

5 (a) Identify three causes of conflict.

Specification 3.1

Responses largely concerned large scale war and conflict, though small-scale conflicts, for example between family members, were also acceptable responses. The most commonly given causes of conflict were greed for land, the need for resources and historical enmity. As with the majority of (a) questions, most candidates had no difficulty accessing these marks.

(b) Outline two ways religions can promote peacemaking.

Specification 3.2

Some candidates appeared to have more difficulty than expected with this question, particularly when it came to developing ways. The most commonly suggested responses included sharing religious teachings that promote peacemaking. This was often developed with reference to the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God' (Matt. 5:9).

(c) Explain why some non-religious people are against capital punishment.

Specification 3.6

This proved to be less of an issue for candidates than many other non-religious questions. Essentially most took the essence of the religious arguments, and removed the religious content, suggesting explanations such as the inherent value of every life, the concern over bias and wrongful convictions and the need for reform and rehabilitation rather than retribution.

(d) "Sins should be against the law."

Evaluate this statement, showing you have considered different points of view.
In your answer you should refer to at least one religion.

Specification 3.4

The essence of the arguments offered revolved around two central thoughts. The first of these suggested that if something was against God's will then it clearly should be against the law of the land. The opposite view questioning the practicality of judging people based on thoughts rather than deeds. This was often developed by questioning the role of other faiths, and those things they may consider a sin, with the most often used example being what a person can eat.

Many candidates referenced the idea that the law already draws heavily on the Ten Commandments, many of which have universal application. No-one could argue that murder should be against the law but may question how a law that forbids the worship of other gods could be enforced in a multi-faith society, or how it would be possible to police a law against adultery.

Some also pointed out, on a more practical note, that since prisons are already full to bursting point where would all these 'thought criminals' go? As a result, most candidates decided that, inadequate as the law may be, it would be impossible to make all sins against the law.

6 (a) Identify three reasons why society punishes criminals.

Specification 3.5

The most commonly suggested reasons were protection, retribution and to promote reform of the criminal. To give justice to the victim and provide examples of unacceptable behaviour for the community were also widely employed.

(b) Outline two reasons why bullying happens.

Specification 3.3

The opportunity to discuss bullying remains a popular choice for candidates. Many, in defence of the bully, suggested bullying was learnt behaviour. Those who bully have often been the victims of bullying themselves. The other commonly cited reason was envy. The bully wants what the victim has, and bullies to make themselves feel better about a situation they have no control over.

(c) Choose one religion. Explain why some of its followers are opposed to capital punishment.

Specification 3.6

Most candidates chose to consider Christianity with both Islam and Judaism well represented. Most candidates suggested the importance of forgiveness and mercy as religious values. They also pointed to the significance of God as the ultimate arbitrator and judge, with the right, as Creator, to take life as he chooses, rather than for humans to usurp God's role. Others cited the reality that courts are not always as fair and just as we might hope, since humans are fallible and

carry, often unchallenged, prejudices. Evidence of this was provided by the relatively high numbers of ethnic minority criminals on death row in those American States that permit capital punishment. The most common response pointed out that it was not loving to take someone's life, regardless of the circumstances, and no matter the heinous nature of the crime. They advocated for reform as an alternative view since no one can change when they are dead.

(d) "Sometimes war is the only way to achieve peace."

Evaluate this statement, showing you have considered different points of view.
In your answer you should refer to at least one religion.

Specification 3.1

Given the ongoing situation in the world it is perhaps not surprising that this statement was accorded a more positive response than may otherwise have been expected. The majority of candidates, whilst arguing fervently for the importance of talks and negotiations, in the end accepted that when everything else had been tried, sometimes war was the only answer. The Second World War was often used as an example of an instance when Chamberlain tried appeasement to no avail, and Great Britain and the Commonwealth felt they had no alternative but to fight with their allies against a common enemy.

In contrast many discussed the role of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in stressing non-violent protest and negotiation to bring an end to apartheid, and in the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to deal with the aftermath for those who were involved. Ghandi's work in contributing to a peaceful transfer of power in India also provided a case study in alternatives to war. In doing so they suggested that there is always another way, another step that can be taken, another attempt at peace.

Happily, few candidates went beyond a brief mention of current conflicts, historical examples proving safer and with a well-established factual basis.

SECTION 4: Rights, Equality and Social Justice

7 (a) Identify three ways people may respond to the poor.

Specification 4.5

Candidates suggested helping them, either practically through charity or service or spiritually through prayer and welcoming them into the community. Other common suggestions included providing opportunities for work or work experience and, less positively, ignoring them or judging them as authors of their own misfortune.

(b) Outline **two** ways society tries to overcome racism.

Specification 4.3

The majority of candidates suggested that society uses laws such as the Equality Act of 2010, which prohibits discrimination based on colour or nationality. Many also proposed desegregated schooling, where children of every race are educated together. The majority of candidates developed these ways very well by suggesting how these government actions lead to a reduction in racism. Some also suggested that employers could operate positive discrimination to address the current inequalities in the workforce.

(c) Choose **one** religion. Explain the attitudes its followers may hold towards equal rights for women.

Specification 4.2

The most commonly utilised religions remain Christianity, Judaism and Islam with Christianity by far the most prevalent. Interestingly there was something of a gender divide evident in the responses. Both genders recognised the difference different groups within a faith may hold. However, female students felt much more strongly about it, clearly believing women were just as capable of holding roles in the religion as their male counterparts.

Inevitably, regardless of the chosen faith, the argument comes down to the traditional view of women primarily as wives and mothers and the liberal view of gender equality. Many referenced the teaching of St Paul that 'Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.' (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Others pointed to the women, like Dorcas mentioned in Acts, who were important in the early Church.

Muslim and Jewish candidates pointed out that different roles in the family and household did not mean a lack of equality, but rather the distribution of responsibility to those best fitted for it.

(d) "Religious people should only mix with others of the same faith."

Evaluate this statement, showing you have considered different points of view.

In your answer you should refer to at least one religion.

Specification 4.4

Those candidates who chose to do Question 7 approached this with enthusiasm. The arguments revolved around the exclusivist and pluralist approaches to the issue. Exclusivists hold that Christ (and the church) are required for salvation. Pluralism, its opposite, holds that all religions may equally provide paths to salvation.

The basis of the exclusivist argument is Jesus' teaching 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). Faced with this scriptural reality they argue that Christians should only associate with other Christians, maintaining friendship groups within the faith and ultimately marrying another Christians who will hold the same beliefs and values, in order to raise Christian children.

Pluralists by contrast, also quote Jesus who said, in the same conversation with the disciples, 'In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.' (John 14:2). They use this to argue that people of all faiths, perhaps none, will be accepted into heaven as 'hidden Christians'. These are people who live by Christian values but do not accept Jesus as the Son of God.

Most candidates suggested that there were risks inherent in mixing with those of other faiths, most notably the risk that in mixing with those of other faiths a religious person's individual's faith may be weakened. There was particular concern for children, who may be more vulnerable to the influence of other faiths.

To rebut this argument many candidates suggested that in order to fulfil the Great Commission Christians must mix with those of other faiths and none since you cannot convert someone you don't know.

Most candidates concluded that mixing was inevitable, both in school and the workplace, and that Christians should use the opportunity to befriend and convert others; in doing so they save those they care about from hell.

8 (a) Identify **three** attitudes non-religious people may have to living in a multi-faith society.

Specification 4.4

Candidates often suggested simple attitudes such as they like it, they don't like it, they enjoy the diversity and they appreciate it as a chance to learn about a lot of different faiths. Some candidates inevitably ignored the non-religious component of the questions and answered from a faith perspective.

(b) Outline **two** ways religious people can support the poor.

Specification 4.5

Responses usually included charitable giving, developed by a scriptural basis for charitable giving. Other responses suggested prayer and asking God to help, and practical support such as volunteering at a food bank in the local place of worship. All these were appropriate ways in

which a religious person could support the poor. Less commonly, ways such as giving them a job or a home, or providing skills training, were also proposed.

(c) Choose **one** religion. Explain the responsibilities its followers have in a multi-ethnic society.

Specification 4.3

As ever with questions concerning issues in a multi-faith or a multi-ethnic society many candidates glibly used the two terms interchangeably. All the major religious groups contain members of a range of ethnicities meaning that a question about multi-ethnic society should contain issues relevant to race.

The better responses suggested that religious people have a responsibility to love and care for those from ethnic backgrounds other than their own, welcoming them into the community and to worship. Many also suggested a responsibility to provide places of worship and business spaces for food requirements, such as halal food. Some also suggested religious people, often Christians, have a responsibility to teach their faith and convert others if they are both of a different race and a different religion, in order to save them from hell. Most focused on the need to demonstrate the love shown by Jesus who did not discriminate against those the rest of society spurned.

(d) “Everyone deserves human rights.”

Evaluate this statement, showing you have considered different points of view.
In your answer you should refer to at least one religion.

Specification 4.1

The majority of candidates supported the statement arguing that human rights were the basic requirements everyone needs to live and thrive. They supported this stance with reference to Jesus feeding the five thousand, rather than see anyone go hungry, and with reference to the Human Rights Act. They strongly supported the redistribution of wealth from the wealthiest countries to those they have previously exploited and the development of a basic quality of life and opportunity for all.

The arguments in opposition were frequently from a religious perspective arguing that human rights sometimes had to be limited in order to ensure the rights of others in society. This perspective was often backed up with reference to religious teachings banning same-sex sexual relationships, banned by scripture in many major religions but accepted by the Human Rights Act. Many suggested that God’s law supersedes man’s law and if God suggests homosexuality is unacceptable then no accommodation should be made.

A similar case was made for limiting the rights and freedoms of convicted criminals for the greater good of society as a whole. Most fell short of suggesting that capital punishment should be reintroduced for the most heinous crimes, reflecting on the fact that all the major world scriptures were written a long time ago and society has evolved since then. In such cases, human rights should be limited for the good of the many, even if that means limiting the rights of the few.

Summary and Recommendations to Centres to improve candidate performance:

- In (a) and (b) questions candidates should be encouraged to limit the quantity they write to conserve the time for the longer answer (c) and (d). There really is no gain from writing half a page in response to an (a) question which may only require a three-word answer.
- Candidates should be encouraged to fully develop their responses. They always add value to their (c) responses if they further describe, illustrate or explain their answer.
- Candidates are reminded that any number of simply developed responses to c) questions can gain only a maximum of 4 marks, and that demonstration of depth of understanding is required to gain the higher marks.
- As the quality of judgement of reasons has improved in (d) questions, time can be more usefully employed in a focus on an evaluative conclusion. More candidates achieved Level 4 this year but few reached the highest level of achievement, as conclusions remained largely a statement of opinion not based in the judgements previously provided.

