



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In Religious Studies (4RS1) Paper 2B

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Principal Examiner's Report for Paper 4RS1_2B Christianity 2024

General Introduction

Once again this year there has been a large entry of candidates for what is now called 4RS1_2B Christianity, following the decision to split Paper 2 into its component religions.

Here are a few initial general observations about this year's Paper, some of which will be exemplified further, later in the Report.

- Candidates are required to answer all questions in the paper, and this seemed to be generally well understood.
- Candidates usually wrote appropriate amounts in their responses, within the spaces provided. A significant number of candidates, however, did use extra paper.
- On this Paper, the different question types have different demands. For example, a) questions test Assessment Objective 1 whereas the c) questions are much more directed towards testing AO2.
- The majority of this year's candidate cohort appeared well prepared for the examination in terms of their knowledge, understanding and willingness to engage with questions as written.
- There was little evidence of candidates being unable to complete the paper in the allocated time. Sometimes, when candidates did fail to finish the Paper, it may have been because they spent too much time on questions, such as a) questions, that did not need as much development.

Teachers and Centres may well find it helpful to look at the Principal Examiner's Report for each of the other religions, as there may be points made there about a specific question that will have more general application.

Comments on specific question types.

a) Questions

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. This could therefore be 'Outline two ways', 'two features', 'two reasons', or a number of other similar terms. 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.

b) Questions

These 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).

c) Questions

These questions are worth up to 10 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 or 8 marks, and Level 4 allocates 9 or 10 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 to arrive at a justified conclusion.

Currently the rubrics for c) questions allow candidates to refer to other religions. It is important for candidates to be aware that such references can only be rewarded when there is a clear attempt to explain why the experience of another religion might be significant for the religion being examined.

General issues per question type that may restrict candidates' marks.

On a) questions, the most usual weakness in candidate responses is the lack of development, where only one or more simple responses are given. Such responses cannot earn more than 2 marks in total. Another occasional weakness is when candidates give features, for example, when they are asked for reasons. It is important to pay attention to that changeable key word.

On b) questions, many candidates do develop their answers and achieve Level 2, 4 marks. However, there is then a tendency for these simply developed responses to be multiplied, rather than explained in greater depth, thereby candidates limiting themselves to 4 marks.

On c) questions, again many candidates do develop their responses. However, an answer that says that some believers would propose arguments a, b and c, but other believers would argue x, y and z – without any attempt to demonstrate a deeper understanding or to evaluate the different points of view – is unlikely to go beyond the top of Level 2.

Strengths and Weaknesses of approaches to specific questions

Section 1 focuses on Origins and their impact on the community.

1a 'Outline two teachings of Jesus about discipleship.'

This question was well understood and well answered. The teachings could be said to fall into two categories: about mission and evangelisation, and also the broader moral teachings about how followers of Jesus should behave. Both approaches were credited. Weaker answers sometimes offered very general paraphrases of teachings, which were then often not developed, such as 'Jesus taught about loyalty'.

1b 'Explain why the resurrection of Jesus is important for Christians.'

There were many good answers to this question, showing a deep level of understanding about the Christian theology of resurrection, and how it relates both to Jesus' divinity and also to the promise of eternal life. However, some candidates conflated Jesus' death and resurrection in such a way as to change the focus to ideas of sacrifice and atonement. Of course, in Christian thinking, there is continuity in the idea of Jesus' death and resurrection, and many such answers were able to draw out the importance of resurrection, from what is often referred to as the paschal mystery. However, it is worth noting that questions about the death of Jesus, and about the resurrection of Jesus, can and will sometimes be asked separately.

1c Discuss the suggestion that 'The ordained ministry is an essential aspect of Christian life'.

A small number of candidates seemed uncertain about the meaning of the term 'ordained ministry' and were unable to provide an effective response. Overall, however, this was a well answered question, with many answers focusing on the alternative perspectives of different denominations, such as Roman Catholics and Quakers. It is possible to draw a distinction based on different understandings of the theological meaning of ordination. However, examiners also credited answers that focused more simply on whether Christian Churches, and Christians generally, need designated leadership, whether they be spoken of as ministers or priests.

Section 2 focuses on Celebration and Pilgrimage.

2a 'Outline two religious practices associated with the celebration of Christmas.'

This was a well answered question. The only aspect that should be specifically noted is the requirement for 'religious' practices. This was interpreted broadly, however, and examiners credited answers such as gift-giving, provided there was an attempt to set the practice within a

Christian religious context, in that example usually with reference to the gifts of the wise men to Jesus.

2b 'Explain why pilgrimage to Jerusalem is important for some Christians.'

Many answers to this question achieved Level 2, 4 marks, because candidates were able to explain what could be seen and done in Jerusalem, and developed that simply by explaining why that might be considered helpful to the Christian life. However, any number of such simply developed examples would still restrict the candidate to 4 marks. To gain the higher marks in Level 2 candidates needed to give fuller explanations of importance. They might say, for example, that 'Christians can visit the Holy Sepulchre, and can be reminded that Jesus died to save people from sin'. Or they might go on to say how pilgrims may go to Jerusalem determined to change their lives, and that this experience at the Holy Sepulchre might highlight their own sinfulness, and encourage them to live a life more in keeping with Jesus' teaching. This is an example of the difference between simple and fuller development.

2c Discuss the suggestion that 'All Christians should try to make a pilgrimage to Bethlehem'.

Answers to this question had similar strengths and weaknesses to answers to the b) question above, being more or less descriptive, more or less evaluative. There was scope in this question to discuss the role played by pilgrimage in the Christian life, and many candidates did so very effectively. However, there is limited value in simply comparing different places of pilgrimage. It is a relatively weak answer to this question simply to say that pilgrimage to Bethlehem is not essential, because Christians can go to Rome or Lourdes instead. With this approach it would be necessary to explain why one might choose one over the other, and avoid being largely descriptive. Some candidates certainly understood this and provided excellent answers.

Section 3 focuses on Worship and Practice.

3a 'Outline two external features of a Christian place of worship.'

This was well understood and well answered. There were just a few candidates who misread the question and gave internal rather than external features. Features such as stained glass windows, which are both internal and external, were credited.

3b 'Explain why private prayer is important for many Christians.'

Many candidates spoke of the distinction between private and liturgical prayer, and were able to explain the perceived merits of private prayer as part of the Christian spiritual life. These included the possibility of a closer personal relationship with God, that private prayer can be a

constant experience, and that some prayers were private for personal reasons. It was, nevertheless, a challenge for some candidates who appeared not to have thought too deeply about the distinction.

3c Discuss the suggestion that 'Marriage is an essential feature of Christian life'.

Candidates mostly accepted the view that marriage is seen within Christianity as part of God's plan, for mutual love, for procreation and the raising of children. Some were able to point to elements of the liturgy of marriage to reinforce these ideas, as well as to specific Christian teachings. At the same time, many pointed out that some Christian denominations welcome the celibacy of priests and members of religious communities and drew the conclusion that not every Christian is called to get married. They also emphasised the element of free choice in the way people live their lives, and some pointed to the exclusive nature of the claim, when same-sex marriages were often not accepted. Almost all candidates were able to answer this question, and some answers were insightful and comprehensive.

Summary and Recommendations to Centres to improve candidate performance

- Candidates should be encouraged to develop their responses. On Paper 2 they will always add value to their response if they further describe, illustrate or explain their answer.
- Candidates are reminded that any number of simply developed responses to b) questions can gain only a maximum of 4 marks, and that a demonstration of depth of understanding is required to gain the higher marks.
- In b) and c) questions, some description can help to develop a response, such as description of pilgrimage sites or aspects of worship. However, to gain higher marks, answers must be followed by an attempt to draw out their deeper meaning.
- Candidates should only spend time explaining the point of view of another religion if they are confident they can show how that helps to provide a better understanding of the religion being examined.

