



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In Religious Studies (4RS1)

Paper 2B: Christianity

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Principal Examiner's Report for Paper 4RS1_2B Christianity

General Introduction

This year saw an increased entry of candidates for 4RS1_2B Christianity.

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 on this Paper, and this seemed to be generally well understood.
- Once again this year, a significant number of candidates used extra paper for their answers, though, depending on handwriting of course, it is possible to provide a full answer in the space available on the exam paper itself.
- 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 the questions. There were some candidates who displayed less complete understanding on certain aspects of the Specification.
- There was little evidence of candidates being unable to complete the paper in the allocated time. When this did seem likely, it may have been because they spent too much time on questions, such as a) questions, which can usually be answered with just a few sentences.

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. If, for example, the question asks about a feature, no marks can be awarded unless a feature is identified, regardless of the quality of the answer.

The other 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. This development does not need to be extensive. For example, if a feature of a place of worship is identified, a sentence that goes on to explain the purpose of that feature can often gain the development mark.

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. It is important for candidates to be aware of these requirements. 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). For these higher marks, depth of understanding is more important than breadth.

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, and help in the understanding of, 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 simple responses are given. Such responses cannot earn more than 2 marks in total, regardless of the number of such responses. 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. Also, if candidates are asked about **one** festival or **one** ritual, for example, both responses must relate to it, and marks cannot be awarded for reference to any further festival or ritual.

On b) questions, many candidates develop their answers and achieve Level 2, 4 marks. However, there can then be a tendency for these simply developed responses to be multiplied, rather than

explained in greater depth, thereby candidates limiting themselves to 4 marks. Although there has been some improvement in this, following previous PE Reports, it is still a common feature in answering b) questions.

On c) questions, again many candidates 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. Also, answers that do not at least consider more than one point of view cannot go beyond the top of Level 2.

It is rarely the case, in examples seen by the Principal Examiner, that references to other religions prove very productive, and so they often waste valuable time. The most common way this is used by candidates is to say ‘and this is very similar in religion x’ along with some description to back that up. That tells us very little about the religion being examined.

Strengths and Weaknesses of approaches to specific questions

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

1a Outline two features of the death of Jesus.

This question was generally well understood and well answered. It did need to be distinguished from a question about the resurrection of Jesus, and for that reason correct answers needed to focus on the events from Jesus’ arrest to his being laid in the tomb. Some candidates made the mistake of writing about the resurrection. More positively, many candidates wrote straightaway about the significance of Jesus’ death, in terms of atonement for example, and this was an acceptable approach because the question did not ask specifically for a description of ‘events’.

1b Explain why some Christians do not accept that the Bible is always literally true.

The question was well understood and there were many good answers. The question seemed to provide a platform for fully developed explanations, often about teachings and stories in the Bible that are now considered either scientifically or morally unacceptable. This led to discussions about whether much of the Bible should be considered metaphorical, and that interpretation is needed to get to the actual truth it is trying to convey.

1c Discuss the suggestion that ‘In Christian communities, lay people have no leadership role.

Overall, this was a well answered question, with many answers focusing on the alternative perspectives of different denominations, such as Roman Catholics who were seen as favouring

leadership based on hierarchy and ordination, and other denominations that allowed a much wider understanding of leadership. Quakers featured strongly in such discussions.

Section 2 focuses on Celebration and Pilgrimage.

2a Outline two places Christians visit on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

This was generally a well answered question. The first mark was awarded for identifying a correct place, and this is where some candidates had a problem, because they were uncertain about the location of events. Some spoke of Jesus' birth, for example, and others of Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan. But most candidates knew many appropriate places and were also able to develop places with explanations of their significance.

2b Explain why some Christians think it is important to go on pilgrimage.

There were some excellent answers to this question, with candidates fully aware of the Christian understanding of the value of pilgrimage. Often they focused on specific pilgrimage sites, which was also an acceptable approach. Discussion was often fully developed. The main weakness was in answers that identified a place (such as Lourdes) explained its significance (such as it being a place for healing) and then moved on to consider other places. At best such answers were able to gain the bottom of Level 2.

2c Discuss the suggestion that 'Celebrating festivals is an essential part of Christian life'.

The general importance or otherwise of Christian festivals was a well understood topic. Often the contrary view focused on issues such as loss of meaning, and commercialisation. The very best answers did then try to get to grips with the term 'essential', by considering what festivals might be essential for – such as essential for salvation, or essential for evangelisation. Candidates who took this approach were often able to achieve Levels 3 and 4.

Section 3 focuses on Worship and Practice.

3a Outline two features of a Christian marriage ceremony.

This was well understood and well answered. Candidates knew about rings and vows in Christian marriage, the role of the minister or priest, location and so forth. They were also usually able to explain the significance of each feature identified.

3b Explain why church buildings are important for many Christians.

Quite a few candidates chose to identify certain features, and then to offer simple development of their significance. This approach, although acceptable, made it more likely they would fail to provide evidence of a fuller understanding of importance. The broader approach of how church buildings are used was often more effective, such as describing their role in worship, and then explaining how various forms of worship might be facilitated in different churches. Others referred to the role of church buildings as support centres, and were able to fully develop the forms of support people often find there. Generally it was a well answered question.

3c Discuss the suggestion that 'The best way for Christians to worship God is in private'.

Many candidates drew on the words and actions of Jesus in the Gospels, which seems to indicate the value of praying in a private place. This was contrasted with the situation in many Christian denominations, which favoured liturgical worship, or large scale charismatic worship. This was often a fruitful line of discussion and led to some very thoughtful and developed responses.

Summary and Recommendations to Centres to improve candidate performance

- Development is very important. On Paper 2 candidates will always add value to their response if they further describe, illustrate or explain their answer. In b) and c) questions such development is essential to gain access to the higher Levels.
- On b) questions, any number of simply developed responses can gain only a maximum of 4 marks, and a demonstration of depth of understanding is required to gain the higher marks in Level 2.
- On b) questions, candidates should not provide an alternative point of view. A question about why pilgrimage may be important to some, for example, is not usually helped by explaining why, for others, it is not.
- In b) and c) questions, some description can help to develop a response, such as description of pilgrimage sites or aspects of worship. However, in 'explain' and 'discuss' questions, only development of reasons and points of view can take answers into the higher marks.
- 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. Otherwise, the time could be better used.

