



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In Religious Studies (4RS1)

Paper 2C: Hinduism

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Principal Examiner's Report for Paper 4RS1_2C Hinduism

General Introduction

Once again this year there has been a small entry of candidates for 4RS1_2C Hinduism.

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 teachings about mukti in Hinduism.

This question about the key concept of mukti was generally well understood by candidates, and well answered, with responses effectively developed.

1b Explain why Krishna is important for many Hindus.

In this question, too, the stories of Krishna were widely known, and their significance well understood, leading to many developed responses about the characteristics that Krishna exemplifies, such as compassion, joyfulness and wisdom. It was important to avoid just recounting stories, however, as this extra detail has only limited impact on demonstrating deeper understanding.

1c Discuss the suggestion that ‘Following the example of swamis is important for Hindus today.’

A key element of this question was about the importance of swamis for Hindus today. Those who picked this up would be able to develop a fuller, more fruitful discussion. Some would say that

the asceticism of the swamis does not reflect modern life, but their deep insight into spiritual truth might be thought timeless. There was also a consideration of the importance of swamis in contrast with reliance on reading sacred texts, with some candidates pointing out that while the texts are essential, swamis can help in their interpretation. Overall this question led to some fruitful discussion.

Section 2 focuses on Celebration and Pilgrimage

2a Outline two features of Hindu festivals.

This question was an open one that allowed candidates to write about festivals in general, but also to choose specific festivals and outline features of those. Both options were taken, and answers were usually accurate and developed. Whilst 'features' was usually taken to mean actions and events, it could also be understood to ask about significance, and both approaches were acceptable.

2b Explain the significance of Durga Puja for Hindus.

Durga Puja is a well understood festival in Hinduism, and its practices and symbolism were well understood by candidates. Various practices were well described, and these were developed with explanations of the symbolism, such as the triumph of good over evil, or the exemplifying of the feminine in Hindu belief. There was occasionally a tendency to describe an event in some detail, and then develop the answer simply, but some candidates certainly sought to explain quite fully the relationship between the festival and underlying Hindu beliefs.

2c Discuss the suggestion that 'All Hindus should go on pilgrimage to the Ganges.'

There was a good understanding of the significance of the Ganges in Hinduism, and this was often very well explained. There was little doubt expressed about the potential spiritual value in making such a pilgrimage. Answers looking at the alternative point of view tended to focus on practicalities. For many Hindus, making such a pilgrimage would be a major, often impossible undertaking, and it was pointed out that it would be wrong to see this as an obligation, and that Hinduism does not impose an obligation of this nature. This was a well answered question, and there were some interesting discussions.

Section 3 focuses on Worship and Practice

3a Outline two ways sounds play a part in Hindu worship.

This question was well answered. Reference was made to sounds such as the ringing of bells, chanting and the recitation of the sacred syllable. Candidates were often able to develop their answers, either with explanation of meaning, or further description of context.

3b Explain why the Aarti ceremony is important for many Hindus.

This question about the Aarti ceremony often produced answers that were more descriptive than explanatory. Candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the ceremony itself, and were often able to provide a simple development of the meaning of various aspects. What they did not do, on the whole, was delve deeper into the meaning and purpose of the ceremony, such as to welcome and honour the divine presence and to express love, devotion, and gratitude to the deity. This often limited their marks.

3c Discuss the suggestion that 'All places of worship have equal importance for Hindus'.

This was a well answered question. Many candidates were able to explain the belief that Brahman is beyond space and time, and that worship also has no such limitations. Some candidates also offered the view that Hindu worship might be considered a more individual than a communal act. By contrast there was also the view that mandirs were specifically designed to enhance the 'spiritual atmosphere' which could help to enhance the quality of worship. This contrast led to some fruitful and insightful discussion.

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.

