



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In Religious Studies (4RS1) Paper 2E

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Publications Code 4RS1_2E_2406_ER

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Principal Examiner's Report for Paper 4RS1_2E Judaism

General Introduction

Once again this year there has been a large entry of candidates for what is now called 4RS1_2E Judaism, 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 ways the Beth Din is important in Jewish life.'

This proved a straightforward question for candidates who understood the term Beth Din, though there were a small number who did not appear to do so. Most of the answers were about specific roles for the Beth Din, including granting Kosher certification, overseeing conversions and granting Gets.

1b 'Explain the contribution to Judaism of one significant Jewish person other than Moses and Abraham.'

This was a well answered question, with many responses highlighting the role of Maimonides. It was important for this to be more than a simple biography, which did form the answer for a few candidates, and needed to explain how the actions of the person contributed to Judaism. Some candidates misread the question and did write about either Moses or Abraham, and the other primary mistake was to write about rabbis in general, rather than one significant person. Overall, however, the answers were on topic, and many were well developed.

1c Discuss the suggestion that 'The Talmud contains all the teaching needed to live the Jewish life'.

Answers to this question indicated the very good level of understanding many candidates have of Jewish sacred scripture and other texts. There was some slight confusion about what the Talmud consists of, or the difference between the Talmud and the Tanach, but that was rare. Many candidates were not only able to explain the contents of the Talmud, but also the way it has been fruitful in directing Jewish observance. Equally, there was an awareness that the written Torah is considered by many to be the direct word of the Almighty, and has to be considered the supreme authority. The recognition that divinely inspired texts may need interpretation, and also explanation to apply them to changing times, is what marked out some very good answers to this question.

Section 2 focuses on Celebration and Pilgrimage.

2a 'Outline two features of the celebration of Yom Kippur.'

Yom Kippur is clearly a celebration, for want of a better word, which is well known and well understood by candidates. The first mark was available just for identifying a feature, such as fasting, and then the development mark was often gained by explaining the purpose of the feature. It was a very well answered.

2b 'Explain the importance of Yad Vashem to many Jews.'

It was a little surprising to note how many candidates did not know about Yad Vashem. Of course it was not the majority, and there were many good and accurate responses. There was a tendency to describe Yad Vashem, which could only go so far in gaining marks without any significant attempt to explain why the place is important. Many candidates wrote eloquently about the importance of remembrance and education and the importance of both to avoid repeating history.

2c Discuss the suggestion that 'The most important part of the festival of Chanukah is the lighting of the candles'.

This question depended on a good level of knowledge and understanding of the festival of Chanukah, which most candidates certainly had. With festival questions, as with places of pilgrimage, there is always the risk of falling into description. It is important to confirm that description can be an important part of answers to such questions, but the ability of further description to develop answers to c) questions is more limited. It is very important to write an evaluative answer, and this requires the demonstration of developed understanding. Most candidates certainly avoided being overly descriptive, and were able to explain the history and symbolism, and also to offer analysis of why some aspects may be more important than others. This sometimes centred on the value of tradition in Judaism, or the importance of remembering history.

Section 3 focuses on Worship and Practice.

3a 'Outline two features of a Bar Mitzvah ceremony.'

This was a well answered question. The answers tended to focus on a number of elements of the synagogue service, such as reading the portion, but some also referred to the celebration afterwards, and this type of response was also credited.

3b 'Explain how synagogues are used by Jewish communities today.'

This question elicited many descriptive answers, which outlined, and developed simply, the use of synagogues today – as places of worship, of education and assembly for example. This was a very marked instance of where many candidates limited themselves to Level 2, just 4 marks, for a series of simply developed responses. Candidates who were able to write in more depth, about the value of worship, or the importance of bringing the Jewish community together for more social events, for example, were then able to access the higher marks in Level 2.

3c Discuss the suggestion that 'Marriage is essential to the Jewish way of life'.

The question on the importance of marriage in Judaism was one that elicited relevant responses across the full ability range. Particularly well known was the importance of marriage for companionship, and as the rightful place to raise a family, something that was often reinforced by reference to teachings and the nature of the ceremony. There was often also a good discussion, with candidates also mentioning the role of the celibate scholar, and the importance for some Jews of exercising a free choice in the way they live their personal and religious lives.

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.

