



# Examiners' Report

## Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In Religious Studies (4RS1)

Paper 2E: Judaism

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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 4RS1\_2E Judaism.

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 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 ways Moses is significant for Jews.**

This proved a straightforward question for candidates who knew a good deal about the story of Moses and of his importance within Judaism. Most answers focused on his role as liberator, and as law-giver, and nearly all candidates were able to develop their answers effectively.

##### **1b Explain the importance of Responsa in Judaism.**

Quite a number of candidates did not know about Responsa, and were unable to answer this question. Others had only a vague understanding. That was somewhat of a surprise, as it is a key text identified in the specification. That said, some candidates had a very good, often quite technical, understanding, and were able to provide some detailed and developed responses.

##### **1c Discuss the suggestion that ‘Jews do not need to rely on rabbis as sources of authority’.**

This was a well answered question. The main focus of most answers was on the role of rabbi as teacher, with candidates offering the view that sources of knowledge and understanding abound in the modern world – alongside the Tenakh and the Talmud, for example, there are modern

commentaries and informative websites. On the other side of the discussion was the way in which rabbis have a more personal relationship with the Jewish community, teaching for Bar and Bat Mitzvah, leading and teaching in synagogue services, and acting as a focal point for the local Jewish community. The discussion were often well balanced and well developed.

## **Section 2 focuses on Celebration and Pilgrimage.**

### **2a Outline two features of Rosh Hashanah.**

Rosh Hashanah is clearly a celebration that is well known and well understood by candidates. The first mark was available just for identifying a feature, such as special foods, and special services, and the development mark was often gained by explaining the purpose of the feature. It was a very well answered question.

### **2b Explain the importance of celebrating festivals for many Jews.**

Most answers referred to specific festivals, such as Pesach and Chanukah, and explained their significance and importance. A great deal can be said to develop such explanations, and this proved a fruitful approach for many candidates. Some candidates chose rather to focus on themes, such as freedom, celebration and new beginnings, and often also provided full, developed answers. As is often the case with b) questions, some candidates described the meaning of individual festivals with only simple development, and limited the mark available to them.

### **2c Discuss the suggestion that 'It is more important for Jews to visit Yad Vashem than the Western Wall'.**

Fewer candidates seemed unaware of Yad Vashem than last year, and most candidates were able to answer this question effectively. The main contrast drawn was between modern history, and the need to honour and show respect for those who suffered, and the longer historical significance (and holiness) of the Western Wall and its association with the Temple. This set up some very interesting discussion about what might seem more important to Jews in the present time. Opinions were mixed, but many of the discussions were well argued and well developed.

### **Section 3 focuses on Worship and Practice.**

#### **3a Outline two ways Jews show respect for those who have died.**

This was a well answered question. Almost all candidates were aware of the various actions and rituals which shown respect for someone who has died, including respecting the dead person's body, sitting shiva, and the special prayers. They were also able to develop responses with an explanation of the significance of the actions. As can be the case with a) questions, there were some candidates who simply identified the ways, without trying to develop the response, limiting themselves to 2 marks.

#### **3b Explain the importance of the internal design of a synagogue.**

This question elicited many descriptive answers, which described, and developed simply, various features that can be found inside a synagogue. This was an instance of where many candidates limited themselves to Level 2, just 4 marks, for a series of simply developed responses. However some candidates were able to provide fuller, more developed responses, sometimes by explaining the relationship between certain features and the Temple.

#### **3c Discuss the suggestion that 'Praying to the Almighty is the most important aspect of Jewish life'.**

The question on prayer to the Almighty was well answered. All candidates acknowledged the importance of prayer, but they also explained the importance in Judaism of adherence to the Torah, to kindness, to improving the world, and suggested that the Almighty might be more pleased with these than with prayer. Of course, as is often the case with such c) questions, the conclusion that all of these things have their place, was often drawn, but some candidates were willing to say that prayer was most important because all else derived from the relationship with the Almighty.

### **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.



