



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In Religious Studies (4RS1)

Paper 2F: Sikhism

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Principal Examiner's Report for Paper 4RS1_2F Sikhism

General Introduction

Once again this year there has been a small entry of candidates 4RS1_2F Sikhism.

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 ways Guru Nanak is important to Sikhs.

Candidates were generally aware of the significance of Guru Nanak, and this question was well answered. The main focus was on Guru Nanak as the founder, but also on some of his most important teachings.

1b Explain the role of leadership in the Gurdwara.

This was also well answered overall. Candidates were able to write about a number of different roles, such as that of the granthi, and those who lead the work of the langar. Some candidates focused on the importance of leadership in general, and this was also a legitimate approach. Many answers were only partially developed, with explanations and simple developments. This limited candidates to the bottom of Level 2.

1c Discuss the suggestion that ‘Guru Gobind Singh has been the most influential of all the Gurus.’

This question allowed candidates to explain the importance and achievements of Guru Gobind Singh, and then to set them alongside those of either one or more of the other Gurus. Candidates were quite well versed in their understanding of the Gurus, and there were some quite detailed responses. A standard answer was to explain the contributions of two Gurus, and then to conclude by saying simply which seemed the most important. Typically that is a Level 2 response on a c) question. A fuller, more developed response would address how one might choose to grade levels of influence, and some candidates did that, and were able to achieve Level 3. One example of such a discussion concluded that each Guru responded to the challenges of their time, and that they should be equally valued.

Section 2 focuses on Celebration and Pilgrimage

2a Outline two reasons Sikhs may go on pilgrimage.

There are many reasons why Sikhs may choose to go on pilgrimage, such as to better understand the history of the faith, or to seek a greater spiritual connection with fellow Sikhs. Candidates answered this question quite well, and offered the reasons and developed them with further explanation.

2b Explain the importance of celebrating festivals for many Sikhs.

Most answers referred to specific festivals, such as Diwali and Guru Nanak’s birthday 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 commemoration or community, 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 marks available to them.

2c Discuss the suggestion that ‘All Sikhs should try to visit the Harimandir’.

Candidates seemed very aware of the significance of the Harimandir for Sikhs, and were able to describe it, and the activities that Sikhs may engage in on pilgrimage there. The answers could be specific, such as bathing in the sacred pool, but others were more general, such as learning about Sikh history and the lives of some of the Gurus. The alternative view was usually to point out that pilgrimages are not commanded within Sikhism and pilgrimage can make great demands on people, sometimes ones they cannot meet, and that there is no loss of spiritual merit in this. Furthermore, many other aspects of the Sikh spiritual life, such as sewa and taking part on the

Akhand Path, could be considered equally meritorious. There were some very good answers to this question.

Section 3 focuses on Worship and Practice.

3a Outline two purposes of the langar.

This was a well answered question. Candidates were well aware of the langar and of its significance in Sikh life, particularly as an expression of the importance of sewa in Sikhism. There was also an acknowledgement of the simple fact that some people in modern society do not have enough to eat, making this act of support also very necessary. Answers were often developed with explanations of this kind.

3b Explain the importance of the interior features of a Gurdwara.

The importance of interior aspects of places of worship can be a challenge for some candidates. In many cases, simple storage shelves or chairs can be offered as an interior feature. But such very everyday, practical aspects can only be rewarded if the answer explains why they may be of particular significance in the worship of the Gurdwara. That would be true of the raised platform for the musicians of example, who form such an important role in Sikh worship, and of course of the resting place of the Guru Granth Sahib. Many responses used only simple development of features and there was limited evidence of the ability to explain the importance of features in detail.

3c Discuss the suggestion that 'All Sikhs should be part of the Khalsa.'

The primary arguments in favour of this suggestion focused on choosing to join the Khalsa to show full commitment to their faith, and follow the example of Guru Gobind Singh. Also, to live by the core values of Sikhism such as equality, courage, and discipline, the 5 Ks and the Sikh code of conduct. But it was also explained that some may choose not to join because they may not feel ready for the full responsibilities, or may prefer a more private or personal expression of faith. Candidates showed some good insight into this topic, and there were some good discussions.

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.

