



General Certificate of Education

## Religious Studies (1061)

RSS09 World Religions 1

Buddhism

Hinduism

Sikhism

## Report on the Examination

*2009 examination - June series*

This Report on the Examination uses the [new numbering system](#)

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*Dr Michael Cresswell Director General.*

## **RSS09 World Religions 1 *Buddhism OR Hinduism OR Sikhism***

### **General comments**

This is the first June examination in the new Specification and the following general points are relevant. More than two thirds of the candidates were entered for the Buddhism paper, with Sikhism the next most popular option and Hinduism the smallest of the three options. A wide range of ability was entered for this examination; examiners reported that all questions were accessible to all candidates.

The new Specification makes clear the separation of the two assessment objectives into separate questions; the first part of each question assesses AO1 objectives and the second part of each question assesses AO2 objectives. This makes it very clear to candidates the nature of the demand of each question. As a reminder, assessment objective AO1 is the ability to select and demonstrate clearly relevant knowledge and understanding through the use of evidence, examples, and correct language and terminology. Assessment objective AO2 is the ability to critically evaluate and justify a point of view through the use of evidence and reasoned argument.

The use of the seven level descriptors ensures careful distinctions are made for each level and that credit is given fairly to the two assessment objectives AO1 and AO2. Examiners considered the difference in quality between Level 4 and Level 5 in relation to AO1. To access Level 4, the answer should include key facts and demonstrate some understanding and coherence. To access Level 5, answers should include a satisfactory treatment of the topic with reasonable understanding and use of relevant evidence. The difference between Levels 5 and 6 for AO1 were considered in detail; Level 6 is exemplified by a fairly thorough treatment of the topic with mostly accurate and relevant information and is distinguished from Level 5 which shows a satisfactory treatment of the topic with some development of key facts and reasonable understanding.

In relation to AO2 Level Descriptors, Level 5 was awarded to a partially successful attempt to sustain a reasoned argument with some attempt at analysis and comment. To access Level 6, candidates needed to demonstrate a mostly relevant and reasoned response to the issues raised and explain different views with some supporting evidence and argument.

One common failing identified in many scripts was the tendency to write everything down about the topic rather than to select and organise the material to answer the exact demands of the question. In questions assessing AO2, candidates demonstrated the ability to present different viewpoints but then neither commented on these nor drew a conclusion based on independent thinking, thus preventing them from accessing the higher levels of the mark scheme.

## **Section A *Buddhism***

### **Question 1 (Topic 1 *Samsara and the three marks of existence*)**

#### **Question 01**

This was by far the most popular question on the paper and nearly all the candidates who addressed the Buddhism section answered this question. Several candidates wrote everything they knew about samsara. The meaning of the concept of samsara was usually understood well and its links with the law of karma was presented by most candidates. However, the significance of this concept in giving Buddhists an explanation for suffering in this life and the

motivation to improve any future existence by developing good karma, as well as aspiring to an eventual escape from the wheel of samsara, was not always included in candidates' answers.

### **Question 02**

Most candidates were able to present arguments and evidence to support the view that the Buddhist attitude to life appears to be pessimistic, with the first two noble truths focussed on suffering. However, the purpose of the Buddhist path is to provide release from the unsatisfactoriness of this present existence and this counter claim was argued well by some candidates.

### **Question 2 (Topic 2 *The Four Noble Truths*)**

#### **Question 03**

Answers to this question varied greatly in quality. Some candidates knew that nibbana is escape from rebirth and is related to the fourth noble truth. The more developed answers referred to the extinction of the three fires of greed, hatred and delusion as well as to the difficulties in describing the experience of nibbana. Reference to the two forms of nibbana, one of which is experienced in this life and the other at the end of this life as paranibbana, was also relevant. An understanding of the various levels of attainment towards nibbana a stream enterer, once returner, etc. was also relevant here, as it was in Question 04.

#### **Question 04**

There were some good responses to this AO2 question in which candidates were able to argue the case that nibbana is an unattainable goal. This, it was argued, was due to the commitment required, the renouncing of worldly concerns and the possibility that all Buddhists could gradually, over many life times, progress towards it. Some candidates referred to the Mahayana traditional understanding of nibbana as the realisation of Buddha nature and, although this was not required knowledge, it did give greater breadth to this answer.

### **Question 3 (Topic 3 *The Eightfold Path*)**

#### **Question 05**

Those candidates who chose to address this question tended to give rather general answers on right mindfulness and right concentration and included all other aspects of the eightfold path in their answer; this was not required. In order to access the highest levels of the mark scheme, more depth and details were sought on the nature and purpose of each of these aspects of the eightfold path.

#### **Question 06**

Answers to this part of the question were of a much higher quality than those produced in response to Question 05 as most candidates were able to argue that meditation is essential for developing a calm and clear mind, but that it is not necessarily the basis of the Buddhist way of life, which is based on morality and wisdom as much as on meditation. All elements were correctly cited as being necessary in order to progress towards enlightenment.

### **Question 4 (Topic 4 *The Sangha*)**

#### **Question 07**

This question required knowledge and understanding of the role and importance of the lay community in the Buddhist Sangha and most candidates were able to explain the support given by lay people to the monastic Sangha. However, the importance of lay people in maintaining Buddhist moral values in the wider society and creating a stable and harmonious community

locally and globally was not often recognised. Those candidates who had detailed knowledge of the particular ways in which the lay community supported the monastery, such as kattina days, maintaining the buildings and various community projects, accessed the higher levels of the mark scheme. Similarly, those candidates who referred to the belief and practice of merit-making amongst the lay community in order to explain the importance of their role, gained high marks.

**Question 08**

The answers to this question were sometimes lacking in clear argument as the underlying theme of the distinction between living in the world and removing oneself from these responsibilities to pursue a spiritual life was not often included. The emphasis on contemporary society was required by the question and the increasing importance of lay people as meditation teachers and scholars was relevant. The Buddhist understanding of the Sangha being a fourfold community in which interdependence rather than superiority is the unifying principle should also have been included to access the higher levels of the mark scheme.

**Section B *Hinduism*****Question 5 (Topic 1 *The Hindu concept of God*)****Question 09**

Few candidates chose to answer this question but those who did gained higher marks when they showed understanding of the nature and role of the goddess. Many candidates did not address both the generic role of the goddess as the creative and life-giving energies of 'shakti' and the specific role of particular goddesses Sarawati, Lakshmi and Durga.

**Question 10**

This question invited candidates to evaluate the importance of goddess in relation to male deities in Hinduism. Most answers indicated how important female deities were in Hinduism for providing role models as well as protectors and nurturers of life, although candidates were also able to argue that male deities were equally, if not more, important in popular worship.

**Question 6 (Topic 2 *Means to liberation in Hinduism*)****Question 11**

This was the most popular question in the Hinduism paper. Not all candidates addressed both aspects of the question, i.e. atman and self-realisation. Most candidates examined the nature of atman and referred to the qualities of atman as eternal, perfect and indestructible, and an inner aspect of all living beings. However, not all candidates were able to examine self-realisation in the same depth.

**Question 12**

This question elicited higher quality answers than Question 11, as most candidates were able to recognise that the question also related to the goal of moksha and to the issue of renouncing the world in order to devote oneself to the pursuit of the ultimate goal of self-realisation. Good arguments claimed that this made the goal of self-realisation impossible for Hindus engaged in worldly activity. Several also argued that there are many paths to self-realisation in the various yogas.

**Question 7 (Topic 3 *Worship in Hinduism*)**

**Question 13**

Candidates interpreted 'various forms of worship' in a number of ways. Some candidates described the main form of worship as the actions of puja; others who gained marks in the higher levels referred to the variety of forms of worship and included yajna, bhajans and festival celebrations.

**Question 14**

This was usually answered well as candidates were able to present different views of the ways in which temple worship is considered to be both essential and optional in the Hindu way of life.

**Question 8 (Topic 4 *The Hindu way of life*)**

**Question 15**

There were few responses to this question. The best gave due attention to both the role and importance of ashrams whilst weaker answers gave only general description.

**Question 16**

A small number of candidates were able to present a balanced argument, but there was a tendency to write only about the importance of the home.

**Section C *Sikhism***

**Question 9 (Topic 1 *The Gurus*)**

**Question 17**

This question was not answered very well by those candidates who chose it, as, although they selected some of the teachings of Guru Nanak and referred to the religious and social conditions of the time, they did not link the two together. For example, the most significant of these conditions of the time was the Hindu caste system which encouraged Guru Nanak to teach about equality, selfless service, honest living and to establish the langar. His teachings about the oneness and openness of God to all were inspired by Islamic saints but were also a reaction against the ritual of Islamic prayer and the Hindu notion of intermediary deities or avatars.

**Question 18**

Very few candidates addressed the issue identified in this question and they were not able to present evidence, or a well argued case, that Guru Nanak did or did not found a new religion. Those who accessed higher levels of the mark scheme were able to argue that Guru Nanak had a distinctive revelation which both included many aspects of existing faiths but was also separate and distinct from them.

**Question 10 (Topic 2 *Festivals*)**

**Question 19**

The better answers responded to the trigger to explain the nature and meaning of the festival of Diwali for Sikhs. In addition to giving a descriptive account of the celebrations and the story of Guru Hargobind, the meaning of this festival needed to be given more attention. This refers to the importance of valour, compassion, equality and courage in the face of adversity. The meaning also extends to the sense of identity and unity which the festival gives to Sikhs.

**Question 20**

Some very good comments were made in response to this question which required an evaluation of the social importance and religious meaning of Diwali for Sikhs today. Many candidates referred to the difference between older and younger generations of Sikhs in how they regarded the meaning of this festival.

**Question 11 (Topic 3 *The Guru Granth Sahib and the Gurdwara*)**

**Question 21**

Those candidates who answered this question well remained close to the words of the question and explained the ways in which the Guru Granth Sahib is used. Some candidates explained its importance instead. Better answers provided very good, detailed accounts of how it is used on a daily basis in the home and in particular ways it is used during rites of passage.

**Question 22**

The thrust of this question was not fully appreciated by all those candidates who chose to answer it. The value of listening to the Guru Granth Sahib, even if the language is not understood, can be seen in a positive way as well as a negative way. Some very well argued points were presented about the current attempts to ensure younger Sikhs in the UK are given language lessons and the increasing use of translations, as well as computer technology in gurdwaras to ensure that all can understand readings from the Guru Granth Sahib.

**Question 12 (Topic 4 *Diwan and langar*)**

**Question 23**

The better answers to this question gave equal attention to the ways in which langar was established in the past as well as to how it is practised today. The trigger 'explain' was not heeded by all and descriptive answers prevailed. The reason for the establishment of the langar was required as well as reason for some of the variations in practice today.

**Question 24**

Most candidates expressed the view that the langar was more important in the past than it is today but a small number presented a variety of views which included evidence that the langar is more important today in sustaining Sikh identity and expressing Sikh values in a variety of cultures. This approach accessed higher levels of the mark scheme for AO2.