

# A-LEVEL **RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

RST4A Life, Death and Beyond  
OR Perceptions of Ultimate Reality  
OR Religious Experience  
Mark scheme

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Mark schemes are prepared by the Lead Assessment Writer and considered, together with the relevant questions, by a panel of subject teachers. This mark scheme includes any amendments made at the standardisation events which all associates participate in and is the scheme which was used by them in this examination. The standardisation process ensures that the mark scheme covers the students' responses to questions and that every associate understands and applies it in the same correct way. As preparation for standardisation each associate analyses a number of students' scripts: alternative answers not already covered by the mark scheme are discussed and legislated for. If, after the standardisation process, associates encounter unusual answers which have not been raised they are required to refer these to the Lead Assessment Writer.

It must be stressed that a mark scheme is a working document, in many cases further developed and expanded on the basis of students' reactions to a particular paper. Assumptions about future mark schemes on the basis of one year's document should be avoided; whilst the guiding principles of assessment remain constant, details will change, depending on the content of a particular examination paper.

Further copies of this Mark Scheme are available from [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk)

## Examination Levels of Response

### Religious Studies (Advanced) A2 Level Descriptors

<i>Level</i>	<b>A2 Descriptor AO1</b>	Marks <i>Unit 4 italics</i>	<b>A2 Descriptor AO2</b>	Marks <i>Unit 4 italics</i>	<b>A2 Descriptors for Quality of Written Communication in AO1 and AO2</b>
<b>7</b>	A thorough treatment of the topic, which may be in depth or breadth. Information is accurate and relevant. A thorough understanding is shown through good use of relevant evidence and examples. Where appropriate good knowledge and understanding of diversity of views and / or scholarly opinion is demonstrated. Knowledge and understanding of connections with other elements of the course of study are demonstrated convincingly.	<b>28-30 41-45</b>	A very well-focused response to the issue(s) raised. Different views, including where appropriate those of scholars or schools of thought, are discussed and critically analysed perceptively. Effective use is made of evidence to sustain an argument. Appropriate evaluation is fully supported by the reasoning. There may be evidence of independent thought. The argument is related perceptively and maturely to the broader context and to human experience.	<b>19-20 28-30</b>	Appropriate form and style of writing; clear and coherent organisation of information; appropriate and accurate use of specialist vocabulary; good legibility and high level of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
<b>6</b>	A generally thorough treatment of the topic which may be in depth or breadth. Information is almost all accurate and mainly relevant. Clear understanding is demonstrated through use of relevant evidence and examples. Where appropriate, alternative views and / or scholarly opinion are satisfactorily explained. Knowledge and understanding of connections with other elements of the course of study are clearly demonstrated.	<b>24-27 36-40</b>	A well-focused response to the issue(s) raised. Different views, including where appropriate those of scholars or schools of thought, are discussed and critically analysed. Appropriate evaluation is supported by reasoned argument. There may be evidence of independent thought. The argument is related clearly to the broader context and to human experience.	<b>16-18 24-27</b>	
<b>5</b>	A satisfactory treatment of the topic. Information is mostly accurate and mainly relevant. A reasonable understanding is demonstrated through use of some evidence and examples. Where appropriate, some familiarity with diversity of views and / or scholarly opinion is shown. Some knowledge and understanding of connections with other elements of the course of study are demonstrated.	<b>20-23 29-35</b>	A satisfactory response to the issue(s) raised. Views are explained with some supporting evidence and arguments, and some critical analysis. An evaluation is made that is consistent with some of the reasoning. Some of the response is related satisfactorily to the broader context and to human experience.	<b>13-15 20-23</b>	Mainly appropriate form and style of writing; generally clear and coherent organisation of information; mainly appropriate and accurate use of specialist vocabulary; good legibility and fairly high level of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
<b>4</b>	Key ideas and facts are included; demonstrates some understanding and coherence using some evidence and examples. Where appropriate, brief reference may be made to alternative views and / or scholarly opinion. Limited knowledge and understanding of connections with other elements of the course of study are demonstrated.	<b>15-19 22-28</b>	The main issue is addressed with some supporting evidence or argument, but the reasoning is faulty, or the analysis superficial or only one view is adequately considered. Little of the response is related to the broader context and to human experience.	<b>10-12 15-19</b>	Form and style of writing appropriate in some respects; some of the information is organised clearly and coherently; some appropriate and accurate use of specialist vocabulary; satisfactory legibility and level of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
<b>3</b>	A summary of key points. Limited in depth or breadth. Answer may show limited understanding and limited relevance. Some coherence.	<b>10-14 15-21</b>	A basic attempt to justify a point of view relevant to the question. Some explanation of ideas and coherence.	<b>7-9 10-14</b>	
<b>2</b>	A superficial outline account, with little relevant material and slight signs of partial understanding, or an informed answer that misses the point of the question.	<b>5-9 8-14</b>	A superficial response to the question with some attempt at reasoning.	<b>4-6 5-9</b>	Little clarity and organisation; little appropriate and accurate use of specialist vocabulary; legibility and level of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar barely adequate to make meaning clear.
<b>1</b>	Isolated elements of partly accurate information little related to the question.	<b>1-4 1-7</b>	A few basic points, with no supporting argument or justification.	<b>1-3 1-4</b>	
<b>0</b>	Nothing of relevance.	<b>0</b>	No attempt to engage with the question or nothing of relevance	<b>0</b>	

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## Section A *Life, Death and Beyond*

### Question 1

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**Examine religious eschatological and apocalyptic teaching.**

Students may draw on one or more religions. There is no requirement for them to treat apocalyptic teaching separately from eschatology. They should be aware of diversity either between or within religions, for example an answer focused on Christianity might refer to the concepts of ‘dispensational millenarianism’, and ‘a-millenarianism’ and/or ‘realised eschatology’. In ‘examining’ the ideas they may, for example, put them in context within the religion concerned, compare and contrast them, consider how such diverse views emerge from a single scriptural basis and why they are not universally accepted.

[45 marks] AO1

0	2
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**‘Eschatological and apocalyptic teaching has a significant impact on people today.’ Discuss how far you agree.**

Students may include some of the following points, but other relevant ideas may be included.

Answers may reflect on how a significant impact would be recognised and give specific examples of those who have planned for the ‘end’ or are continually looking for signs that it is about to happen. They may, but need not, refer to non-religious views of the end; they may explore how such ideas are reflected in popular culture – e.g. movies, TV and the media in general; There may be some attempt to put these responses, religious or secular, in context – for example, they may impact greatly on a particular group or sect, but apparently make little or no impact on the majority of people.

[30 marks] AO2

## Question 2

0	3	<b>Examine religious ideas about the importance of the present life and of life after death.</b>
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Answers may draw on one or more religions. Both this life and life after death should be considered but no balance between the two is expected. The focus of the answer should be on importance rather than a description of the nature of life /life after death.

Students may include some of the following points, but other relevant ideas may be included.

**The present life:** A diversity of views about how important this life is might include: it has only an instrumental importance as it helps people prepare for the next; it may be sacrificed in the service of God; it has some importance because it gives an opportunity for soul-making, but not the only one since this may continue in the afterlife if necessary; it is of vital importance because life is soul-deciding so the faith decisions made in this life determine the afterlife; in contrast predestination suggests life is endured but has no significance for the afterlife; this life is important because humans are co-workers with God (process thought); religion is focused on the quality of life in this life with no literal belief in life after death; may be relatively unimportant if it is seen as one of many rebirths, but birth as a human being may be seen as a rare and valuable opportunity for enlightenment.

**Life after death:** the purpose for which we were created; reward; makes life fair /just; continuation within the mind of God (some process thought); not to be taken literally – refers to a spiritual state achievable here and now (e.g. some Christian and Buddhist thinking); in Tibetan Buddhism the Bardo state is seen as a further opportunity for enlightenment, but in Theravada it is merely the transition from one life to the next.

For answers that do not deal with both aspects – Max Level 5.

**[45 marks]      AO1**

0	4	<b>‘Only life after death gives any purpose to this life.’ Discuss how far you agree.</b>
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Some analysis of ‘purpose’ could be expected. Life after death does give purpose to life for some people – for example a purpose to suffering and to death; views concerning predestination would not support the idea that life after death gives life a purpose, nor those religious interpretations which reject a literal belief in life after death but affirm an intrinsic purpose to life – e.g. achieving a spiritual quality; of those secular thinkers who reject the afterlife, some also reject the idea that life has any purpose, which could suggest that the two are linked, but others affirm a purpose to life – e.g. passing on genes or memes, living life to the full.

**[30 marks]      AO2**

## Section B *Perceptions of Ultimate Reality*

### Question 3

0	5	<b>Examine definitions and understandings of God/Ultimate Reality in one or more religion(s).</b>
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Students may include some of the following points, but other relevant ideas may be included.

Definitions may come, for example, from creeds or theology and some diversity should be reflected in the answer, either between or within religions. For example, in Christianity, students could refer to the concept of God in the Apostles' Creed and in process thought, and/or to deistic and theistic interpretations. Within Islam there may be reference to the definition of the word Allah and understandings of the attributes of God expressed through his Names and the relationship between those Names and the essence of God, and/or of discussions surrounding the transcendence and immanence of God. In Hinduism answers may refer to personal and impersonal aspects of Brahman.

Examination may consider, for example: the possibility of defining God/Ultimate reality; reasons for the different definitions/understandings within a religion; objections that have been made to particular definitions/understandings and/or the relationship between definitions/understandings and their source in scripture and/or experience.

Students should offer both 'definitions' and 'understandings' of God/Ultimate Reality. The distinction between the two is likely to be blurred, but while a definition is clearly an understanding, an understanding need not be a definition.

Answers that make no reference to 'definitions' – Max Level 5.

**[45 marks]      AO1**

0	6	<b>'The concept of God has a positive effect on society.' Discuss how far you agree.</b>
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Students may include some of the following or other relevant examples/arguments.

The concept of God may be seen to maintain social and moral order which may be considered beneficial or, as in Marxist thinking, as a tool of oppression by the ruling class; views from Durkheim may also be considered and relevant ideas from Freud; the concept of God may also give life a purpose, value and goal, and, in particular, a value to suffering but it can also lead to passivity in the face of events which are accepted as 'God's will', or be used to justify war.

Students may consider whether it is the concept of God or belief in God that has the impact.

**[30 marks]      AO2**

**Question 4****0****7**

**Examine the role of religious experience as a source of knowledge about God/Ultimate Reality.**

Answers may refer to one or more religion(s).

Students may include some of the following points, but other relevant ideas may be included:

The role of religious experience as a source of knowledge about God/Ultimate Reality varies according to a variety of factors including the nature of the experience, e.g. individual or corporate, mystical or propositional revelation, and the status given to that experience e.g. the status given to the experiences of Prophet Muhammad in Islam determines their role in Islam. Students may compare/contrast the role of core experiences recorded in scripture and personal religious experience today, and/or the role of propositional revelations in which the ‘words’ of God are received and ‘non-propositional’ revelations during which insight is achieved. The connection between the experiences and the knowledge gained from them should be clear and there may be some recognition that from some perspectives ‘religious experience’ has no such role e.g. religious experiences may be a form of perception but could also be seen as non-cognitive.

**[45 marks]****AO1****0****8**

**‘Whatever may be learned about God/Ultimate Reality through religious experience cannot be expressed in words.’ Discuss how far you agree.**

Students may suggest that what has been realised through direct experiences of God may be inexpressible in words since this would reduce God to something within human understanding; the noetic and ineffable characteristics of mystical experiences support this view, as does criticism of attempts to talk meaningfully about God. However, evocative language may recreate the sense of the presence of God achieved through such experiences.

Other views of revelation claim that the words describing God were provided during the experience, in fact it could be argued that ‘the words’ and ‘what is learned’ are identical. However, that does not mean that those words can be understood by someone who has not shared the experience; it may be necessary for the person who hears the words to access their ‘spiritual dimension’ in order to understand God/Ultimate Reality.

**[30 marks]****AO2**

## Section C *Religious Experience*

### Question 5

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**Examine the value of religious experience within one or more religion(s).**

Students may select historical experiences, including those recorded in scripture and/or more recent or contemporary experiences.

Students may include some of the following points, but other relevant ideas may be included:

Some religious experiences such as the revelation of the Decalogue to Moses or the Qur'an to Muhammad have great value for many believers. Students may explore the varying ways in which such experiences have value— e.g. as a source of knowledge, and/or authority and/or inspiration. Examination may consider how far that value lies in the past, and consider why some believers may have different views about how valuable the chosen experiences are, for example, the limited or even negative value attached to some mystical experiences by more traditional believers. More recent or contemporary experiences may be compared and contrasted with historical or core experiences in this context.

**[45 marks]      AO1**

1	0
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**'The only way to understand the nature of a religious experience is by having one.' Discuss how far you agree.**

In support, answers may focus on the difficulty of describing such experiences and the possibility that the words needed to describe them get their meaning from the experiences themselves; however, recognising any experience as 'religious' arguably requires a prior knowledge of the nature of such experiences which could challenge the claim. Some definitions/descriptions seem to convey something of their nature, e.g. the defining characteristics of a mystical experience identified by James, and those who see 'religious experiences' as misinterpreted natural experiences have, in their own minds, a clear understanding of their nature without claiming to have experienced one. The nature of such experiences may also be apparent from their effects. It may also be asked if it is possible to truly understand such an experience.

**[30 marks]      AO2**



**Question 6**

1	1	<b>Examine ways in which the validity of both individual and corporate religious experiences may be established.</b>
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Students may include some of the following points, but other relevant ideas may be included:

Religious experiences may be tested by criteria agreed by the religions concerned, such as the threefold test of St Teresa; Swinburne's principles of credulity and testimony may be considered; the extent to which experiences must simply match the definitions of particular types of 'religious experience' in order to qualify as such could also be considered using, for example, James' definition of mystical experiences. Students may question the meaning of validity and consider both cognitive and non-cognitive experiences. Examination should unpack the ways/examples chosen and may consider strengths and weaknesses in the methods proposed and any distinctions between the methods used by those who are trying to validate their own experience and those who are attempting to validate the experiences of others.

Answers must refer to both individual and corporate experiences for marks above Level 5.

**[45 marks]      AO1**

1	2	<b>'Attempts to establish the validity of religious experiences satisfy believers, but these attempts have no impact on non-believers.' Discuss how far you agree.</b>
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Both claims are debatable: Some attempts within religion fail to convince all believers – e.g. the 'test' that the insight an experience brings must be consistent with existing teaching; the insights of mysticism are treated with suspicion by more traditional thinkers in some religions; equally the atheist sceptic may not be convinced by the attempts but may not dismiss them out of hand; there may be discussion of 'validity' and recognition that, for example, Jungian psychology sees validity in such experiences but not necessarily as believers would understand the term.

Both elements of the claim should be considered – Max Level 5 for answers considering only one.

**[30 marks]      AO2**