



A-LEVEL RELIGIOUS STUDIES RST4AR

PAPER 4A LIFE, DEATH AND BEYOND OR PERCEPTIONS OF ULTIMATE
REALITY OR RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Mark scheme

June 2016

Version: 1.0 Final

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.

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Examination Levels of Response
Religious Studies (Advanced) A2 Level Descriptors

Level	A2 Descriptor AO1	Marks <i>Unit 4</i> <i>italics</i>	A2 Descriptor AO2	Marks <i>Unit 4</i> <i>italics</i>	AS Descriptors for Quality of Written Communication in AO1 and AO2
7	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.	28-30 41-45	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.	19-20 28-30	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.
6	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.	24-27 36-40	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.	16-18 24-27	
5	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.	20-23 29-35	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.	13-15 20-23	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.
4	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.	15-19 22-28	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.	10-12 15-19	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.
3	A summary of key points. Limited in depth or breadth. Answer may show limited understanding and limited relevance. Some coherence.	10-14 15-21	A basic attempt to justify a point of view relevant to the question. Some explanation of ideas and coherence.	7-9 10-14	
2	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.	5-9 8-14	A superficial response to the question with some attempt at reasoning.	4-6 5-9	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.
1	Isolated elements of partly accurate information little related to the question.	1-4 1-7	A few basic points, with no supporting argument or justification.	1-3 1-4	
0	Nothing of relevance.	0	No attempt to engage with the question or nothing of relevance	0	

Indicative content

Note: This content is indicative rather than prescriptive and students are not obliged to refer to all the material contained in this mark scheme. Any legitimate answer will be assessed on its merits according to the generic levels of response.

Question 1 Life, Death and Beyond

0 1 Examine religious teaching about, and religious attitudes to, the future, especially the end.

This wording exactly echoes the specification and may be interpreted in a variety of ways. The future and end may be taken as the end of time and/or end of the world and include teaching about the final destiny of the individual. Answers may or may not consider ‘the future’ separately, but must deal with both teaching and attitudes for higher marks.

Reference may be made to one or more religions, students should make it clear which religion(s) they are referring to as illustrated below.

Christianity: students may refer to:

- Biblical teaching about resurrection and final judgement.
- Interpretations of the apocalyptic teaching in the Book of Revelation.
- The coming of God’s Kingdom on earth, hope for the Second Coming and for the reward of heaven.
- Teaching about hell and fear of hell.
- Informed answers may also reflect something of the diversity of views among Christians. This may include realised eschatology and the idea that God’s judgement and Kingdom are present realities rather than future hopes.

Islam: students may refer to:

- Teaching in the Qur’an about resurrection and judgement.
- Development of these ideas in Muslim tradition including teaching about Barzakh and experiences in the grave.
- Hope for the coming of the Mahdi, a positive personal judgment and the idea of heaven as a reward.
- Teaching about hell and fear of hell.
- Informed answers may reflect different interpretations of the nature of heaven and hell as spiritual rather than physical realities.

Examination of the teaching may include detailed unpacking of the ideas, consideration of the link between the teaching and underlying sources of authority and of reasons for different teaching within particular faiths.

Maximum level 5 for answers that do not deal with all aspects of the question.

[45 marks] AO1

0 2

'Religious believers should focus on the present rather than the future.'
Discuss how far you agree.

- The idea of 'focus' may be interpreted in a variety of ways.
- It may be argued that religion stresses the care humans should have for each other and for the planet, suggesting that it is a religious duty to focus on the present. This can be evidenced from many faiths.
- Religions have a strong social concern for the poor and suffering. Many emphasise the 'mission' of the believer in this world – either to spread the message or to ensure that the rule of God is established.
- The present is the opportunity for developing a relationship with God, for soul-making or spiritual development.
- The future is dependent on the present (eg in terms of rewards or punishment or karma production) so the present is the only opportunity to influence the future.
- It may also be argued that much religious teaching warns against focusing on this life and its pleasures – eg warnings against attachment in Buddhism. Family, wealth, possessions may be seen as a barrier to spiritual development, temptations to be overcome and of no value in themselves.
- This life may be seen only as a means to an end, not important in itself. This may be reflected in teaching on self-sacrifice/martyrdom, the willingness to give up this life in pursuit of a better life in the world to come. Believers may be expected to work to a future goal, and that focus on the future enables them to cope with the challenges of the present.

[30 marks] AO2

Question 2 Life, Death and Beyond

0 3 Examine religious beliefs about death.

Reference may be made to one or more religions, students should make it clear which religion(s) they are referring to as illustrated below.

- Death is a repeated experience in the cycle of life (eg Buddhism) which continues until Nirvana or liberation is reached.
- Death is the loss of everything that has been accumulated in this life except karmic potential (Buddhism) or consequences of actions for future judgement or legacy (eg in Process Theology).
- It is the dissolution of the body but continuation of soul (eg Hinduism) or the death of both body and soul awaiting resurrection (eg some forms of Christianity).
- Death is temporary, and sometimes described as a sleep. It may be the transitional stage between lives, eg Barzakh in Islam and Bardo in Tibetan Buddhism. In such cases consciousness may continue through death.
- Death is the end of the individual identity eg Process Theology and religious thinking that identifies life after death as a spiritual state within this life only.

Examination of the beliefs may include detailed unpacking of the ideas, consideration of the link between the beliefs and underlying sources of authority and of reasons for different beliefs within particular faiths.

[45 marks] AO1

0 4 'If death is the end, then life can have no purpose.'

Discuss how far you agree.

- The assumption behind this statement is that only life after death gives the present life any purpose. Much religious teaching seems to assume this, for example the idea that suffering is soul-making places its purpose in the relationship with God after death that it makes possible.
- The purpose of life may be seen as earning a good judgement or a better rebirth that brings one closer to enlightenment or liberation.
- Some atheists explicitly link the belief that death is the end with the belief that life has no meaning or purpose – eg Camus.
- However, some humanists and existentialists see no need for anything external to life to give it a purpose, rather they believe that each individual should give their own life a purpose. Paradoxically some may even see that as a purpose for life.
- Purpose, if death is the end, may include maximising contribution to life either within either a secular framework or a religious framework such as Process Theology. Alternatively it may be to maximise experiences in life.
- Death can also be argued to give life a purpose by limiting the number of days available for living.

[30 marks] AO2

Question 3 Perceptions of Ultimate Reality

0 5 Examine religious understandings of the relationship between God / Ultimate Reality and the physical world with particular reference to the ideas of immanence and transcendence.

- Within a theistic framework, God may be seen as the creator and present sustainer of the physical world, in which case the physical world is dependent on God. It may also be seen to be controlled by God in every respect, in which case God causes everything that happens. Alternatively God may be seen as an interventionist who interferes with the way things usually happen when necessary.
- Immanence is the idea that God/Ultimate reality is within the physical world, both pantheism (God is everything) and panentheism (God is within everything) emphasise this view.
- Transcendence stresses that God is beyond the physical world and ‘wholly other’. This can be linked to deism.
- Those referring to Buddhism may treat Nirvana, Buddha or emptiness as the Ultimate Reality and consider the relationship between the world as it appears to be, conditioned existence, with the reality that can be realised through enlightenment.

Note that the emphasis needs to be on the relationship between God/Ultimate Reality and the physical world. Examination of the beliefs may include detailed unpacking of the ideas, consideration of the link between the beliefs and underlying sources of authority and of reasons for different beliefs within particular faiths.

Max level 5 for answers that do not deal with all aspects of the question.

[45 marks] AO1

0 6 ‘From a religious perspective, God / Ultimate Reality is beyond understanding.’ Discuss how far you agree.

The idea that God/Ultimate Reality is partly or wholly transcendent links to this, and the idea that the created cannot comprehend the creator.

- If God is ‘wholly other’ for example, it may be argued that none of the words that derive their meaning from the physical world can apply unambiguously to him – eg references to God as Father, the face of God, God speaking to the Prophets. Language that links God to a specific place (eg ‘in heaven’) must also be considered misleading since the concept of God is of a different order. Problems with religious language relevant to God/Ultimate Reality can be illustrated in many contexts.
- Some uses of language may, however, make God / Ultimate Reality understandable, such as Via Negativa: eg the descriptions of Nirvana in the Questions of King Milinda, and the evocative use of language. The theory of language games may also be referenced. Answers should evaluate how successful far these understandings of religious language make descriptions of God/Ultimate Reality understandable.
- There may also be discussion of the idea that a spiritual gift is needed to understand descriptions of God – eg the view that it is the Holy Spirit guiding those who use the language that makes it understandable.

[30 marks] AO2

Question 4 Perceptions of Ultimate Reality

0 7 Examine how both religious language and art express ideas about God / Ultimate Reality.

- Answers may refer to a range of ways in which language is said to express ideas about God / Ultimate Reality including by use of analogy, symbolic language, via Negativa, evocative use of language and language games.
- Examination of these ways in which language is used should include examples and may include a degree of comparison and contrast or consideration of reasons why particular uses of language are preferred, or not, within particular faiths.

References to art may, but need not, be limited to the visual arts.

- Art may also be considered to be symbolic or evocative rather than figurative or informative and there may be reference to the interpretation required of the work to make it meaningful. There may be reference to icons as art forms and their conventions, but the focus needs to be on how they express ideas about God/Ultimate Reality. Presentations of Buddhist or Hindu art need to be similarly focused.
- Examination of how art expresses ideas should include examples and may include a degree of comparison and contrast and consideration of reasons why particular forms of visual art are preferred, or not, within particular faiths.

Max level 5 for answers that do not deal with all aspects of the question.

[45 marks] AO1

0 8 'Art expresses ideas about God / Ultimate Reality more effectively than religious language.' Discuss how far you agree.

- Answers may include challenges to the meaningfulness of religious language and an evaluation of how far these are successful, balanced against a critique of the strengths and weaknesses of art as a means of communicating ideas about God/Ultimate Reality.
- Other ideas may include the archaic nature of some scriptural language which can be a barrier to understanding and problems of translation which may mean that the intended meaning is obscured.
- Difficulties of understanding theories about the nature and function of religious language can also prove a barrier to understanding the words.
- Some visual art that portrays God in (white) human form may be considered misleading, and expressions from different cultures difficult to interpret.
- Art that is intended to be evocative may communicate nothing to an observer without a commentary in which case the success of the work of art depends on the success of religious language interpreting that art.
- Artistic images may, however, have more currency in popular culture albeit in publicity or secular art. This may mean that images of the Buddha, of Hindu gods and of Michelangelo's creator are better known than examples of religious language, and communicate some limited idea of the divine.

[30 marks] AO2

Question 5 Religious Experience

0 9 Examine the characteristics and processes of the following types of religious experience:

- **conversion**
- **revelation.**

Characteristics and processes are very closely linked and may be distinguished in different ways. Characteristics may be taken to mean the features scholars, such as James and Hick, associate with each type of experience while processes deal more with how they happen and the changes taking place within them.

Conversion

- This may be defined as an experience that brings about a moral and/or spiritual change in a person. James describes the process as one in which a sick and divided soul becomes unified and healthy.
- The process may be passive and sudden as typified by Saul’s experience on the Damascus road or in accounts of Umar’s conversion in Muslim tradition.
- It may also be volitional and gradual as typified by Newman’s conversion from Anglican to Catholic. Rambo and Farhadian analyse a process of change within which some form of direct religious experience plays a part.

Revelation

- Propositional and non-Propositional forms may be identified. In Propositional forms truths are communicated from God to chosen individuals so that the resulting scriptures are ‘The words of God’. There are differing understandings of the role of the recipient in this process but the general idea is that they are passive receivers. The authority for the words lies with God. This view is expressed for example in some Christian beliefs about the Bible and some Muslim beliefs about the Qur’an.
- Non-propositional revelation gives a much greater role to the recipient who derives his or her understanding of the divine from personal experience. Such realisation may come from insight meditation as in Buddhism, from reflection on the natural world or an instinctive understanding of the difference between right and wrong. The authority for such a revelation comes from the recipients and those who have shared their experience and insight.

Max level 5 for answers that do not deal with all aspects of the question: conversion and revelation, characteristics and processes.

[45 marks] AO1

1 0 'There is no real difference between a religious experience and a non-religious experience.'

Discuss how far you agree.

It may be argued that the differences are apparently very clear, for example:

- that religious experiences are 'from God' rather than natural
- that they are of religious subjects eg visions of Mary or hell
- that they involve a sense of the numinous.

However, apparently religious experiences may have a natural explanation.

- There may be references to drugs, temporal lobe epilepsy and the neurotheology here.
- Dreams or visions of religious subjects may have the same natural causes as other dreams, there may be reference to the psychology of religion here.
- The numinous is a subjective experience and there is no way of knowing if the feeling is present in 'non-religious' experiences or not.
- The only difference between religious and non-religious experiences may lie in the way they are interpreted. This would explain why some individuals interpret a personal experience as religious when it happens but reclassify it as 'natural' later in life.

[30 marks] AO2

Question 6 Religious Experience

1 1 Examine the influence of religious experience as a source of religious practice and good religious behaviour.

- The influence of a religious experience depends on the authority given to it and/or to the person receiving it.
- Answers may consider the influence of those experiences in which chosen individuals are said to have received ‘the word of God’ such as the revelation of the Qur’an to Muhammad.
- Such experiences can provide explicit guidance on how to worship, for example, how to pray or carry out pilgrimage, and moral laws such as the Ten Commandments, and so govern religious practice and behaviour.
- Answers may also consider the influence of the Buddha’s enlightenment experience as an example of insight meditation to be emulated by others and as a source of teaching. In the latter case they may consider the Buddhist teaching that each individual should not accept the ‘truths’ based on that experience without question but should seek to verify them for themselves through experience.
- Reference may also be made to post-scriptural or present-day experiences and their influence. For example the influence of Bernadette’s visions of Mary at Lourdes. This may lead to consideration of how far the influence of any experience depends on its validation by religious authorities.
- Answers may consider the influence such experiences had in the formation and development of particular religions and how changing attitudes to such experiences today have affected their influence. For example, historically Saul’s conversion experience can be considered to have a vital influence on the development of the early Church through its effect on Saul and the way in which it was used to establish his credibility and authority as a Christian preacher. Some liberal Christians today may however dismiss the experience as purely natural and dispute Paul’s authority.

Examination may explore the link between the experiences and their influence in detail and consider why the same experiences influence different people in different ways.

Max level 5 for answers that do not deal with all aspects of the question.

[45 marks] AO1

1 2 'Religious experiences do not provide a sound basis for religious belief and practice.'

Discuss how far you agree.

- Answers may present and evaluate arguments against the validity of any relevant religious experiences based on the possibility of error or deceit and a range of alternative natural explanations for such experiences which may include drugs and temporal lobe epilepsy.
- There may be reference to the insights of neurotheology.
- The extent to which all beliefs, religious or not, are based on personal experience and the principles of credulity and testimony may also be discussed.
- Recognition of the subjectivity of many experiences may lead to the conclusion that no judgement can be made on this issue.
- Attempts to validate religious experiences based on their 'fruits' may lead to a discussion of the benefits of religious practice based on such experiences but this may be countered with reference to supposed religious experiences that have had very negative 'fruits'.

[30 marks] AO2