



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Religious Studies 4050

Unit 14: Sikhism

405014

Report on the Examination

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Unit 14: Sikhism

General Comments

There was a small rise in the overall entry for this unit. A full range of ability was seen and students responded well to all aspects of the paper with few problems arising. Stimulus material was well used by many students in support of their answers in the first section. There was evidence that students were very well prepared and the quality of writing and use of technical language by many students was exemplary. There were some instances of students quoting in a foreign language and they need to be reminded that this paper is examined in English and credit cannot be given in such instances. A number of students also write much more than is required, providing full paragraphs where a sentence or two would suffice. They should be reminded to take note of the number of marks available. A further area where many students could conserve examination time is in responses to questions in Section A where no repetition of the question itself is necessary as they are writing in spaces provided.

Part A

Question 1: Practice and Equality

In part (a) most students offered full mark responses with problems only arising where students had not clearly understood the question and said why rather than how the Guru Granth Sahib is shown respect. A full range of answers to part (b) was seen with many noting key features such as the Nisan Sahib and the Khanda. Less full responses wrote about general design or gave lists and thus did not explain how this made the building recognisable, limiting them to a lower mark. A full range of evaluation skills was seen in response to part (c). The question did not prove problematic and the best answers developed reasons and considered the relative merits of community worship and participation in contrast to private devotion and family involvement. Weaker answers tended to focus on the disadvantages rather than the positives of worship in either venue.

Question 2: Family Life and Personal Lifestyle

Part (a) required a description of the ceremony of Amrit Sanskar. Where students were familiar with the ceremony, they gave full and often precisely detailed responses. Weaker answers described what they could see in the stimulus with varying degrees of accuracy. There was some confusion of the ceremony with Baisakhi and also the naming ceremony for children. Some students missed the 'describe' command and gave lengthy and unnecessary explanation or gave lists of rules of Khalsa membership. In such instances the higher levels of the mark scheme were rarely accessed.

Students gave thoughtful and considered responses to part (b) making some excellent references to the history and principles of Khalsa membership in opposing the view expressed in the statement. Where students considered the possibility that a Sikh may not wear the 5ks, they pointed to the importance of other aspects of faith and noted that the 5Ks should be worn with appropriate reverence and respect. Some students failed to develop reasons fully and thus achieved lower marks. A few struggled with the term discrimination.

No problems were posed by part (c) and most students achieved full marks. Some did not develop and only stated a reason for the importance of the naming ceremony and there were a small number of instances of students not knowing which ceremony was required.

In part (d) most students evaluated well on either side of the statement with the best responses contrasting the different roles women may have within the Sikh community. Weaker answers focussed on whether children should be taught the Sikh way of life and thus missed the focus of the question.

Question A3: Justice, Equality and the Right to Life

This question proved challenging for students and the weakest responses in Section A were given here. In part (a), where students were familiar with Sikh teaching and picked up on the focus which was when abortion may be considered acceptable, they gave full and accurate responses. A significant number of students gave much generalised responses to when abortion might be considered acceptable by some, but these were not all accurate in the context of Sikh teachings and beliefs. For examples, general answers about not wanting a child and not being able to give a child a good life were among those not credited. Several students mixed Sikh teaching with Islamic teaching on this issue and talked about ensoulment at 120 days. A small number also missed 'allow' in the question and responded with reasons against abortion. There were also instances of students not actually knowing what abortion meant.

In part (b) responses were much better and most students seemed aware of what euthanasia was and could demonstrate accurate insight into Sikh teachings on this subject. The best answers made reference to specific teachings and beliefs, though these were not necessary to achieve full marks.

Where students focussed their responses around specific life and death issues such as abortion and euthanasia, the evaluation in part (c) posed few problems. Thoughtful and considered arguments were offered on alternate sides recognising the difficulties of decision making on modern issues. The lack of specific guidance in sacred writings was widely cited in favour of the argument, whilst guidance based on principles of faith was used in opposition. Weaker answers failed to pick up on the focus of life and death issues in the statement and offered more rambling arguments on generic reasons for and against following a religious tradition. Few marks were gained by such responses.

Question A4: Personal Lifestyle

Most students achieved full marks in response to part (a). In part (b) the strongest responses made reference to specific examples of the practice of the Sikh faith by devout followers for example, morning prayers, the three responsibilities and attendance at the gurdwara. These were mostly phrased in a positive structure and written with fluency showing complete understanding of how lifestyle is influenced by religious belief. The weaker responses tended to list for which a maximum of Level 2 is available. Others lacked focus by discussing the problems of following a religious belief. Some completely missed the focus of the question by discussing how daily life affects faith.

Many excellent responses were seen to the evaluation in part (c). Students were confident in making arguments on either side with the best answers contrasting the spiritual and moral benefits of faith with the challenges presented to young people by an increasingly secular lifestyle and dominance of secular view. Weaker answers tended to make simple arguments centred on religion being old fashioned. There were also a number of responses where only one side of the argument was considered and answers which made no direct reference to Sikhism or Sikh views, consequently confining them to the lower levels of the mark scheme.

Part B

Question B5: Beliefs and Sources of Authority

This question was less popular than B6 with only around a third of students opting for this. Many answers seen were thorough and detailed. In part (a) many students gave comprehensive accounts of how the Guru Granth Sahib is used and made reference to its use in worship, ceremonies and as a guide to life. Answers to its compilation tended to focus on the history and details of specific contributors such as Guru Nanak. Hardly any students made reference to its specific practical structure such as its reproduction for worship in identical form, the same number of pages etc.

The evaluation in part (b) was well responded to with students showing detailed knowledge of the life, work and contribution of the Ten Gurus to construct balanced and reasoned arguments. Weaker answers struggled with the term authority and gave answers that were more historical accounts of what the gurus accomplished. Few considered alternative sources of authority other than the Guru Granth Sahib; where they did, full mark answers usually ensued.

Part (c) posed few problems to those students familiar with the terminology used in the question. They were able to offer thorough and detailed responses and the best answers used an array of technical language with confidence and precision. The weakest answers did not know what the stages of liberation were and talked generally about how lifestyle can lead to liberation which was creditable in the lower levels of the mark scheme. Some confused the term with the virtues in answers which again could achieve some marks but were more limited.

Part (d) did not present problems for students and they were able to present sound arguments for and against here, with the best responses illustrating their reasoning with reference to Sikh lifestyle. Many made reference to the three responsibilities and the importance of private devotion, for example.

Question B6: Festivals and the Gurus

This was the more popular extended essay of the two with approximately two thirds of students opting for this. Part (a) was done very well and students could give detailed accounts of both the historical background to the festival and the celebrations. The best answers considered both aspects of the question with equal consideration. Some responses made only detailed reference to either celebration or importance and thus did not quite make the highest level in their responses. As in some questions in Section A, the command word 'describe' was not focussed upon and some students gave lengthy explanations of celebrations that were unnecessary and in some cases actually inaccurate.

Part (b) was responded to well, with most students recognising that the fun and festivities festivals are particularly appealing for children. Many contrasted this with the importance of learning faith elsewhere and gave reasoned and thoughtful arguments often concluding that festivals were only one means of learning about a faith.

Students were very confident in their knowledge and understanding of the life and work of Guru Nanak in part (c). Many responses were detailed and articulate, citing specific instances from the Guru's life and explaining their importance in relation to the development of the Sikh faith. Weaker answers lacked explanation and, very occasionally, there was some confusion with the work of other Gurus being wrongly attributed to Guru Nanak for example, the formation of the Khalsa.

Part (d) presented few problems. Students demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the work of Guru Gobind Singh which they used to argue why he may be considered to have contributed more to the formation of a unique Sikh identity. This was often contrasted well with examples of the work of other Gurus, with most students ultimately concluding that all of the Gurus were significant in their own way and none should be given prominence. A few contrasted Guru Gobind Singh's work with the principle of equality but this invariably led to weak arguments that missed the focus of the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [AQA results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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