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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In Religious Studies Short Course (3RA0)
Paper 4: Area of Study 4 – Study of Judaism

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Introduction

Religious Studies A Short Course : Paper 04, Study of Religion – Judaism

This paper consists of two questions: candidates must answer both questions. The detail of the assessment content is provided in the specification. Centres are to use this, rather than other published resources when planning the course content.

It is really good to see, however, the standard of Jewish knowledge increase year on year, with candidates confidently writing about Shekhinah, Pikuach Nefesh and Maimonides. Unfortunately in 'd' questions there is still a lack of appraisal. A number of candidates confused Judaism with Christianity, with references to the teachings of Jesus and quotes from the New Testament.

In questions 1d, marks are given for correct spelling and grammar, indicated by SPaG.

3RA0_04_Q1a

The question asked was:

'Outline three beliefs about life after death in Judaism.'

The majority of the candidates used the specialist terms and spoke of Gan Eden, Gehenna and Sheol. Some candidates used purgatory. Where they said 'a purgatory-like place' or similar phrase they were given marks. If they said 'Jews believe in purgatory' they were not given the marks. Some candidates also wrote about what Jews do not believe in.

Examiner tip:

Write in separate sentences.

3RA0_04_Q1b

The question asked was:

'Explain two reasons why the Messiah is important for some Jews.'

This question asked about the why the Messiah is important for some Jews. The best answers wrote about the coming of the messianic era, a time of peace on the earth, a time of resurrection, the rebuilding of the Temple and developed these. A number of candidates wrote about Jesus, either as the Messiah, or that Jews do not believe he was the Messiah.

Examiner tip:

- Separate the two points into paragraphs. This makes it easier for the examiner.
- Exam technique is important - candidates must understand development.

3RA0_04_Q1c

The question asked was:

'Explain two ways the Covenant at Sinai is important for Jews.'

This question was answered well by a significant number of candidates who wrote about the giving of the Ten Commandments, the mitzvot and the significance of these for Jews. A number of candidates wrote about the escape from Egypt rather than the Covenant, and some confused this with the Abrahamic Covenant.

Examiner tip:

- Candidates do not have to write quotes word for word. If a quote or a reference to scripture can be recognised then it will be credited.

3RA0_04_Q1d

The question asked was:

‘Saving a life is more important than any law.’

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you should:

- refer to Jewish teachings
- reach a justified conclusion.

Most candidates gave a for and against response, with a conclusion which repeated the point they favoured. The best answers understood that this was a question about Pikuach Nefesh and wrote about the difficulties of balancing this with the need to follow the mitzvot, and used Shabbat laws, abortion and euthanasia. Some candidates took a wider view and talked about war and terrorism in the world, but typically these lacked any Jewish teaching. These questions have 3 marks allocated for AO1 and the rest are AO2. Candidates need to be evaluating the arguments, appraising them, showing which are the stronger arguments and why. Many candidates were limited to level 2 as although their knowledge was excellent, they did not really address the question.

Examiner tip:

- The best (d) questions are not pages long. Candidates should answer the question and use their knowledge to back it up, rather than giving their knowledge but not really answering the question.
- Evaluation and appraisal

3RA0_04_Q2a

The question asked was:

‘Outline three things Jews do during the ritual of shiva.’

Many candidates answered this successfully. Where candidates did not perform as well was where they wrote a sentence with more than one ritual in it. Some candidates who did not recognise the word, assumed it was a festival and some picked up a mark for prayer. Candidates need to write three separate sentences to get the marks available.

Examiner tip:

- If candidates write a list with three things, where one of them is incorrect, they will get 0 marks. It is important to write them in separate sentences.

3RA0_04_Q2b

The question asked was:

'Explain two features of the Tenakh.'

For candidates who knew what the Tenakh was, this proved a straightforward question to get 4 marks on, as they were awarded marks for the book, and what is in it, for example it has the Torah in it, which is the five books of Moses. Some candidates did not know what the Tenakh was, however, and there were some blank responses to this question.

Examiner tip:

- Encourage candidates to write succinctly on (b) and (c) questions.
- However, if they do need more space, tell them it is ok to write on the blank space underneath. It will be marked accordingly.

3RA0_04_Q2c

The question asked was:

'Explain two reasons why synagogue services are important for the Jewish community.'

In your answer you must refer to a source of wisdom and authority.

This is an example of training candidates to read the question carefully as it is not a difficult question, but too many candidates wrote either about the features of a synagogue or what Jews do in a synagogue without saying why it is important for the Jewish community. Some candidates, however, answered it well, and wrote about Jewish identity and the need for a community place for continuing traditions.

Examiner tip:

- Candidates need to link their source of wisdom to what they are writing. A quote on its own will not get a mark, it has to support the point being made.

3RA0_04_Q2d

The question asked was:

'Celebrating Shabbat is more important than any of the Jewish festivals.'

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you should:

- refer to Jewish teachings
- reach a justified conclusion.

The best answers wrote about the frequency of Shabbat, about members of the Jewish community who are not members of a synagogue but who still observe Shabbat in some way, about the commandment to keep it holy, and compared this with other festivals such as Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah. Evaluations were weak overall, however, and many candidates were unable to gain the higher marks available.

Examiner tip:

- Evaluation questions need more than a for and against response.
- A good conclusion can take an answer up a mark. Candidates need to show evaluation.

Summary:

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Do not attach extra sheets to your examination paper, write within the scannable pages using the blank spaces.
- When answering the (a) items use three full sentences.
- The source of wisdom offered to support answers in (c) items must be relevant to the question and support the reason given.
- The (d) items asks for evaluation, after considering the evidence. The higher grades are achieved if the evidence/reasons given is 'considered' or appraised for its value as an argument as part of deciding the evaluation.
- On (d) items the bullet points indicate the viewpoints that can be awarded in the answer.
- Candidates should read the questions carefully, answer the question asked fully.