

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/12 Paper 1

Key messages

- It is important that candidates focus on the question asked in order to respond to it fully.
- Candidates need to be familiar with command words and what they ask for as well as with the key terms used in questions.
- It is important to practice exam skills such as time management and using the number of marks available for the question as an indicator for answer length and/or amount of time to spend on it.

General comments

The level of religious knowledge shown by candidates was generally good and most candidates showed evidence of having studied the two religions they chose to answer questions on in reasonable depth. There seemed to be some disparity in performance between the first and second religions chosen, suggesting candidates felt they had greater knowledge of one than the other. There was also significant use of Christian terminology and, occasionally, Christian religious concepts in responses to questions on other religious traditions. This is not an issue which tended to occur in any other combination of religions.

While most candidates were able to identify relevant knowledge, there were many who did not seem to have noted the command word used in the question. This was most common with **part (b)** responses which require explanation rather than description of knowledge. Some candidates also seemed to find it difficult to know how much was required to adequately answer a question, giving extended answers to **a(i)** and **(ii)** at the expense of later questions. There was also a tendency to give all answers in bullet points which, for **(b)-** and **(c)-part** questions, tended to limit the marks that could be given. Lack of development in responses also arose from an overly narrow understanding of religious belief and practice, for example giving the impression of religion as being nothing more than a set of moral codes and obedience to those as the only purpose of religious practices. This was observed across all three religions, and it meant that responses to some questions were limited.

With regard to the **part (c)** evaluation questions, many candidates seemed to have difficulty in developing arguments rather than stating a few points on either side. The skill of thinking through to a considered conclusion, based on evidence and consideration of other ideas, was displayed unevenly, with some candidates able to demonstrate it on one question but not others, or in relation to one of the two religions studied rather than both.

Comments on specific questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) (i)** The majority of candidates gained at least some of the available marks here. Most were able to identify at least a linguistic understanding of the term 'reconciliation', and consequently made reference to forgiveness and bringing parties back together. Religious terms such as 'repentance', 'atonement' and 'confession' were commonly used.

The most common omission was to recognise that the question asked about 'a service of reconciliation' rather than the concept of it. 'Service' was interpreted broadly, so that an account of an individual making confession was a creditable response, but responses which dealt only with making up after an argument could not receive full marks.

- (ii) As with (a)(i), most candidates gained some of the available marks with references to preaching, teaching and interpreting scripture for the laity being commonly included. Specific types of Bible service were not commonly referenced, but Bible study session were, and were credited appropriately. However, full marks were not as common as might have been expected since many candidates wrote general responses about ministerial roles across a range of settings rather than focusing on Bible services, as required by the question.
- (b) Most responses demonstrated knowledge of Holy Communion as the sharing of bread and wine by Christians and of what is represented by these items. The strongest responses linked this to the Last Supper and Christ's instructions to his disciples, or to the concept of sacrifice and Christian acceptance of it in order to be saved. Both approaches could be used to illustrate why Christians might find Holy Communion significant. A large number of responses did not offer this kind of explanation, remaining wholly descriptive and often including irrelevant material about the rest of a Church service or about the events of the Last Supper.
- (c) This section was, for the most part, less well answered than other parts of **Question 1**. Many responses indicated some confusion about what a communion table might be, with candidates attempting to differentiate it from an altar. Some discussions were based entirely around this problematic distinction and limited themselves as a result – to justify this view would not be entirely impossible, but it does require greater knowledge than what was being displayed. The most common approach was to argue that all parts of a Church are important because they are all there for a reason, which does respond to the question but does not really open the way to consider whether the communion table is the most important.

Question 2

- (a) (i) This question was generally answered well, with candidates drawing a range of examples from the Christmas story. Another common approach was to name different feast days, which generally achieved some marks – usually for Christmas and Epiphany, as these are both also the names of events. However, this approach generally did not gain all the marks. Easter was often included as the third example, or candidates listed different days which are part of the Christmas festival, neither of which were correct responses to a question about events associated with the birth of Christ.
- (ii) This was also a well-answered question overall, with most candidates showing awareness of the events of the Last Supper. A small number of responses listed four (or more) things Jesus did on that occasion, thereby limiting their available marks as the question asked for a description of two. There were also a few examples which included miracles from other occasions, most commonly turning water into wine.
- (b) Common approaches were to explain salvation as linked to the sacrifice of Jesus to pay for human sin, to salvation as inherent to the process of conversion and to the personal experience of the believe being saved from sin, either now or in the afterlife through the promise of heaven. These responses often demonstrated a high level of knowledge and tended to be more explanatory in nature than other **part (b)** responses.
- (c) The question asks about the need of the Bible in worship, but the majority of responses appeared to ignore the worship element and considered the overall importance of the Bible. This limited the availability of marks; some responses taking this approach incorporated implied material about worship existing outside formal settings, and this was credited as appropriate. Where worship was explicitly addressed, the most common approach was to distinguish reading the Bible from other things, which might take place during public or communal worship, arguing that different congregations value different forms of worship. Private or personal worship was rarely considered.

Section B – Islam

Question 3

- (a) (i) This was generally well answered, with most candidates gaining at least some of the available marks for naming Muhammad (pbuh) and identifying him as the last prophet. There was less consistency in gaining the third mark, with some candidates expanding on the general meaning of

prophet in this context and some developing the idea of Muhammad (pbuh) receiving the complete and final message from God.

- (ii) Most candidates understood the term 'Sunnah' and were able to describe it with reference to the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Many included references to it as an example to Muslims. Some seemed to confuse 'Sunnah' with 'Sunni' and described different forms of Islam. A smaller number confused it with 'surah' and wrote about the structure of the Qur'an. These approaches did not generally include any creditable material.
- (b) The majority of candidates seemed to struggle with this question; while most were aware of what the Qur'an is in the literal sense of being a text, there was little to relate this to sacredness. Most responses described it as a book of rules, telling Muslims how to be Muslims. Some were able to give a history of it, which meant that they did include relevant material (such as being the words of God), but without applying it to the question. Descriptions also tended to include how Muslims use and treat the text, again sometimes touching on relevant points but without identifying or using these.
- (c) Most responses demonstrated knowledge that the Shahadah is one of the pillars of Islam and some of these expanded upon that to explain what it entails. The most common argument was to say that as one thing in a set of five it can not be complete in itself, which is a relevant argument, but which does not lend itself to considering alternative views. The difference between beliefs (which is what the Shahadah states) and practices (which is what the other pillars are) was rarely mentioned. However, some responses did identify other Muslim beliefs such as al Qadr or akhirah, and considered whether the beliefs stated in the Shahadah encompasses these.

Question 4

- (a) (i) The question asked about things necessary for performing salah. Most candidates gained some of the marks, identifying primarily the need for cleanliness of the body and the prayer site (prayer mat was a creditable response) and the importance of knowing the direction of Makkah. Many responses seemed to have missed the reference to necessity and gave examples of things which might be used in some types of prayer – such as prayer beads – but which are not required for salah.
- (ii) Correct responses selected two things identified in (a)(i) and gave an account of their purpose. Marks were not available for restating the (a)(i) response; the description needed to be sufficiently developed to gain two marks per example chosen. Most candidates who answered (a)(i) correctly also answered this question well.
- (b) Responses to this question were commonly extremely generic, giving a generalised religious view of private devotion as strengthening faith and being an opportunity for personal petition, but without any specific references to Islam. Some also wrote generally about different forms of private worship rather than identifying du'a as a kind of prayer. More Islam focused responses were often descriptive, giving an account of what du'a is rather than explaining its significance.
- (c) Responses to this question demonstrated a good range of knowledge about Jumma prayers, with most candidates able to set out advantages of attending in the form of hearing the sermon and following the Sunnah. This was often set against the different obligations upon men and women in Islam. Some candidates also considered the difference between what is compulsory – performing the prayer – and what is desirable or ideal. Most responses clearly identified different perspectives on the issue, making this one of the better answered **part (c)** questions overall.

Section C – Judaism

Question 5

- (a) (i) Candidates who knew the term 'kiddush' answered this question well, but many candidates did not appear to know it. There were responses describing kaddish, ketubah and kashrut. There were also a lot of responses describing various articles of ritual dress.
- (ii) This was generally well answered, with most responses gaining full marks. There was a noticeable number of responses confusing synagogues and churches, describing crucifixes, altars or fonts.

- (b) Most responses to this question appeared to ignore the reference to the role in community, being generally about everything a rabbi might do. This was often also very generalised, citing responsibilities applicable to clergy within any religious tradition. Often the terminology and sometimes specific examples used were Christian rather than Jewish, with rabbis sometimes being explicitly described as 'Jewish priests' and reference to activities such as 'spreading the word' or baptism and hearing confession.
- (c) Most responses to this question did consider two perspectives, but the most common ones were the general points that the home is comfortable but also has lots of distractions while the synagogue enables worship as a community. These arguments would be equally applicable to any religious tradition. Where Judaism specific material was included, candidates considered the importance of Shabbat or the importance of the family in festivals like Pesach. Reference to festivals such as Simchat Torah, which are more synagogue focused, was less common,

Question 6

- (a) (i) Most responses gained some of the available marks because the majority of candidates were able to give a general definition of the concept of 'a covenant'. However, a lot of these did not address the specific concept of the covenant and its meaning in Judaism.
- (ii) As with **6(a)(i)**, most responses gained some marks on this question as a majority of candidates were aware that Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. There were also responses which addressed the idea of the Promised Land, being supported with manna in the desert and the idea of a Chosen People. Responses tended to be focused on the obligations of one or other party to the covenant rather than the idea of a two-way agreement. A minority of candidates appeared to confuse the Mosaic and Abrahamic Covenants.
- (b) This was not a well answered question. Some candidates wrote more evaluative responses for this than for their **part (c)** answers, presenting quite full arguments as to why the Tenakh is not relevant today – which is not an answer to the question. Others were very descriptive, naming the three parts of the Tenakh and giving an overview of their contents. This was sometimes limited in scope, presenting the texts as being simply a list of rules and regulations. A minority of responses considered the kashrut laws and explained how food and clothing choices would be impacted by these.
- (c) Most candidates gave a general argument that the covenant is important because it is the foundation of Judaism, but were less clear about how the relationship with God it creates might be more or less significant in the modern world. Some responses suggested that if it were not important God would have replaced it, and some used the events of the Holocaust to consider whether Jews could still rely on being God's Chosen People.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/13
Paper 1

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Comments on specific questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) (i)** While most candidates recognised that ‘bishop’ is a term associated with hierarchical status, many responses presented an archbishop as being answerable to the bishop and as having fewer responsibilities. Some responses were simply about the responsibilities of clergy in general.
- (ii)** This was generally well answered. Responses ranged across many different denominations of Christianity – any of which were creditable – and most candidates were able to give a good summary of the ministerial role in worship. For some candidates this was a repletion of their **(a)(i) part** response, but it was creditable here.
- (b)** This question was not well answered, with many responses showing no awareness of what a pulpit is or how it is used. It was commonly confused with a lectern, which did usually include at least some relevant material about use. Other responses confused it with the font, or with roles performed by people in the church, such as being an usher. Where correct knowledge of its use

was demonstrated, its importance was often left unaddressed, leaving the response wholly descriptive.

- (c) Responses tended to be very general, offering arguments about the relative importance of public and private worship which would be of equal relevance to any religion. While this is not incorrect material, it does limit the overall response to the question, which is explicitly about Christianity. Responses which included Christian specific material commonly argued that partaking in communion was an instruction given by Christ to his disciples, or cited the belief that the Holy Spirit is present where Christians gather in the name of Christ.

Question 2

- (a) (i) This was generally well answered. Creditable responses included identifying the Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity, reference to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the World and to the gifts given by it. The broad scope of the question meant a wide range of material could be credited.
- (ii) This was another well answered question, with most candidates able to give a good summary of the main points, including the visit by Angel Gabriel, Mary's virginity and her acceptance of God's will.
- (b) This question was not well answered, with many candidates demonstrating limited knowledge about what the Apostles' Creed is; not knowing what it is clearly makes it challenging to demonstrate understanding of why it is important. A common error was to suggest that it must be important because it was written by people who knew Jesus personally.
- (c) Most responses presented the view that Christians have faith in the presence of the Holy Spirit. This was relevant to the question. However, relatively few candidates made the kind of explicit consideration of faith in relation to doubt or to ideas of external proof that would have led to a discursive response.

Section B – Islam

Question 3

- (a) (i) This was a generally well answered question, with most candidates identifying the direction of qiblah as the direction of Makkah and the niche as indicating that direction within a mosque. Most responses developed this by observing the importance of facing Makkah during salah.
- (ii) While this was a well answered question overall, there was a noticeable number of responses which included Christian or Jewish elements in their description, including reference to altars, crosses and arks.
- (b) Responses to this question tended to be detailed descriptions of salah, with much less explanatory material relating to its importance. The knowledge displayed was good, but its application to the question asked was more limited.
- (c) Most responses gained some of the available marks for generalised points about the overall importance of a mosque, the prayer that takes place within it or for considering the importance of the imam in Muslim worship. However, few responses showed clear understanding of the term 'muezzin'. Some candidates presented the two roles as synonymous, which greatly limited their ability to discuss relative importance.

Question 4

- (a) (i) The most common reason for losing marks on this question was to confuse the Articles of Faith with the Five Pillars of Islam.
- (ii) This was generally well answered, with most responses focusing on the command to read and Muhammad's protests that he could not with the final miracle of his reading the words. Other details were creditable.
- (b) Most responses gave a descriptive account of the historical events which originated Sunni and Shi'a Islam. Some had the names the wrong way round, but the details were otherwise correct.

- (c) This was a well answered question, with most responses arguing that the Qur'an is central and has the most authority but that it is not complete. Some responses demonstrated quite detailed knowledge of the processes through which Islamic law is created. There were some simplistic presentations of the Qur'an as a rulebook and religious practice as being solely a matter of following the rules.

Section C – Judaism

Question 5

- (a) (i) This was a well answered question, with most candidates demonstrating familiarity with the term 'mezuzah' and knowledge of how it is used.
- (ii) This question was also well answered, with most candidates able to give clear description of both items.
- (b) This question was not well answered, with many responses simply describing the use of the ark. Some of these presented the Sefer Torah as containing nothing but the Ten Commandments, although there was sometimes some implied reference to significance in the description of these as given by God.
- (c) This was a well answered question, with most responses identifying another object with symbolic meaning in a synagogue and presenting it as more or less important than the Ner Tamid.

Question 6

- (a) (i) A lot of incorrect responses were given to this question. Most candidates were able to identify some books of Jewish scripture, but very few chose three which are part of the Ketuvim.
- (ii) This was not very well answered, with most responses giving a generalised description of any sacred text as being a collection of rules and instructions. Some made reference to the mitzvot rather than generally to rules, but since these are not really the concern of the Ketuvim this did not greatly improve the responses. General references to the history of the religion were able to gain some marks, although again these were usually too generic to be a full response.
- (b) As responses to (a)(i) and (ii) demonstrated limited knowledge about what the Ketuvim contains, this proved to be a challenging question. Responses about the general significance of sacred texts were the most common approach and these were able to gain some marks.
- (c) This was the best answered part of **Question 6**, with most candidates able to give a view about the overall importance of the Torah. Discussion was limited by the level of knowledge candidates had about different texts and their contents however, and many responses were descriptive or wholly one-sided.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/22
Paper 2

Key messages

The majority of candidates showed that they had prepared well for the exam with excellent notes and guidance given. In **part (a)** questions, most candidates were able to select the correct areas of knowledge. Many achieved higher levels in these questions, some of whom wrote more extensively than was necessary. Other candidates would be able to access the higher levels if they gave more detail and made their responses less like a list. There were responses which were purely generic; this affected the levels that candidates were able to access.

In **part (b)** questions, many candidates also selected the correct and relevant body of knowledge from the syllabus. It is in the application of this knowledge that further development would allow candidates to access the higher levels. 'Explain' is generally the command word used in these questions and candidates need to tailor their responses accordingly. Weaker responses can become stronger responses when the candidate adds understanding to the knowledge that they provide. Understanding that the assessment objectives for these questions necessitates far more than simply describing will further enhance answers. Candidates must demonstrate a good understanding of religious teachings and clearly demonstrate the relationship between belief and practice.

Part (c) questions should be discussed from more than one perspective, and many were well versed in this technique. Stronger answers were not constrained by a formulaic response. An opinion ought to be substantive, rather than being purely the reiteration of material already included in the response. This opinion can be complemented by a number of different reasons.

General comments

The performance overall was good. Candidates were well prepared, and answers reflected the fact that candidates of all abilities were able to access the questions. A range of skills were displayed which were evident across the part questions but to a varying degree.

A considerable number of rubric infringements were in evidence, which reduced the amount of time (and hence marks) that candidates had for an answer that was credited. Also, candidates need not write everything they know about a topic in order to gain full marks. However, it was good to read responses that answered with considerable flair.

Section A and Section B (Christianity and Islam) were the most popular combination of questions. **Section C** (Judaism) was answered less by candidates overall.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Christianity

Question 1

- (a) Stronger responses were able to describe a range of celebrations in a Christian church on Easter Sunday. Many were able to suggest celebrations across two denominations whilst others concentrated on one denomination only. Both were equally valid responses. Some responses diverted their focus away from Easter Sunday and gave information on celebrations from other days during the Easter period. Such responses were not able to access the full range of marks for

that reason. General references to 'singing' or 'worshipping' can apply to most church activities and should be accompanied by something specific to Easter Sunday for credit.

- (b) Weaker responses were able to explain why celebrations at Easter are important for Christians. However, this was not the particular requirement of the question. It was the 'thanksgiving' element that allowed stronger responses to access the higher levels. What Christians are giving thanks for and therefore why Christians give thanks, are the elements that responses needed to focus on. Ideas could include Jesus' sacrifice and the redemption of humanity through his death.
- (c) There were some excellent responses to this question. A large number of responses suggested that decorating the church is unimportant. They gave reasons such as decoration adding nothing to worship, suggesting that the motivation behind attending church is what is important. However, others suggested that artefacts and other adornments can help people worship. In addition, some responses said that decorating the church is an important element in giving thanks at Easter.

Question 2

- (a) There were many comprehensive responses to this question. Stronger responses methodically worked through a funeral service from start to finish. Some were aware of denominational differences also which provided breadth to the response. Further, depth was shown when responses were able to cite specific texts and readings in a funeral service. Weaker responses wasted time on events immediately surrounding the death of a person whereas they should have focused on the funeral service.
- (b) Stronger responses recognised that the focus of this question could be taken in more than one way. Some suggested that Christian beliefs might help a person who is dying as well as those beliefs helping those who are bereaved. The beliefs that might help are numerous. Some examples are the belief in the justice of God, the belief in heaven and the belief that God has an ultimate plan.
- (c) Some responses suggested that this sentence is completely true. A reason often given was that a belief in God will 'take care of' all possible obstacles in life. Very many responses though suggested that there are several problems in life that Christian belief cannot help with. One such problem was regarding financial issues in life which are so concerning for people that nothing can help with it. Many responses did not deal with the 'all' problems. Suggesting that problems faced today might not be found in the Bible would help.

Question 3

- (a) Stronger responses could give a wide variety of ways in which Christians show love and concern for others by obeying the Ten Commandments. These responses did not merely list some of the commandments, which is what some weaker responses did. Stronger responses cited a commandment and then suggested how obeying this commandment shows love for others. The 'others' could refer to both God and the whole of humanity. Inclusion of The Two Greatest Commandments is creditworthy when described as a summary of The Ten Commandments. However, a substantial number of candidates responded to this question as if The Two Greatest Commandments *are actually two of The Ten Commandments* or that they are one and the same thing. This was not credited.
- (b) Responses that scored highly were those that could link Christian beliefs and teachings to the idea that the Christian community should be like a 'family.' One such idea is that all Christians share the same beliefs which unite them as one large family. Other ideas surrounded the concept of 'brotherhood' within the Christian community. Some referred to nuns and monks. Others suggested that Jesus considered his disciples not as friends but as family and that Christians today should do the same.
- (c) The majority of the responses were able to show the merits of performing good actions in secret. For example, good actions should not be done with the hope of rewards but should be done purely because performing good actions is what Christians should do. Many commented that doing good actions publicly takes away any good from the action itself. Some suggested that if the intention behind the action is pure then it does not matter whether the action is done publicly or in private.

Section B Islam

Question 4

- (a) Stronger responses were able to describe a range of activities that take place during Id al-Fitr. Many were able to suggest different activities across different countries and cultures as well as describing the activities that are common to most Muslim communities. Most referred to the joy and the celebration attached to the end of Ramadan. Stronger responses were also able to appreciate the solemnity which can co-exist with the celebrations.
- (b) Most responses were able to say that the period at the end of fasting opened the possibilities for consuming more extensively and suggested this as a reason why Id is celebrated. Stronger responses suggested more sophisticated reasons for the celebration. One explanation was that the celebration generates a sense of brotherhood, promoting the ummah. Another explanation was that the celebration emphasises the dependence of Muslims on the support of God.
- (c) Stronger responses were able to give a variety of perspectives in response to the stimulus. Many suggested that it is the simplicity of a celebration that generates a 'pure' form of worship, a direct dialogue between the individual Muslim and God. Another line of reasoning would be that an elaborate approach to celebrations reflects a desire to direct everything towards God, the ultimate expression of love and respect. Perceptive responses appreciated that all celebrations performed with the right intention were valid, irrespective of the form that these celebrations take.

Question 5

- (a) There were many comprehensive responses which showed excellent knowledge of this aspect of the syllabus. Stronger responses described both birth rituals in equal measure, giving rather elaborate details for both. Most knew the reasons behind these rituals. It should be noted that this was not needed in this question as that would relate to an 'explain' question. Time can be saved by not including unnecessary detail, although it is commendable that responses were aware of the reasons. For adhan, the words said are creditworthy. For aqeeqah the naming of the child, shaving of the hair and animal sacrifice were all credited as well as distribution of money/meat to the poor.
- (b) Responses that were able to show knowledge and understanding of Muslim views about life in general were able to access the higher levels. Such responses were aware that life can be considered as a test from God. Stronger responses were able to explain possible reasons for life being a test from God, that is the purpose behind the test. The most well-known was the belief that this life is preparation for the next life. It should be noted that this is not a question about life after death in itself.
- (c) Weaker responses made this into a question purely about wealth and the reference to passing God's test was missed. Some responses did appreciate that being wealthy does not necessarily mean that the wealthy person was at a disadvantage when it comes to passing God's test. However, some did suggest that wealth could lead to greed which would make spiritual progress more difficult. Stronger responses recognised that wealth is loaned and not owned, and that pious Muslims are the ones that live life according to the wishes of God.

Question 6

- (a) Stronger responses were those that did not merely list several actions that might relieve poverty in the local community. Such responses gave substance to the aspect they referred to. For example, 'raising money' on its own is a correct phrase whereas 'raising money' and then describing how this might be done and importantly how it might relieve poverty, is a stronger response. The response could be linked to the Muslim act of giving. The answer could be very much wider than referring to only zakah and sadaqah.
- (b) The key word here is 'explain.' It is not a 'describe' question. Responses of course will say what the ummah is but should focus on the explanation of Muslim teachings about the ummah and caring for others. For example, a response might give a teaching and then say what this teaching means in terms of how Muslims treat others.

- (c) This question necessitated an understanding of what both sadaqah and zakah are. Many suggested that as zakah is one of the five pillars then this is of greater importance to Muslims. Other responses suggested that as zakah is something that all Muslims should perform then that is more of an obligation and therefore of greater importance than sadaqah. More balanced responses were able to say that as sadaqah is voluntary then it is important in order to supplement zakah. In general, it could be said that they are of equal importance as all giving is of equal importance.

Section C Judaism

Question 7

- (a) It is inevitable that there will be some reference to Rosh Hashanah in responses. However, the focus should be on the period covered by Yom Kippur. The fundamental parts of the response can cover a variety of aspects. Responses generally knew that the synagogue is a focal point for the observance of Yom Kippur. Most knew about the blowing of the shofar and about the period of fasting. Stronger responses were also able to express that Yom Kippur is observed with solemnity.
- (b) Candidates who knew in **Part (a)** that Yom Kippur is a solemn celebration were well equipped for this part question. Stronger responses were able to explain what Atonement is. They were then able to connect the idea of fasting with the concept of atoning. They were also aware that the blowing of the shofar can stir up feelings of being alert and being ready to atone. Its seriousness is shown in these points as well as in the fact that it is important to seriously consider one's previous actions before embarking upon the next year.
- (c) Some perceptive responses suggested that every day is a special day as every day is given by G-d. G-d also gave the Jewish Law and so it is this Law that is the most important aspect in the life of a Jew. However, stronger responses also recognised that humanity was told to 'remember Shabbat' as it is holy. Therefore, it is also important to observe this special day. Other responses suggested that life should be seen as a whole and that living according to the Law as well as observing special days contribute to a fulfilled Jewish life.

Question 8

- (a) Many knew little more than that the ketubah is signed and often signed before the actual marriage ceremony. Different Jewish groups request signatures from different people. In Orthodox communities, for example, it is often not the bride and groom. Others were aware that the ketubah needs to be signed by two witnesses and that it is traditionally read out aloud under the chuppah. Stronger responses knew that the ketubah sets out the many obligations, rights and responsibilities of the husband and wife, with it being a contractual agreement between the couple. Reference could be made to how the ketubah is used during the course of the couple's married life to remind them of their commitments.
- (b) Many responses knew that a husband and wife have differing roles in a Jewish marriage. Stronger responses not only said what these roles were, but truly answered the question by explaining why these roles are important. The importance could include such reasons as clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities and a clear structure which is decreed by G-d. Very few responses explained the importance of the husband in worship or the importance of the woman in home life. It could be suggested that both have equal importance in raising children and that this is an important shared responsibility. However, the vast majority of responses gave only roles of the husband and wife in general, rather than the importance of these in a marriage.
- (c) The statement is suggesting that by a family observing traditional Jewish values it makes it easier to care for the elderly. In other words, traditional Jewish values instil the principles of caring for others into family life. Some candidates found this question challenging and did not address it coherently. In the main, responses agreed with the statement stating that the elderly are given a high degree of respect within a Jewish family. Stronger responses were able to connect this fact with a creditworthy point.

Question 9

- (a) There were many responses which showed excellent knowledge of the Jewish food laws. This could include several aspects. The majority of responses were aware of certain food types which are either allowed or forbidden. Some knew the laws surrounding certification. Others knew the method of slaughter adopted in order to render food as being kosher. There could be wider awareness of the source of these laws so that responses could describe the context of these laws. Candidates should avoid merely providing a list of food which is permitted.
- (b) This was not merely a question about what the food items on the seder plate are. Stronger responses knew what the food items are and were able to explain what they represent. Most responses were able to refer to at least two items of food. Less widely known was the symbolism behind the roasted egg. Most referred to 'new life' and got this confused with Easter eggs. One reason for the presence of the egg is that the roasted egg represents the sacrifices made in the Temple.
- (c) Some responses stated that following religious laws is restrictive and takes away free will from human beings. In that sense, people cannot and do not make their own decisions and their life is dictated to by religious laws. Other responses were able to suggest that people might follow a religious law by choice rather than by compulsion. Responses could refer to religious laws that one would always wish to live one's life by, for example, 'do not kill.'

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/23
Paper 2

Key messages

The majority of candidates showed that they had prepared well for the exam with excellent notes and guidance given. In **part (a)** questions, most candidates were able to select the correct areas of knowledge. Many achieved higher levels in these questions, some of whom wrote more extensively than was necessary. Other candidates would be able to access the higher levels if they gave more detail and made their responses less like a list. There were responses which were purely generic; this affected the levels that candidates were able to access.

In **part (b)** questions, many candidates also selected the correct and relevant body of knowledge from the syllabus. It is in the application of this knowledge that further development would allow candidates to access the higher levels. 'Explain' is generally the command word used in these questions and candidates need to tailor their responses accordingly. Weaker responses can become stronger responses when the candidate adds understanding to the knowledge that they provide. Understanding that the assessment objectives for these questions necessitates far more than simply describing will further enhance answers. Candidates must demonstrate a good understanding of religious teachings and clearly demonstrate the relationship between belief and practice.

Part (c) questions should be discussed from more than one perspective, and many were well versed in this technique. Stronger answers were not constrained by a formulaic response. An opinion ought to be substantive, rather than being purely the reiteration of material already included in the response. This opinion can be complemented by a number of different reasons.

General comments

The performance overall was good. Candidates were well prepared, and answers reflected the fact that candidates of all abilities were able to access the questions. A range of skills were displayed which were evident across the part questions but to a varying degree.

A considerable number of rubric infringements were in evidence, which reduced the amount of time (and hence marks) that candidates had for an answer that was credited. Also, candidates need not write everything they know about a topic in order to gain full marks. However, it was good to read responses that answered with considerable flair.

Section A and Section B (Christianity and Islam) were the most popular combination of questions. **Section C** (Judaism) was answered less by candidates overall.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Christianity

Question 1

- (a) Stronger responses were able to describe a range of things that happen in churches during Holy Week. Many were able to suggest occurrences across two denominations whilst others concentrated on one denomination only. Both were equally valid responses. Some responses preferred to describe things that happen only on certain days during Holy Week. Others maintained a focus on one or at times, two days during this week. Liturgically, Easter Sunday is not part of Holy Week and was not credited.

- (b) Some responses appreciated the importance of church services in general. These responses emphasised the communal aspects of such services as well as other benefits of participating in church services. This allowed access to this question. Festivals by nature generate a feeling of brotherhood and celebrating festivals in a church service complements this. It can also be argued that festivals can be celebrated at home, without the need to attend a church service. However, the question is asking why it 'might be' important so responses should have looked for reasons why festivals might be celebrated with church services.
- (c) Many responses were comprehensive and there was a variety of ways in which this question was answered. Some responses concentrated on one or two festivals and evaluated the importance of these. Other responses adopted a more general approach and referred to 'festivals' in general. Some argued that either Christmas or Easter were the most important Christian festivals. Others suggested that all festivals are of equal importance as they all make up the Christian calendar.

Question 2

- (a) Most responses were able to describe some features which form the part of an infant baptism. Many referred to the fact that the infant will usually have a godparent, but stronger responses were able to describe any possible role these might have during the ceremony. The presence of (holy) water was noted by many. Some responses were able to give an account of some of the words that might be said during an infant baptism ceremony. Lesser known was the possible presence of other features such as a candle or a baptismal certificate.
- (b) Responses generally knew one reason as to why infant baptism is important to many Christians. The main explanation given is that infant baptism can introduce the child to the fellowship of the church. Stronger responses were able to explain this further by explaining some of the benefits of this introduction to the church at an early stage in life. Some responses appreciated that for some Christians infant baptism gives the child an advantage in life, including an awareness of morality that it otherwise would have not had.
- (c) Many responses suggested that it is very important that godparents are Christians. This is because one of the roles of godparents is to instil Christian values and to help to raise the infant in a Christian family. However, some responses argued that it does not matter whether godparents have any religious belief at all. Often the reason given was that all godparents will want the best for the child and that atheists can clearly show excellent morality and nurturing abilities. Some responses did consider whether godparents can belong to another religion.

Question 3

- (a) Weaker responses merely gave a list of how 'love your neighbour' might be practised. The question is 'give an account of' which does mean that more information needs to be given. Common responses included such things as 'helping out'. This is a valid response but giving an account of what 'helping out' might mean is what was needed in order that a response may access the higher levels. Responses could also consider the emotional and/or spiritual aspects of 'love your neighbour'. Also, missionary work and/or the work of Christian aid agencies would be relevant to this response.
- (b) Some candidates appeared to struggled a little with this question as they wanted to say that Christians *should* worry about possessions. Those that did access the question provided a range of explanations. Some perceptive responses were able to suggest that 'God will provide' as well as the idea that ultimately material possessions do not matter. Relating this question to what they knew about Christian beliefs about the afterlife would have been useful. That is that material goods are of no use in the afterlife and that there are 'treasures in heaven.'
- (c) Most candidates agreed that thinking about people who are suffering could help people to become better Christians. Some questioning of what a 'better Christian' might be an interesting addition to the question. Some reasons given in agreement with this question were that having empathy is a good Christian quality, as well as the argument that thinking of those less fortunate is also what Jesus did. An alternative argument would be that being a 'good' Christians should be a given without having to be alerted to the suffering of others. Some referred to the need for action as well as thought. Fewer candidates suggested that thinking about the suffering of others could actually make some question their beliefs.

Section B Islam

Question 4

- (a) Many responses were familiar with the fact that Muslims wear ihram. Some described the fact that this is white cloth which is a means by which Muslims display that they are in a state of purity. Stronger responses looked at ihram in its wider sense. Some knew that this would mean that certain rituals are performed and that certain activities are not allowed. Less well known was the fact that men should not cut their nails or their hair. Similarly, only stronger responses were aware of purity being maintained by not wearing perfume or by wearing cosmetics. A very good inclusion would have referred more to pure thoughts as well as actions.
- (b) Responses were generally familiar with the fact that Makkah is important. However, the question was asking why Makkah is important, looking for its significance historically. Responses could explain that this is where Islam began, possibly recounting the revelations of Muhammad (pbuh). Some noted the significance of Makkah due to it being Muhammad's birthplace. Less well known was that it is where his grave is. Some responses were able to place the Kaba in its historical context, thus showing the significance of Makkah further.
- (c) It was clear to many that the wearing of ihram is for reasons of equality. Many agreed with the statement for this reason. Strong responses commented that equality is an important feature within Islam as a whole. Ideas surrounding equality and brotherhood were common in responses. Some responses separated these two things whereas others made brotherhood and equality two parts of one whole. Other responses did suggest other important features of hajj. Examples included references to the importance of pilgrimage itself, irrespective of the notion of equality.

Question 5

- (a) Some responses looked at thoughts and actions that are halal and then eliminated those in order to describe what is haram. Generally, candidates found it easier to describe the actions rather than the thoughts which are haram. Weaker responses were only able to describe food items. Stronger responses were able to show how greedy or envious thoughts would be haram as well as deceitful actions, for example. Some candidates included reference to shirk and could show that this is haram in both thought and action.
- (b) Shariah is a code of conduct for Muslims. It is the ethical guide which forms an integral part of the life of a Muslim. Living life according to Shariah means living life according to the straight and established path. Doing this is important as it ensures that life runs smoothly and that right and wrong are clearly established. Shariah is set according to the example of the Prophet (pbuh) and so this makes it important in itself.
- (c) By far most responses agreed with this statement. This is because the thoughts and actions of Muslims should be in accordance with Muslim principles. If a job conflicts with Muslim principles, then it can be legitimately argued that a Muslim cannot, with a good conscience, do that job. Some responses did consider that there might be occasions when a Muslim might need to take a job that does not conform to Muslim principles. A reason given was that the fundamental obligation would be to provide for their family. It could also be argued that the fundamental obligation should be to God.

Question 6

- (a) In order to access the higher levels, responses needed to supplement fairly generic points with teachings which relate to Islam in particular. Bringing up children who learn good manners and providing them with a good home life is standard across religions and families without a religion. Specific reference could be made to teaching children about Shariah Law or about the example of the Prophet (pbuh), which would lead to stronger responses. The value of family life in general would also be relevant here.
- (b) The same applies in this part question as it did in **part (a)**. It is accepted across all societies that the elderly should be cared for and there are obvious ways in which this could be done. For example, one way is by caring for their physical and spiritual needs. Explaining specific ways in

which Muslims can care for elderly people in a family could involve a number of things. It could be said that Muslims can ensure that the elderly are helped to attend the mosque or are given opportunities for worship at home.

- (c) Some responses appreciated the importance of respect for elders in Islam. Because of this it was suggested that the statement is true. Further, other reasons were given for agreeing with the statement such as parents always set a good example so following parents' example is always the best thing to do. However, other lines of argument could disagree with the statement. Some responses argued that some parents might not set a good example and so children should make their own decisions in life.

Section C Judaism

Question 7

- (a) Shavuot is an agricultural festival. It is one of the three Pilgrimage festivals. This festival celebrates the revelation by G-d of the five books of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, seven weeks after the Exodus. During the festival several things are traditionally done. Jews might have festive meals. Certain dairy products might be eaten as well as certain fruits and other such produce. In some synagogues particular poems might be read. The Book of Ruth is also read. Jewish homes and synagogues are traditionally decorated with green items. All night Torah study might be performed by some. Many do no creative work at Shavuot.
- (b) As Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah then it is obvious that the Torah should feature highly at this time. Hence the intensive Torah study. The Book of Ruth especially is prominent. Many reasons are suggested for this. One is to celebrate the conversion of Ruth to Judaism. Another is that King David was born and died at Shavuot. The decoration of homes with greenery is to commemorate the festival as an agricultural one. In terms of the consumption of dairy produce, the Torah was compared to milk by King Solomon. It also refers to the separation of meat and milk which was necessary after the Torah had been given.
- (c) Many responses were comprehensive and offered a range of reasoning. Some suggested that past events are not as important as contemporary events and therefore are relatively unimportant. Many responses however argued that past events have shaped Judaism today and are very important indeed. Often the examples given were of particular festivals with the reasons for their celebration also being given. For others the past is something that it would be better to forget if it holds painful memories and examples were given.

Question 8

- (a) Charity is an important concept in Judaism and children might be taught about this from a young age. Children will be taught that Jews should give to those that are less fortunate. This can include the giving of money, other items and the giving of one's time. The general teaching will concern justice and righteousness which will extend to all people. Children will be taught that they will benefit from being charitable as much as the person receiving. Children will be encouraged to deposit money in pushkes which are collection boxes. These can be found in the home and in synagogues. This pushke can be filled at any time but there are certain festival times where it is more encouraged.
- (b) In general, Jewish teaching would say that wealth ultimately belongs to G-d. Any human being who has personal wealth is fortunate and should acknowledge that. It is the duty of Jewish people to share their wealth with others. This is evidenced by the emphasis on charity in Judaism. Jewish teachings about personal wealth are that everyone is equal before G-d. No human being should be in need and Jews should extend charity to others in their everyday lives. Some responses were able to introduce concepts and general principles which, if followed, ward against the misuse of personal wealth.
- (c) Some responses argued that charity itself might not always be a helpful thing as it might make some people feel too complacent. Other responses addressed this question in a different way. In these responses candidates discussed the relative merits of charity which is performed publicly and privately. It could also be argued that as charity can take physical and spiritual forms that helping people in one of these ways might be better than the other. Many weaker responses just considered how large the donation might be and tended to focus on monetary donations.

Question 9

- (a) Weaker responses included rituals performed on the body of the deceased and/or described what happens at a Jewish funeral. Stronger responses focused on the question and were able to give a range of customs observed by the family. One such custom might be that there is a reception held in the synagogue or at the home. Families will light a candle for the deceased. They might sit on low stools and cover mirrors. Personal grooming is not allowed nor is intimacy. The Kaddish will be recited. A second period of mourning might be observed for thirty days after the funeral. Some family members will mourn for a year after the death.
- (b) Jewish mourning customs can help people considerably after a death. The customs display a realistic approach to death as well as an 'acceptance'. One custom is that the Jewish community will help the family during their period of mourning, and this will help the family cope with the pressures after the death of a loved one. The customs of covering mirrors and the prohibition on hair cutting will help mourners. This is because the mourner does not have to worry about personal appearance. Symbolism also helps. Light is important. The sitting on low stools shows that the person is feeling low. There is no pressure on the mourner to return to everyday life quickly.
- (c) Some responses suggested that Jewish funerals should always be simple occasions as the simplicity will very much be of benefit to mourners. The simple, plain coffin ensures that all people are considered equal. There will be no pressure on families to have to pay for elaborate occasions. In fact, the simplicity of the funeral ensures that complete focus is on the memory of the deceased person. All of one's attention can be on that. However, other responses suggested that mourners are benefitted more by being able to choose the type of funeral they wish to arrange. This could be the choice of the deceased. For some, an elaborate funeral makes them feel that they have given the deceased a fitting 'send-off'.