

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/11
Paper 1

Key messages

Candidates need to:

- understand the key differences between the religions
- read the question very carefully
- answer the specific question with relevant knowledge

General comments

Overall, many scripts displayed both good understanding and some interesting reflective material. Some candidates had better understanding of one religion than another. Generally, those who opted to answer questions on Islam demonstrated good understanding. Answers on Judaism were mixed, with much generalisation on charity and festivals. Here a minority of candidates confused Christian and Jewish beliefs. Answers on Christianity were mixed in quality, with some candidates confused about Christian faith and practice, and some substituting evangelical exhortation for knowledge.

A minority of candidates need to practice using time effectively as they were not using the number of marks available as a useful guide to the expected length of answers. Some penalised themselves by writing at unnecessary length only to run out of time without completing the required number of questions. A few candidates answered only one question from each section, despite the requirement to answer all questions in the section.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) (i) Most candidates answered this question well, giving a good account of the symbols of water, oils, the sign of the cross and a white garment. Some responses confused a 'cross' with the 'sign of the cross' and thought that a dove appeared during the ceremony.
- (ii) While many candidates had a good understanding of the responsibilities of godparents, there were some less successful answers which were general and confused, with little understanding of the spiritual responsibilities of godparents.
- (b) Most candidates had a good understanding of why Christians think that being baptised is important. Many described baptism as the first of the three sacraments of initiation and an important foundation therefore to any Christian faith.
- (c) There were many very good responses to this question, giving good arguments from both points of view. Many saw being baptised as an infant and growing up in the Christian faith as the way to become a stronger Christian, while others put equally strong arguments together for the idea that choosing to be baptised demonstrated a fuller commitment to their faith.

Question 2

- (a) (i) Most candidates understood that tithing is about giving, but fewer understood that the idea of giving a tenth of one's income or produce to their church was expected by a number of Christian denominations.

- (ii) Candidates generally responded well to this question, producing answers which gave wide-ranging examples of ways Christians can fulfil this duty. Some described the sort of things which can be done in their local parishes such as fund-raising for local charities or individuals who are suffering. Others took a more world-wide view, for example discussing support for raising disaster funds.
- (b) Most candidates were able to give a good account, both of the action of Jesus demonstrating his care for others, and the teachings such as the 'Sheep and the Goats'. They explained that being Christians meant being followers of Jesus, and that in turn meant following what he did and what he said we should do. A few needed to focus their responses on 'important', to avoid producing more 'implicit' responses.
- (c) Many candidates assessed this question as producing a false dichotomy, in that looking after one's family does not preclude worrying about the suffering of others. Some felt it was arguable that a man's first priority is to look after his family. Once one has had children they must become the main responsibility in his life. Others argued that not helping those who are suffering could in fact put their own family at risk, and therefore could be seen as equally important.

Question 3

- (a) (i) This question depended on candidates simply knowing the meaning of certain words; the majority did and were credited with full marks.
- (ii) Most candidates demonstrated a good understanding and knowledge of the rites which take place seven days after a child is born. They wrote accurately about the circumcision, the shaving of the child's head and the hair being weighed.
- (b) Most candidates began their responses by assessing the importance of the feasts of sacrifice, many mentioning the significance of the event in Abraham's life where he was asked to sacrifice his own son. Others pointed to Islam being a religion of submission to Allah and gave many examples of how believers might have expectations of smaller to greater sacrifices in their lives.
- (c) Many candidates argued for the importance of both Ummah and family. Some were keen to explain that they believed family to be the most important aspect of the Islamic religion. They argued that it is in family that they first learn the teachings of Islam and the importance of these messages. Others were clear that the Ummah was essential to the growth and support of Islam and that it often needed the Ummah to survive.

Question 4

- (a) (i) Most candidates explained that the Minaret was a tower usually attached to a mosque from which the adhan, call to prayer, is proclaimed. Some added that it was a sign of where the community should gather for prayer.
- (ii) The majority of candidates knew that mosques contain a wall niche, known as mihrab, which indicates the qiblah, explaining that is fixed in the direction of the Ka'ba in Makkah. A few confused it with other features of a mosque such as the dome or the rooms for performing Wudu.
- (b) Most candidates gave a good account both of how and why Wudu is performed. The best responses demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of niyyah (intention) and mental preparation being as important as being physically clean. They then went on to give a detailed account of washing which follows the recitation of Bismillah. A few did not go much beyond a few acts of washing.
- (c) Candidates generally gave a good account of the need to be pure in mind and body to pray, while at the same time demonstrating awareness of the conditions where they could clean themselves with sand rather than water. Most gave a good account of both sides of this issue, demonstrating sound evaluative skills. The primacy of prayer over other actions was often argued.

Question 5

- (a) (i) Candidates gave a good account of the Shema and its roots in the book of Deuteronomy 6. Many described it as the most important prayer in Judaism as well as an important statement of Jewish beliefs.

- (ii) The majority of candidates were able to give a good account of the importance of this prayer, both through its use at different times of the day and its inclusion on doorposts in the home, written on a scroll inside a mezuzah. The point was also made that a tefillin is often strapped on the arm or forehead.
- (b) There were many different attempts to answer this question. Those who knew about the oral tradition and its importance tended to write good responses showing its importance in understanding the written laws. Some suggested that even with its 613 commandments, the Torah on its own was an insufficient guide for Jewish life.
- (c) This question elicited some thoughtful and insightful reflections on the importance of sacred writings. Some looked at the extent to which we are living in a very different world from the one in which these writings were put together. The way media and especially social media has helped bring about a world where cultures are being assessed and questioned on an almost daily basis was not considered when these were written. Other candidates argued that at root many moral questions have not changed and that sacred writings had the ability to contribute much to ethical debates.

Question 6

- (a) (i) Some candidates wrote out all they knew about Bar Mitzvah preparation rather than Bat Mitzvah. They rarely mentioned that she might focus on the mitzvah, which refer more specifically to women. Most candidates managed to mention 'preparing for a party'.
- (ii) Candidates generally knew that there would be a religious ceremony in a synagogue or temple. In some synagogues the girls would be expected to read from the Torah and may recite some prayers. Some also said she may have prepared a short speech in her own language. Some discussed that now she has become a daughter of the commandments she is a woman in the eyes of Judaism.
- (b) Candidates generally responded well to this question. They mostly demonstrated a good understanding of Jewish ritual both in the synagogue and the home. Many discussed the Sabbath rituals and the roles of different members of the family in the Passover rituals. Many used their responses to show how Judaism and its rituals permeate the daily lives of Jews.
- (c) While there are many different roles for men and women in Judaism, many candidates recognised that the differences do not mean that rituals are more relevant to either sex. They gave examples of the importance and relevance of rituals which are practiced by both men and women. Lower achieving responses gave one-sided poorly supported answers.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/12
Paper 1

Key messages

Candidates need to:

- understand the key differences between the religions
- read the question very carefully
- answer the specific question with relevant knowledge and specific detail where required

General comments

Overall, many scripts displayed both good understanding and some interesting reflective material. Some candidates had better understanding of one religion than another. Generally, those who opted to answer questions on Islam demonstrated good understanding, with the exception of **Question 4(a)(ii)**, which was difficult for a significant number. Answers on Judaism were mixed, with much generalisation on charity and festivals. Here, a minority of candidates confused Christian and Jewish beliefs, for example by referring to Pesach as a feast about Jesus' redemptive actions. Answers on Christianity were mixed in quality, with some candidates confused about Christian faith and practice, and some substituting evangelical exhortation for knowledge.

A few of candidates should practice using time effectively as they were not using the number of marks available as a useful guide to the expected length of answers. Some penalised themselves by writing at unnecessary length, only to run out of time without completing the required number of questions. A few candidates answered only one question from each section, despite the requirement to answer all questions in the section.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) (i) Most candidates could name three significant days in Lent, though Epiphany, Christmas and Shrove Tuesday were often added to Lenten occasions, and some candidates wrote 'Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday'.
- (ii) This was generally well-answered, though some were unable to move very far beyond prayer and fasting. Some offered slightly other responses, such as 'giving up killing people' or 'going without food or water for forty days'.
- (b) The best responses demonstrated understanding of the principal events and days of Holy Week, pointing out their different significance. Some produced more generalised responses about preparation, buying presents and decorations, and a few thought the week preceded Christmas.
- (c) Answers were often very generalised as some candidates were unaware of festivals other than Christmas and Easter. Some considered the issue in wholly secular terms (parties and decorations) without considering religious aspects of the question.

Question 2

- (a)(i)(ii) Responses were mixed. For those who knew the 10 Commandments, the questions were straightforward, but many responses did not display this knowledge.

A significant number of responses demonstrated a confusion between the two greatest commandments and the decalogue.

- (b) Some found it difficult to move much beyond 'love for neighbour', but the best answers were much more specific in detailing how that love should be shown, incorporating ideas such as forgiveness and reconciliation under the rubric of love. Many focused on Christian actions rather than teachings.
- (c) Again, the better answers were specific in citing instances of Christian service, while others were general in discussion. Some lower achieving answers interpreted 'service' as meaning 'having the job of servant', suggesting that not everyone could be a waiter or that the need for service had been superseded by the advent of self-service stores. A significant number of candidates missed marks by not expressing a personal opinion.

Section B – Islam

Question 3

- (a) (i)(ii) Most candidates answered these questions well.
- (b) Good responses explained why each of the Five Pillars is significant within Islam, but some simply referred to the Five Pillars in general terms, with the result that some of their statements were unsupported assertions with little substance. Sometimes a list of the pillars and what they mean would be given, but with no clear link to the question about Islam not existing without them.
- (c) Responses were very mixed in quality. More perceptive answers demonstrated the public aspects of Islam entailed by the Five Pillars and supporting beliefs. The best answers referred to the public aspects of Islam adopted in distinctive dress and behaviour. Some responses demonstrated a lack of understanding of the concept of 'private matter', offering only vague answers.

Question 4

- (a) (i) Responses to this question were mixed, with many showing a lack of specific knowledge. 'Because he felt like it' was offered among less persuasive responses.
- (ii) This was difficult for the majority of candidates. Many ignored the phrase 'on his arrival' in the question, describing instead later events in Medina. Quite a large number discussed Muhammad (pbuh) in the cave after leaving Makkah. Other answers seemed to confuse Yathrib with Makkah as a place that was hostile to Muhammad.
- (b) Most responses demonstrated knowledge of Muhammad (pbuh) as the last prophet and some developed very well his specific significance in relation to the Qur'an and Allah's final message.
- (c) Overall, this question was well answered with a good for/against argument. Most responses argued in favour of Muhammad (pbuh) being most important, with some candidates giving good insights. Many candidates also understood that, in reality, most Muslims see all prophets as equally important, but Muhammad (pbuh) is more central because he corrected the distortions of the past with the Qur'an.

Section C – Judaism

Question 5

- (a) (i) While most candidates were aware of the use of the pushke boxes (sometimes referred to as 'piggy-banks'), rather fewer were able to develop other aspects of Jewish education about charity.

- (ii) There were good answers from those familiar with Gemilut hasadim, but too many wrote generally about giving, unaware that the concept did not involve the giving of money. Better answers revealed specific knowledge of the charitable actions entailed. Some responses did not give any examples of kind actions and instead talked about kind actions being rewarded by God.
- (b) Again, many candidates resorted to generalisation about giving to be blessed, revealing little detailed understanding of a concept so fully developed in Jewish life and practice.
- (c) Better responses dealt thoughtfully with the relationship in Judaism between charity as a duty and its dutiful development of religious choice and the right disposition. Most answers saw the issue in either/or terms and made little reference to specific practice in Judaism.

Question 6

- (a) (i) Some did not notice that the question was about preparations and not the feast itself. Some, despite the wording of the question, did not notice the significance of unleavened bread, and a few confused the feast with Christmas. Most, however, had some conception of the preparations.
- (ii) Many responses demonstrated no knowledge of the meaning of Haggadah, saying that it was a table-cloth or a candle, but better answers outlined its purpose of readings and instructions.
- (b) There were good answers from those who had learned and remembered the items used, though some simply listed the items without explaining their significance, thus overlooking the precise requirements of the question.
- (c) This question needed some specific knowledge of Jewish festivals to make a reasoned judgment, and there were some excellent answers from those who thought through the issues. In many answers there was a good for/against argument with the examples of Pesach and Rosh Hashanah being most commonly referred to. Some candidates appear to have misunderstood the question and answered it as though it were **1(c)**.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/13
Paper 1

Key messages

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A minority of candidates need to practice using time effectively as they were not using the number of marks available as a useful guide to the expected length of answers. Some penalised themselves by writing at unnecessary length only to run out of time without completing the required number of questions. A few candidates answered only one question from each section, despite the requirement to answer all questions in the section.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

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- (ii) While many candidates had a good understanding of the responsibilities of godparents, there were some less successful answers which were general and confused, with little understanding of the spiritual responsibilities of godparents.
- (b) Most candidates had a good understanding of why Christians think that being baptised is important. Many described baptism as the first of the three sacraments of initiation and an important foundation therefore to any Christian faith.
- (c) There were many very good responses to this question, giving good arguments from both points of view. Many saw being baptised as an infant and growing up in the Christian faith as the way to become a stronger Christian, while others put equally strong arguments together for the idea that choosing to be baptised demonstrated a fuller commitment to their faith.

Question 2

- (a) (i) Most candidates understood that tithing is about giving, but fewer understood that the idea of giving a tenth of one's income or produce to their church was expected by a number of Christian denominations.

- (ii) Candidates generally responded well to this question, producing answers which gave wide-ranging examples of ways Christians can fulfil this duty. Some described the sort of things which can be done in their local parishes such as fund-raising for local charities or individuals who are suffering. Others took a more world-wide view, for example discussing support for raising disaster funds.
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- (ii) The majority of candidates knew that mosques contain a wall niche, known as mihrab, which indicates the qiblah, explaining that is fixed in the direction of the Ka'ba in Makkah. A few confused it with other features of a mosque such as the dome or the rooms for performing Wudu.
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Question 5

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- (ii) The majority of candidates were able to give a good account of the importance of this prayer, both through its use at different times of the day and its inclusion on doorposts in the home, written on a scroll inside a mezuzah. The point was also made that a tefillin is often strapped on the arm or forehead.
- (b) There were many different attempts to answer this question. Those who knew about the oral tradition and its importance tended to write good responses showing its importance in understanding the written laws. Some suggested that even with its 613 commandments, the Torah on its own was an insufficient guide for Jewish life.
- (c) This question elicited some thoughtful and insightful reflections on the importance of sacred writings. Some looked at the extent to which we are living in a very different world from the one in which these writings were put together. The way media and especially social media has helped bring about a world where cultures are being assessed and questioned on an almost daily basis was not considered when these were written. Other candidates argued that at root many moral questions have not changed and that sacred writings had the ability to contribute much to ethical debates.

Question 6

- (a) (i) Some candidates wrote out all they knew about Bar Mitzvah preparation rather than Bat Mitzvah. They rarely mentioned that she might focus on the mitzvah, which refer more specifically to women. Most candidates managed to mention 'preparing for a party'.
- (ii) Candidates generally knew that there would be a religious ceremony in a synagogue or temple. In some synagogues the girls would be expected to read from the Torah and may recite some prayers. Some also said she may have prepared a short speech in her own language. Some discussed that now she has become a daughter of the commandments she is a woman in the eyes of Judaism.
- (b) Candidates generally responded well to this question. They mostly demonstrated a good understanding of Jewish ritual both in the synagogue and the home. Many discussed the Sabbath rituals and the roles of different members of the family in the Passover rituals. Many used their responses to show how Judaism and its rituals permeate the daily lives of Jews.
- (c) While there are many different roles for men and women in Judaism, many candidates recognised that the differences do not mean that rituals are more relevant to either sex. They gave examples of the importance and relevance of rituals which are practiced by both men and women. Lower achieving responses gave one-sided poorly supported answers.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/21
Paper 2

Key messages

Candidates need to:

- Understand the key differences between the religions
- Read the question very carefully
- Answer the specific question with relevant knowledge and specific detail where required.

General comments

All three religions were represented across the range of candidate responses and all three were answered equally well. There were few rubric errors, but some candidates answered questions for one religion with information from another. For example, several answers wrote about a church when the question was about a synagogue.

It is important that candidates learn to adapt their material so that they can answer the question that is on the question paper, not a question that they have practiced. The part (c) questions require the candidates to give a personal opinion as well as different points of view in their answers. The personal opinion was quite often omitted.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Christianity

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates were able to answer this question. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to write about certain things like the bride and bridegroom, legal statements, witnesses and someone who is authorised to conduct the wedding. Most candidates wrote about the bride and groom and the vows, but only better responses mentioned the witnesses and the person conducting the wedding.
- (b) This question was answered satisfactorily. More could have been written about how more women tend to work in the twenty-first century and responses could have used the teachings of Paul, for example in Ephesians. Responses tended to be general, e.g. that the man should work and the woman should stay at home to raise the children, and then the marriage would last.
- (c) Most candidates were able to answer this question well, looking at both sides of the argument and coming to a conclusion.

Question 2

- (a) Some candidates had good responses, but generally, the question was not answered well. Confirmation was confused with baptism, First Communion and confession. A few candidates mentioned the oil. Some candidates thought that Confirmation was for babies (infant baptism).
- (b) As above, First Communion was confused with Confirmation, confession and baptism. Answers tended to describe what happened, rather than why First Communion was important. Very few candidates answered why it is an important step of commitment. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to address this part of the question.

- (c) This question was answered well. It was the best answered part of this question.

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates answered this question using Bethlehem and Jerusalem. They answered by describing the places during the lifetime of Jesus. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to say something about what remains now and the churches that have been built on the different sites.
- (b) This question was answered very generally, mainly by saying that a visit helps to strengthen faith. More could have been said about how visiting these places reaffirms a Christian's belief in Jesus as God incarnate and as Saviour and Messiah. Only a few candidates explored the connection with the Old Testament and these places.
- (c) This question was well done. Candidates were able to construct arguments and produce personal opinions in their responses.

Section B: Islam

Question 4

- (a) Most candidates who answered this question did so by using the Five Pillars. The best answers were able to link this with equality, race, nationality and so on. Some candidates did not make the link and just described whichever Pillar they chose, usually Zakah or Hajj, and said that this is when the Ummah unites in the same thing.
- (b) This question was answered quite well. The best answers gave examples of countries where Shariah law is the law such as Saudi Arabia, which means that it is very important. It was important that candidates understood what Shariah law is, rather than just describing how the laws are derived.
- (c) The best answers for this question used some interesting comparisons to argue whether or not obeying God's law was most important. The majority of candidates used faith and prayer as being potentially more important. Evaluation and personal opinions were well executed for this question.

Question 5

- (a) Generally, candidates knew funeral rites, but many described them in a general way rather than in any detail. For example, candidates stated that the body should be washed three times, but did not then say that the body is perfumed with scents. Also, the words which are said as the body is lowered into the ground were very rarely mentioned.
- (b) This question was well answered, explaining that on the Last Day all Muslims will be judged for their actions, which have been recorded.
- (c) Again, this question was well answered. Candidates looked at it from the viewpoint of religion, but many also looked at it from the perspective of emotional well-being. Some candidates initially agreed with the statement, but then argued finally that mourning should not be excessive. Most candidates came to this compromise.

Question 6

- (a) Most candidates knew how Muslims give Zakah. The best responses were able to answer the second part of the question with more than just the poor, e.g. travellers, converts, prisoners of war. Very few responses mentioned paying the Zakah collectors.
- (b) Most responses were general in their answer to this question, saying that individuals benefitted by giving to the poor, that the poor benefitted by being able to afford food, and that the community benefitted because Muslims were made more equal. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to include an explanation that Zakah is a form of worship and that it needs to be done with sincere intention and willingness: it is a way of showing submission to God. Zakah is more than just giving and receiving.

- (c) This question elicited some passionately argued responses and most candidates answered the question well. If a candidate started out making a statement that it was the responsibility of the government or religion, they tended to come to the conclusion that relief of poverty was actually the responsibility of both the government and religion. Most candidates had a personal opinion.

Section C: Judaism

Question 7

- (a) Most responses were general in answering this question. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to include details such as the bride visiting the Mikveh before the ceremony, the marriage contract being read out at the ceremony, the groom led to the chuppah by his and the bride's father and standing facing Israel, and the bride being accompanied by her mother and the groom's mother. These details were very rarely seen as most candidates mentioned the marriage contract being signed, the couple standing under the chuppah, the seven blessings, the drinking of wine and the breaking of the glass, but not in great detail.
- (b) This question was answered well, with candidates explaining about the Rabbi's role in worship, the rites of passage, giving advice, education and spending their time in study.
- (c) Again, this question was fairly well answered, with arguments and personal opinions.

Question 8

- (a) To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to read the question carefully. Many responses described what happened on Shabbat rather than describing the regulations and categories of what work is forbidden. The best responses described some of these regulations and categories.
- (b) This question was answered well, with responses including the time to think about God, worshipping as a family both at home and at the synagogue, and having family time at home.
- (c) As with **Question 6(c)**, candidates often started by saying that one or other of the home and synagogue was the most important, but through their arguments they tended to come to the conclusion that the statement was correct. This question was answered well.

Question 9

- (a) This question was answered well, with many candidates producing a lot of details. Only a few responses mentioned that manufactured goods have to be checked under rabbinical supervision.
- (b) This question was answered well.
- (c) This question elicited a mixed response. Some candidates answered that as the rules come from God and are part of the covenant, they should still be practical today. Some candidates said that as kosher food can be bought in shops, it is practical. Most candidates said that rules about food are practical and some candidates wrote about the health benefits.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/22
Paper 2

Key messages

Candidates need to:

- Understand the key differences between the religions
- Read the question very carefully
- Answer the specific question with relevant knowledge and specific detail where required.

General comments

All three religions were represented across the range of candidate responses and all three were answered equally well. The standard of Religious Studies knowledge and its application appeared stronger than in previous years. There were few rubric errors, but some candidates did answer questions for one religion with information from another. For example, several answers wrote about a church when the question was about a synagogue.

It is important that candidates learn to adapt their material so that they can answer the question that is on the question paper, not a question that they have practised. The part (c) questions require candidates to give a personal opinion as well as different points of view in their answers; the personal opinion was quite often omitted.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Christianity

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates were able to answer this question. Candidates needed to be selective with the material that they used rather than writing in general terms about church services. Some candidates concentrated on the meaning of the Eucharist rather than describing the service, whilst others did not mention the Last Supper or the words that Jesus spoke on this occasion. Candidates should be able to recognise the different terms: For example, some candidates confused 'Holy Communion' with communication between Christians.
- (b) This question tended to be answered in a general way. Some candidates combined public and private worship, whilst others looked at them separately. When answering a question with two parts, candidates need to have a balanced answer to achieve the higher levels.
- (c) Candidates used several different approaches to answer this question. Few candidates looked at the question from a denominational perspective, although it was sometimes mentioned. Most responses were one-sided accounts of what the candidate thought it meant to be a Christian. Good answers identified what a Christian would expect to be essential beliefs and backed them up with teaching. Candidates found it difficult to express and support a personal opinion.

Question 2

- (a) This question was the least popular in this section. A number of candidates missed out this question, but those who did attempt it did it well. Candidates needed to refer to the 'cruel treatment' in the question, not just give a general account of the events of Holy Week. Details were required.

- (b) Candidates needed to know what Ascension Day was. Some confused it with Epiphany and some with Advent. More candidates wrote about the resurrection of Jesus, but took the narrative no further. Some wrote about Pentecost instead of Ascension. Most who wrote about Ascension achieved a satisfactory or good level.
- (c) Candidates recognised an issue requiring discussion and most proposed and supported a conclusion. This was done in general terms, rather than with the Christian specific material required by the question, but some candidates were able to utilise historic material on Christian persecution to good effect and others used social and cultural contexts to consider what makes a religion a 'minority'. There was some confusion about what a minority religion was and whether it deserved to be persecuted.

Question 3

- (a) Overall, this question was not well answered. Most answers were basic, limited to describing Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus and where the Magi visited him. Those who expanded did so with reference to David and events in the Old Testament. Nazareth was described as the place where Jesus spent his childhood but little else was said. It is important for candidates to know the difference between the places mentioned in the Bible as some described Nazareth as where Jesus was crucified, or baptised, or resurrected and ascended to heaven.
- (b) Most candidates were aware of Epiphany being associated with the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to explain why this was a significant event, not just describe the event. The best responses recognised the disparate events associated with Epiphany. Again, an explanation of their significance was required.
- (c) This question was well done. Candidates were able to construct arguments and produce personal opinions in their responses.

Section B: Islam

Question 4

- (a) There were many reasonable attempts at this question. There were a few excellent, detailed answers. Some candidates mixed up the features and their religious purposes, whilst many candidates appeared to be confused about what an 'architectural feature' might be. Consequently, there was a lot of irrelevant material. Most candidates were aware of at least some of the key features of a mosque and were able to describe them and how they are used.

It is important that candidates know the difference between mosques, churches and synagogues and can assign them to the correct religion. Not only did candidates describe mosques with altars and pews, but there were references to 'Muslim churches' and similar. This was not confined to just this question, but was seen throughout this section.

- (b) Generally, this question was well answered, with some very good answers including a range of roles and their significance. Candidates should know the difference between 'Imam' and 'Muezzin' as some thought that these terms were interchangeable.
- (c) This question was answered fairly well by some candidates. Others included little or no discussion and some candidates found it difficult to find arguments to support the statement.

Question 5

- (a) Candidates needed to start their answers by saying that pilgrims go to the Ka'ba and then describe the different stages of Hajj. Candidates were familiar with the concepts and events, but quite often were unable to follow the sequence.
- (b) This question was reasonably answered, but more detailed understanding of the significance of the sacrifice was required. Many candidates described the story of Ibrahim and Ishmael. Some candidates borrowed the phrasing from part (c) in an attempt to show that the significance of the sacrifice is the importance of these qualities for Muslims, which was done with reasonable success.

- (c) Candidates needed to understand what compassion and responsibility are and what making a sacrifice might have to do with these qualities. Candidates tended to concentrate on one aspect and found evaluation difficult.

Question 6

- (a) A few candidates were able to connect the split with the death of Muhammad (pbuh) and a few knew the names of Abu Bakr and Ali. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to know the details.
- (b) Candidates needed to talk about the shared beliefs 'about God'. Most candidates gave a summary of the beliefs Muslims share, for example life after death, angels and Muhammad (pbuh). These were generally given as a list, with little development or attempt to connect them further to beliefs about God, and only a few of them (such as Tawhid) were beliefs about God.
- (c) Most candidates answered either that Islam is a universal religion, or that Islam is a religion of peace. Few candidates combined the two as in the question. The better responses were able to explain the concept of Jihad, both lesser and greater, and some gave explicit consideration of the difference between valuing peace and being a pacifist that characterises Islam. Some candidates needed to give more evaluation and a personal opinion.

Section C: Judaism

Question 7

- (a) This question was reasonably well answered. The majority of candidates identified Sukkot correctly and focused on the building and the use of the sukkah.
- (b) The question lent itself to a generic response and that is mostly what the candidates gave. Answers to this question tended to be quite extensive with a small amount of Judaism specific content.
- (c) Candidates seemed to engage well with this question and produced very personal arguments on one side or the other. Most candidates who attempted it were able to give different perspectives and to reach a conclusion. As with part (b), Judaism specific content was very limited.

Question 8

- (a) This was a well-answered question. All responses were able to list the main items, with the lowest achieving ones with limited description of at least one of them, and the better answers with detailed description of all of them.
- (b) Good answers showed understanding and a clear relationship between belief and practice. Some responses gave generic answers about the importance of texts in worship. It was important that candidates recognised the association between the Sefer Torah and the synagogue.

As stated above in *Section B*, there was some noticeable Christianisation of responses such as the 'Jewish Bible', describing a synagogue as a Jewish church and Jews communicating with Jesus. It is important that candidates understand the differences between the religions and use the correct terminology.

- (c) This question was well answered, with some mature and thoughtful responses given.

Question 9

- (a) Most candidates answered this question well and identified the correct ceremony. A minority of candidates would have given better answers if they had been more specific about what circumcision actually involves. Candidates should not confuse Brit Milah with Bar Mitzvah.
- (b) Most candidates were able to make reference to the Covenant in their responses. These responses needed more details to gain the higher levels of response.

- (c) To answer this question, candidates tended to write in general about people and whether or not a single ceremony could determine their religion. They needed to be more specific and write about Brit Milah. There were some excellent responses which considered circumcision and the various possible reasons as to why it might be undertaken as a means of examining whether Brit Milah constituted an undeniable stamp of identity.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/23
Paper 2

Key messages

Candidates need to:

- Understand the key differences between the religions
- Read the question very carefully
- Answer the specific question with relevant knowledge and specific detail where required.

General comments

All three religions were represented across the range of candidate responses and all three were answered equally well. There were few rubric errors, but some candidates answered questions for one religion with information from another. For example, several answers wrote about a church when the question was about a synagogue.

It is important that candidates learn to adapt their material so that they can answer the question that is on the question paper, not a question that they have practiced. The part (c) questions require the candidates to give a personal opinion as well as different points of view in their answers. The personal opinion was quite often omitted.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Christianity

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates were able to answer this question. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to write about certain things like the bride and bridegroom, legal statements, witnesses and someone who is authorised to conduct the wedding. Most candidates wrote about the bride and groom and the vows, but only better responses mentioned the witnesses and the person conducting the wedding.
- (b) This question was answered satisfactorily. More could have been written about how more women tend to work in the twenty-first century and responses could have used the teachings of Paul, for example in Ephesians. Responses tended to be general, e.g. that the man should work and the woman should stay at home to raise the children, and then the marriage would last.
- (c) Most candidates were able to answer this question well, looking at both sides of the argument and coming to a conclusion.

Question 2

- (a) Some candidates had good responses, but generally, the question was not answered well. Confirmation was confused with baptism, First Communion and confession. A few candidates mentioned the oil. Some candidates thought that Confirmation was for babies (infant baptism).
- (b) As above, First Communion was confused with Confirmation, confession and baptism. Answers tended to describe what happened, rather than why First Communion was important. Very few candidates answered why it is an important step of commitment. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to address this part of the question.

- (c) This question was answered well. It was the best answered part of this question.

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates answered this question using Bethlehem and Jerusalem. They answered by describing the places during the lifetime of Jesus. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to say something about what remains now and the churches that have been built on the different sites.
- (b) This question was answered very generally, mainly by saying that a visit helps to strengthen faith. More could have been said about how visiting these places reaffirms a Christian's belief in Jesus as God incarnate and as Saviour and Messiah. Only a few candidates explored the connection with the Old Testament and these places.
- (c) This question was well done. Candidates were able to construct arguments and produce personal opinions in their responses.

Section B: Islam

Question 4

- (a) Most candidates who answered this question did so by using the Five Pillars. The best answers were able to link this with equality, race, nationality and so on. Some candidates did not make the link and just described whichever Pillar they chose, usually Zakah or Hajj, and said that this is when the Ummah unites in the same thing.
- (b) This question was answered quite well. The best answers gave examples of countries where Shariah law is the law such as Saudi Arabia, which means that it is very important. It was important that candidates understood what Shariah law is, rather than just describing how the laws are derived.
- (c) The best answers for this question used some interesting comparisons to argue whether or not obeying God's law was most important. The majority of candidates used faith and prayer as being potentially more important. Evaluation and personal opinions were well executed for this question.

Question 5

- (a) Generally, candidates knew funeral rites, but many described them in a general way rather than in any detail. For example, candidates stated that the body should be washed three times, but did not then say that the body is perfumed with scents. Also, the words which are said as the body is lowered into the ground were very rarely mentioned.
- (b) This question was well answered, explaining that on the Last Day all Muslims will be judged for their actions, which have been recorded.
- (c) Again, this question was well answered. Candidates looked at it from the viewpoint of religion, but many also looked at it from the perspective of emotional well-being. Some candidates initially agreed with the statement, but then argued finally that mourning should not be excessive. Most candidates came to this compromise.

Question 6

- (a) Most candidates knew how Muslims give Zakah. The best responses were able to answer the second part of the question with more than just the poor, e.g. travellers, converts, prisoners of war. Very few responses mentioned paying the Zakah collectors.
- (b) Most responses were general in their answer to this question, saying that individuals benefitted by giving to the poor, that the poor benefitted by being able to afford food, and that the community benefitted because Muslims were made more equal. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to include an explanation that Zakah is a form of worship and that it needs to be done with sincere intention and willingness: it is a way of showing submission to God. Zakah is more than just giving and receiving.

- (c) This question elicited some passionately argued responses and most candidates answered the question well. If a candidate started out making a statement that it was the responsibility of the government or religion, they tended to come to the conclusion that relief of poverty was actually the responsibility of both the government and religion. Most candidates had a personal opinion.

Section C: Judaism

Question 7

- (a) Most responses were general in answering this question. To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to include details such as the bride visiting the Mikveh before the ceremony, the marriage contract being read out at the ceremony, the groom led to the chuppah by his and the bride's father and standing facing Israel, and the bride being accompanied by her mother and the groom's mother. These details were very rarely seen as most candidates mentioned the marriage contract being signed, the couple standing under the chuppah, the seven blessings, the drinking of wine and the breaking of the glass, but not in great detail.
- (b) This question was answered well, with candidates explaining about the Rabbi's role in worship, the rites of passage, giving advice, education and spending their time in study.
- (c) Again, this question was fairly well answered, with arguments and personal opinions.

Question 8

- (a) To achieve the higher levels, candidates needed to read the question carefully. Many responses described what happened on Shabbat rather than describing the regulations and categories of what work is forbidden. The best responses described some of these regulations and categories.
- (b) This question was answered well, with responses including the time to think about God, worshipping as a family both at home and at the synagogue, and having family time at home.
- (c) As with **Question 6(c)**, candidates often started by saying that one or other of the home and synagogue was the most important, but through their arguments they tended to come to the conclusion that the statement was correct. This question was answered well.

Question 9

- (a) This question was answered well, with many candidates producing a lot of details. Only a few responses mentioned that manufactured goods have to be checked under rabbinical supervision.
- (b) This question was answered well.
- (c) This question elicited a mixed response. Some candidates answered that as the rules come from God and are part of the covenant, they should still be practical today. Some candidates said that as kosher food can be bought in shops, it is practical. Most candidates said that rules about food are practical and some candidates wrote about the health benefits.