



National
Qualifications
2026

2026 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies

Advanced Higher

Question Paper Finalised Marking Instructions

These marking instructions have been prepared by examination teams for use by Qualifications Scotland appointed markers when marking external course assessments.

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General marking principles for Advanced Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies

Always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates' responses.

- (a) Always use positive marking. This means candidates accumulate marks for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; marks are not deducted for errors or omissions.
- (b) If a candidate response does not seem to be covered by either the principles or detailed marking instructions, and you are uncertain how to assess it, you must seek guidance from your team leader.
- (c) Where a candidate violates the rubric of the paper and answers both optional 30 mark questions in a section/part, all responses should be marked, and the better mark recorded.
- (d) Use the full range of marks available for each question.
- (e) The detailed marking instructions are not an exhaustive list. Award marks for other relevant points.
- (f) Award marks only where points relate to the question asked. Where candidates give points of knowledge without specifying the context, award marks unless it is clear that they do not refer to the context of the question.
- (g) In this question paper the following skills are assessed:
 - knowledge and understanding
 - analysis
 - evaluation.
- (h) For essay questions candidates must integrate these skills with their knowledge, in response to the question or statement.
- (i) For source questions candidates must demonstrate the skills of knowledge, analysis and evaluation in short responses. Source questions always use the following command words:
 - 'Describe . . .'
 - 'Analyse . . .'
 - 'Evaluate . . .'

	26–30	21–25	16–20	11–15	6–10	0–5
Overview	The essay is clearly focussed on the question at all times.	The essay is clearly focussed on the question, but at times refers generally to the topic rather than the question.	The essay is focussed on the question at times but drifts into general comments about the topic.	The essay is focussed more on the topic rather than the question.	The essay is focussed more on the topic than on the question and has information that lacks relevance.	The essay lacks relevance to both the question and/or the topic.
	9–10	7–8	5–6	3–4	1–2	0
Knowledge and understanding	KU is consistently in depth, accurate and relevant.	KU is mainly in depth, accurate and relevant.	KU has inconsistent depth but is mainly accurate and relevant.	KU lacks depth overall but is mainly accurate and relevant.	KU lacks depth overall and has issues with accuracy or relevance.	KU is superficial and is not consistently accurate or relevant.
	There is clear evidence that the candidate has drawn together relevant and appropriate information from a range of specific sources or perspectives.	There is clear evidence that the candidate has drawn together mainly relevant and appropriate information from some specific sources or perspectives.	There is some evidence that the candidate has drawn together relevant and/or appropriate information but references to sources and perspectives tend to be more general and limited.	There is evidence that the candidate has attempted to draw together relevant and/or appropriate information but references to sources and perspectives are general in nature and limited.	There is some evidence that the candidate has attempted to draw together relevant and/or appropriate information but references to sources and perspectives are brief, undeveloped, and general in nature.	The essay lacks evidence of sources and perspectives and those used lack relevance and accuracy.

	9–10	7–8	5–6	3–4	1–2	0
Analysis	The analysis clearly identifies specific issue(s) related to the question.	The analysis identifies specific issue(s) related to the question, but the depth is uneven at times.	The analysis identifies a mix of specific and general issue(s) that are related to the question and there is insufficient depth and explanation of them.	The analysis identifies some general issue(s) related to the question and there is insufficient depth or explanation.	The analysis identifies a few issue(s), but they are not clearly related to the question and coverage is superficial.	Any analysis often fails to identify issues and those that have been identified are not clearly related to the question and superficial.
	The explanation of issues takes account of a range of clearly identified perspectives and demonstrates a clear understanding of their relevance to the question.	The explanation of issues takes account of some perspectives and demonstrates a good understanding of their relevance to the question.	The issues are explained and there is evidence of some understanding of their relevance to the question which at times is general in nature.	The issues are explained and there is evidence of some understanding of their relevance to the question at times, but which is generally superficial.	The issues are briefly explained but there is evidence of some understanding of their relevance to the topic but not to the question.	There is evidence of some understanding of the topic but not the question.

	9–10	7–8	5–6	3–4	1–2	0
Evaluation	The evaluation is insightful, valid, and clearly reasoned.	The evaluation is valid, may be insightful and is mainly clearly reasoned.	The evaluation is valid but not consistently and clearly reasoned.	The evaluation is valid but not clearly reasoned and lacks sufficiency.	There is limited valid evaluation, but it is not clearly reasoned and lacks sufficiency.	The evaluation either lacks validity or relevance to the issue/question.
	It has relevant judgements on the issues and/or perspectives on the issues.	It has mainly relevant judgements on the issues and/or perspectives on the issues.	It has some relevant judgements on the issues and/or perspectives on the issues.	It has relevant judgements on the issues and/or perspectives on the issues, however it is simply a judgement with brief reasoning.	It may have judgements on the issues but there is some brief reasoning behind them.	
	Conclusions have successfully been woven throughout the essay/drawn at the conclusion of the essay.	Mainly clear conclusions have been drawn.	There has been some attempt to draw conclusions, but they lack depth.	There has been some attempt to draw brief conclusions, but they lack depth.	Conclusions may be restricted to closing comments.	

Marking instruction for each question

Section 1 – Philosophy of religion

Question			Max mark	Marking instructions for this question
1.			30	Knowledge and Understanding may include: • presumption of atheism • other arguments for atheism • philosophical responses • scientific responses • religious responses • relevant sources Analysis may include: • implications of presumption of atheism • consequences of presumption of atheism • connections between different arguments for atheism • explanations of sources Evaluation may include: • counterarguments • judgements • conclusions throughout • overall conclusions

Question			Max mark	Marking instructions for this question
2.			30	Knowledge and Understanding may include: • Aquinas' Teleological argument • other teleological arguments • philosophical responses • scientific responses • religious responses • relevant sources Analysis may include: • implications of Teleological arguments • consequences of Teleological arguments • connections between different Teleological arguments • explanations of sources Evaluation may include: • counterarguments • judgements • conclusions throughout • overall conclusions

Question			Max mark	Marking instructions for this question
3.	(a)		5	The cosmological argument relies on the causal principle; this is the observation that everything has a cause. It rejects the idea that time could be infinite so logically, it must have begun at some point. If this is the case, then it also needs to have a cause. Without this cause nothing would exist now, but we can see that things do. Aquinas wrote that this cause is what ‘all men call God.’
	(b)		5	Aquinas knows the ‘ <i>universe now exists</i> ’ through observation, this means this argument is inductive and his observations could be wrong in some way. The phrase ‘ <i>it could not have come into existence of its own accord from nothing</i> ’ implies he believes it is impossible for something to come into existence from absolute nothingness. Logically, Aquinas would not have been aware of quantum physics and so his observations need to be taken with the understanding that they reflect his 13 th century views. The phrase ‘ <i>something equivalent in terms of power</i> ’ acknowledges that God might not be the only option for the cause. However, it shows that Aquinas has not considered that the universe might be the cause of itself.
	(c)		5	From a scientific perspective, there are a lot of weaknesses to Aquinas’ observations. Some physicists have proposed that the universe could have come about spontaneously through quantum fluctuations so if this is true, Aquinas is wrong to say, ‘it could not have come into existence’. I know Aquinas went on to reject this idea, but I also don’t think there’s anything wrong with the belief ‘the universe must always have existed’ because it could have been here but just in a different form. Aquinas is right when he said ‘something equivalent in terms of power’ as the Big Bang was an incredibly powerful expansion of energy. But he was wrong in thinking that this cause was something external to the universe because the Big Bang was a feature of the universe itself. So, from a philosophical perspective Aquinas’ argument is also weak because he is committing the fallacy of ‘false dilemma’ because he is only presenting a limited number of options when there are in fact more.

Section 2

Part A – Religious Experience

Question			Max mark	Marking instructions for this question
4.			30	Knowledge and Understanding may include: • Otto's ideas about religious experience • James' ideas about religious experience • Swinburne's ideas about religious experience • relevant sources Analysis may include: • implications of Otto's ideas about religious experience • consequences of Otto's ideas about religious experience • connections between other understandings of religious experience • explanations of relevant sources Evaluation may include: • counterarguments • judgements • conclusions throughout • overall conclusions

Question			Max mark	Marking instructions for this question
5.			30	Knowledge and Understanding may include: • examples of conversions • understandings of religious experience • examples of other categories of religious experiences and/or accounts • relevant sources Analysis may include: • implications of faith perspectives • consequences of faith perspectives • connections between other faith perspectives and alternative accounts of religious experience • explanations of relevant sources Evaluation may include: • counterarguments • judgements • conclusions throughout • overall conclusions

Question			Max mark	Marking instructions for this question
6.	(a)		5	A sociological account of religious experience focuses on how religious practices and experiences impact groups of people, culture, and creates a shared identity. An example of a sociological religious experience is the Hajj in Islam where people share a spiritual experience and offers them a sense of belonging. Karl Marx viewed religion as a social construct that reflects economic conditions and power structures. He famously called religion the ‘opium of the people,’ arguing that it provided comfort but also maintained social inequality. Émile Durkheim believed religion serves a key social function, promoting social unity and collective identity.
	(b)		5	<i>‘Religious experience is not simply a private, individual event’</i> this implies that they are thought of as deeply personal moments, eg, a sense of connection to God. However, this part of the quote highlights that religious experiences are rarely individual as they are influenced by external factors. <i>‘It is shaped by cultural context’</i> , this implies that cultural beliefs have a huge impact on how people interpret and experience religion, eg, what counts as a ‘religious experience’ in one culture may not be seen the same way in another. <i>‘It is shaped by social structures’</i> , this implies that social structures – such as institutions, class systems, and societal norms – can dictate how religious experiences are expressed or understood.
	(c)		5	I agree with parts of this source. I agree with the idea of <i>‘it is shaped by cultural context’</i> as for many people religious experiences have been shaped by the traditions and beliefs they have grown up with. For example, attending church or mosque regularly may create a specific way of understanding God that wouldn’t have developed without that cultural influence. I also agree with the idea that social institutions provide structure and meaning because institutions like churches, synagogues, or temples help define and validate religious experiences. However, I disagree that they are not private as I think religious experiences can be purely personal and private as people can feel God’s presence in a quiet moment or during individual prayer, which has nothing to do with society or a cultural context. I also disagree because I think cultural differences don’t always change the experience because it can be argued that certain spiritual experiences are universal, regardless of cultural context. For example, feelings of awe and wonder when contemplating the universe.

Section 2

Part B – Medical Ethics

Question			Max mark	Marking instructions for this question
7.			30	Knowledge and understanding may include: • personal autonomy • sanctity of life • moral issues arising from abortion • religious/non-religious responses • sources Analysis may include: • implications of religious/non-religious responses to abortion • consequences of religious/non-religious responses to abortion • connections between religious and non-religious responses • explanations of sources Evaluation may include: • counterarguments • judgements • conclusions throughout • overall conclusions

Question			Max mark	Marking instructions for this question
8.			30	Knowledge and understanding may include: • personal autonomy • altruism • sanctity of life • moral issues arising from organ procurement • religious/non-religious responses • sources Analysis may include: • implications of religious/non-religious responses to organ procurement • consequences of religious/non-religious responses to organ procurement • connections between religious and non – religious responses • explanations of sources Evaluation may include: • counterarguments • judgements • conclusions throughout • overall conclusions

Question			Max mark	Marking instructions for this question
9.	(a)		5	Assisted dying refers to the legal ending of life through the administration of specific drugs by a medical professional. The proposed bills in England and Wales and in Scotland are similar: you have to have been registered with a GP for at least 12 months and be expected to die within six months. You have to have the mental capacity to make the choice and be deemed to have expressed a clear, settled and informed wish, free from pressure. Assisted dying is legal in the Netherlands and Canada where the range of people who can ask for assisted dying is much bigger. For example, in the Netherlands, you do not have to be terminally ill.
	(b)		5	An implication of the statement, ‘until access to good quality support and services become the norm’ is that if disabled people can’t get the level of help they require, they may feel coerced into requesting assisted dying. As a consequence of having a limited lifestyle, disabled people may become isolated, feel dependent on others and as a result, feel undervalued. An implication of this is that they may feel more pressure that the assisted dying bill is directed at them, as there may be a perception that many disabled people have a lower quality of life. The statement that disabled people won’t have ‘a real choice’ implies a perception that if you have a poor quality of life where you depend on others then this is little different from being terminally ill and so assisted dying will be quickly given or legalised for disabled people too. A further implication stems from the phrase, ‘danger to disabled people’ as the word ‘danger’ is quite emotive and suggests that resources will never be put into improving quality of life and so disabled people will never be fully valued and therefore vulnerable to being tagged onto the assisted dying bill.
	(c)		5	I strongly agree that all disabled people should have full equal status in society and that access and support should be a basic expectation for all. I think this because we will all be affected by disability directly or indirectly at any point in our lives, for example, when a parent suffers a massive stroke. However, I see this as a separate issue from being able to opt for assisted dying. I think this because everyone should have the autonomous right to choose assisted dying if they are terminally ill without fear of prosecution for family members. If we can euthanise pets without consent to relieve suffering, I think it’s more humane to allow assisted dying to consenting adults who have requested it. I disagree that the ‘. . . proposed change in the law poses a danger to disabled people’ because I think that adequate safeguards are being discussed such as two doctors. If the law is a danger, then it would be a danger to everyone potentially able to choose assisted dying and considering that at the moment the bill is tightly focused on the terminally ill with less than six months to live then there is no specific danger to the disabled.

[END OF MARKING INSTRUCTIONS]