



RS.TE6 The Death Penalty

AQA 8062 • Calculators not allowed • about 55 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Show all your working.

1 This question checks key vocabulary used when discussing the death penalty.

(a) State what is meant by the death penalty. (1)

(b) State what is meant by a retentionist. (1)

(c) State what is meant by an abolitionist. (1)

(d) State what is meant by sanctity of life. (1)

(e) State what is meant by a miscarriage of justice. (1)

(Total for Question 1 is 5 marks)

2 Give three facts about the death penalty in the UK.

(Total for Question 2 is 3 marks)

- 3** Explain two religious teachings that could be used to support the death penalty. Refer to a source of wisdom and authority in your answer.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

- 4** Explain two contrasting religious teachings that could be used against the death penalty. Refer to a source of wisdom and authority in your answer.

(Total for Question 4 is 5 marks)

5 This question is about religious and non-religious perspectives on the death penalty. It is the AQA-style 24-mark, five-part question: parts (a) to (d) are worth 12 marks; part (e) is the 12-mark evaluation.

- (a)** State one country, other than the UK, that still retains the death penalty today. (1)
- (b)** Give two reasons why the UK abolished the death penalty. (2)
- (c)** Explain two religious teachings relevant to the state's right to punish serious crime severely. Refer to a source of wisdom and authority in your answer. (4)
- (d)** Explain two contrasting views, religious and/or non-religious, on whether the death penalty is ever justified. Refer to a source of wisdom and authority or another source in your answer. (5)
- (e)** Evaluate this statement: 'The death penalty can never be justified.' In your answer you should: refer to religious teaching, refer to different points of view, reach a justified conclusion. (12)

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(Total for Question 5 is 24 marks)

- 6** Explain two non-religious arguments about the death penalty: one in favour of retaining it, and one in favour of abolishing it. Refer to non-religious beliefs in your answer.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

- 7** Give three facts about how the death penalty is used or debated around the world today.

(Total for Question 7 is 3 marks)

Mark scheme · RS.TE6 The Death Penalty

Question 1

- (a) **B1** a legal punishment in which the state executes a person who has been convicted of a serious crime, oe
- (a) **Answer: A legal punishment in which the state executes a person who has been convicted of a serious crime.**
- (b) **B1** a person who believes the death penalty should be kept as a legal punishment, oe
- (b) **Answer: A person who believes the death penalty should be kept as a legal punishment.**
- (c) **B1** a person who believes the death penalty should be ended as a legal punishment, oe
- (c) **Answer: A person who believes the death penalty should be ended as a legal punishment.**
- (d) **B1** the belief that all human life is holy or sacred, often because it is seen as given by God, oe
- (d) **Answer: The belief that all human life is holy or sacred, often because it is seen as given by God.**
- (e) **B1** a case in which someone is wrongly convicted or wrongly punished for a crime, oe
- (e) **Answer: A case in which someone is wrongly convicted or wrongly punished for a crime.**

Question 2

- **B1** the death penalty was abolished for murder in Great Britain by the Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Act 1965, oe
- **B1** the death penalty was abolished completely, for all remaining offences, in the UK in 1998, oe
- **B1** before abolition, the death penalty in the UK was used for the most serious crimes, such as murder, oe
- **Answer: Any three: abolished for murder in 1965; abolished completely for all offences in 1998; before abolition it was used for the most serious crimes such as murder.**

Question 3

- **B1** point 1: some Christians point to Old Testament teaching that taking a human life can justly be answered with the offender's own life, oe
- **B1** development: 'Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind' (Genesis 9:6), oe
- **B1** point 2: Islamic teaching on qisas gives a murder victim's family a recognised legal right to seek equal retribution, oe
- **B1** development: 'Do not take a life which Allah has made sacred, except in the course of justice' (Qur'an 17:33), read by some as permitting lawful execution for murder, oe
- **Answer: E.g. Genesis 9:6's teaching on shedding blood for blood; the Qur'an's qisas framework in Qur'an 17:33.**

Question 4

- **B1** teaching 1: some Christians argue Jesus's teaching and example show mercy should outweigh strict retribution, even for serious wrongdoing, oe
- **B1** development: when a crowd wanted to stone a woman, Jesus said 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her' (John 8:7), and no one did, oe
- **B1** teaching 2: some Muslims argue Qur'anic teaching on the value of life urges extreme caution about ever taking a life, even where the law permits it, oe
- **B1** development: 'whoever kills a soul unjustly... it is as if he had slain mankind entirely' (Qur'an 5:32) is used by some to stress the seriousness of taking any life, oe
- **B1** reference to a source of wisdom and authority made accurately, oe
- **Answer: Contrast: mercy shown in John 8:7 vs the extreme caution about taking life drawn from Qur'an 5:32.**

Question 5

- (a) **B1** any country that currently retains the death penalty, e.g. the United States (in some states), China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, oe
- (a) **Answer: E.g. the United States (in some states) (also accept: China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other retentionist countries).**
- (b) **B1** concern about the risk of executing an innocent person, since a wrongful execution can never be undone, oe
- (b) **B1** changing attitudes towards human rights and the value of human life in the UK over the twentieth century, oe
- (b) **Answer: E.g. concern about wrongful convictions being irreversible; changing UK attitudes towards human rights.**
- (c) **B1** point 1: some Christians believe governing authorities are given a genuine right to punish serious wrongdoing, oe
- (c) **B1** development: the ruling authority 'does not bear the sword for no reason. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer' (Romans 13:4), oe
- (c) **B1** point 2: Islamic teaching sets out qisas as a recognised right of a murder victim's family, prescribed in law, oe
- (c) **B1** development: 'O you who have believed, prescribed for you is legal retribution for those murdered' (Qur'an 2:178), oe
- (c) **Answer: E.g. the state's authority to punish wrongdoing (Romans 13:4); the qisas law of retribution (Qur'an 2:178).**
- (d) **B1** view 1: some, both religious and non-religious, argue the death penalty is justified for the very worst crimes, as the only fully proportionate response and a permanent guarantee against reoffending, oe
- (d) **B1** development: this can draw on the qisas principle recognised in Qur'an 2:178, alongside secular arguments that the punishment should match the severity of the crime, oe
- (d) **B1** view 2: others, both religious and non-religious, argue it can never be justified because the risk of executing an innocent person can never be fully removed, oe
- (d) **B1** development: this can draw on Jesus's example of mercy in John 8:7, alongside secular human-rights arguments that an irreversible punishment is too dangerous to use in a justice system that is not infallible, oe
- (d) **B1** reference to a source of wisdom and authority or another appropriate source made accurately, oe
- (d) **Answer: Contrast: justified for the worst crimes (Qur'an 2:178, plus secular proportionality arguments) vs never justified because of the risk of irreversible error (John 8:7, plus secular human-rights arguments).**
- (e) **L4** (10-12): A well-argued, balanced answer that considers more than one point of view in a developed way, using accurate and detailed references to religious teaching and/or scripture to support each point, and reaches a clear, justified conclusion. Either conclusion (that the death penalty is, or is not, ever justified) is equally creditable at this level, provided it is well supported.
- (e) **L3** (7-9): A clear and reasoned answer that considers more than one point of view, supported by relevant references to religious teaching and/or scripture, though the justification of the conclusion may be less developed.
- (e) **L2** (4-6): A reasoned answer that considers at least one point of view, with some relevant supporting evidence, but with limited or no consideration of an alternative view.
- (e) **L1** (1-3): One or more relevant points are made, but with little or no supporting evidence and no reasoned conclusion.
- (e) **L0** (0): No relevant content.

- **(e) Indicative content:**

- Note for markers: this is the most contested question in the theme. No conclusion is intrinsically right or wrong. Credit a well-argued agree, disagree, or nuanced conclusion equally, provided it is supported by accurate evidence and engages with an opposing view.
- Agree (never justified) - religious: some Christians point to Jesus's intervention in John 8:7 ('let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone') as teaching that judgement should be tempered with mercy, and that no human is in a position to demand another's death.
- Agree (never justified) - religious: some Muslims argue that although the Qur'an permits qisas (Qur'an 2:178), it also strongly commends forgoing it in favour of compensation or forgiveness (Qur'an 5:45), showing mercy is presented as the better path even where retribution is technically allowed.
- Agree (never justified) - non-religious: a strong secular argument is that no justice system is error-free; wrongful convictions happen, and unlike imprisonment, an execution cannot be reversed once carried out.
- Agree (never justified) - non-religious: many human-rights organisations argue the state taking a life undermines the very principle, that killing is wrong, that the punishment is meant to uphold; research into deterrence is also inconsistent, with many studies finding no reliable evidence that the death penalty deters murder more effectively than long imprisonment.
- Disagree (can be justified) - religious: some Christians cite Genesis 9:6 ('whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed') as showing that judicial execution for murder can be religiously justified.
- Disagree (can be justified) - religious: qisas in Islam (Qur'an 2:178, 17:33) gives a murder victim's family a recognised right to seek equal retribution, which some Muslims argue is a legitimate form of justice that should be respected.
- Disagree (can be justified) - non-religious: some argue the death penalty is the only punishment that permanently and completely removes any risk that a convicted murderer could kill again, and that for the very worst crimes only it offers a proportionate response and full acknowledgement of a victim's family's loss.
- Disagree (can be justified) - non-religious: many countries, including the United States (in some states), China and Saudi Arabia, continue to retain and use the death penalty, showing it remains a live, seriously held legal and political position rather than a settled question; some argue wrongful convictions should be addressed through rigorous appeal processes rather than requiring total abolition.
- A balanced conclusion might note that the UK's abolition (1965 for murder, complete in 1998) reflects one legal and moral judgement, arrived at over time, but not a universally shared one, since other countries continue to retain the death penalty; the strongest single point in the debate on either side is arguably the tension between the demand for proportionate justice and the risk of an irreversible error.

Question 6

- **B1** retentionist point: some non-religious people argue that for the very worst crimes, only the death penalty is a fully proportionate ('just deserts') response, oe
- **B1** development: on this view, society should be able to express the seriousness of a crime such as murder through the strongest available penalty, oe
- **B1** abolitionist point: many Humanists argue the risk of executing an innocent person makes the death penalty too dangerous to use, however serious the crime, oe
- **B1** development: unlike imprisonment, a wrongful execution can never be corrected once it has been carried out, oe
- **Answer: E.g. a secular proportionality/just-deserts argument for retaining it; a secular irreversibility argument for abolishing it.**

Question 7

- **B1** a number of countries, including the United States (in some states), China and Saudi Arabia, still retain and use the death penalty, oe
- **B1** the methods and legal processes used for the death penalty vary widely between the countries that retain it, oe
- **B1** international organisations, such as Amnesty International, campaign for its worldwide abolition, oe
- **Answer: Any three: some countries, e.g. the United States (in some states), China and Saudi Arabia, still retain it; methods and processes vary between retentionist countries; organisations such as Amnesty International campaign for global abolition.**