



General Certificate of Education

## **Religious Studies (1061)**

RSS08 Religion and Contemporary Society

# **Report on the Examination**

*2009 examination - June series*

**This Report on the Examination uses the [new numbering system](#)**

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*Dr Michael Cresswell Director General.*

## **RSS08 Religion and Contemporary Society**

### **General comments**

It was pleasing to note the size of entry for this new option and the range of approaches which had been taken. It is clear that many candidates had been prepared well for the examination and were able to write coherently on relevant topics.

Some candidates clearly lacked examination technique. It is important that candidates are encouraged to read the **whole** question before starting their answers. Often candidates appeared not to have read the second part of each question before embarking on the first part, and thus included evaluative material which was not relevant and could not be credited in the first part. Similarly, some candidates went on to give a lot more 'facts' in the second part of each question. Again 'cross credit' cannot be given. Some candidates also wrote at unnecessary length in the second part of each question. As the paper indicates, this part assesses candidates' skills of argument and is not the place for 'telling the story'. It was also clear that a significant number of candidates needed to perfect timing as an examination skill. Some candidates gave very full answers for their first question, thus penalising themselves on their second.

One particular issue became apparent on this paper which must be noted. It was a matter of concern to see the way in which quite a number of candidates were writing about the various faith communities to which they were referring. They frequently spoke about 'immigrants', not recognising that many members of non-Christian religions are third and fourth generation British residents. There was also an 'us and them' language used when candidates spoke of 'our English culture'. Worse still, there were several references to 'the normal population' and even 'normal British white citizens'. To draw attention to this is not a matter of 'political correctness' but rather to the importance of helping young people to be aware of the real nature of society today.

### **Question 1 (Topic 1 *Changing patterns of religious practice in the UK during the 20<sup>th</sup> century*)**

#### **Question 01**

This question was answered quite well by some candidates who were able to give an informed picture of the strengths and distribution of religious groups in the UK today. There was no expectation that candidates should know a lot of detailed statistics, although some were able to give very detailed figures. What was expected, however, was that candidates would be able to talk about *relative* strengths and distribution, and thus be able to consider the proportions of the different religions in relation to each other. The phrase 'relative strengths and distribution' is in the Specification and should have been understood by candidates. A considerable number of candidates misinterpreted the question and commented on 'strength' here as features of the religion. Whilst some credit was allowed for this, it was necessarily limited. Some candidates had no notion of the idea of distribution. Again, whilst very detailed information was not expected, candidates should have been able to write about the distribution of Islam in terms of particular centres of population, such as Bradford, East London, etc. and of Judaism in terms of London, Leeds, Manchester, etc. Some candidates interpreted 'distribution' more locally and wrote about, for instance, the particular parts of London or West Yorkshire where different groups were concentrated. This approach was perfectly acceptable.

**Question 02**

Even where Question 01 had not been answered well, there were some good responses to Question 02, although a number of candidates penalised themselves by giving a one-sided answer. The best answers tended to be able to explore the implications of the claim by, for example, considering that religion may yet be alive but not particularly well.

**Question 2 (Topic 2 *Expressions of religion within society*)****Question 03**

This was a popular question and was answered well by some candidates. The better candidates were able to show understanding of the Dual System and of the wide variety of faith schools which may be found, supporting their answers with relevant examples. There were, however, far too many answers where it appeared that the topic had not been studied in adequate depth. Some only saw 'faith schools' in terms of 'supplementary schools' provided within some faiths. Others were reliant on very stereotypical views of, for instance, cases where parents have been attempting a variety of means to get their children into certain schools. In some cases it did not appear that candidates had considered the range of faith schools, both primary and secondary, which may be found within their locality. Such weaker answers tended to lack real knowledge.

**Question 04**

There were some well-reasoned answers to this part of the question, which looked at both sides of the argument and were able to reach a rational conclusion. Again, too many answers were one-sided.

**Question 3 (Topic 3 *Issues of identity and belonging*)****Question 05**

A wide variety of approaches could be taken to this question and high marks could be attained by considering the question in either depth or breadth. The best candidates were able to consider a range of factors which might cause difficulties. The most popular examples given tended to focus on issues such as dress, diet, location of places of worship, the facilities for the practice of religion, and the attitudes of others. The best answers gave clear and accurate examples, and in some instances showed *why* certain practices were important in particular faiths. Weaker responses tended to limited themselves in the depth or breadth of their answer, and often showed limited understanding of the key practices of the religions concerned, conflating the practices of one religion with another. Candidates were thus impeded by a poor level of 'general knowledge' of religion of the sort which is important for this paper. A small number of candidates tried to turn this question into one on assimilation. They could gain limited credit for this.

**Question 06**

There were some good answers to this question, which focussed on the demand of the question to assess the claim. Quite a number of candidates, however, missed the point of the question, and argued that 'people would make life a lot easier for themselves if they didn't bother with the practices of their religion.' Whilst this approach led to some valid argument, it made it difficult for candidates to gain high marks.

**Question 4 (Topic 4 *An introduction to New Religious Movements (NRMs) and the rise of new forms of religious activity during the 20<sup>th</sup> century*)**

**Question 07**

Results on this question tended to be polarised. There were some excellent answers, in which candidates showed that they understood the concept of millenarianism, and were able to refer to the most common background of Biblical apocalyptic with appropriate examples. Such answers then gave examples from particular movements, drawing out the particular features of millenarian belief which characterise them. At the other extreme, some candidates proceeded to write about New Religious Movements (NRMs) with either no reference to millenarianism, or showing no understanding of this key term.

**Question 08**

Those candidates who had shown understanding in Question 07 often made quite a good attempt at this part of the question. They were familiar with the 'relative deprivation' theory and were able to apply it to their argument. Some candidates were able to tease this out in some detail, and to show that whilst the theory could be applied well to some millenarian movements, it applied less well to others. Other candidates clearly had little understanding of this idea. The theory is one of the standard sociological explanations for the rise of NRMs and candidates should be able to debate various aspects of the appeal of NRMs.