AQA

ASSESSMENT and
QUALIFICATIONS
ALLIANCE

General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RSS08 Religion and Contemporary Society

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

General Comments

There was a pleasing increase both in entry and in the quality of work this year. Candidates were generally better prepared and used their time more effectively, getting a better balance between their two questions. There were still instances of candidates using 'us and them' language, speaking of members of non-Christian religions as 'immigrants', and assuming that 'they' ought to assimilate, but these were fewer than noted last year. The most popular combination of Questions was 1 and 3.

Question 1 *Changing patterns of religious practice in the UK during the 20th century*

Part 01

There were some very good answers to this part of the question. Such answers tended to focus on the issue of "distribution" in geographical terms, and were able to give some good examples of where particular faiths are concentrated and the reasons for this. Others did this effectively by talking of distribution in terms of the types of areas, without so much specific geographical detail. Some spoke of distribution in terms of age or ethnicity and this was also acceptable. Weaker answers just gave statistics, and whilst credit was gained for this, they needed to say something about distribution in order to be awarded higher marks. A few clearly did not understand the word 'distribution' and just wrote in general terms about religions, gaining few marks.

Part 02

There were some good responses to this part, which examined a range of arguments both for and against the claim, and worked their way to a well reasoned answer, such as that although fewer people go to Church, the country still has a Christian character. Some used some valid counter arguments, such as the influx of new arrivals from countries such as Poland, many of whom are Catholic. Some used statistics to good effect whilst others looked at "no longer Christian" in a broader way, looking at the values and mores of society. Most did look at both sides of the argument, although sometimes in a rather formulaic way, rather than going through a process of reasoning. The best were able to work through their ideas to reach a conclusion. Weaker answers tended simply to cite a few evidences of decline.

Question 2 *Expressions of Religion in Society*

Part 03

This was not a very popular question. Some candidates presented very good answers, going through a range of forms of leadership in one or more religions, and showing a good understanding of the different types and roles involved and how they related to each other. Weaker answers tended simply to name a few types and to make rather general comments on their roles, such as 'teaching the religion' and 'visiting people who are ill'. Whilst some credit could be gained for this, more depth is needed at this level. A few had taken this in terms of named individuals, such as the Archbishops of Canterbury and Westminster and the Chief Rabbi. This was a legitimate approach on which it would be possible to gain full marks, but candidates should be encouraged to take a broader approach to the idea of leadership within their chosen religion(s).

Part 04

There were some good answers here, where candidates were able to cite instances of say, the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Chief Rabbi, speaking out on a range of issues, and thus claiming their importance outside their faith communities. Some spoke of the role of religious leaders on programmes such as the BBC's 'Thought for the Day', and showed how this proved their importance, whilst others spoke of roles such as hospital and prison chaplaincies where clergy and other leaders minister to the needs of a range of people. Such answers were also able to comment on the limitations of their importance, and the ways in which their specific role lies within the faith community. Weaker answers tended not to focus on the 'faith community' but rather on the religious building. This limited the kind of response which could be given. Weak answers tended to be one-sided.

Question 3 *Issues of identity and belonging*

This was by far the most popular question, and one which was done well by many candidates.

Part 05

The best answers to 05 tended to fall into one of two categories: some candidates wrote very well and in detail on both dress and diet within one or more religions, and were able to show very good understanding of the reasons for these practices; others showed themselves to be very much at ease with the practices they were describing and were able to move comfortably between religions, drawing on a range of examples appropriately. Better answers were also able to recognise the diversity which is found within religions. Weaker answers tended to present prepared material which was not well understood, and there were very frequent confusions and conflations between the practices of different religions. It is reasonable to expect a level of accuracy on basic facts. Some answers described the practices in detail, without attention to the ways in which these affect the lives of individuals; others wrote a lot about how they affect the lives of individuals without sufficient attention to the practices themselves.

Part 06

There were some good answers here, but many ignored the focus on "maintaining the identity of a faith community", and thus tended to penalise themselves by just talking about whether or not these practices were important. Many tended to see identity simply as being recognised by other people; better answers were also able to talk about issues of self identity and belonging. The best were also able to talk about self-definition, the strength which comes from the discipline of dress and diet, and the idea of that people are proud of their religion and so wish to identify with it.

Question 4 *An introduction to New Religious Movements (NRMs)*

Part 07

There were some good answers here, and those which gained high marks took a variety of approaches. Some took the traditional models of the sect and the cult, whilst others examined different types of sect, such as world-rejecting, world-affirming and world-accommodating, or other sub-sets employed by sociologists. Many were able to write in detail about the views of particular sociologists. A few candidates penalised themselves by not giving exemplification of the ideas they were discussing. Weaker answers tended to write in general terms about New Religious Movements rather than about the specific types of the sect and the cult.

Part 08

Those who had dealt with the demands of the first part of this question were usually able to deal with this part. They offered a variety of suggestions on the success or limitations of the sect/cult typology, or, if they had approached part 07 in terms of world-rejecting, world-affirming, etc, were able to look at the validity of these models. Others argued in terms of saying that the theology of such groups is more significant than the sociological definitions.