



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

Religious Studies

RSS08

(Specification 2060)

Unit H Religion and Contemporary Society

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

There were some pleasing scripts, but in several cases it was evident that students who had good knowledge penalised themselves by paying insufficient attention to the demands of the question. Prepared answers on the general topic are no substitute for answers which focus on the particular question set.

It was noticeable that nearly all the scripts from a number of centres addressed the same two questions. This may suggest that these topics were the only ones which had been studied. Such an approach inevitably limits the choice of the students, especially if they are not comfortable with the particular focus of the questions on the topics they have prepared, and this should be discouraged.

Although it was not as noticeable in some previous years, it is still a matter of concern that some students fall into 'us and them' language, when writing about various groups in the UK today. This is not a matter of political correctness, but a matter of recognising the nature of British society today, and that what students refer to as 'our' culture is itself very diverse. As students of Religious Studies, it is to be hoped that they will recognise this.

It was pleasing to note that there were no problems with the legibility of scripts this year.

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

This was a very popular question attempted by the great majority of students.

01 There were some good answers here, which looked at a range of evidence, such as the decline in attendance, the closure of church buildings, the decrease in vocations, Sunday trading, the decrease in baptisms and church weddings, and the status of Christian festivals. Most of these answers were well supported with statistical evidence from the work of Peter Brierley, or from the Tearfund Report. Some were also able to talk about the loss of status of Christian authorities, the decline of Christian values and the ways in which Christianity may be openly mocked in the media. Such answers were usually well supported with particular examples. Some saw the growth of non-Christian religions as evidence of decline. In a situation of rapid population growth, the two do not equate. Overall, however, marks were depressed because far too many students did not focus sufficiently on the question set. Some wrote about reasons for decline. While this approach might gain some incidental marks, it was not what was asked for. Others entered into discussion about whether or not decline was taking place. This was an AO1 question, and such AO2 type debate could not gain credit. As has been emphasised before, across all units, it is vital that students recognise the distinction between AO1 and AO2 answers.

02 There were some good answers which were well focused on the question set. Such answers focused on the nature of the severity of decline and the signs of resurgence. Too many, however, seemed to be giving a prepared answer on whether the UK is still Christian, or whether the decline is real, rather than focusing on the particular demand to discuss the steepness of the decline, and whether there is any way back.

Question 2 *Expressions of religion within society*

This was the least popular question.

03 This was a very accessible question, but students who simply wrote in generalised terms about church towers and steeples, or about the cruciform shape of a church, could gain limited credit. At this level, students need to show some understanding of these features. More significantly, whether focusing on one religion or on several, they needed to show some understanding of diversity, rather than producing generalised and stereotypical views. The best answers were able to do this effectively. So, in the case of Christianity, such answers did not simply imply, as the weaker answers did, that 'all churches have towers and are in the shape of a cross', but were able to recognise both denominational diversity, and the diversity of buildings found within a tradition.

These answers showed awareness of both traditional and modern buildings. In some cases, such answers were also able to comment well on the role of non purpose built places of worship, and what the 'clues' are to their function.

04 There were some thoughtful answers here, whether or not the students concerned had dealt well with 03. The best were able to draw out the idea of 'distinctiveness' and the ways in which particular buildings may draw attention to themselves, discussing the effect this may have on, for instance, community relations, or the relationships between those of faith and those of no faith. Some brought in good counter arguments about the presence of buildings helping communities to understand each other, and about the different functions which are open to the whole community which take place in some religious buildings. There was some good exemplification from local situations known to the students.

Question 3 *Issues of identity and belonging*

This was the second most popular question.

05 There were some answers here which showed a real understanding of the nature of religious and cultural identity and of the relationship between them. Such answers were able to define both concepts, and to explore the inter-relatedness, giving appropriate examples, of, for example, the cultural influences on different forms of Muslim identity, and the ways in which these are manifested. Some were also able to look at the complex identity of, for example, being British Muslim, or of some of the issues facing Anglo-Jewry. Some weaker answers just wrote about various aspects of dress and diet, with varying levels of success. Generally, religious identity was much better understood than cultural identity. Too few students were really able to define either, or to explore the ideas of self-definition, the determination of association, and the sense of 'belonging' that identity implies. Such answers simply concentrated on 'manifestations' of identity, such as practices relating to dress and diet. Here there was a lot of generalisation (e.g. from some students, the implication that all Muslim women wear burkas) and also, frequently, a lack of gender awareness (e.g. Sikhs wear turbans. There are of course an increasing number of Sikh women who do wear the turban, but this is predominantly a male practice.) There was a tendency among a few students to drift into AO2 type discussion here, but this was not nearly as marked as in 01.

06 Here again it was evident that some students were giving their 'prepared answers' rather than focusing on the specific question. The question asked about the need for strong faith in maintaining religious identity. Too many wrote simply about 'practising religion', which, while it had some overlap, was a slightly different focus.

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

This was the third most popular question.

07 There were some good answers here, which showed understanding of the work of a range of theorists, and were able to look at a number of classifications of sects and cults. It was unfortunate that some students who clearly had very good knowledge failed to give any examples to illustrate their understanding, and thus failed to access the highest levels of the mark scheme. Some students were not able to distinguish sufficiently between sects and cults. It is recognised that different sources produce different typologies, emphasising different characteristics, but it is important that students can distinguish between the two types of movement.

08 There were some thoughtful responses here, which led to some interesting answers. Some argued, for instance, that sects had more impact on individuals, whereas cults had more impact on the wider society (or vice versa). Some argued that sects had more impact because of the values they espoused, whilst others argued that cults had more impact because of the media attention they attracted. All of these processes were valid, and were often associated with a good level of reasoning. Those students who had failed to distinguish appropriately between sects and cults in the first part of the question obviously had more difficulty here.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website.

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