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Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Religious Studies (8RS0)
Paper 02: Religion and Ethics

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8RS0 02 – Religion and Ethics 2019

Introduction

NOTE TO CENTRES: *Please encourage your candidates to write all their answers within the space available in the answer book. Attaching pages does not merit any advantages and should be limited to the situations when the candidate genuinely run out of space.*

The third cohort of candidates taking AS Religious Studies continue to be well prepared and more candidates are able to tackle a range of questions based on the specification material. There were virtually no questions left unanswered and in many cases, candidates were able to reflect a good range of scholarship and awareness of a range of relevant material to support their answers.

In some cases, candidate wrote excessively for smaller mark questions which had a knock-on effect on their timing. The examination requires a substantial amount of writing within a given time frame, so candidates should practice writing to time as often as possible.

Some candidates were able to produce exceptional answers across the board. These are to be highly commended as reflecting best practice at AS level, ensuring that answers are not generic or based on common sense or general knowledge material. For candidates who take this examination as an AS qualification in its own right, there is everything to be gained in taking the opportunity to perform to the highest level and benefit from the UCAS points it has to offer. Candidates who are taking it as a form of practice exam, or mock or entry test to Year 2, should take the opportunity to revise Year 1 material thoroughly, and to prepare revision materials which will help substantially in Year 2, reducing the need for revision materials made from scratch at such an intense time.

Summary

- Centres should ensure the all the specification content is covered.
- Candidates should practice writing to timed conditions as often as possible.
- Do not over write on the shorter answers – notably the 8 and 9 mark questions.
- Ensure that AO2 material is clearly evident in Questions Q02, Q03 and Q04(b)
- Ensure that responses are scholarly and based on a firm knowledge of appropriate reference material.
- Make the most of the marks available in Question Q04. It may be worth considering answering this question first to ensure it is given enough time.

Question Q01

Candidates on the whole coped well with this question and Situation Ethics is clearly a popular topic. Responses were the main in middle to top Level 3 offering insightful answers regarding the principles of Situation Ethics and displaying a wide range of knowledge and a depth of understanding of the subject matter. There was some evidence of good material on the fundamental work of John Robinson and Joseph Fletcher and candidates were clearly happy to discuss the role of agape in moral decision making. Candidates were not always as confident when dealing with the finer details of the principles of Situation Ethics and weaker answers placed considerable emphasis on agape to the exclusion of other concepts. Stronger answers were able to make reference to the social influences of the time on the development of the theory.

Advice to centres: ensure that candidates do not engage with an over simplistic understanding of this theory.

Question Q02

Candidates were clearly happy to engage with a question on Just War Theory and virtually all answers included material worthy of credit. However, most answers generated marks in the range from level 2 to the middle of level 3, just lacking that extra finesse to show the full range of all the elements required in analytic and evaluative skills. Whilst candidates were happy to define *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* and to allude to the relevant principles, the examiners were surprised that candidates were less able to deal with these principles in detail. The requirement of the question to assess the principles should not preclude an exposition of those principles and many candidates failed to access the highest level because they did not show sufficient knowledge of the various criteria of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. Assessment generally focussed on the overall value of applying the Just War criteria under any circumstances, most particularly because it could not be reconciled with pacifism, and whilst this is a valid approach, it did not provide sufficient substance for a full response to the question.

Advice to centres: Ensure that candidates support the assessment of issues with sufficient AO1 content.

Question Q03

Candidates are, as whole, happy to tackle the concept of stewardship as a religious approach to the environment, and this was generally well expressed and assessed. Strong answers were able to expand on this by reference to Papal Encyclicals and Rapture Theology. The distinction between dominion and domination was well made and candidates generally understood the concept of anthropocentrism and how it may conflict with responsible stewardship. It was interesting to read some answers which challenged the idea of stewardship as genuinely considerate of the environment at all. Weaker answers were entirely

dependent on a few verses from Genesis and failed to grapple with the subtleties of the concept.

Candidates had a good knowledge of ethical approaches such as Gaia, Deep Ecology and Shallow Ecology and were able to assess them effectively. Weaker answers were brief and failed to provide relevant assessment and candidates are encouraged to explore a wider range of secular approaches, including ethical understandings of the role of non-human animals and their wellbeing.

Advice to centres: Develop candidates' understanding of religious approaches particularly how far they challenge genuine consideration for the intrinsic value of the environment.

Question Q04(a)

Whilst almost all candidates understood the concept of contraception and were able to explain why it is challenged by a number of contemporary religions groups, material nevertheless remained at a basic level. Significantly, however, many candidates were unable to distinguish between these two issues and could not offer any distinct material on childlessness as a concept in its own right. There is much which candidates could have discussed here, including the idea that the creation ordinance to fill the earth is no longer such an essential imperative and that human free will can be reasonably exercised to make responsible decisions about remaining child-free. Most importantly, the specification suggests that centres look at the approach of the Quiverful movement who advocate that Christian couples must be open to accept all the children which God sends and hence, condemn voluntary childlessness.

Advice to centres: ensure that candidates are able to see the various subtopics as clear and distinct areas for discussion.

Question Q04(b)

Many candidates continued their discussion of contraception into this question and failed to take advantage of the opportunity to think more widely around the topic of sexual ethics. This inevitably led to a lower mark range and answers were often muddled and lacked clear structure. Religious teaching rarely extended beyond the Ten Commandments and fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible.

Stronger answers were able to engage with a wider range of issues in sexual ethics, most typically homosexuality and to refer to a range of religious approaches and ethical theories. However, the depth of understanding was limited in many cases. Candidates are encouraged to ensure that they can discuss a range of concepts and approaches at depth. Most answers failed to achieve higher than level 3 and there is considerable scope for ensuring that sexual ethics is not taught or understood at merely GCSE level.

Advice to centres: Ensure that candidates are aware of the greater expectation at AS level. This topic may have been covered at GCSE by many candidates, but the expectation is that they have increased in knowledge and in their ability to assess and analyse the material.