AQA

ASSESSMENT and
QUALIFICATIONS
ALLIANCE

General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (1061)

RSS01 Religion and Ethics 1

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - June series

This Report on the Examination uses the <u>new numbering system</u>

RSS01 *Religion and Ethics 1*

General comments
There were some excellent and interesting scripts and in every question there were some very high scoring answers. Some candidates limited the marks they could achieve by making little use of examples either to explain ideas or as evidence to support arguments. The best answers to the second part of each question tended to be short and focused. This meant that candidates had plenty of time to plan and write longer answers to the first part of each question. In contrast, some answers to the second part of each question were almost as long as those written for the first part, despite the fact that they were worth only half the marks.

Question 1 (Topic 1 *Utilitarianism*)

Question 01
Most candidates correctly focused on Mill's presentation of Utilitarianism, but a small number confused his ideas with those of Bentham, or wrote generally about Utilitarian ideas. Mill's distinction between higher and lower pleasures was often clearly explained, but the use of this idea in moral decision-making was less well outlined. Most knew that Mill could be considered a Rule Utilitarian but some had a very simplistic idea of what this means; in some good answers candidates explained Mill's attitude to self-sacrifice, and considered the tension between the individual's pursuit of their own happiness in relation to the happiness of the community as a whole.

Some of the best examples of how Mill's utilitarianism might be applied focused on issues of distribution of happiness-making resources. These included issues about how medical treatment should be prioritised, or about who should receive donated organs, and issues concerning the use of public funding such as for providing hospitals or art galleries. Other issues which were used successfully included those concerning how far an individual has the right to pursue his / her own pleasure, which used examples from sexual ethics. Some candidates simply illustrated how the hedonic calculus may be applied. Such answers gave no more than a partial account of the application of Mill's theory and could not, therefore, be rewarded highly. Despite the explicit instruction in the question a small number of candidates did choose abortion or euthanasia as their ethical issue.

Question 02
Some candidates penalised themselves by failing to note the exact wording of the statement given for discussion. Other candidates used arguments based on only a partial understanding of what Mill's utilitarianism would actually involve, especially in relation to Rule Utilitarianism. Some candidates argued that Mill would never advocate breaking a rule such as 'Do not lie', despite the fact that Mill explicitly identified occasions when lying would be justified.

Question 2 (Topic 2 *Situation Ethics*)

Question 03
The candidates had two tasks here: to explain what the presumptions were and to show how they guide the situationist in making moral decisions; some candidates did not address the second part of the question. The great majority of candidates correctly identified the four presumptions as listed in the Specification. Candidates were generally accurate in their explanation of pragmatism and were effective in their explanation and illustration of contextual relativism and personalism. Positivism was often the least well presented element. The weakest answers showed little understanding and suggested, for example, that this meant that

situation ethics had a very positive attitude on life or worked for a positive outcome. Better explanations focused closely on what Fletcher wrote about theological positivism in Chapter 2 of *Situation Ethics*. Many answers lacked good examples of how the presumptions can guide situationists in making moral decisions.

Question 04
Some candidates seemed to be unaware that Fletcher presented Situation Ethics as a Christian form of moral decision-making, but many were able to contrast Situationism with a more legalistic Christian approach and to find apparent similarities between Situationism and the teaching of Christ as recorded in the gospels. Some of the examples used to contrast a legalistic Christian approach with a Christian situationist approach showed a very limited understanding of Church teaching.

Question 3 (Topic 3 *Religious teaching on the nature and value of human life*)

Question 05
Some very good answers were seen, many drawing on two contrasting religious traditions, such as Buddhism and Christianity. Many answers were illustrated with reference to scriptures and showed a pleasing use of technical terms. Weaker answers tended to offer a list of ideas with only limited explanation or development.

Question 06
Many candidates offered a thoughtful discussion of this issue and chose various examples of 'non-human life' to make their points. Those who chose to classify the embryo as 'non-human' sometimes found it difficult to maintain a coherent answer because candidates referred to the embryo as a 'baby' and so destroyed the argument they were offering. Conservation issues, especially de-forestation and the preservation of endangered species, were discussed to good effect. In some cases, however, candidates simply had an opinion to offer without evidence or argument to support it.

Question 4 (Topic 4 *Abortion and euthanasia*)

Question 07
There were some very good answers to this question. The best answers considered both the issues raised by present legislation and those raised by the possibility of legalising euthanasia in the future. Good use was made of case studies to explain the issues. Some answers focused almost exclusively on the possible consequences of legalising euthanasia and sometimes tended to list those consequences without comment or direct application to the question. Some candidates wrote much more generally about euthanasia with little or no reference to legislation; this limited the marks that candidates could achieve. Other candidates distinguished very clearly between passive and active euthanasia and were very clear about the different issues raised in each case.

Question 08
This question required a reasoned debate and allowed candidates to consider some of the issues they had explained in their answer to Question 07. Many of the best answers focused on the meaning of the word 'good' and argued, for example, that euthanasia could never be 'good' if it broke religious law. Some candidates, however, did not have an accurate understanding of religious teaching on the subject, especially with regard to turning off a life-support machine or withdrawing treatment. This meant that some of the arguments they offered against euthanasia were incorrect.