



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

**Religious Studies**

**RSS01**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit A Religion and Ethics 1**

***Report on the Examination***

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## **General comments**

The questions proved accessible and there were full mark answers to each part of each question and much evidence of careful preparation both by students and by schools and colleges. There were also, however, answers that did not relate closely to the question set, suggesting that students had not read the questions carefully enough or had not reminded themselves of the demands of the question as their answers progressed. Such weaknesses were rarely seen in scripts which included clear essay plans which highlighted the key words of the question. Many scripts were easy to read; however in some cases legibility was poor, and students must realise that what cannot be read cannot be credited. A number of students wasted time writing lengthy introductions and conclusions. In the worst cases (since it happened four times over) this represented almost a quarter of their whole script.

### **Question 1 *Utilitarianism***

This was a very popular question and there were many well-informed answers.

- 01** The question focused on the hedonic calculus and its application; however, some students wrote instead about utilitarianism in general or discussed a single issue at length, which was not required. Many students were able to explain the criteria of the calculus, in varying levels of accuracy and clarity, but only some explained how they might be used in combination to reach a conclusion – for example how the pleasure gained by some people would be weighed against the pain of others, or how short-term benefits might be outweighed by long-term suffering or vice versa.
- 02** This issue is highlighted in the Specification, so it was expected that all students would be familiar with it. Some, however, did not appear to recognise it and some did not appear to understand the term ‘goal’. Among the effective arguments were those that focused on the idea that the chosen goal might bring personal satisfaction, or focus on the well-being of others, rather than bring happiness to the individual. Some less successful answers focused on alternative goals, like money or fame, but then justified them by arguing that they brought happiness. In such cases it was not always clear whether this was an argument in favour of or against the view being assessed.

### **Question 2 *Situation Ethics***

- 03** Many students were able to give a clear explanation of the meaning of ‘Christian Love’ and then selected ideas from the presumptions and /or principles to explain how love is used in the decision-making process. There was some very effective use of examples to illustrate when and why ‘love’ may set law aside. In contrast there were many answers which simply presented an overview of Situation Ethics, often by listing the presumptions and principles, which paid very little attention to the question.
- 04** There were some excellent answers to this question. Many were able to debate whether Situation Ethics gives any real guidance and/or whether the relative lack of guidance was a weakness. Many were able to refer to the views of scholars, although some simply reported those views rather than used them in support of their argument. Weaker answers tended to offer opinion without any reasoning in support.

### **Question 3 *Religious teaching on the nature and value of human life***

- 05** Many of the answers to this question were focused and well-informed. Some drew on information from more than one religion, however, some of these answers included broad generalisations which were only partially accurate. Some very good answers explained ideas found in relevant passages from scripture. Some used the supposed difference between an unborn and born human being to explore what ‘being human’ means; others

referred to ideas about when life starts but did not draw out anything specifically relevant to the question from this.

**06** In general students were aware of a wide range of relevant ideas within religion and could discuss why some would agree with the claim and others totally reject it. Some attempted very complex, and sometimes very confused, explanations of human freedom in relation to God's omniscience and omnipotence which went far beyond what the question required. Some answers that referred to Buddhism were confused about the extent to which karma influences life, and there were many vague generalisations.

#### **Question 4 *Abortion and euthanasia***

**07** In addition to some well-focused and very well-informed answers, there were others which were largely or partly irrelevant, usually because they offered the arguments against euthanasia. Some relevant answers concentrated mostly on the possible consequences of carrying a baby to full term. Sometimes these considered consequences for the mother, the child who is yet to be born, other children in the family and the wider society, but sometimes only a very narrow range of consequences was considered. In many cases there was no supporting argument to show that we may have a moral duty to prevent unnecessary suffering caused by not having an abortion. Many of the best answers referred to women's rights, particularly the right to self defence, and good use was made of arguments from Judith Jarvis Thompson and Mary Anne Warren.

**08** Some excellent answers reflected differing views within religion and balanced, for example, sanctity of life arguments against the principle of double effect, or legalism against Situation Ethics. Others distinguished between 'permissible', as the lesser of two evils, and 'good'. Weaker answers often failed to focus on religious views, or attributed apparently secular views to religion without providing any supporting evidence or argument.

#### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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