



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 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 responses to this paper, with students showing insight and understanding, and able to draw on appropriate exemplification thoughtfully. It was noticeable that nearly all the scripts from a number of schools and colleges 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 and should be discouraged.

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

01 This was a popular question, but students did not always read the question carefully enough. 'Changing patterns of membership' includes more than statistics on decline. It includes the different 'ways of belonging', for instance to house groups, Alpha courses, cross-denominational memberships. It also includes the fact that whereas taking on church membership used to be a rite of growing up, nowadays, many will be attendees, without ever having formally become members of a Church. Some dealt with the demands of the question well, and were able to look at denominational differences in patterns of statistics, as well as to examine some of the implications of Sunday trading, the variety of forms of church life, etc. This question was about Christianity, and thus answers which gave lengthy details of statistics and practice in non-Christian religions could gain no credit for this.

02 There were some thoughtful responses here, and some were able to look at ways in which today's '24/7' lifestyles make it more difficult for people to find time for churchgoing. Surprisingly few really grappled with the debate about 'changes in belief', and many wrote at length about issues to do with the Church's attitudes to homosexuality, rather than the fundamental issue of belief. Similarly, on the 'changes in society' side, many could have made more use of the idea that people join organisations in general far less than they used to, and that many are reluctant to take on long-term commitments in any walk of life.

Question 2 *Expressions of religion within society*

This was the least popular of the questions. However, there were some good responses from those who attempted this question.

03 This question could be answered in a variety of ways, depending on the leaders chosen, and there were some good responses. The best were able to look at a variety of types of leaders, as required by the question. This variety was sometimes from within one religion or across a range of religions, either approach was acceptable. Such answers were then able to explore the authority of these leaders, looking at the fields of life over which authority was held, or the absoluteness or relativeness of that authority. In some cases they made effective links to other forms of authority, e.g. citing the bishops who sit in the House of Lords, or the chain of authority which is found in a hierarchy. Weaker answers tended to describe the 'jobs' of various leaders without making clear links to their authority.

04 There were some good answers to this question, with many students being able to discuss the authority of leaders in relation to other forms of authority, such as the scriptures. Others made a good case for saying that the authority of the State is more important. Many, of course concluded, that the most important authority is God.

Question 3 *Issues of identity and belonging*

This was a popular question, and one which was very accessible. Students did not always approach it in sufficient depth to be able to access the higher levels.

05 A few students approached this question with a prepared answer on dress and diet, which they tried to make fit the question, usually with limited success. Many gave rather simplistic answers, talking about times as, for example, Muslim prayer times, and the significance of Jummah prayers on Friday, and the need for Wudu facilities and a clean place to pray. Better answers were able to look at a range of times (either from within one religion, or across more), such as festival times, times for pilgrimage etc. Similarly, in discussing facilities, lower level answers tended to make very basic comments on places of worship, whereas better answers were able to talk about what these represented or provided. Too many students did not really understand the word 'facilities', and tended to write about artefacts, rather than the provisions of particular space.

06 With these observations about 05, answers to this part were obviously variable. There were some good answers, in which students were able to balance thoughtfully the issues of practicalities of providing for all, and the issues of religious equality and human rights. A few muddled their debate by talking about Jedi Knights, which was not really helpful in this context. As has been noted previously on this unit, there was an unfortunate tendency among a small number of students to use 'us and them' language, or to speak of members of non-Christian religions as 'new arrivals', rather than recognising that the majority are at least second or third generation UK residents.

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

07 This was a popular question and quite well answered. The best were able to exemplify the points made appropriately from particular movements. Some gave thorough accounts of different classifications offered by different sociologists, with good exemplification, though such reference was not necessary in order to gain the higher levels. A number of students seemed slightly 'thrown' by a general question on the nature of NRMs and gave thorough accounts of narrower areas, e.g. the sect/cult distinction or charismatic leadership. Surprisingly few said much about the millenarian emphases of such groups. Some students who obviously had good knowledge penalised themselves by not giving any exemplification. This prevented them from accessing Level 5 and above.

08 There were some thoughtful responses to this question, with arguments made on both sides. Some tended to argue rather narrowly, for example, basing their whole argument on the effect of the death of a charismatic leader, or arguing that since the millennium has come and gone, NRMs must be short lived. Whilst AO2 answers are not expected to be long, for the higher levels, they should be able to mention a range of factors.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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