

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

GCE Religious Studies
6RS02_1D
The Study of World Religions

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AREA 1D - The Study of World Religions

Introduction

General Comments

The Investigations Paper of June 2011 demonstrated a high level of scholarship evident across all areas of study and many answers demonstrated the engagement that candidates had with their area of investigation. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many responses that were truly academic in their approach. Candidates were very well prepared for the examination and it was evident that Centres used their specialist resources and interests to encourage candidates to research in depth a particular area of study. It is important to stress again that the 'Investigations' unit has a definite academic purpose. The aim is to involve candidates as active participants pursuing open-ended enquiries with an emphasis on independent learning. Questions were designed to be inclusive of all possible approaches to various topics and all valid answers were considered.

Whilst most centres had entered their candidates for the correct option there were still a few entries for particular areas of study where consideration regarding entry for a different area of study may have been beneficial to the candidate. It is important to ensure candidates know which areas of their investigation is the best fit for the question they answer on the paper. There was evidence of candidates choosing a different question on the paper to the question they had clearly prepared for before the examination.

Candidates were not penalised if correct entries were not made or a cross was put in a box that did not match the answer. Examiners were encouraged to mark positively. Centres should ensure that candidates are entered for the option that matches their area of study and that candidates are clear about which question they have been prepared for on the paper.

Variation in achievement was related to the two assessment objectives. These objectives should receive prominent attention in the process of the investigation. Each question consistently referred to the assessment objectives with the trigger word 'Examine' for AO1 and 'Comment on' for AO2. These dictated the structure of the question and helped candidates to plan their answers. It would be advisable for candidates to pay regular attention to the level descriptors for these assessment objectives as a way of monitoring their development and progress during their investigations. The phrase 'with reference to the topic you have investigated' will always appear in the question to ensure that the generic question can be answered with material from any appropriate investigation. The mark scheme itself is generic to all questions. In preparation for this examination candidates may find it useful to write up their investigation under exam timed conditions to a variety of different possible questions. They might build up a number of different essay plans to different possible questions. The important point in these activities is to enable candidates to develop their management of material such as how to best structure their content to answer the specific question. However, success can be undermined by writing up a rote-learned answer which was not adapted to the question set or by answering a question that has been written for a topic they have not studied.

6RS02 reports features work produced by the candidates in the actual examination for candidates in Area 1A, 1B and 1C where possible. Areas 1D, 1E, 1F and 1G have smaller entries and the style of report is briefer for these areas of study.

Specific Comments – Area 1D – The Study of World Religions

Question 1: Ethical Precepts & Applied Ethics

There was a more detailed approach to discussing religious teachings and traditions that resulted in much better quality essays. Careful use of scholarship was directed towards the demands of the question and this approach is to be encouraged.

The most popular topics included Jihad, homosexuality, capital punishment, suicide and euthanasia with reference to two world religions. There was some very interesting work on the ethical teachings of sexuality and marriage in Islam this summer. Many candidates demonstrated careful investigation and breadth of reading with high level critical appraisal skills. There was much evidence of proficient use of technical terms from a range of Islamic schools; candidates quoted a wide range of Islamic sources in addition to the Qur'an; for example hadith and various Islamic scholars. Issues were addressed from an Islamic perspective with a balanced argument which showed knowledge of more than one point of view. Some candidates included excellent information on greater and lesser Jihad with reference to scholars, the Qur'an and hadith with detailed analysis of alternative views whilst a few needed to include a range of evidence and reasoned argument in their exposition. Weaker responses struggled to provide alternative views.

Candidates who chose to address the issues in these topics with reference to Buddhism presented some very knowledgeable responses that scrutinised closely the ethical precepts of Buddhism. Some weaker responses failed to address the question and much of the writing was about the history of Buddhism. These responses also made little or no reference to scholarship. Candidates can improve their answers by demonstrating a much more detailed approach to studying any particular world religion. Weaker responses might contain a few quotes from sacred scripture but fail to include other sources such as relevant scholarship and on the other hand scholarship is best accompanied in this Area of Study by ethical precepts that are derived from religious tradition and the authority of religious leaders.

Question 2: Religious Pluralism, Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Practice

There were few answers to this question and hence the range of topics offered was narrow. There were some very good answers on the Interfaith Dialogue - this is a topic that candidates find difficult but the strongest responses showed the intricacies of this dialogue through secure knowledge of appropriate sources and scholarship throughout their exposition. Candidates deployed a wide range of evidence and were able to draw sophisticated conclusions using sound religious terminology.

Candidates need to include a range of evidence in their investigation that is supported by sound scholarship and, where possible, to show knowledge of more than one point of view. Answers in the lower levels tended to be brief, descriptive and generalised.

Question 3: Contrasting Standpoints on Beliefs About God

This question attracted a number of excellent answers; candidates who wrote about Judaism knew their material well and included a range of sources in their essays.

Candidates were very well informed about the different beliefs about God in Islam; however some candidates did not understand fully the Christian teachings on the existence of God and Christian denominations were mixed up. Some candidates were not very clear about the differences between the contrasting viewpoints on belief about God they were arguing for. Candidates generally appreciated differences in belief and their research conveyed the desire to understand in greater depth a view they did not ascribe to. Candidates, in most cases, were aware that in this type of topic it is important to create a balance of material between the different traditions under investigation.

Candidates focusing on Hinduism produced some excellent responses. Candidates discussed different beliefs about God using the Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita, Vedas and different schools of thought. The better responses to this question included detailed knowledge of different beliefs about the existence of God; in particular Shankaras Advaita Vedanta and critically compared this with Dvaita Vedanta.

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