

Examiners' Report
June 2012

GCE Religious Studies 6RS02 1A

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Introduction

General Comments

The Investigations Paper provides for a balance of teacher-directed and more independent student enquiry. The aim is to involve students as active participants within a process where they undertake individual research into a topic of particular interest. Questions are designed to be inclusive of all possible approaches to various topics and this is the reason the expression, "with reference to the topic you have investigated" is included in each question. The ability to select and manage individual research to fit the demands of the question is an important discriminator in terms of assessment. The mark scheme is generic and allows for a very wide range of possible approaches – there are no indicative mark schemes for each question because there are so many legitimate ways of answering questions based on independent research. Preparation for this unit is focussed around the two assessment objectives. Candidates are expected to determine whether there is sufficient material to access a variety of appropriate sources (Assessment Objective 1) and to evaluate alternative views (Assessment Objective 2). Candidates may develop their research with reference to the criteria in the level descriptors across both AO1 and AO2. The assessment criteria are typically mentioned in each question through the trigger words, 'examine' for AO1 and 'comment' for AO2. The candidates work is assessed according to the application of both assessment objectives as in the exam itself there must be explicit attention to these objectives in the examination answer.

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, candidates should be careful not to use a pre-prepared answer in the exam which has not been adapted to the question set or by answering a question that has been written for a topic they have not studied.

June 2012 demonstrated once again a very 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 answers that were truly academic in their approach. Some Centres chose to focus on the same or similar topics for all their candidates, whereas other Centres permitted considerable choice for individual candidates. 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. Many responses evidenced a wide range of relevant material with substantial background reading used effectively. A feature of high quality answers was the ability to manage research material to integrate an aspect(s) of the question. Candidates performed well across both assessment objectives with detailed content and insightful, cogent argument. There were well-structured responses based on the question and candidates used their knowledge to address the focus of the question.

In some cases candidates did not select their material in accordance with the specific question and could have adapted their material more effectively to address the question. The question was briefly mentioned and in some cases there was only reference to the question in the final section. At the lower levels some candidates drew on sources that were below the standard expected for GCE level. These responses tended to be descriptive rather than analytical and in some cases were too short to cover the topic in any breadth or depth; these responses typically lacked elaboration and lacked GCE level substance.

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.

There were still a few examples where entry for a different area of study may have been beneficial to the candidate. It is important to ensure candidates know which area 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.

Question 1

Question 1 - Religion and Science

Candidates are very well informed on many different past and present debates between religion and science. High quality answers discussed a range of scientific and religious accounts in relation to their research and the best answers drew their material back to the question, or set up their approach clearly with reference to it and then proceeded to address key themes through a variety of models of the relationship between religion and science which answered the task well. A feature of high quality scripts was their clear, coherent structure based around contrasting stances on the relationship between religion and science. Relevant material was used and scholarship referred to in a majority of cases, however some answers lacked supporting or illustrative material of a suitably academic nature.

Quite a number of responses commented on the question and were able to handle an in-depth discussion of whether scientific knowledge undermines religious faith. Most studies were up to date and referred effectively to contemporary debate with reference to a broad range of influential scholars in the field.

Overall there was good material on science but sometimes not so good on the distinctive discipline of religion although quite a few candidates dealt with religious issues and some were very aware of the academic discipline of religious studies.

Question 2

Question 2 - Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology of Religion

This question was largely very well done.

One of the most popular choices was an investigation into Freud and his importance for an understanding of religion. There was much evidence of skilful interaction with the question that resulted in stimulating discussion. In AO1 most candidates presented the core, basic details about Freud's ideas with a proficient use of terms. It was clear that the best candidates were familiar with Freudian views and terminology. Candidates who performed at the lower levels were content with a straightforward exposition of Freud's key ideas. Those candidates who were credited at the higher levels selected and adapted their work to the demands of the question. With regard to this question, these able candidates focused on those Freudian ideas pertinent to an understanding of religion. It is not essential, but some candidates knew the distinctive ideas in some of Freud's primary texts and were able to draw on specific textual data. If candidates know this type of material it is to their credit to draw on this expertise. AO2 tended to be well answered with a consideration of a range of debate and controversy ending in a conclusion that decisively argued for or against the question. There was also some examples of Freud and Jung in the same answer and these essays worked well when presented as a comparison of their views in relation to the view that religion plays a positive role in the lives of people.

Other approaches included a comparison and analysis of sociologists of religion and an assessment of the validity of those views in the light of the quotation and some focused on Dawkins' critique of religion and evaluated that viewpoint well.

The same points made about Freud apply in terms of the crucial importance of managing the content so as to focus on the question. There was evidence of informative essays on cults which might have been more analytical. Some candidates attempted to cover a breadth of several academic discipline such as psychology, sociology and anthropology within an essay. There is nothing to prohibit this but there is no requirement that such breadth of material is essential and in the time available it is sometimes difficult to attempt such breadth.

Question 3

Question 3 - Creative Expressions in Religious Life

This area of study continues to attract a wide range of material, mostly brilliantly written and researched. Some candidates presented a very wide range of material covering various art forms across different historical periods. Outstanding work was presented within the field of literature with some excellent work using the literature of C.S. Lewis, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Dostoevsky as an exemplar for creative expression in religious life. There were examples of the highest quality work from this more specific approach as well as the broader perspective. This topic attracted much research conducted in the best spirit of the Investigations Paper and candidates produced highly independent studies. Many studies conveyed a strong grasp of the relationship between religious ideas and creative expression. There is also a growing interest in liturgical music and a selection of artists renowned for their works on religious themes such as Caravaggio and Leonardo da Vinci. The individual interest in this area of study is evidenced in very high quality work that demonstrates a high level of command of the religious themes studied.

Paper Summary

Key points to remember:

- Manage the material to focus on the demands of the question.
- Use appropriate sources and, if possible, include recent scholarship.
- Demonstrate how well you understand the topic by your selection of material.
- Do not forget to comment on your material. Show that you have thought about your research.
- Use your evidence to substantiate your argument.
- Comment on alternative views if you know them.
- Express your viewpoint clearly.
- Practice writing under timed conditions as part of your preparation.
- Do not spend too long writing out your essay plan to the detriment of the essay itself.

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