

Examiners' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

January 2013

Edexcel GCE – Religious Studies
Unit 2: Investigations – The Study of
Religion

6RS02/1A

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Unit 2: Religious Studies - The Study of Religion

Introduction

GENERAL COMMENTS

The Investigations Paper of January 2013 demonstrated a very high level of independent student enquiry. The engagement that candidates had with their area of investigation was evidenced in the way they independently used and evaluated a wide range of source material. 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. It is important to stress again that the 'Investigations' unit has a definite academic purpose. The aim is to involve students 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 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. In some of these cases the candidate was using material suitable for Question 1 to answer Question 3 and not really grappling fully with the demands of the question. 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. Importantly, in the exam itself there must be explicit attention to these objectives in the examination answer. 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 but the answer itself is not necessarily generic as candidates are expected to use their material to answer the question. The purpose of the question is to challenge candidates to adapt their material so that at the highest

levels they may demonstrate a coherent understanding of the task, based on the selection of their material. Widely deployed evidence/arguments/sources were evident in well-structured responses to the task whereby a clearly expressed viewpoint was supported by well-deployed evidence and reasoned argument. There was skilful deployment of religious language in many answers and the fluency of the essay showed command over the material.

Candidates at the lower end of achievement struggled with the demands of the question. In preparation for this examination some 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.

Specific Comments – Paper 1A – The Study of Religion

6RS02_1A_Q01 – Religion and Science

This area of study attracted a wide range of responses to this question, some very ably marshalling a range of scientific and religious accounts of origins of the universe and others at the other end offering a descriptive narrative with little focus on the wording of the question. The best answers adapted their material to the question, or set up their approach clearly with reference to the question and offered a thorough discussion as to whether religion and science will always be in conflict. Key themes were addressed through a variety of models of relationship between religion and science, which answered the thrust of the question well. Good mention was made in some answers to the methodology of the two disciplines, and the use of language within the two systems. Other more 'straightforward' approaches also did extremely well in many cases because they did not ignore the question. A good range of material was used in the majority of cases with appropriate scholarship but the weaker answers lacked supporting or illustrative material of a suitably academic nature. Overall there was good material on science but sometimes weaker on the distinctive discipline of religion. The best candidates were well versed in the debate from a scientific and religious perspective.

Quite a number of studies discussed the relationship between religion and science within the context of creationism and evolution. It was encouraging to see how up to date most studies were and academic material was offered on the more contemporary debates including reference to a broad range of influential scholars. There was good analysis of key terms and an assessment of their significance. Effective use was made of material which candidates had studied in 6RS01 such as the design argument and process theology, although a few weaker answers relied on 'Design Argument' type approaches without demonstrating any further knowledge of the religion and science debate. It must be stressed that the demands of the Investigations Paper are different to the Foundations Paper and this Area of Study is not exclusively about the existence of God. It is also worth noting that some answers echoed of fundamentalism, and whilst any point of view can be argued for, it is important to be able to substantiate an individual view with balanced knowledge of both sides of the debate.

6RS02_1A_Q2 – Anthropology/Sociology/Psychology of Religion

This question was largely very well done. The level of scholarship was most impressive at the higher end of achievement. There much evidence of skilful interaction with the question; candidates presented a coherent discussion regarding how understanding religion may have been advanced through the particular thinker and/or discipline. One of the most popular choices was an investigation into Freud; in AO1 most candidates presented the core, basic details about Freud's ideas with a proficient use of terms. Candidates who performed at the lower levels were content with a straightforward exposition of Freud's key ideas without much acknowledgement of the question. 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 understanding religion may be advanced through the work of a thinker and/or discipline.

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. Some candidates attempted to cover a breadth of several academic disciplines 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 a daunting task to attempt such breadth.

6RS02_1A_Q3 – Creative Expressions in Religious Life

This Area of Study attracted a narrower range of material as entry numbers for this question were low. The range of topics covered was narrower in this session but reflected the potential for producing research conducted in the best spirit of the Investigations Paper. There were examples of studies that covered a very wide range of material, covering various art forms across different historical periods. There is a growing interest in Film and Art and some candidates drew on both expressive forms to study creative expressions in religious life. Some of these studies were highly independent studies. The individual interest in this area of study is often evidenced by very high quality work where candidates possess fluent knowledge of the religious themes studied.

Advice for Candidates

- Please directly address the question being asked.
- A generic question is not best answered with a generic answer. The question is made up of two parts. The question itself and the generic phrase 'Examine and comment with reference to the topic you have investigated.' Answer the question.
- Use appropriate sources and, if possible, include recent scholarship.
- Thoughtfully deployed material will show how well you understand your topic and how you are using your material to answer the question.
- Do not forget to comment on your material in relation to the question.
- 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 much time on your essay plan to the detriment of the essay itself.
- Write legibly.

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