

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel GCE in Religious
Studies (6RS02) Paper 1E

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AREA 1E Old Testament

Introduction

GENERAL COMMENTS

Expressing annual praise for the quality of candidates' work is a delight because, once again, the Investigations Paper evoked excellent studies drawn from an inspiring range of topics within a wide range of varied academic fields. The high standard of work evidenced in June 2014 was no exception to historical high standards as candidates demonstrated a very high level of independent enquiry which clearly demonstrated engagement with their chosen area of investigation. Candidates showcased their knowledge of a particular academic field in the way they identified a line of enquiry, clearly expressed their view, analysed key concepts and deployed evidence with coherent understanding of their task whilst fluently evaluating a wide range of source material that they had at their disposal. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many answers that were truly academic in their approach. Some Centres continue 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 (or vice versa) and not really grappling fully with the demands of the question. This practice does not always work to the best effect as the candidate might end up answering neither question as fully as possible. It must be noted that each question was written for ONE of three topics within each particular Area of Study. Candidates were not penalised if correct entries were not made or a cross was put in a box that did not match the answer or if no box was ticked at all. However, evidence shows that candidates have decided that the question for a topic that they clearly had not prepared for looked more inviting and selected that question but that did not necessarily mean they were best prepared to answer that question. More candidates in this session answered a question they had not prepared for and may need to be reminded which question their material is best directed at and be advised to answer that question. Examiners were encouraged to mark positively and to credit all valid material according to the mark scheme and question paper. 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 is still evidence of Centres studying Papers 1B and 1F being entered for 1A. This might be an oversight regarding filling out the form – Centres must choose 6RS02 and then identify which of the seven papers from 1A to 1G is the specific entry.

Variation in achievement was related to the two assessment objectives. These objectives should receive prominent attention in the process of the investigation. Importantly there must be explicit attention to both objectives in the examination answer and also to the question that is intended to focus the 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 good essays showed command over the material; such command makes for high outcomes and rewards the amount of hard work done by the candidate. Many candidates had clearly learned much in the process and their overall grasp of the issues involved and command over their material was highly commendable.

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. There was evidence of rote learned answers using the same structure and material inclusive of quotes; whilst much information was relevant to the topic and consequently was awarded in terms of AO1, there was a significant lack of engagement with the specific demands of the question and consequently marks for AO2 were low, with only generic evaluation provided. This approach is contrasted with another form where candidates were trained to answer the question; arguably, this is evidence of good practice but at the lower end some candidates thought it was sufficient to simply use the question stimulus at the end of each paragraph. The best answers were those which were guided by the statement as opposed to simply '*tagging it on*' to content that they were already anticipating to write about. A balanced approach to the question that meets the highest levels of achievement according to both assessment objectives is obviously desirable and the generic question accommodates many possible routes to success whereby any valid approach to the question was credited.

Finally, there is increasing evidence of poorly written scripts that are almost illegible – scripts are scanned onto software for marking and even though the examiner can enlarge the screen many scripts were still very difficult to read. Candidates are strongly advised to develop their practical handwriting skills and then practice writing under timed conditions. Candidates who cannot achieve legible writing may need to consider accessing the facility for word processing their answers according to the regulations. Centres are assured that much time was invested in attempting to decipher illegible answers but there is always the risk that a badly written word/phrase/paragraph could be misinterpreted and it is best to avoid the chances of this occurring. Examiners understand the time constraints that candidates are

writing under but this problem regarding illegible handwriting seems to be on the increase. Centres need to address this issue because the current format for examinations requires candidates' ability to sustain handwriting and academic standards under examination pressure.

That said, the excellent work of centres and candidates in 6RS02 bears testimony to the academic potential of candidates that is a joy to behold when it is fully realised.

Specific Comments - Area 1E - The Study of the Old Testament/Jewish Bible

It would be good to see more entries for this paper as the Old Testament had the fewest candidates of all the 6RS02 options. It is evident that candidates engage enthusiastically with this unit as there were some very insightful and detailed studies.

Question 1 - Religion and Science

The take up for this question remains rather low and this seems a shame because the potential of this topic is not really explored by many candidates. Candidates appear to fear discussing with confidence how the study of the interface between religion and science might have real relevance for the study of the Old Testament. There is scope for examining the historical interaction between religion and science by focussing on the dialogue between Christianity and the natural sciences. The Old Testament provides rich material for the application of natural science, for example, in the creation narratives, miracles or prophecy. Very few candidates addressed, for example, how the Christian doctrine of creation could be explored by examining scientific explanations for the origins of the universe. The best candidates were able to discuss the creation and evolution debate in detail; other candidates extrapolated a relationship between the design argument and the Old Testament. Origins of the universe in the Old Testament were contrasted by some candidates against scientific discovery. The focus of the question was missed by a few who were unable to comment on the claim the religion and science answer different questions. The best answers adapted their material to the question, or set up their approach clearly with reference to the question. In the best essays the issues were firmly located within contemporary scholarship from within the religion and science debate and coupled with appropriate knowledge of Old Testament scholarship. Overall there was an excellent selection of material drawn from the Old Testament that supported very good essays but in some cases responses were weaker on the distinctive discipline of science. The best candidates were well versed in the debate from a scientific and religious perspective and were up to date with their account of it. There was good analysis of key terms and drawing out of their significance.

Weaker candidates generally struggled to relate issues within the religion and science debate to a study of the Old Testament. Some candidates were rather one-sided in their approach to the religion and science debate and opportunities to refer to the Old Testament narratives were generally missed. Scholarship in the Old Testament is extensive and is best deployed with the relevant textual extract from which the theological issues emerge; good candidates had no difficulty handling

their material with this point in mind. There were a few scripts that might have fared better if they were entered for 1A Q1 because it appeared that in-depth knowledge of the Old Testament was not so secure. A few candidates managed to move beyond a purely Dawkinian critique towards a balanced reflection on the question but would have benefitted from the inclusion of commentary from other, more well known, Old Testament scholars. It is also worth noting 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.

Question 2 - The Nature of God

This question was very well done. This question provides scope for examining the Old Testament in order to understand the nature of God. Some excellent responses navigated a wide range of different Old Testament literature and explored in detail the significance of these for understanding our relationship with God. Candidates offered a range of convincing views about the nature of God that were coupled with solid exegesis of the biblical text and appropriate scholarship. Candidates answered this question with a high level of insight and were well equipped to examine the many valid interpretations of God whilst backing up their views with a wide range of contrasting biblical quotations, both from the Law and the Prophets. The various attributes of God were understood in detail and discussed through the use of scholarly opinion backed up by the Prophets and the Psalms. Evaluation was interesting and varied in approach, from the evangelistic notions of God's embracing agape love, through pre-destination, heaven and hell to philosophical notions of free will and epistemic distance.

In the mid-range, similar to last year, there was much evidence of Dawkins' analysis of the psychotic nature of God at the expense of reference to classical Old Testament scholarship. Dawkins was too often quoted as an Old Testament scholar whilst negative issues about God were discussed in a polarised fashion. More scholarly analysis would have added a qualitatively academic edge to the discussion. At the lower end of achievement candidates concentrated on re-telling Bible stories with little scholarly analysis; or alternatively candidates in this range had little knowledge of the Old Testament.

Question 3 - Job and The Problem Of Evil And Suffering

By far, this question was the most popular with most candidates handling it really well. Candidates were able to examine the Book of Job skilfully, with clarity and coherence; candidates discussed its relationship to the problem of evil and suffering by comparative analysis of textual narratives in the Book of Job and from elsewhere in the Old Testament, most notably the Genesis myths. The best candidates had secure knowledge of the Book of Job and scholarship specific to the Book of Job such as C.S.Rodd. They were also familiar with a range of other well known Old Testament scholars. Candidates really did explore issues deeply within this question, and most answers were full of scholarship, good learning and interesting evaluation.

Effective use was made of material which candidates had studied in 6RS01 such as the Problem of Evil, some weaker answers relied on 'Problem of Evil and Theodicy'

type approaches without demonstrating any further knowledge of the Old Testament. This raises the question as to why candidates are not prepared for a different paper for which they might have more distinctive knowledge. It must be stressed again that the demands of the Investigations Paper are different to the Foundations Paper and this particular question is not exclusively about the problem of evil. Candidates must demonstrate secure knowledge of the Book of Job to secure higher levels of achievement. Many candidates examined solutions to the problem of evil, particularly the Augustinian and Irenaean Theodicies, but not so many used this material effectively to comment on the Book of Job. Some weaker candidates re-told the Job narratives and then wrote about philosophical notions, but were unable to relate the two in a very meaningful way. Some candidates tended to concentrate on the philosophical arguments concerning suffering and tended to use Job as an example (or an after-thought) – this results in some uneven answers. This question demands detailed knowledge of the Book of Job and achievement is directly related to a working knowledge of this material. It is insufficient to present an outline of the problem of evil if this is not applied directly to the Book of Job

Paper Summary

Key Points to Remember

- Do not ignore the question.
- 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.
- Well 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.

