



Pearson

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Religious Studies (6RS02)
Paper 1A Investigations – The Study of Religion

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AREA 1A The Study of Religion

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2017 examination season heralded the end of an era and the final entry stands as a testimony to the historic high level of engagement with selected studies drawn from a very wide range of academic fields. Over the life of this specification there has been consistent evidence of superb research on topics that are clearly of great interest to candidates. This legacy of academic achievement has been inspirational for examiners whose privilege it is to see what can be achieved by our candidates. The new specification will obviously provide a different assessment experience and centres will find that their excellent resources can be integrated into future schemes of work.

The high standard of work evidenced in June 2017 was no exception to historical high standards as candidates demonstrated a very high level of independent enquiry which clearly demonstrated what their chosen area of investigation had meant to them as a learning experience. 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. Candidates were mostly 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. At this stage in the life of the specification it is difficult to find new things to report because, in the main, centres possess a very high degree of expertise and this is clearly evidenced in the work that is produced on the day of the examination.

Examiners were encouraged to mark positively and to credit all valid material according to the mark scheme and question paper. Variation in achievement was related to the two assessment objectives. 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. These candidates were insecure with their management of material and did not know how to best structure their content to answer the specific question. 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. This approach is contrasted with excellent praxis whereby 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 anticipated content. 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.

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 1A – The Study of Religion

Question 1 RELIGION AND SCIENCE

The study of the interface between religion and science attracted some of the best responses that have appeared so far within this specification. Question 1 was very well answered with many students giving insightful comments on the various different models of science and religion working together. There was the usual wide range of responses to this question. Some candidates examined the historical interaction between religion and science and focused on the dialogue between Christianity and the natural sciences. Candidates were aware of the best research in the Religion and Science field and were able to distinguish the contributions of significant scholars such as Barbour, Peacocke, Polkinghorne and McGrath. Some candidates discussed Barbour's four models of the relationship between religion and science to great effect and very ably marshalled a range of works of proven value for their exploration of the field. Issues in religion were discussed with reference to a range of scientific and religious accounts of the origins of the universe; most notably the creation and evolution debate that is not without its own controversy. 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 science and religion as disciplines are mutually enriching as opposed to the traditional context of conflict. Key themes were addressed through a variety of models of the relationship between religion and science which answered the thrust of the question very well. Good mention was made in some answers to the methodology of both disciplines, and the usage of language within the two systems but other more 'straightforward' approaches also did extremely well in many cases because they did not ignore the question.

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 and were up to date with

their account of it. Overall, the range of responses for this question was largely skewed towards the higher levels of response as candidates demonstrated great fluency and control over their material. It is clear that over the life of the specification the academic achievement of candidates in this topic has been very accomplished.

Question 2

Question 2 ANTHROPOLOGY/SOCIOLOGY/PSYCHOLOGY of RELIGION

There was a marked improvement in the quality of investigations within the psychology of religion. Many answers investigating Freud were particularly well done and this remains one of the most popular choices of topic. With regard to this question, more able candidates focused on, for example, 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. The level of scholarship was most impressive at the higher end of achievement in all topics with much evidence of skilful interaction with the question; candidates presented a coherent discussion regarding the contribution of their chosen thinker/discipline to the study of religion. Most candidates used mainly the psychological or sociological disciplines, but a significant number included thinkers from both disciplines, most commonly Durkheim, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Jung. This year it was apparent that many candidates were able to explore in much greater depth the discipline of sociology in relation to religious belief and practice. Studies on cults were very well executed and some candidates showed evidence of original research that is to be highly commended.

Question 3

Question 3 CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

There has been so much originality and real research in this Area of Study over the years that it is a shame that numbers for this question were very low in this last session. This is the one question where candidates perennially achieved brilliant responses with individual flair accompanied by in-depth research on the topic. I would like to have seen more candidates attempt this question.

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.

