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# **Examiners' Report**

## Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

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

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## **Area 1C The Study of Ethics**

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### **Introduction**

#### 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 1C – The Study of Ethics**

#### Question 1 MEDICAL ETHICS

This question attracts the largest number of responses across the entire 6RS02 Unit. The best answers to medical ethics were attempted with an eye to scholarship and candidates had a very wide ranging understanding of the topic and included an in-depth knowledge of a wide range of religious and ethical teachings. Most candidates who attempted to answer this question did so with a good degree of success. The best responses married breadth with depth to produce an effective argument. The best candidates were those who were able to apply their knowledge to the question and actually answer it, although other responses only gave a vague indication that the question was there. The best responses demonstrated an understanding that religious and secular perspectives are not strictly polarised and were able to address, with some sophistication, the different interpretations of these concepts. These candidates successfully recognised and made relevant comparisons across a range of perspectives. This question is by far the most popular and candidates seemed to be well-prepared for the requirements of AO1 with the majority investigating issues related to abortion and euthanasia. The most memorable answers debated issues related to organ transplants and stem cell research/embryology and candidates adapted their material to the question with a decisive view about the question. The best answers had a long and highly discursive conclusion, making it clear that the candidates recognised they were dealing with an issue.

## Question 2

### Q2 THE NATURAL WORLD

This question attracts a very low take up each year despite the obvious accessibility of this topic and the clear engagement candidates who have studied the natural world appear to have. Most of the answers to this question demonstrated an understanding of the concept of stewardship, and most were able to link and contrast it with the concept of dominion, with reference to topical concerns, using examples such as 'battery hens' and global warming. Some candidates addressed the concept of stewardship in the light of recent international political initiatives. There was some awareness of the scientific debate surrounding the environmental crisis and its possible implications for stewardship. Some candidates appreciated how far a religious approach to life expected the concept of stewardship to be acted on. There were several religions cited for this and in the main Christian principles were cited. The low number of candidates who attempt this question is surprising especially since there is so much material to be found on a wide variety of topics related to the natural world. Ecotheology is highly relevant in a modern world that is conflicted between the need to progress and yet not overexploit natural resources to meet growing demand. Many approaches to this topic are as yet unexplored.

## Question 3

### Question 3 EQUALITY IN THE MODERN WORLD

There were some outstanding answers in this area which demonstrated ample evidence of contemporary scholarship. Candidates rose to the challenge and investigated the many different responses in the Christian Church and the underlying reasons for this. The best candidates discussed and analysed the contradictions within a religion in their view of equality: this discussion led to the conclusion that liberal schools of thought were theologically correct in their understanding of equality and were the most challenging. The standard of answers has improved in this question as candidates accessed broader research. The historicity of equality legislation, and its relevance for current thinking was addressed, at varying levels, by most candidates. In many instances, attitudes and legislation in the UK was compared to attitudes elsewhere. Some candidates addressed the extent to which religious views have contributed to equality and inequality. Most candidates were able to identify reasons for differing religious responses to issues of inequality and opted to investigate homosexuality and race. There were some good detailed answers on this and basic terms such as gender and homosexuality were thoroughly expounded. The candidates that did well were able to examine and comment on the implications of this issue in terms of ethical teaching. Candidates that opted to write about gender did incredibly well as they could discuss at length the variety of ethical responses and particularly the recent issue of the ordination of Bishops in the Anglican Church. However, there were instances of very incomplete or opinionated understanding of

Roman Catholic teaching on homosexuality that lost a certain objectivity regarding the issues under discussion. Responses that concentrated on the inequality caused by homophobia were either done very well or very badly. Better answers clearly supported a discussion on homophobia with ethical theory and scientific argument and weaker answers were self-limiting with a one-sided argument with limited support.

## 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.

