

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

AEA

AEA Religious Studies (9871)

Edexcel is one of the leading examining and awarding bodies in the UK and throughout the world. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers.

Through a network of UK and overseas offices, Edexcel's centres receive the support they need to help them deliver their education and training programmes to learners.

For further information please call our Customer Services on 0870 240 9800, or visit our website at www.edexcel.org.uk.

Summer 2008

Publications Code UA020431

All the material in this publication is copyright

© Edexcel Ltd 2008

Contents

1.	9871 - AEA Religious Studies Examiners' Report	1
2.	Statistics	4

9871: AEA Religious Studies

Introduction

The pattern of entry this year saw some changes from previous examinations. There was, once again, a small reduction in the number of candidates entering. Larger groups of up to 10 candidates entered from a few centres. There were still small but significant numbers of withdrawals before the examination. Notably, far fewer candidates at the lower end of the ability range entered than had previously been the case. This may mean that the message from previous years has been heeded, namely that this examination is intended for those who would normally be considered in the top 10% of the A level ability range. Disappointingly, it also appears that there were fewer candidates who showed the highest qualities, though the small number who did were, as usual, quite outstanding in the way they balanced breadth and depth, in the conciseness and clarity of their presentation, and in the independence of their thinking and argument. It is a continuing regret that some of the high calibre candidates who show very good skills, for example, in the synoptic element at A level are not currently entering for this examination.

The overall outcome was, therefore, broadly divided between two main traits. At the lower end, candidates' work was characterised by a clear attempt to address the question, but tended to include a range of material which was relevant though not always shaped into a clear line of argument. A continuing tendency to fasten on to a familiar idea arising from the question and to record everything that could be recalled on that topic continued to typify some of the work at this level. As a result, some did not really address the substance of the task and tended to write discursively.

At the higher end, work was characterised by a careful analysis of the issues, usually based on an ability to clarify the relevant key concepts and to explain the links between them, to use sources selectively to illustrate arguments and to consider carefully the implications of their own conclusions.

The following observations offer some comments on some of the answers to more popular questions in this year's paper.

Question 1

Many candidates took issue with the contention in the passage that one of either love or retribution must be sublated by the other, but arguments tended to be based on a somewhat simplistic assertion that that these two elements were merely characteristic in turn of the Old and New Testaments, without considering how both inform the overall theology of both Testaments. Very few took issue with the concept of eternal punishment and suffering. Of those who took a wider view of the passage, many simply wrote all they knew about theodicies.

Question 2

Some better responses offered a careful analysis of the concept of revelation, and entered fully into the debate about the issue of non-realism and its relationship to the use of symbol and metaphor in religious language.

Question 4

This question proved very popular and the passage offered a fairly straightforward structure for opening up the theme of whether or not there are objective values. Many dealt thoroughly with the options suggested, and with others, drawing on a wide range of sources, and some very good answers used these as a basis for discussion of the implications of the passage.

Question 7

Those who were fully conversant with Freud, and familiar with his supporters and detractors, were able to offer a concise analysis of the basic ideas in the passage. Some appeared to see this question as one about which they could write from their general knowledge, but successful candidates used their analysis to good effect as a basis for discussing other possible roots of the need for religion, and for challenging the assumption that the apparent abandonment of religious belief in adolescence is attributable to the breakdown in paternal authority.

Question 8

Many attempted this question, but most did not progress beyond a consideration of the first sentence. Answers tended to discuss examples of literalist and liberal interpretations of the text but without even considering the debate about the driving forces behind human progress, what such progress might mean, and whether such progress should even be considered if it does not fall within the scientific and technological spheres.

Question 11

Although only a few attempted this question, it again illustrates the same principle as the answers to Question 8 - namely that there were some very thorough discussions about modernisation and globalisation, but little engagement with the second part of the statement.

Question 14

Unsurprisingly, this question provoked the widest variety of answers, the best of which tended to be highly selective about the scope of their responses and to concentrate on a limited number of issues and debates as a basis for their discussion. Answers were generally well illustrated with apposite examples from a variety of ethical standpoints.

Question 15

This very popular question provoked some wide-ranging and well-informed answers. Most saw it as an opportunity to replay the contest between virtue ethics and 'the rest'. Better answers widened their discussion into exploring what ethics is actually about and took issue with the suggestion that there is any meaningful dichotomy in ethical thinking such as that suggested in the claim.

Question 19

The familiar territory opened up by the quotation was too tempting for many not to choose this question. The level of debate was, however, generally superficial, with some exceptions. Some dealt very well with the ethical considerations about the value of a faith based, as it were, on the toss of a coin, and the theology that it implies. Surprisingly few candidates sharpened up their discussion by reference to other accounts of religious faith, or to some of the potential subtleties in the quotation itself, or to other much more 'respectable' accounts of faith based on the 'as if' consideration.

Question 21

Many candidates attempted this question, divided fairly evenly between those who thought they could debate the issue in a general way without any psychological or philosophical understanding; and those who used their understanding from their course of study, with appropriate sources, to open up the debate about nature and nurture in an imaginative way. A wide range of approaches included, for example, an occasional consideration about whether a concept of God may be culturally determined.

Conclusion

Some of the above comments should highlight two features of the kinds of tasks that appear in the AEA examination. The tasks are certainly designed to open up a range of issues for debate, and there is no prescribed answer. Generally the best answers set out clearly what they select for discussion, recognising almost in passing that there are other legitimate approaches, and using the opportunity to discuss in some depth a particular aspect of an issue. They always, however, do justice to the whole task as set, and not just to one part of it with which they may be particularly familiar.

Statistics

Grade	Max. Mark	Merit	Distinction
Raw boundary mark	80	42	54

Further copies of this publication are available from
Edexcel Publications, Adamsway, Mansfield, Notts, NG18 4FN

Telephone 01623 467467
Fax 01623 450481

Email publications@linneydirect.com

Order Code 14166 Summer 2008

For more information on Edexcel qualifications, please visit www.edexcel.org.uk/qualifications

Edexcel Limited. Registered in England and Wales no.4496750
Registered Office: One90 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7BH