

Examiners' Report Summer 2009

AEA

AEA Religious Studies (9871)

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9871: AEA Religious Studies

Examiner's Report

This is the last report on this examination, which comes to an end this year. It has provided an interesting experiment over the years in how to identify outstanding A level students who have the capacity to show insight, flair, imagination and independent thinking - the sort of qualities our universities should be looking for. For a variety of reasons, the examination has provided only limited and spasmodic evidence of these qualities, largely because the entry has been small and there has been a tendency to enter many candidates of more limited ability than the intended target group, namely the top 10% of A level students.

Nevertheless, over time there have been fewer entries where candidates were not able to offer a meaningful response to the tasks at the appropriate level. Each year, on the other hand, a small number of candidates have clearly relished the task of tackling unseen texts and unprepared essays, and have done so with courage, flair, confidence and panache, such as the candidate this year whose response to the brief dialogue in the text of Q6 simply presented an imaginary continuation of the dialogue, showing a lucid understanding of the issues being raised.

Once again this year, it was relatively easy to discriminate between the different levels. In both sections of the paper, those who did not reach the merit or distinction levels tended, for example, to present argument at the level of personal opinion, without the support of scholarly opinion or careful analysis of the issues; or would typically fasten on to emotive terms or peripheral issues with which they felt confident, largely unrelated to the task. Those who gained a merit award were much more focused in their responses, showed that they could identify a clear issue for debate and presented a coherent argument based on their obvious understanding of the relevant area of study and awareness of some of the contributions which scholars have made to the debate. They tended however to be weaker in their evaluations or in their consideration of the implications of the views expressed.

Candidates gaining the distinction award usually showed their strengths in their capacity to evaluate a viewpoint, and to demonstrate that they were aware of why the issue under consideration had wider implications, all based on sound analysis. Once again, it has been a genuine pleasure to enjoy the quality of some these responses and to take encouragement for the future from them.

No doubt some of the lessons learned from this experiment can be transferred back into A level. One lesson is very obvious. The most able are clear, very concise, selective in their evidence and argument, and thoughtful in their conclusions. That is a skill worth learning at this level. They can assume that the examiner knows what they are talking about, and do not need to write half a page of information about Paley and his chronometer. Those candidates who wrote 35 pages in the examination did not serve themselves well, providing nothing more than a stream of (un)consciousness and a headache for the examiner in trying to decipher what the argument was supposed to be.

Statistics

Grade	Max. Mark	Merit	Distinction
Raw boundary mark	80	41	52

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