AQA

ASSESSMENT and
QUALIFICATIONS
ALLIANCE

General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies 1061

RSS03 Philosophy of Religion

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - January series

RSS03 *Philosophy of Religion*

General comments
This first paper of the new Specification produced some good responses, and it is clear that some candidates had prepared well for the examination. However, very few candidates scored really well, and this would appear to be due to a number of factors. There was evidence that some candidates were merely repeating class notes, with candidates from one centre providing almost identical answers as a result. Such an approach is not only disappointing but detrimental, with candidates employing notes as a template to be used for their answers to each and every question, regardless of the actual focus. This strategy was noted in response to Questions 1(a) and 2(a) in particular.

There was also evidence of poor examination technique. In particular, a significant number of candidates spent an inappropriate amount of time addressing part (a) of a question, and so left themselves with insufficient time to attempt part (b). This often meant that the maximum mark that could be gained was 60 rather than 90. In contrast, a small number of candidates infringed the rubric and answered three, or even all four, questions on the paper.

Of concern was that some candidates did not appear to be aware that part (a) questions always address AO1, and that part (b) questions always address AO2, and hence they evaluated in part (a). This indicated that they were not clear of the demands of the trigger words (for example 'examine'). Candidates should be aware of the command words used in A Level Religious Studies examinations; these can be downloaded from the following area of the Religious Studies web page http://www.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/religious_studies_trb_new.php

There was evidence that some candidates had entered for the examination before they were prepared fully. A significant number of candidates gained less than ten marks overall. Candidates should bear in mind that the demands of AS Level are significantly higher than those of GCSE Level and, as such, a candidate's motivation and confidence may be challenged if they achieve poor marks in an examination.

It should be noted that there is no negative marking in A Level Religious Studies examinations. However, candidates may penalise themselves by spending time producing lengthy answers that do not address the question set, even if the nature of the material produced is accurate. In general, there is no cross-crediting of material from part (a) to part (b) if material is relevant only to part (b).

Questions 1 and 2 were the most popular, but there were a significant number of candidates who chose to address the new area of Specification content on Jung, though fewer opted for the question on postmodernism.

Question 1 (Topic 1 *The Cosmological Argument*)

Part (a)
Many candidates disregarded the focus of the question and merely rehearsed the cosmological argument. Although such an approach was credited, higher marks were awarded for answers that focussed on the role of God. This aspect is clearly identified in the Specification. Candidates must be aware of the areas for study outlined in the Specification content in order to be in a position to access the highest levels of the mark scheme. There is a danger that candidates merely learn by rote the cosmological argument, and produce this as an answer, regardless of the actual question set.

The question required an explanation of the different understandings of the role of God which are found in Aquinas' argument. However, a number of candidates neglected this focus and proceeded to give a whole number of other forms of the cosmological argument. A significant number of candidates wrote at length on the criticisms of the argument. Part (a) did not require this as it clearly focussed on the trigger 'explain' (AO1).

Candidates tend to find the first three ways of Aquinas' Five Ways very demanding. This was reflected in the constant confusion between movement and cause. Few candidates were able to explain the role of God in terms of moving from actuality to potentiality. Similarly, explanations of the role of God in terms of contingency and necessity were often confused. Candidates should be aware that giving two short sentences for each of the three ways does not address the trigger 'explain'. Disappointingly, a significant number of candidates gave all five of Aquinas' Five Ways.

Part (b)
A number of candidates scored very well here, gaining full, or nearly full marks. A common weakness was to answer this question by listing the criticisms of the cosmological argument. This ignored the focus of 'religious faith'. In part (b) reference could be made to other forms of the cosmological argument, as long as they were related to the focus of 'religious faith'.

Question 2 (Topic 2 *Religious experience*)

Part (a)
A small number of candidates answered this part well, but many seemed to be unaware of the argument from religious experience. Instead, the majority of answers contained detailed coverage of the types of religious experience, with a one line statement claiming that this proved the existence of God. It was anticipated that candidates might refer to the arguments proposed by Alston and / or Swinburne, as well as the contribution of Otto. It should be noted that the argument from religious experience for the existence of God appears in the Specification as an area for study. It is expected that candidates will study this area from a philosophy of religion approach. As in Question 1(a), some candidates seemed to be unsure of the meaning and demands of the command word 'explain'.

Part (b)
This question elicited some good answers. However, some candidates who clearly had good knowledge of the issue limited the marks that could be achieved by merely listing the arguments for and against and not evaluating them. The AO2 skill involves showing a reasoned argument to justify the conclusion. Listing one side, then the other, and then adding a conclusion does not qualify as a reasoned argument.

Question 3 (Topic 3 *Psychology and religion*)

Part (a)
This was generally answered well with a clear account using the appropriate technical terms. Weaker answers tended to use the terms but without explaining them, and at times there was some doubt as to the extent to which candidates understood what they were writing. For instance, terms such as 'meta-narratives' and 'archetypes' were used but not explained. The focus of the question was explaining Jung's understanding of religion. However, some candidates made no reference to the link with religion or individuation. Instead they merely listed the different archetypes that Jung detailed. Many candidates made reference (some at great length) to the work of Freud and to the fact that Jung arrived at different conclusions about

religion from Freud's. Explaining what something is not, does not constitute explaining what that something is.

Part (b)
Some answers demonstrated good, reasoned responses that were thoughtful in their consideration of the extent to which God has been explained away by Jung's views. Others seemingly struggled to criticise Jung's views and tended to repeat much of what they had written in response to part (a). A number of candidates chose only to answer part (a) of the question and they severely limited the marks that could be achieved on the papers as a result.

Question 4 (Topic 4 *Atheism and postmodernism*)

Part (a)
This was the least popular of the four questions on the examination paper, but there were a small number of very good responses. Some candidates seemed to have attempted this question without actually having studied the topic. These candidates showed little or no understanding or knowledge of the areas for consideration outlined in the Specification, though some key words from the Specification content did appear in their answers. However, such key words were either unexplained or used in the wrong context without clear appreciation of their meaning. In contrast, other candidates gave a very clear account of the main ideas of postmodernism, explaining key ideas and using appropriate terminology.

Part (b)
Those candidates who produced weak answers in response to part (a) tended to neglect to address part (b) altogether. Again, there was a tendency to list the two sides of the debate separately, rather than engage in a reasoned argument.