AQA

ASSESSMENT and
QUALIFICATIONS
ALLIANCE

General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies 1061

RSS08 Religion and Contemporary Society

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - January series

RSS08 *Religion and Contemporary Society*

General comments
This first examination for the new Specification produced some interesting responses and it was clear that some candidates had prepared well for the examination. This is a unit in which exemplification can come from a wide range of sources, but it was clear that a number of candidates were relying too heavily on prepared material. A good 'general knowledge' of religion is advantageous to candidates on this paper and it was evident that some lacked this basis for their work. It was also clear that candidates seemed better prepared for the AO1 elements of questions than for the AO2. Candidates should be encouraged to read the level descriptors and to understand the demands for a balanced argument on the AO2 questions.

Question 1 (Topic 1 *Changing patterns of religious practice in the UK during the 20th century*)

Part (a)
This question asked for an examination of the changes which took place in the practice of Christianity during the 20th century. As the Specification indicates, this is much broader than simply 'decline', and those candidates who only wrote about decline penalised themselves. Most were able to make some appropriate comment about decline, and it was good to see that they had used material such as the Tearfund Report or 'Religious Trends' for some evidence. Some were able to provide some very detailed statistics, although high marks could be gained without these. Better answers also spoke well about a range of new evangelical and charismatic churches and groups outside the traditional structures, and gave appropriate illustration. Some of these candidates would have scored more highly if they had had a greater breadth of examples of change.

Part (b)
Generally this question was not addressed well. Some candidates did not focus sufficiently on the *practice* of Christianity and thus limited themselves to rather general comments. Others gave one-sided answers which could gain limited credit. Many did not consider sufficiently the nature of the changes in society which might have led to changes in practice; these could have included changing patterns of 'belonging', changing family structures, working hours, etc.

Question 2 (Topic 2 *Expressions of religion within society*)

Part (a)
There were some interesting answers here, although this was a point at which the poor level of 'general knowledge' became apparent in a number of scripts. Illustrative examples could come from any religion but some breadth to approach was required. A significant number of candidates, when focussing on Christianity, gave answers which were limited to very stereotypical small country Anglican churches, and gave little or no recognition to diversity within Christianity, let alone the role of buildings within other faiths. Candidates should note that when a question asks for 'features and purposes' attention must be paid to both of these aspects if they are to access the highest levels of the mark scheme.

Part (b)
The phrase 'social cohesion' appears in the Specification and as such, it should be understood by candidates. It was clear that many did not understand the phrase and thus were making rather generalised comments in response. Some wrote about the faith community concerned,

arguing along the line that it was good for people to have a place where they could meet. Credit which could be given for such responses was limited.

Question 3 (Topic 3 *Issues of identity and belonging*)

Part (a)
There were some detailed answers here, but many candidates failed to examine the **ideas** of identity and assimilation, choosing instead to talk about ways in which people express identity, for example through dress. Few candidates attempted any real definition of the concept, although they sometimes showed some partial understanding. Candidates needed to consider the idea of self-definition and of sense of belonging, and some of the different levels at which identity can be expressed. The term 'assimilation' was less well understood. Only a small number of candidates were able to look at the idea of 'absorption' and integration which is involved in this concept. 'Identity' and 'assimilation' are central to this unit and should be understood by candidates.

Part (b)
Because of the lack of understanding of 'assimilation', candidates' responses were often limited to rather generalised comments which could gain only few marks.

Question 4 (Topic 4 *An introduction to New Religious Movements (NRMs) and the rise of new forms of religious activity during the 20th century*)

This was quite a popular question for which some candidates had prepared well.

Part (a)
Generally, the sociological aspects were handled better than the theological. A number of candidates tried to employ a categorisation of sects (world-rejecting, world affirming, etc.) here where, although it could be made relevant, the application was not clear. Most candidates were able to talk about the secure structures offered by New Religious Movements (NRMs) and what a NRM would have to offer to people. A number made good use of the relative deprivation theory. Answers would have been helped if the theological factors had been dealt with more fully. Here candidates might have considered the breakdown of many traditional forms of religion, the rise of liberalism in mainstream religions, and the attraction of the 'certainties' offered by NRMs.

Part (b)
On the whole, this question was addressed quite well, although, again, there were candidates who gave one-sided answers. Better answers were able to suggest a range of reasons why NRMs might have lost their appeal, and also to point to factors suggesting their continuing appeal, and then to draw an appropriately reasoned conclusion.