

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCE

GCE Religious Studies (8560/9560)

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6581: Unit 1 - Foundations

Introduction

This was the second sitting of the new specification. Candidates had 35 minutes to answer each question and, as last year, we were impressed by the fact that most responded well - offering concise and well-structured answers. There was also less evidence of pre-prepared answers than in previous years, though a number of candidates tended to write all they knew about the topic, rather than address the issues raised directly by the question.

As in previous years, the most popular units were Philosophy and Ethics.

Philosophy of Religion

Q1(a)

This was the most popular question. At the top end, candidates wrote excellent, well-structured answers offering the full range of responses, backed up by scholarly opinion. At the middle and lower end, many offered more basic accounts of Paley and Aquinas, with the inevitable lengthy, and unnecessary accounts of Paley's watch. Some candidates offered a number of versions of the argument, though these tended to be somewhat superficial. There was some confusion over the details of the Aesthetic Arguments. There were some good responses in (ii), particularly, on critiques from Kant and Dawkins. Weaker candidates tended to say that they were an atheist or religious believer and then evaluated accordingly, though usually weakly and without scholarly back-up.

Q1(b)

A similarly popular question and most candidates displayed a good knowledge and understanding of this topic. Nearly all offered Aquinas' three ways, and higher level candidates included other responses, such as the Kalam and modern forms from Copleston, Swinburne and Russell. Most candidates offered a good range of knowledge, though more religious terminology would have helped in the lower and middle range. In (ii), many wrote lucidly on the strengths/weaknesses of the argument, but did not really address the question of equal balance and instead simply said which argument they preferred.

Q2(a)

Candidates at the top end offered excellent knowledge and analysis of the issues, well-supported by scholarship and terminology. Most candidates had a sound understanding of the problem and many were able to distinguish the theological and philosophical problems. Nearly all used Mackie and diagrams of the Inconsistent Triad. There were excellent accounts of Augustine and Irenaeus and a number concentrated quite well on Process Theodicy and the Free Will Defence. In (ii), weaker candidates contented themselves with just writing all they knew about evil and suffering, and tended to evaluate in a confessional way, concluding either that God did not exist or had given us free will and left us to get on. Higher level candidates evaluated by offering sound critiques by Schliermacher and Dawkins and a number referred to scriptures to support their views.

Q2(b)

This question produced sound answers, many based heavily on the textbooks. Higher level candidates offered a range of useful and well thought out arguments, supported by scholarship and evident good learning. At the middle and lower end, a number were pre-prepared and it was clear that many candidates were hoping for a question that required them to define miracles first. As in previous years, many wrote descriptive accounts of the different types of miracles and laboured over examples such as Holland's train analogy. In (ii), higher level candidates went beyond Hume's criticisms and offered an evaluation based on a range of scholarly ideas. At the middle and lower end, candidates tended to concentrate exclusively on Hume and some wrote anecdotal accounts of the different definitions of miracles.

Ethics

Q3(a)

This was the least popular question. The higher level candidates were able to explain the different arguments and put it into context well. Many offered useful modern critiques and referred to scholarly debate. Weaker candidates simply wrote all they knew and there was evident confusion between parts (i) and (ii). In (ii), whilst the better candidates were able to offer carefully crafted arguments, a number of weaker candidates, disappointed that there was no Situation Ethics question, tried to put their Situation Ethics material in here, not always to good effect.

Q3(b)

This was the most popular question and generally well done. Higher level students displayed a good knowledge and understanding of the theory and offered a wide range of scholarly responses and reasoned debate. Weaker candidates tended to write all they knew about utilitarianism and few were able to offer any other scholars beyond Bentham and Mill. Many answers were too long in (i) and subsequently suffered in (ii). A few resourceful candidates offered Situation Ethics as a modern version of Utilitarianism.

Q4(a)

There were relatively few really good answers. Those who did knew the material well and offered a clear understanding and evaluation, together with the views of scholars. Weaker candidates wrote all they knew, particularly about the Just War and more anecdotally on Pacifism. Most candidates followed the textbook-style format, with most spending too long on Just War notions, rather than Pacifism. In (ii), whilst the higher level candidates were able to compare and contrast the two notions well, middle and lower level candidates tended to be either confessional or idealistic in their approach, offering sound, though simplistic answers.

Q4(b)

This question produced a very variable response from candidates and it was evident that many middle and lower level candidates did not appreciate what ‘resolve’ really meant. Many concentrated on homosexuality and answers tended to rely heavily on GCSE-type material. At the higher level, candidates were able to offer sound knowledge and understanding of sexual ethics and, slightly less-so, of religious beliefs but even they found it difficult to show how one could resolve the other. In (ii), stronger answers offered analysis coupled with scholarship, but at the lower end, evaluation largely consisted of anecdotal responses with limited scholarly debate.

Buddhism

Q5(a)

This was a very popular question. Higher level Candidates used a variety of resources and scholarly opinion and identified the rich variety of religious beliefs with detailed analysis of the extent the period was a time of much religious upheaval. A number of weaker candidates lacked focus on the question and simply wrote everything they knew about the social and political background.

The quality of answers in part (ii) varied greatly. The better responses identified not only beliefs with which Gautama agreed or disagreed, but also the extent to which and reasons why he manipulated and reinterpreted the common beliefs of the age.

Q5(b)

This was a popular question. Most candidates accurately described the ‘four signs’ and the better scripts analysed the meaning and its mythological embellishments. Many candidates went on to describe Gautama’s period of asceticism. However, surprisingly few seemed to be able to examine the key features of his enlightenment.

Answers for part (ii) were variable. Most candidates highlighted the authority the enlightenment gave to the Buddha’s teaching whilst others wanted to challenge whether it held any significance at all. Some excellent answers suggested that it was not important for the Buddha to have achieved enlightenment. They argued that what was important was that someone, not a particular person, had followed the Magga and achieved enlightenment.

Q6(a)

There were many competent answers, but few outstanding ones to this question. Though some weaker candidates wrote about all the refuges, most candidates stayed focused upon the question and there were some good answers that identified variations in the key features according to which tradition one belongs. It is worth reminding centres that “The World of Buddhism” (Ed: Bechert and Gombrich) provides excellent material for this part of the course.

In part (ii), most students focused on the reciprocal relationship between the laity and Monastic Sangha within the Theravada tradition. The better answers argued that the relationship was strongly dependent upon which tradition was being described.

Q6(b)

This was a popular question, but for a number of candidates this was the last question they attempted and was either rushed or incomplete. Most students focused on the vipassana and samatha meditation but many wrote significantly more about samatha than vipassana.. There were some excellent answers that used a range of scholarship to both describe the main types in detail and analyse the relationship between the two.

In part (ii), weaker candidates simply wrote about the importance of meditation in achieving Nirvana. The better responses emphasised that meditation is a tool for perfecting morality and wisdom, whilst others were specific about the benefits of such practices as metta-bhavana upon moral conduct.

Christianity

Q7(a)

This was well answered at the higher range, with candidates having a good grasp of historical detail and offering the Arian Controversy or John Calvin and arguments concerning the divinity of Christ. Weaker candidates tended to lack structured argument and strung facts together loosely. In (ii) there was good evaluation at the higher level over the consequences of Chalcedon and salvation. Weaker candidates resorted to re-telling textual narrative.

Q7(b)

This was not a popular question, with a number of candidates being confused by the notion of social context. Higher level candidates used Liberation theology or scripture, whilst middle and lower range candidates wrote used church teachings and biblical stories. In (ii), the better candidates were able to unpack the material and discuss the significance. Weaker candidates gave a basic historical account with limited evaluation.

Q8(a)

There were some very good answers on the nature of God as creator and His omnipotence. Higher level candidates used scholars to expound and develop the teaching about God and the implications of His goodness and personal relationship with humanity. Weaker candidates stayed at the general level of 'omnipotence' or 'creator'. In (ii), higher candidates were able to offer a range of scholarly evaluation linked to scripture and church teaching. Weaker candidates answered generally, but lacked specific reference to the requirements of the question.

Q8(b)

This was a popular question. The higher candidates were able to examine key points and aspects of symbolism of the baptism and Eucharist and such concepts as the sacraments, infant baptism and original sin. Some also discussed the reasons behind denominational differences. Weaker candidates offered descriptive GCSE-type descriptive responses.

In part (ii) there was good evaluation of the issues at the higher level, though There was a slight lack of scholarly opinion and limited critical and theological analysis.

Hinduism

Q9(a)

This was a popular question. Higher level candidates knew the material well and offered a clear understanding and evaluation, together with the views of scholars. A range of religious terminology was evident and most candidates were able to explain how the features are exhibited in various beliefs and practices found in Hindu movements today. Candidates achieving the lower levels simply wrote all they knew of the Indus Valley.

In part (ii), higher level candidates offered a range of useful evaluation, linked to scholarly debate. Lower level candidates tended to be more anecdotal and simplistic in approach

Q9(b)

There were relatively answers to this question. Those who produced a good response knew the material well and offered clear understanding on different Vedic beliefs such as the nature of God and, in (ii), were able to evaluate and compare the significance of the practices to Hindus today. Candidates achieving the lower levels failed to recognise the difference between belief and practice and, for (ii), seemed to miss the main thrust of the question.

Q10(a)

There were very few answers to this question and responses were sound rather than impressive. Most candidates offered general material on Yoga, but tended to move away from mentioning the features of yoga. Those achieving the lower levels focussed on the nonreligious features of yoga and failed to include religious terminology in their answers.

Part (ii) was generally poorly answered, with many candidates being confused about the features and actual aim of yoga. Higher level candidates gained marks, for example, by explaining Patanjali's Samkhya philosophy and connected this to the aim of yoga.

Q10(b)

This was a popular question with most candidates being able to offer a full exposition of the different characteristics of Krishna and Siva. There were excellent accounts of different Hindu movements such as the Hare Krishna Movement and beliefs and practices carried out by Shivites and Vaisnavas. Candidates achieving the lower levels listed stories associated with the God and failed to include any information about their characteristics.

There was some excellent evaluation in (ii) over a range of scholarly comments, though at the lower level answers were largely anecdotal.

Islam

Q11(a)

This was a very popular question. Candidates achieving the higher levels were able to provide accurate and relevant information to meet the demands of the question and examined the range of religions existing in and around Arabia prior to the time of Muhammad from polytheism, to Zoroastrianism, the Hanifs, Judaism and various Christian groups. Many were able to substantiate comments with quotes from relevant scholars. Candidates achieving the lower levels simply referred to religious groups or selected a particular group whilst others wrote generally about the social context of Arabia prior to the time of Muhammad rather than the religious.

In part two, those candidates achieving the higher levels were able to compare and contrast the religious beliefs and practices prior to Muhammad and during his time in Makkah whilst others simply described or referred to the life of Muhammad in Makkah or described his call.

Q11(b)

A few candidates who achieved the higher levels focused well on examining the key prophetic features of Muhammad in Makkah and political features in Madinah though mainly they were more successful in describing the political features. Those candidates achieving the lower levels simply described Muhammad's call to Prophethood; time in Madinah or his life in general. This question saw the most descriptive approach from candidates of all the questions on Islam.

Part two of the question was generally more successful, although, in some cases, it was brief. Candidates at different levels focused upon the significance of Muhammad as a Prophet for Muslims. Some dealt with the importance for the religion as a whole whilst others concentrated upon his importance as a role model for individuals today.

Q12(a)

Those achieving the higher levels were able to provide a clear answer examining beliefs about angels, the day of judgement and paradise; putting these beliefs in context. Many answers contained fuller detail about angels than the other two topics. Those candidates achieving in the lower levels provided descriptive answers without any examination at all.

Part two of the question was often very short. Some candidates did not understand predestination and were therefore unable to achieve in this part whilst others provided descriptive answers rather than an analysis.

Q12(b)

This was a popular question. Many candidates defined Shahada and gave examples of how it was important but only a few achieved the higher levels by making the link successfully with the other four pillars. Many candidates referred to the pillars or simply just described them each in their own right.

Part two was more successful. Many candidates were able to comment upon the significance to a greater or lesser degree. Some were able to show the significance of the activity involved in Salat such as the washing ritual and the positions for prayer and the implications of the practice as a whole for bringing Muslims closer to God; to each other and away from sin. However, some candidates simply described the practice without reference to any significance and hence only achieved marks in the lower level.

Judaism

There were very few responses to this unit.

Sikhism

There were no responses to this unit.

New Testament

Q17(a)

Luke: There were some excellent answers on the Sermon, with candidates at the higher end structuring their responses well. Most concentrated on wealth and poverty, with candidates displaying clear knowledge, understanding and a range of scholarship. Weaker candidates tended to re-tell the narrative. In (ii), higher level candidates used Old Testament references to support their evaluation, whilst the weaker ones made general comments on the text.

Fourth Gospel: There were excellent answers on the 'I am' sayings, reflected a range of scholarship and background information, linked in well with the text. Weaker candidates wrote in generalised terms and often resorted to a simple re-telling of the narrative. In (ii), better candidates offered detailed evaluation, supported by scholarly debate and biblical support. Many weaker candidates re-used their part (i) material, which left them little new or useful to say.

Q17(b)

This question produced a variable response from both Luke and Fourth Gospel candidates. The better candidates were able to offer detailed knowledge and understanding, linked to Old Testament symbolism. Weaker candidates simply re-told the textual narrative. In (ii), higher level candidates could highlight the arguments for and against the importance of the miracles for the ministry of Jesus and offered scholarship and useful comment. Weaker candidates offered largely speculative and unsubstantiated comment.

Q18(a)

Luke: This was well answered. Candidates paid close attention to textual detail, though most wrote much more on prayer than they did on the Sabbath. Weaker candidates tended to concentrate on the Lord's Prayer only. In (ii), the better candidates offered a range of scholarly evaluation, supported by textual narrative, whilst weaker candidates simply commented somewhat vaguely on the biblical material.

Fourth Gospel: This was the most popular question. Candidates at the higher level were able to display knowledge and understanding of the textual narrative and could show how Jesus' attitude to women was different to Judaism. Weaker candidates concentrated on re-telling the stories. In (ii), better candidates offered useful insight, coupled with scholarly evaluation. Middle and lower level responses tended to be largely speculative. There were still a large number of candidates who did not possess an accurate understanding of the status of women at the time and still referred to them as 'second class citizens'.

Q18(b)

As in the past, this was the least popular question for both Luke and Fourth Gospel. The better candidates were able to use the textual narrative to highlight the significant features of Jesus' teaching and there was some evidence of scholarship. Weaker candidates offered rather unstructured accounts with loose paragraphs on the demands of discipleship and re-telling the story. In (ii), only the better candidates offered an evaluation of the importance of the Holy Spirit. Weaker candidates re-told the textual narrative with little consideration of the importance.

6582: Unit 2 - Investigations

Religious Studies coursework remains a much-valued component of the specification that provides candidates with an opportunity for independent learning. Topics such as 'creative expressions in religious life' have continued to attract an increasing number of candidates who have seized the chance to research a topic of interest to them and as a result produced interesting, scholarly investigations on visual art, film studies and liturgical music. Religion and Science topics have increasingly attracted more candidates who produced thought provoking work. The best candidates examined with academic rigour scholars such as Freud, Durkheim, Kierkegaard and issues such as dualism and existentialism. The high number of students who are achieving an excellent mark is a testimony to the seriousness with which coursework is approached by both centres and candidates.

At the highest level, standards remained excellent as candidates displayed skilful investigative techniques based around thorough literature searches, resulting in careful selection and adaptation of material leading to a clear exposition of knowledge and understanding. Good candidates displayed a high level of sustained critical investigation and analysis whilst maintaining a reasonable balance between the demands of Assessment Objective 1 (AO1) and Assessment Objective 2 (AO2). Material for AO1 was presented in a scholarly fashion and was fully justifiable through a sound referencing system and bibliography. It was encouraging to note obvious interest in the subject evidenced through reading and research, the best candidates showed clear evidence of reasoning and sifting through arguments so as to highlight strengths and weaknesses of various views. The best candidates were consistent in providing excellent verification of references, which is demanded in Level 4. The standard of work produced by the best candidates showed that previous years' high standards have been maintained or raised significantly.

A larger number of centres are offering a broader range of titles and this suggests that students have a wider choice that meets the creative needs of more able candidates. There is an interesting balance between centres where all students follow the same topics and where students have a free choice. Where students have a free choice there is often a huge variation in the quality of topics, although the better work displays real engagement with a topic. These centres often produced wonderful pieces of coursework, which was original, well researched and critical. These investigations were interesting to read and this approach often allowed the candidate to explore a topic they were interested in or passionate about. However, a few centres that adopted this approach must be aware that a diverse choice of titles also demands a diverse range of appropriate resources which must be reflected in the bibliography. Some centres select one title for all candidates and provide a resource booklet and a standard methodology; generally the same centres were able to produce a good range of marks, which included the highest marks available. While such an approach guarantees a certain level of success, it may be more difficult for the originality of better students to stand out. Other centres limit the range of titles for their students. This approach encourages greater originality whilst ensuring a good level of response; essays from these centres were usually well referenced and accessed a variety of resources and there were diverse levels of responses to the same title.

Candidates must provide explicit evidence of meeting the requirement of both assessment objectives. This is particularly the case with attention to AO2; weaker candidates tended to tackle the AO2 component in an 'add on' fashion which resulted in a one paragraph conclusion instead of considering a range of views, drawing out the strengths and weaknesses of arguments and then formulating substantiated conclusions. A number of good candidates produced good research but failed to answer the question set. Candidates must pay close attention to the title of their investigations. In some cases there appears to be a tendency to write in general terms about a topic and only incidentally on the precise title. There is room for improvement in both assessment objectives - this might involve choosing a question that steers clear of unnecessary biographical detail or improving research through using resources that are aimed at a higher level. Too many candidates at the lower end used material that is intended for GCSE work or downloaded material from the internet which they used in a cut and paste style. Internet sites must be used critically to avoid using material that is difficult to digest or that clearly does not meet AS requirements. It was evident in the work of weaker candidates that there is an increased use of the internet that is not balanced by the appropriate use of good relevant books. The randomness of website choice raises issues as to the reliability of the source and the effect this has on the cohesion of the work in progress.

There are study skills issues that persist each year that merit attention and would help to improve the quality of work of weaker candidates. One of the distinctive features of coursework is the facility of developing bibliographical skills. Many candidates are competent in constructing bibliographies. However, there continues to be a few problems with some candidates making elementary mistakes. Page 64 of the specification contains a few basic rules such as the 'bibliography should include author, date, title and publisher and/or place of publication. The bibliography must be arranged alphabetically in order of the author's last name'. A significant problem with a number of candidates is that although they may have constructed a bibliography there was too little evidence of referencing skills. Some candidates used references for primary texts such as biblical sources, but failed to provide basic references for secondary sources. One of the criteria for Level 4 AO1 is 'excellent use of factual material, from a variety of sources, verifiable through references'. Some essays can be improved by a systematic attempt to improve paragraph techniques that avoid pithy paragraphs devoid of analytic content. On the other hand candidates who write very long paragraphs, which show a lack of discrimination in the selection of material, would benefit from learning how to sign post their paragraphs efficiently to relate to the overall essay plan.

Internal Assessment

Good practise was clearly evident in that centres have been marking efficiently and professionally referring to the AO1/AO2 Objectives in the mark scheme either on the essay or on the assessment form. The best centres were exemplary in the process of internal assessment; coursework was clearly annotated and some centres wrote their own summary of how each level was justified according to the title and the mark scheme. Marks were thoroughly deserved and justified by the candidate and centre respectively. There has been consistent improvement by centres in demonstrating their assessment process and achieving the required level of accuracy in allocating marks. There were a few centres who did not produce evidence of internal moderation and who were lenient in marking candidates. Annotation was non-existent for some centres and a few centres had not used the mark scheme.

Administration

Most centres followed procedures accurately with an increasing number of centres showing an exemplary standard of administration. Most centre assessors paid first class attention to administrative procedures and are to be commended for this. Some perennial administration problems still occur which create problems for the moderation process - these instances are now an exception. These include:

- Scripts not arranged in candidate order
- The work of the highest and lowest candidate is not sent if they were outside the pre-selected sample and had to be requested by the moderator.
- The top OPTEMS form was not sent to Edexcel. Centres must post the copy of the OPTEMS to Pearson Assessments and Testing NOT to the moderator.

Comments on Specific Topics

The Study of Religion

Popular topics included responses to the titles related to 'A study of creative expressions in religious life'. Some candidates offered studies of film, which were clearly thought out; however, weaker candidates could improve their study by addressing in more detail the religious theme that underpins the films/directors they are investigating. Popular topics also included the psychology and sociology of religion with some candidates focussing on an in-depth study of an important scholar related to these areas such as Marx, Freud and Jung. In this section the studies offered were of a consistently high standard with the best works being of undergraduate level. Weaker candidates generally penalised themselves in the AO2 section rather than on the AO1 element.

Philosophy of Religion

Popular topics included mind-body topics, religious experience, religion and science with some candidates focussing on an in-depth study of an important scholar such as Descartes or Kierkegaard. In this section the studies offered were of the usual high standard. The best quality essays displayed evidence of philosophical analysis and reasoning. Most of these topics were thoroughly investigated by candidates with access to commendable sources. There were some exemplary investigations on Religious Experience that were superbly referenced throughout and tightly argued. It was pleasing to see a greater interest in the Religion and Science titles. In this area there were some excellent studies by the best candidates; however, a general area of improvement would be to update the range of sources accessed within the religion and science field. Weaker candidates generally penalised themselves in the AO1 section rather than on the AO2 element in religion and science studies; the weaker candidates studying a particular philosopher also penalised themselves in the AO2 objective rather than the AO1 objective.

Ethics

As in recent years the coursework in this field ranged from high standard work to that which made little progress beyond GCSE-level. The best essays on medical ethics were well informed and explorative and offered a scholarly exegesis of how religious teachings and philosophical influences impact on ethical issues. There were more investigations on the issue of homosexuality, animal rights and equality that were well thought out and achieved a high level.

Essays on abortion and euthanasia still predominate. It is often in these essays that candidates present a great deal of information, but fail to focus on the philosophical and ethical arguments related to the debates or the demands of their selected study. Some candidates presented too much biological information or a range of definitions and pictures that were a prelude to a piece of work hovering around GCSE-level. Some moderate candidates presented a very wide range of views such as several Christian denominations often accompanied by Islamic and Jewish perspectives. In these essays candidates sometimes get bogged down in the detail and AO2 suffers. Weaker candidates might benefit from focussing on a narrower range of views, but to explore and analyse these views in more depth. Many essays in medical ethics could have benefited from the use of an essay structure that lent itself to better quality analysis of key concepts such as autonomy, quality of life, sanctity of life, ensoulment and personhood.

Candidates answering the Martin Luther King and Malcolm X questions, with a few exceptions, tended to be too biographical/historical and did not include enough theological assessment in the evaluation and comparison of their lives. Only a few of these were of Level 4 standard. This topic required attention to the ethical issues surrounding human rights and equality - again, the bibliography used by many candidates was of GCSE-level.

Religions

Some candidates produced very well researched essays, which displayed good investigative techniques of analysis of key concepts and beliefs with careful weighing up of evidence and reasoning; the best candidates supported their argument with careful critical scholarship.

Whilst there was an awareness of different points of view in titles which demanded a balanced knowledge of two religions there was a great deal of depth shown on one view and a limited view for the comparison religion - this one sided approach meant that the demands of the question could not be fulfilled. This was particularly evident in essays that were comparing the teachings of Islam with another world faith. Many candidates also included much irrelevant detail that was not required for the question they were answering. In these cases it should be noted that a key consideration for any candidate is the choice of title and then meeting the demands of that particular title throughout the investigation.

A great majority of candidates appreciated differences in belief and their research conveyed the desire to understand in greater depth a view they did not ascribe to. The candidates offering an essay in World Religions produced work reflecting a serious interest in religious belief that was generally supported by well-informed teaching and good resources.

Old Testament/Jewish Bible

Candidates at the top end produced impressive pieces of work with commendable scholarship and use of an outstanding range of academic material. Middle/lower range candidates used material that they did not understand or found it difficult to critically analyse.

There appeared to be a decrease in the number of candidates offering Old Testament investigations.

New Testament

As in recent years, the coursework in this field was of a high standard, with excellent presentation and generally good use of scholarship and resources. The most popular topics were homosexuality and miracles. There were very few pieces on the ordination of women.

Candidates at the higher end produced scholarly work with an impressive attention to detail and focus on argument. Candidates (in the minority) at the lower end relied on sources that are of GCSE-standard.

Christianity And The Christian Church

The topics presented were varied, with good knowledge on aspects of church teaching. There were some outstanding essays on the influence of Christian thought, which employed a range of sources and arrived at a substantial conclusion. A few candidates produced essays on Church history, whether the early church or the reformation. Generally, these were either excellent or disappointing; the best essays were scholarly, well-written and researched pieces of work and the weaker essays did not tailor their responses to the assessment objectives or the demands of the title.

Conclusion

It is a unique privilege to be involved in coursework assessment and to enjoy the excellent range of work produced by candidates who clearly are engaged with the subject and who want to excel in their work. Indeed, any candidate who produces work that matches the best of their ability is to be congratulated for acquiring skills that will enable further progression. The hard work and dedication of centres empowers our students to engage with religious studies and coursework itself provides the opportunity for in-depth engagement that short exams cannot provide. It is clear that centres value the research process very much and individual candidates have engaged on an intellectual journey that is a clear result of their own independent learning.

Congratulations to so many students who display excellent powers of investigation, competent referencing and bibliographical skills. There was great evidence of genuine interest in Religious Studies and rigorous attempts to pursue this in greater depth. Standards are very high in this unit and centres should feel proud of their outstanding achievement in the June 2008 session.

Final Word And Anticipating Next Year

A time of transition is always difficult for centres that, quite rightly, worry each year about the high achievement of their students. For those of us who will miss the coursework element next year - I hope these few words will help you to prepare for the new exam and to feel that the Investigations Paper will attract the same level of enthusiasm that has been enjoyed by the coursework unit.

One important point about the replacement for course work is that existing good practices should be capable of being developed in this new type of exam. For example, effective teaching and learning techniques may be adapted to this new mode of assessment. Students may investigate a topic from any area and are not bound by the questions they are taking in 6581. As in the past, some Centres choose to focus on the same or similar topics for all their candidates, whereas other Centres permit considerable choice for individual candidates. This flexibility may be developed in this new mode of assessment. A number of centres have built up admirable resources for course work topics and this new examination enables Centres to continue to use their specialist resources and interests. With these various changes it is important to note the overall title of this unit is 'Investigations'. The aim is to involve students as active participants pursuing open-ended enquiries with an emphasis on independent learning.

It is important to ensure candidates know which area of their investigation is the best fit for the question they answer on the paper. In many cases, this is straightforward such as an investigation on the topic of euthanasia fits into Area C: question 7 entitled 'medical ethics'. However, some topics may share generic ideas across a number of different areas. An example of this is the topic of 'religion and science' that could be answered under Area A: 'The study of religion' or Area E: 'The study of the Old Testament/Jewish Bible' or Area F: 'The study of the New Testament'. It is vital that candidates know the distinctive features of their investigation so that in the exam they know which question to answer i.e. question 1 or 13 or 16. Another example concerns ethical dilemmas. For example, if the investigation is primarily a study in ethics candidates would answer Q7. If however their investigation is mainly a study of applied ethics in one or more world religions the relevant question is 10.

Current good practice in coursework places emphasis on adequate attention to the two assessment objectives. These objectives should receive prominent attention in the process of their investigation. Importantly, there must be explicit attention to these objectives in the examination answer. Each question will refer to AO1 with the trigger word 'Examine' and AO2 will have 'Comment on'. These will dictate the structure of the question and help candidates to plan their answers. It would be advisable for candidates to pay regular attention to the level descriptors for these assessment objectives as a way of monitoring their development and progress during their investigations.

It may be the case that the process of preparing coursework may be adapted to the process of preparing for this new exam. For example, students may build up a portfolio of material that represents their aims and purposes and key points with relevant evidence and illustrations together with their conclusions. They may find it useful to write up this material under exam-timed conditions to a variety of different possible questions. In addition, it may be an efficient use of their time to build up a number of different essay plans to different possible questions. The important point in these activities is to enable candidates to develop their management of material such as how to best structure their content to answer the specific question.

There is an important health warning to preparing candidates for this examination. It will seriously damage a student's success if they rote-learn an answer in conjunction with the rest of their group. More than likely the learnt answer will not fit the question on the exam paper and the whole group will suffer from not selecting and adapting their material to the demands of the question. Positively, those candidates who will do well will have cultivated the opportunity of an enquiry-based approach that has enabled them to study independently.

6583: Unit 3 - Developments

This was the first sitting of this paper, sat, in the main, by candidates who took the first sitting of 6581 in June 2007. General indications were pleasing - most candidates coped well with the demands made by the exam, producing three well-managed essays in the time available. As in previous years, the trend towards Philosophy and Ethics has continued, but, it was notable this year that many candidates are clearly choosing to answer two Philosophy questions and one Ethics question. Numbers of candidates choosing New Testament questions continued to maintain the greatest presence outside these two major options, with smaller, but not insignificant numbers answering questions on Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, with slightly smaller numbers opting for Christianity questions. Minimal numbers chose to answer on Judaism, and no centres entered candidates for Sikhism.

A handful of candidates failed to use the answer book correctly, and centres are encouraged to ensure that their candidates are aware of the need to begin each new question on the appropriate page of the answer booklet. Other candidates generated a significant number of extra pages which were attached to the answer booklet. Whilst in the main these pages included useful and relevant material, in some cases candidates produced gratuitously long and increasingly illegible answers which did not necessarily produce a higher mark than a shorter and more focussed answer would have done.

It is also worth noting that whilst teachers often feel that high level reading and access to primary sources is necessary to achieve high marks, there was little indication of this filtering through to the candidates' answers. Whilst candidates perform at different levels, the best candidates are not typically those who have accessed, understood and applied material beyond the demands of the A Level specification, but who have made good, relevant and accurate use of materials appropriate to this stage of learning and assessment.

Philosophy

Many candidates produced solid answers especially on the Ontological Argument and Religious Language where the structure as set out by the centre's teaching was often very evident. Answers on religious experience and life after death were often more individual in style, although use of the same scholars across candidates' answers was typical.

Q1(a)

The best answers recognised the demands of the question with regard to strengths of the argument from religious experience. Material was selected appropriately to enable candidates to address the extent to which the argument from religious experience was likely to prove the existence of God with good use of examples, terminology and scholarship rather than emphasising tangential incidents such as NDEs or miracles. Most used the principles of credulity and testimony and revealed solid knowledge and understanding whilst others were narrative and anecdotal. Those candidates who were able to manipulate the material and apply it carefully to the specific demands of the question were best able to achieve higher marks. Weaker responses typically tended towards descriptive and anecdotal answers, which tended more towards the characteristics of a religious experience rather than the strengths of a philosophical argument for God's existence based on the evidence of religious experience. The wording of the question informs the mark scheme and the expectations of examiners, and candidates do themselves a disservice if they do not take it into account in their answers.

Q1(b)

This popular question generally showed that most candidates had a competent grasp of the various forms of the argument and the main criticisms raised over the centuries. Many answers could often have been improved further, however, if the 'distinctive features' - such as its *a priori* nature, the definition of God, and its use of 'existence' as a predicate - could have been emphasised, rather than simply implied by a description of the ideas of Anselm, Descartes, Malcolm, Plantinga and other key thinkers in a broadly chronological order. Only the strongest responses drew attention to its nature as proof and some good answers discussed its value in an anti-realist context rather than a realist proof of God.

Q2(a)

This question was answered with very varying levels of success. Many candidates were able to write correctly about the contribution of figures such as Plato, Ryle and Hick, but a good number of answers would have been improved with a better understanding of the underlying philosophical ideas and their relevance to resurrection and immortality. Other answers showed confusion between immortality or resurrection and reincarnation to the extent that some candidates appeared to be determined to write about reincarnation even though it was not asked for in the question. Although some credit could be given, it was naturally limited. Some answers focused well on the issues of identity and continuity and dealt in depth with the concept of resurrection before comparing it to immortality. Weaker answers tended to make little reference to scholarship and were more reliant on unsubstantiated personal opinion or confessional claims. Some of the best answers were able to suggest that since the notion of life after death could be considered to be incoherent or meaningless, then the question of which form was more persuasive was academic. Some candidates found it difficult to focus on the PHILOSOPHICAL ideas, and rather restricted themselves to religious teachings.

Q2(b)

There were many competent answers from candidates who were familiar with both the verification debates and language games and were able to outline them correctly and to show their respective contributions to the religious language debate. Many others left significant room for improvement. The two main faults were (a) dealing well enough with verification but then barely mentioning, or even missing out completely, language games and (b) writing a general account of virtually all approaches to the religious language issue which went far beyond just a bit of useful background. Many used the falsification principle as a means of evaluating verification, but some candidates were operating on automatic and did not seem to appreciate the difference between the aims of these principles. Some candidates had evidently had hoped for a question on other aspects of religious language so wrote all they could on analogy and myth and symbol too. The best responses assessed complex philosophical issues and make good evaluative points about the nature and problems of religious language.

Religious Ethics

Q3(a)

The majority of answers to this question were very well-rehearsed and, despite this, candidates answered the question and explored it from a variety of perspectives. Whilst most candidates wrote about Kantian deontology and Natural Moral Law some explored Divine Command Ethics and related it to the debate on religion and morality, and some candidates introduced Virtue Ethics into this question. It was refreshing to see the range of responses offered to this question and candidates genuinely assessing the strengths and weaknesses, rather than simply listing them. Some centres clearly encouraged candidates to refer to the Anthology and use this to illustrate their answers. However, other responses took the question as an opportunity to summarise all three ethical theories on this specification and others showed remarkably little knowledge of the key ideas of deontology, but were still able to produce rambling, although often simplistic evaluation! There is plenty of easily accessible material on these ethical theories, and candidates should not rely on a handful of basic claims on which to base un-academic evaluation which cannot rise above Level 2.

Q3(b)

The strongest answers showed evidence of a range of relevant and accurate knowledge about Natural Moral Law, focussing as much, if not more, on the details of the theory, than on how far it can be applied to modern moral dilemmas. Candidates used a good range of scholarly contributions were able to deploy these in order to evaluate the issue at hand without relying on extended and anecdotal case studies Responses tended to focus on issues of sexual and medical ethics such as abortion or contraception although stronger answers typically explored all of most of the primary precepts and considered the contribution of proportionalism to the modern application of the theory. Some candidates assumed that this questions was inviting them to discussion the relationship between religion and morality, an assumption which seems to say more about the question they wished was on the paper rather than what was really there! As is the case for deontology, it is surprising to see so many candidates basing lengthy and simplistic evaluation on thin foundations. Detailed knowledge of the theory should precede any attempt to apply it to moral dilemmas.

Q4(a)

In the best answers, candidates selected accurate, comprehensive and relevant material, and made no misunderstandings about the demands of the question. Weaker responses were handicapped by a confusion with religious language, but many candidates linked a range of ideas together in order to produce a lucid coherent account supported by a accurate examples of how ethical language is employed and the nature of the problems it raises. Most candidates were able to explore issues of emotivism and intuitionism with some confidence, although fewer were able to really grapple with the problems raise by the use and application of 'good' and of the naturalistic fallacy.

Q4(b)

As usual, this was the least popular and the weakest of the ethics questions. Few candidates were able to move beyond the most basic observations of the chosen concept, and struggled to link it with justice or law and punishment. Those centres which have made something of a project of this topic did rather better, but they are still few and far between. The best answers reflected on the range of possibilities that an application of a specific approach to ethics would have on justice or law and punishment.

Buddhism

Q5(a)

This was a very popular question. On the whole answers were thoughtful and detailed, identifying a number of key influences on the reign of Asoka. Some of the better scripts considered the contributions Asoka made to Buddhism, with a discussion centring on Asoka's motivation for adopting Buddhism. Others questioned whether or not Asoka's patronage of Buddhism was a good thing for the religion. Arguments ranged from the effect of the missionaries he sent out which took hold in Asia and Sri Lanka to the building of stupas. There was plenty of excellent scholarship, with an analysis of scholarly opinion on the issue. Some students used modern scholarship to discuss whether Asoka was a Buddhist at all. The weaker students failed to answer the question which was set and uncritically wrote down everything they knew about Asoka.

Q5(b)

This was not a popular question and on the whole was not answered very effectively. Many students simply wrote all they knew about Pure Land and Zen, but failed to compare and contrast the schools.

Q6(a)

Although not a particularly popular question, there were some excellent scripts which weaved their way through these three key doctrines and fully explored their relationship. The better scripts used the set texts extensively to support their arguments. The weaker scripts simply wrote what they knew about the three concepts, without explaining the relationship of anatta and anicca to dukkha. Some students tried to discuss the relationship but failed to get passed the peripheral and obvious.

Q6(b)

This was an extremely popular question. Many students produced some excellent answers to this question. A wide range of material was used, but all fully justified. For some the difference in goals was paramount, while others focused on doctrine. Some even suggested that the Bodhisattva doctrine fundamentally changed the nature of Buddhism in adopting characteristics of a theistic religion. The views of many scholars were used and some even discussed the disagreements concerning the delaying of Nirvana. The better scripts used the set texts extensively, particularly the Lotus Sutra.

Christianity

Q7(a)

This was a popular question, although some candidates' response would have been more suited to 7(b). Some chose to discuss the baptism or Eucharist, or issues of sexual ethics and did so by making use of good AO1 material, but struggled to develop a clear evaluative line of argument.

Q7(b)

Another popular question, most candidates chose to discuss the development of relationships between Christianity and other religions, and offered detailed and accurate information about the different approaches, such as particularism, exclusivism and pluralism. The best answers were able to draw on recent observations made by Rowan Williams and other leaders or committees and drew useful conclusions on the way in which relationships between Christianity and other faiths have changed and evolved.

Q8(a)

This question was less popular, and a hard one for candidates to score well on. Generally candidates find it hard to be critically evaluative about this doctrine and it would be helpful to think of it in terms of evaluating the way in which the emerged and developed rather than the concept of the Trinity itself. The best answers were able to draw on a range of scholarship which is essential for a strong response to this question, otherwise responses are likely to fall into very generalised and confessional type answers.

Q8(b)

This was also relatively unpopular, and interestingly candidates did not pick up on the responses anticipated by the mark scheme. This is not in principal a problem, but weak responses were dependent on a few simplistic observations and struggled to develop a line of argument.

Hinduism

Q9(a)

Answers to this question were variable. The better candidates offered clear understanding together with the views of scholars and evaluated M K Gandhi's contribution as a reformer. Some successfully compared and evaluated M K Gandhi's work with Ramakrishna and Dayanada Saraswati. Less able candidates offered largely narrative accounts of M K Gandhi's life and failed to use this material to address the question.

Q9(b)

This question produced a variable response. The more able candidates were able to successfully highlight the strengths and weaknesses of both reformers and comment on the influence of their work on Hinduism.

There were some good responses challenging the role of both these reformers and comparing them to Vivekananda and evaluating their contribution towards various Hindu movements in the East and the West. Less able candidates simply wrote all they knew about Ramakrishna and Dayanada Saraswati and relied on pre-prepared essays.

Q10(a)

Most candidates were able offer interesting and well thought out responses of samsara. The better responses to this question included detailed knowledge of different Hindu Philosophy's of Samsara in particular Shankaras Advaita Vedanta and critically compared this with Dvaita Vedanta. Candidates were able to support their ideas using the Bhagavad-Gita and Upanishads.

Q10(b)

This question produced a number of excellent answers. The better candidates knew the Hindu scriptures well and were able to offer an interesting analysis of atman using the set text. Scholarship was evident and generally well-used. Good answers were able to compare and evaluate teachings about the atman from the set text and were able to draw sophisticated conclusions using sound religious terminology. Weaker responses tended to list everything they know about the atman and failed to evaluate the teachings of the atman within the set text.

Islam

Q11(a)

This was a popular question and candidates gaining marks in the higher levels demonstrated a good knowledge of the topic, scholars and the Qur'an. They related their material well and focused tightly on the question. Most candidates had a good knowledge of the history of the death of Muhammad, the period of the Caliphs and claims of Ali's supporters but tended to concentrate on giving an account of the period rather than developing an argument analysing the factors that led to division.

In part two the better answers gave a balanced view concerning the contributions made by both groups to the expression of Islam and these answers reflected good evaluative skills. However, the answers in the lower levels were often brief and sometimes gave material relating to one rather than both groups.

Q11(b)

This question was answered well by a relatively small number of candidates. Answers achieving marks in the higher levels demonstrated a thorough and up to date knowledge of the country used in the answer and scholars' comments. Other answers tended to concentrate upon a particular subject area such as women's rights or described briefly the social or political situation in the country chosen. Those achieving in a low level often provided work that was brief or over generalised.

The better answers successfully discussed the extent to which these features represent a revival of Islam and indeed, some were able to give views for and against whether these features actually represented a revival at all.

Q12(a)

This was the least popular of the questions in this section and only a few gained marks in the higher levels for answering the question competently. These showed a good knowledge of set texts such as Sura 2 about the prophets prior to the time of Muhammad and were able to discuss the different interpretations and understanding of the roles of such people as Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Too often, candidates referred briefly to one or two prophets without examining beliefs about these. Some candidates misread the question and described the call of the prophet Muhammad and others wrote all they knew about the teaching in set texts about Allah but not the prophets.

Though answered quite well by a few candidates, answers to the second part of the question were generally of a poor standard with many students describing the need for keeping the pillars to avoid hell or of paraphrasing words from the Qur'an relating to Judgement. Where the set texts were used in relation to Jews and Christians, they were quoted rather than explained.

Q12(b)

This was a very popular question and many candidates showed a good knowledge and understanding of Sufism. They were able to quote relevant scholars and adapted their material to focus on the question. Most candidates had a sound knowledge of Sufism but those in the lower levels tended to write all they knew about the subject.

The answers to the second part of this question were often longer than the second parts of the other Islam questions. The better answers were able to show the similarities and differences between Sufism and other branches of Islam such as Sunni and Shi'ah and come to conclusions about whether or not Sufism is radically different.

Judaism

There were very few response to these questions.

Sikhism

There were no response to these questions.

New Testament

Q17(a)

Luke's Gospel: Few candidates attempted this question. Most responses included reference to views of scholars concerning present and future eschatology, however, frequently this was merely mentioned in passing. The parables of the Great Banquet, the Sower and the Mustard Seed, were usually explained clearly. The best responses combined knowledge of Jesus' teachings with scholarship in addressing the interpretation of 'within you'.

Fourth Gospel: A popular question with many responses following a set structure. Most included knowledge of key features of the Prologue and many addressed the question specifically by demonstrating how these themes are reflected throughout the Gospel with reference to the text. Knowledge of scholarly debate concerning purpose was evident, however weaker responses simply listed scholars and their theories with little reference to the question.

Q17(b)

At all levels candidates were able to offer knowledge of possible purposes for the Gospels, usually with reference to text and often to relevant scholars (although often referred to as philosophers). Many attempted to discuss the view expressed in the question with higher level responses including reference to the text as well as scholars to support their evaluation of it.

Q18(a)

Many responses at all levels simply addressed the question of culpability with little or no reference to the question as set. Lower level responses often gave no indication as to which Gospel was being addressed, often tempted to write all they know about conflict and unwittingly bring in details from other Gospel accounts. However, at all levels candidates expressed some knowledge of textual narrative and background. Many higher level responses included reference to Old Testament and fulfilment of Scripture. In general there was limited use of scholarship but where it was employed, it stood out effectively.

Q18(b)

Lower level responses often gave no indication as to which Gospel was being addressed, and details from other Gospel accounts were included erroneously, particularly with reference to the words of Jesus from the cross. At all levels candidates were able to offer at least some knowledge of textual narrative and background. Higher level responses on drew out links with the themes reflected throughout the Gospel studied. Fewer responses were offered regarding the importance of the resurrection. This part of the question often reflected a basic awareness, and sometimes drew heavily on liturgy. The best responses drew on textual narrative and scholarly opinion to provide a clear personal opinion, however there were fewer responses of this type.

6584: Unit 4 - Implications

1A Philosophy of Religion

Examiners were unanimous in their praise for teachers and for a considerable proportion of candidates who had worked very hard in their preparation for this new examination. There were numerous examples of very high quality work showing evidence of rigorous study and lively debating skills.

There was a wide range of legitimate approaches to this examination. Some candidates clarified the passage by an exposition of a sentence or groups of sentences. Others preferred a more thematic approach by selecting key ideas and views and analysed aspects of the passage around this analytical method. Some candidates referred to the other sources in their anthology. Examiners had no preference for any particular method and all these different approaches produced some very good responses.

It was made clear to examiners at standardisation that it was not essential for candidates to examine particular terms or ideas in the passage. Given that there is no choice of questions on the paper it is important for candidates to approach this task with confidence, even if there happens to be an expression that eludes them on the day of the examination. This is an important principle of positive marking ensuring candidates are credited with what they know and understand rather than penalised for omissions.

Most candidates planned their work well, managing to recognise the heavier weighting of (a) and to write at an appropriate length in order to clarify the passage. Most also wrote almost as much for part (b) suggesting that the process of commenting on the implications and exploring the passage in an evaluative manner was an interesting task for candidates.

There was some evidence of pre-prepared responses that did not fit the passage. Some candidates shared very similar approaches that covered a general tour of the topic without really focusing on the demands of the passage. This type of rote-learning has serious and detrimental consequences on candidates' marks because they present limited evidence of selecting and adapting material to the particular demands of the passage and candidates fail to manage their material in order to answer the question.

With reference to AO1 at the lower levels, candidates may inter-link parts (a) and (b) into a homogeneous answer. However, there was evidence of some candidates who put the two parts together in such a way that the material did not pay explicit attention to the respective demands of the two parts. These answers tended to be unstructured and generalised. Some of these answers lacked explicit focus on the passage itself with limited reference to other thinkers and the philosophical context of logical positivism. Other candidates presented an exploration of logical positivism rather than address the specific passage. Some candidates displayed a misunderstanding of Ayer. For example they took sentences and expressions in isolation such as 'the existence of God must be taken on trust' to indicate that Ayer agreed with theists about religious faith. Some confused Ayer with Davies and also Donovan. Candidates in the lower levels had unsatisfactory paragraph techniques. Either their paragraphs were far too short or else non-existent. This issue is important in terms of identifying substantial points and progression of the essay.

In terms of AO2 at the lower levels, some candidates displayed a misunderstanding of Ayer. Some thought that Ayer was in agreement with anti-realists and that Ayer and Swinburne were in agreement with each other. Some candidates focused on religious experience at the expense of religious language.

These lower level scripts showed limited evidence of discussing synoptic implications of the AO2 material. Some candidates at these levels presented formulaic responses and became assertive without the ability to express reasons why or why not they disagreed with Ayer. These seemed to lack an ability to express their own authentic critical views.

At the higher levels for AO1, candidates examined relevant parts of the Ayer source and showed how the selected passage fitted into the overall argument. There was an examination of a range of other philosophers and philosophical theories such as setting the verification principle in context and showing why it was formulated and why it caused such as stir. Some developed this by additional examples of religious language including *via negativa*, analogy, symbol and myth. Some candidates approached their analysis by drawing on the generic topic of religious language in order to tease out the distinctive contributions of the Ayer source. In the hands of competent candidates this approach worked well. Many presented relevant material on religious experience including God as mystery from philosophers across the ages. These included reference to James and Otto with illustrative material from Teresa of Avila. Some made effective use of selected parts of other anthology sources with material from Donovan on intuition and the background context of Ayer with material from Westphal on Hume. A broader perspective was supplied by candidates in their examination of the contributions of philosophers such as Aquinas, Flew and Wittgenstein together with influential critiques of religion. As a synoptic examination candidates made excellent use of related material such as debates about the meaning of 'existence' in the ontological argument.

AO2 features at the higher levels: With reference to AO2 at the higher levels, candidates often started with a clear explanation of why they do or why they do not agree with Ayer. These discussions were acutely observed, accurately drawn and precisely expressed. Candidates performed well with tightly argued and well-constructed evaluations. These debated the strengths and weaknesses of logical positivism often linked to evaluations based on the 'University Debate'. A number made effective use of Wittgenstein and wrote well on anti-realism. The good candidates argued their own opinion through the developments in the debate using scholars to substantiate their views.

1B Ethics

Examiners were unanimous in their praise for teachers and for a considerable proportion of candidates who had worked very hard in their preparation for this new examination. There were numerous examples of very high quality work showing evidence of rigorous study and lively debating skills.

There was a wide range of legitimate approaches to this examination. Some candidates clarified the passage by an exposition of a sentence or groups of sentences. Others preferred a more thematic approach by selecting key ideas and views and analysed aspects of the passage around this analytical method. Some candidates referred to the other sources in their anthology. Examiners had no preference for any particular method and all these different approaches produced some very good responses.

It was made clear to examiners at standardisation that it was not essential for candidates to examine particular terms or ideas in the passage. Given that there is no choice of questions on the paper it is important for candidates to approach this task with confidence, even if there happens to be an expression that eludes them on the day of the examination. This is an important principle of positive marking ensuring candidates are credited with what they know and understand rather than penalised for omissions.

Most candidates planned their work well, managing to recognise the heavier weighting of (a) and to write at an appropriate length in order to clarify the passage. Most also wrote almost as much for part (b) suggesting that the process of commenting on the implications and exploring the passage in an evaluative manner was an interesting task for candidates.

There was some evidence of pre-prepared responses that did not fit the passage. Some candidates shared very similar approaches that covered a general tour of the topic without really focusing on the demands of the passage. This type of rote-learning has serious and detrimental consequences on candidates' marks because they present limited evidence of selecting and adapting material to the particular demands of the passage and candidates fail to manage their material in order to answer the question. This included some candidates who did not supply material that discussed the implications for understanding religion and human experience. These points are significant features of the synoptic assessment and this affected the marks awarded.

Some candidates at the lower levels seemed to be unaware of the identity of the author and at times referred to Rachels and even Ayer as the author. Some candidates attempted to answer the question globally without a clear structure between parts (a) and (b). This division within an answer is not essential but it became a problem with lower level answers because parts of the question remained unanswered. Candidates in the lower levels had unsatisfactory paragraph techniques. Either their paragraphs were far too short or else non-existent. This issue is important in terms of identifying substantial points and progression of the essay. There were some candidates whose response to (a) was weaker than their response to (b). In these cases the material in (a) was little more than a paraphrase without explicit evidence of clarifying the argument and interpretation.

There were a number of impressive scripts that successfully teased out the thrust of LaFollette's views. Some were able to extend their examination beyond the passage including contrasting the ideas in the passage with other sources in the Ethics anthology and relevant Ethics content studied in other units such as Deontology and Utilitarianism. Scripts at the higher levels debated key issues such as the potential conflict between personal relationships and morality and the theme of justice and partiality.

1C Buddhism

Examiners were unanimous in their praise for teachers and for a considerable proportion of candidates who had worked very hard in their preparation for this new examination. There were numerous examples of very high quality work showing evidence of rigorous study and lively debating skills.

There was a wide range of legitimate approaches to this examination. Some candidates clarified the passage by an exposition of a sentence or groups of sentences. Others preferred a more thematic approach by selecting key ideas and views and analysed aspects of the passage around this analytical method. Some candidates referred to the other sources in their anthology. Examiners had no preference for any particular method and all these different approaches produced some very good responses.

It was made clear to examiners at standardisation that it was not essential for candidates to examine particular terms or ideas in the passage. Given that there is no choice of questions on the paper it is important for candidates to approach this task with confidence, even if there happens to be an expression that eludes them on the day of the examination. This is an important principle of positive marking ensuring candidates are credited with what they know and understand rather than penalised for omissions.

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There was some evidence of pre-prepared responses that did not fit the passage. Some candidates shared very similar approaches that covered a general tour of the topic without really focusing on the demands of the passage. This type of rote-learning had serious and detrimental consequences on candidates' marks because they presented limited evidence of selecting and adapting material to the particular demands of the passage and candidates failed to manage their material in order to answer the question. This included some candidates who did not supply material that discussed the implications for understanding religion and human experience. These points are significant features of the synoptic assessment and this affected the marks awarded.

There was a wide range of answers to part (a). There were some very good scripts that used material from the set texts to support their answers, especially *The Questions of King Milinda* and the *Deer Park Sermon*. Others amplified what Griffiths meant using and exploring other parts of the chapter to demonstrate how the nature of impermanence for Buddhists varies considerably. Many used contributions by other scholars, such as Gethin and Harvey to illuminate the text. A number of answers explored and discussed the meaning of the various terms and words used in the passage.

The weaker scripts lacked systematic focus on the passage and tended to pad out their answers with too much irrelevant detail. A popular technique was to give a full account of the details of the life of the Buddha, regardless of relevance. Others were content to write whatever they knew about Buddhism, regardless of relevance. As well as not answering the question a large number of scripts seemed to lack an understanding of some of the key terms used by Griffith.

For example, a surprisingly large number of students seemed uncertain of what Griffith meant by the phrase, 'randomness in causal relations'. Some admitted to not knowing the meaning of the term 'determinism'.

On the one hand some scripts in part (b) simply stated personal opinions and made little attempt to justify their ideas. Others seemed to write little for this part of the answer, despite it being worth 16 of the 40 marks available. Some candidates worked on the assumption that the question required a judgement along the lines that 'as a westerner from a non-Buddhist perspective what do I think of Buddhism.' This type of confessional approach is not required and is certainly not essential. Some presented reasons and evidence to support their evaluation but others gave superficial views. The majority approached part (b) in terms of debating the ideas in the passage from the context of Buddhist studies.

Some good answers focused on the implications of these beliefs and the philosophical challenges they faced. Sometimes these challenges reflected a misunderstanding of Buddhist doctrine. Others went on to consider Buddhist responses. For example some questioned the effect of anicca on moral behaviour. The text of King Milinda provides a clear response to this criticism, of which some students seemed ignorant.

Some students effectively used a variety of scholars to question whether or not this passage reflected key teachings about 'middle' path. Some used evidence from Rupert Gethin, who argues that depending on which text is used, one could interpret that Buddhism veers towards eternalism or annihilationism. In terms of the implication for religion and human experience, a number of students identified the problems of understanding religious terms, such as anatta and anicca, from cultures other than ones' own, while some considered the effect upon moral behaviour of adopting a middle way. Many argued that some religions adopted a middle path in some form or another.

1D Christianity

Examiners were unanimous in their praise for teachers and for a considerable proportion of candidates who had worked very hard in their preparation for this new examination.

There was a wide range of legitimate approaches to this examination. Some candidates clarified the passage by an exposition of a sentence or groups of sentences. Others preferred a more thematic approach by selecting key ideas and views and analysed aspects of the passage around this analytical method. Some candidates referred to the other sources in their anthology. Examiners had no preference for any particular method and all these different approaches produced some very good responses.

It was made clear to examiners at standardisation that it was not essential for candidates to examine particular terms or ideas in the passage. Given that there is no choice of questions on the paper it is important for candidates to approach this task with confidence, even if there happens to be an expression that eludes them on the day of the examination. This is an important principle of positive marking ensuring candidates are credited with what they know and understand rather than penalised for omissions.

Most candidates planned their work well, managing to recognise the heavier weighting of (a) and to write at an appropriate length in order to clarify the passage. Most also wrote almost as much for part (b) suggesting that the process of commenting on the implications and exploring the passage in an evaluative manner was an interesting task for candidates.

There was some evidence of pre-prepared responses that did not fit the passage. Some candidates shared very similar approaches that covered a general tour of the topic without really focusing on the demands of the passage. This type of rote-learning has serious and detrimental consequences on candidates' marks because they present limited evidence of selecting and adapting material to the particular demands of the passage and candidates fail to manage their material in order to answer the question. This included some candidates who did not supply material that discussed the implications for understanding religion and human experience. These points are significant features of the synoptic assessment and this affected the marks awarded.

Most candidates were able to place the passage within the context of Ninian Smart's work, though one or two appeared to be unfamiliar with a close study of the source. Most were able to refer to his six dimensions of Ritual, Mythological, Doctrinal, Ethical, Social and Experiential and place this passage firmly within the Social sphere. In relation to AO1 some candidates presented well-rounded answers that incorporated their studies in other units including Christianity in unit 3 and some relevant philosophy of religion and ethics material.

Some struggled with the fact that religion had a social sphere as if that were a condemnation of its validity as revelation; these saw the passage as one to criticize and disagree with in a spirit of self-defence. Others saw the fact of a social sphere as a vindication of their own belief that there was no substance to religion anyway and lauded Smart for saying so. The candidates who scored in the higher levels were balanced in their understanding of the pathways of revelation through humanity and an exploration of the effect of religion on social values and the other way around. Many referred to the view that homosexuality was now commonly accepted by society and either applauded the Church of England for its (apparent) openness to change or criticise the Catholic Church for its (supposed) unwillingness to do so.

1E Hinduism

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It was made clear to examiners at standardisation that it was not essential for candidates to examine particular terms or ideas in the passage. Given that there is no choice of questions on the paper it is important for candidates to approach this task with confidence, even if there happens to be an expression that eludes them on the day of the examination. This is an important principle of positive marking ensuring candidates are credited with what they know and understand rather than penalised for omissions.

Most candidates planned their work well, managing to recognise the heavier weighting of (a) and to write at an appropriate length in order to clarify the passage. Most also wrote almost as much for part (b) suggesting that the process of commenting on the implications and exploring the passage in an evaluative manner was an interesting task for candidates.

There was some evidence of pre-prepared responses that did not fit the passage. Some candidates shared very similar approaches that covered a general tour of the topic without really focusing on the demands of the passage. This type of rote-learning has serious and detrimental consequences on candidates' marks because they present limited evidence of selecting and adapting material to the particular demands of the passage and candidates fail to manage their material in order to answer the question. This included some candidates who did not supply material that discussed the implications for understanding religion and human experience. These points are significant features of the synoptic assessment and this affected the marks awarded.

Many candidates presented well-structured answers displaying competent understanding of the details within the passage alongside clear insight into Hindu schools of thought and various philosophical systems. Candidates displayed clear engagement with the author and his analysis. A few made pejorative comments about a 'western scholar' having any competence to write about Hinduism. Candidates were proficient in their use of technical terms. An interesting feature of some high quality scripts was the way candidates supplemented their exposition with effective use of the set texts in unit 3 and other relevant part of the anthology. Some candidates worked on the assumption that the question required a judgement along the lines that 'as a westerner from a non-Hindu perspective what do I think of Hinduism.' This type of confessional approach is not required and is certainly not essential. Some presented reasons and evidence to support their evaluation but others gave superficial views. The majority approached part (b) in terms of debating the ideas in the passage from the context of Hindu studies.

Candidates were particularly good at discussing the implications of the passage in terms of various developments and scholarly debates in Hinduism.

1F Islam

Examiners were unanimous in their praise for teachers and for a considerable proportion of candidates who had worked very hard in their preparation for this new examination. There were numerous examples of very high quality work showing evidence of rigorous study and lively debating skills.

There was a wide range of legitimate approaches to this examination. Some candidates clarified the passage by an exposition of a sentence or group of sentences. Others preferred a more thematic approach by selecting key ideas and views and analysed aspects of the passage around this analytical method. Some candidates referred to the other sources in their anthology. Examiners had no preference for any particular method and all these different approaches produced some very good responses.

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The standard of work in Islam was generally better in this paper than the other two papers. Candidates on the whole wrote much more and provided greater depth to their answers; reflecting a good knowledge of the historical context to which the authors A Nanji and A Esmail referred. The better answers reflected a good knowledge of the historical context to which the authors referred, such as the influence of Greek philosophy and its application and purpose in Islam. This paper encouraged an awareness and understanding of the diversity within Islam and provided the means of demonstrating informed debate concerning the approaches and beliefs of a range of Muslim traditions. In contrast, those achieving marks in the lower bands for part one briefly described the call of Muhammad, gave some paraphrasing of the passage and dismissed the philosophical approach without reasons. Answers to the second part of the question provided further differentiation between the better answers providing balanced and supported arguments rather than the generalised viewpoints provided by the weaker answers.

1G Judaism

There were very few response to these questions.

1H Sikhism

There were no responses to this unit.

1J New Testament

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At the lower levels, candidates were less competent with the theology and tended to concentrate on rewriting the passage and then developing ideas from it. Some tended to ignore the thrust of the passage and concentrated on tangential issues. For example, those who studied philosophy of religion turned their answers into a 'life after death' narrative at the expense of a focus on the leading ideas in the passage. Some candidates re-told the biblical account of the crucifixion without adequate attention to the theological aspects of the passage. Candidates at these lower levels found the AO2 demands harder than the AO1 material.

Examiners were pleased by the overall standard of responses to this question. At the top end many were excellent and in several cases received full marks. There was a clear and detailed understanding of the passage. Candidates referred to a range of scholars, both ancient and modern as well as detailed theological debate and argument. There was a proficient use and understanding of complex ideas such as 'salvation', 'atonement', and 'sin'. Some candidates related material from the passage to other units they had studied including Christianity. In addition, the use of Old Testament symbolism was impressive.

Statistics

6581: Unit 1 - Foundations

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	120	80	70	60	50	41	32
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

6582: Unit 2 - Investigations

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	50	41	36	32	28	24	20
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

6583: Unit 3 - Developments

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	120	82	73	64	56	48	40
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

6584: Unit 4 - Implications

1A - Philosophy of Religion

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	40	31	27	23	19	16	13
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

1B - Ethics

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	40	31	27	23	19	16	13
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

1C - Buddhism

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	40	31	27	23	19	16	13
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

1D - Christianity

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	40	31	27	23	19	16	13
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

1E - Hinduism

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	40	31	27	23	19	16	13
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

1F - Islam

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	40	31	27	23	19	16	13
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

1G - Judaism

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	40	31	27	23	19	16	13
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

1H - Sikhism - There were no responses to this unit.

1J - New Testament

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Raw boundary mark	40	31	27	23	19	16	13
Uniform boundary mark	150	120	105	90	75	60	45

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