

C A R I B B E A N E X A M I N A T I O N S C O U N C I L

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

JUNE 2011

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

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GENERAL COMMENTS

The study of religion as an academic endeavour is intended to enable candidates to *develop an understanding of the meaning and purpose of life as advanced by different religious practices*. The academic enquiry into the phenomenon of religion must be differentiated from religious instruction, where the latter is intended to enable faith or proselytise individuals. Consequently, it must be made explicitly clear that persons engaging in the study of Religious Education should not seek for the promotion of their faith but should be willing to expand their knowledge and understanding about religion and different religions. The examination for Religious Education for the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) is grounded in this understanding and candidates sitting the examination should be aware of the focus of this academic discipline.

The Religious Education examination consists of three components. Paper 01, the Multiple-Choice paper, assesses four major world religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism) along with six Caribbean Indigenous religions and the Essentials of Religion. Paper 02, the Structured Essay paper, assesses candidates' in-depth study of one of the major world religions. To date, only the Christianity option is available for Paper 02. Paper 03 is the School-Based Assessment (SBA). The SBA for Religious Education consists of a research paper based on one of the selected world religions or any other religion selected from the list indicated on pages 78–80 of the syllabus.

As of next year (2012), candidates will have the opportunity to select one of four major religions to specialize in for Paper 02.

As in previous years, the examinations for 2011 were set to enable candidates to explore a variety of social and interpersonal issues through the lens of religious thinking and to inculcate moral thinking. Some of the issues candidates were asked to investigate through the lens of religion were bullying in schools, bribery and extortion, faith healing and salvation.

Candidates were required to display knowledge (Profile 1), to interpret and analyse information (Profile 2), and to apply their knowledge (Profile 3). The stronger candidates were those who were able to display all three profiles very well. Candidates' performance this year showed improvements in Profile 2 (Interpretation and Analysis). The improved performance seen in Profile 1 (Knowledge) and Profile 3 (Application) in 2010 was not sustained in 2011. This became evident in the ways candidates answered questions as many of them tended to give sermons rather than a coherent discussion on the issues being raised. Generally, while candidates had a stronger showing for Interpretation and Analysis it is evident that more work is still needed in this area. Candidates need to be assisted in knowing how to explain the meaning of scripture passages.

At the same time, it is clear that candidates preparing for this examination need to be aware of various social issues. The inter-linking of subjects is necessary for a subject such as Religious Education which touches on all areas of life. The stronger candidates displayed an awareness of the world around them and were able to analyse same through the lens of religious thinking.

It would seem that both students and teachers continue to grapple with the serious academic discipline that is required for the study of Religious Education. It is once again being stressed that Religious Education as an academic discipline is not the same as a Sunday School or Sabbath School class. Weaker candidates may not have understood this point and tended to approach the answering of questions from the vantage point of preaching or pontificating. While homiletic skills may be necessary for Church, it is not a requirement for taking the Religious Education examination.

Given the demands that the syllabus makes, it is advisable that only teachers who have been trained in this area should be engaged in its teaching. The tendency to believe that a teacher 'who goes to Church frequently' is ably suited to teach the subject must be strenuously avoided. The same would be true of any other academic discipline.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

This paper consisted of 60 multiple-choice questions. Candidates were required to answer all 60 questions. Performance on this paper was quite satisfactory and continues to be consistent with performance in previous years. Candidates demonstrated sound all-round knowledge and understanding of the content and objectives tested. A weakness noted in the 2010 examination was again seen in the 2011 performance — candidates' are still not prepared to handle the questions relating to the Caribbean indigenous religions. Teachers need to adequately prepare themselves for teaching this area of the syllabus by doing research on the Caribbean indigenous religions to better prepare their students for this aspect of the examination. The mean on this paper was 35.23.

Paper 02 – Structured Essays

Question 1 (Human Life Issues)

This question tested Specific Objectives 2 and 3 of Section 1, Option A.

This was the compulsory question. The question was worth 36 marks.

Part (a) focused on Jesus' healing ministry and the response of the society to persons who were considered different. The stimulus for the question was taken from Mark 5:25–29 which dealt with the woman who suffered with haemorrhages. Candidates were expected to display their knowledge of the story and the response of society to persons who were different because they were ill. Part (b) also called upon candidates to display their understanding of how Jesus treated persons who were ostracized by society. To this end, candidates were required to compare Jesus' encounters with the woman caught in the act of adultery and the woman with the haemorrhage. Part (c) required candidates to use their understanding of how Jesus treated persons who were ostracized by society and to apply that knowledge by proposing possible solutions to the issue of bullying in schools.

Candidates' response to this question was generally good. Many of the responses showed that candidates were quite familiar with and had a good understanding of the passage of scripture. Most candidates were also able to offer other examples of persons being healed by Jesus in the gospel narratives as required in Part (a) (vi).

Part (b), on the other hand, was not well done. Many candidates were unable to see the similarities between the two stories. Many of them offered only generalized and superficial similarities, which were not sufficient to earn all of the nine marks allocated to that part of the question. Furthermore, those candidates who were unable to answer Part (b) (i) were invariably unable to respond to Part (b) (ii), that is to explain what Jesus teaches by his response in the two situations. Candidates' responses seem to suggest that each story is being taught as a discrete example of Jesus' actions and not much is being done in the classroom for candidates to see the underlying issues which the stories address. Candidates would have been able to better make connections between the stories and Jesus' actions. Regrettably, many candidates had weak analytic skills and therefore had difficulty interpreting the passage. More intentional work needs to be done with candidates to ensure that their interpretive and analytical skills are honed before taking the examinations.

Part (c) was handled quite well by the better able candidates. They were able to offer some good suggestions to both school authorities and parents regarding ways of keeping bullying out of schools. In many cases, candidates displayed a fair degree of maturity in dealing with the subject and offered in the main sound advice to schools and parents. Many candidates were able to support their suggestions by quoting relevant scripture passages in their answers. The weaker candidates, however, tended to moralize on the issues, did not provide innovative solutions to the problem of bullying and offered scripture passages without any application of the passage to the issue under consideration.

Not many candidates were able to apply an understanding of Jesus' treatment of persons who were ostracized or who were hurting to their responses and so were not able to gain the total marks awarded for this question. The mean for this question was 20 out of 36.

Question 2 (The Bible)

This question tested Specific Objectives 2, 3 and 4 of Section 2, Option A.

This was the first of three optional questions, each worth 32 marks. Approximately 73 per cent of the total candidate population chose this question. The stimulus for the question was taken from Proverbs 3:3–6. For the most part candidates responded well to Part (a) which assessed Profile 1 (Knowledge). Part (a) (i–iii) were answered well by the majority of candidates as the answers were in the text given. Part (a) (iv) proved to be more challenging. This should not have been because the different types of Biblical writings are clearly outlined in the syllabus. The better candidates were able to identify examples of Biblical writings as required, for example, *narrative*, *prophecy*, *parable* and *wisdom sayings*. The weaker candidates had a tendency to cite the books of the Bible as examples of Biblical writings.

Part (b) was well done by candidates. Stronger candidates competently expounded what the passage teaches about personal conduct as required for Part (b) (i). They were also able to cite relevant examples from their community about the consequences of being unfaithful and uncaring which was required for Part (b) (ii). Weaker candidates were, however, unable to interpret the question and simply transcribed from the passage given.

Most candidates demonstrated an understanding of the dialogue between Sam and Earl, the stimulus for Part (c). The dialogue presented candidates with a situation with serious moral and ethical challenges. Candidates were able to cite and refer to the relevant Biblical passages to support their arguments. This demonstrated that they had knowledge of moral, ethics and the Bible. It also showed that there was an awareness of how individuals should use positions of power and authority appropriately. A small number of candidates misrepresented the stimulus and gave inappropriate advice.

The mean for this question was 22.18 out of 32.

Question 3 (God)

This question tested Specific Objectives 1, 2 and 4 of Section 3, Option A.

The stimulus for this question was taken from Exodus 15:26. The question tested candidates' knowledge of the attributes of God. This was the most popular of the optional questions with approximately 79 per cent of the candidates attempting it.

Many candidates did not understand the use of the word *function* in Part (a) (i). Many of them interpreted the function of God as being the same as the role of God. This should not be as the roles and functions of God are clearly indicated in the syllabus. Generally, candidates were able to elicit from the passage the answers to the questions posed in Part (a). Many candidates were, however, unable to differentiate between the roles of God and the names of God. Candidates were able to provide a wide selection of names that were Biblical, but not included in the syllabus for example, El Gibbor, El Roi, El, and Alpha and Omega.

Part (b) (i) was generally well done. Candidates' responses indicated that they understood the passage. However, some candidates were not able to develop their arguments sufficiently and tended to gloss over points or gave generalized arguments. Most candidates who were unable to respond to Part (b) (i) adequately had difficulties responding to Part (b) (ii).

Part (c) required candidates' to write an argument supporting the view that God still heals. Candidates accepted the concept that God still heals. Some candidates gave good arguments which included that God was working through many sources such as doctors and faith healers. Candidates were able to cite stories of healing as stated in the Bible. Some of them also shared personal experiences of healing in the contemporary world.

In some cases, candidates were not able to achieve the maximum marks for the question because they did not give a balanced answer. Many candidates either focused on outlining a story or only one aspect of the issue they were given to discuss. In some cases, answers tended to sound like evangelical sermons aimed at faith development rather than the presentation of a balanced argument in response to the question.

The mean for this question was 18.88 out of 32.

Question 4 (Sin and Salvation)

This question tested Specific Objectives 1, 4, 5 and 7 of Section 4, Option A. This was the least popular of the optional questions, with only 43 per cent of the total candidate population attempting it.

A passage was used as the stimulus for this question. Many of the candidates who attempted this question did not use the stimulus to answer the questions. The weaker candidates were unable to answer questions (a) (iii) and (a) (iv) because they could not identify the correct theme of the stimulus — atonement. Many candidates opted instead to speak about forgiveness and love.

Some candidates presented very good responses for Part (b), but were unable to divorce the teachings of their denomination from the objective consideration of the subject.

Responses for Part (c) revealed that some candidates displayed very good application skills. Notwithstanding the foregoing, some did not address the issues raised by the question. In many cases, candidates showed that their knowledge of the content of the subject was limited and this affected their responses in a negative way. The weaker candidates again offered responses that were laden with denominational biases.

Paper 03 – School-Based Assessment (SBA)

Overall, the SBA samples presented were satisfactory. However, while marking samples the following issues were identified.

Presentation

- A number of projects had no title, candidate registration number, table of contents and bibliography. In some cases, even the subject (Religious Education) was missing from samples.
- In some cases, the layout of the project was poorly done. For example, the analysis came before the summary of findings and the method of data collection was found at the end or nearing the end of the projects.
- Incorrect font size and font style was noted in some projects.

- Some centres continue to use the mark scheme from the old syllabus (pre 1997) which allowed for great disparity between teachers' scores and the moderated scores.
- Some projects exceeded the word limit — projects were too lengthy. Students should be reminded that there is a word limit for the SBA and that too lengthy SBAs will be penalized as stated in the syllabus.

Aims

In some cases the Aims

- were not specific and in others what were the Aims presented seemed more suited for the Analysis and Conclusion.
- and the Summary of Findings were not related to the topic of the project.

Data Collection

In some cases, the term *instrument* was misunderstood as candidates included in this stationery, for example, pen and paper. Students should be helped to recognize that this term should relate to activities such as observation, interviews and questionnaires.

Summary of Findings

- The instances of students copying directly from the Internet without summarizing or assimilating the information occurred too often. Care should be exercised to ensure that students present their own work and not work that has been taken 'wholesale' from a third party. In some instances, the vocabulary used in projects seemed far beyond the scope of reasoning offered in the project. In other cases, it was very evident that the work of students was extremely similar to information present on the World Wide Web. In one instance, a search engine was cited as a reference source. Students should be made aware of the consequences of plagiarism and the seriousness with which it is held in academic circles.
- The term *Summary of Findings* has caused some confusion among students. It is suggested that the term *Review of Literature* may be better to use to avoid confusion.
- Some students presented information which was not supported by any evidence. Consequently, the veracity of these could not be substantiated.
- Students needed to be more focused in arriving at their summary of findings. In some cases, the summary had no relationship with the stated aim and in other instances more than one topic was being addressed in the summary of findings.

- Students need to be assisted in the use of graphs, tables and other visual aids in their presentations. In some cases, far too many graphs and tables were being used and many of these did not relate to the findings and were therefore not necessary for the project. Students should be taught the difference between quantitative and qualitative research and the types of visual aids which would be helpful in either types of research.
- A number of topics presented were related to the subjects of History and Social Studies and not to Religious Education. For example, one project looked at the Baptist's contribution to the development of Free Villages in Jamaica. While the topic is useful for academic study, it does not fall within the parameters of a study for Religious Education. The project was most suited for a History SBA.
- Some students presented projects for religions that were not mentioned in the syllabus and were therefore outside of the scope of the examination. Some of the projects presented included studies of Taoism, Buddhism and New Age religions.

Analysis and Interpretation of Information

In some cases, there was no difference between the analysis of information and the summary of findings.

Conclusion

- It appears that the term *Conclusion* was misunderstood by candidates. In many cases it appeared that students were not using their own vocabulary to arrive at a conclusion. In these cases, it appeared that the information was being presented in language which was above the scope of reasoning of the students.
- Students were not making appropriate inferences in their conclusion.

Communication of Information

While students are not marked for grammar, it would be in their best interest to ensure that their grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence construction are the best for the presentation of a research paper. At points it appeared that students were challenged in the ability to communicate the information effectively.

It is evident that many teachers were challenged in their ability to mark the SBA projects effectively and as such were unable to properly guide the students.

Recommendation to School Administrators and Teachers

- Teachers should make a deliberate effort to assist students with knowing the Biblical references associated with topics in the syllabus.
- Teachers should ensure that the emphases of the syllabus are brought to the attention of students. Students should, from the onset, be made aware of the difference between Religious Education and Religious Instructions. It must again be stressed that Religious Education as an academic discipline is not the same as Sunday/Sabbath School Class. The inability to make this distinction may be working negatively against some students. Every effort must be made to divorce the teaching of the subject from religious and denominational bias.
- Teachers should continue to assist students in developing their skills of application, interpretation and analysis. Classroom activities which will assist students to develop and hone these skills should be undertaken throughout the time of preparing for the examinations.
- Care should be taken to enable teaching across the curriculum so that students can apply the knowledge gained in other disciplines to the study and reflections about religion.
- Students should be enabled to reflect on the events which are reported by the news media through the lens of religion. Highlighting denominational differences on various topics should be encouraged in order to help students to understand the panorama of religious thought on a number of issues. Care should be made to respect all denominational perspectives.
- Adequate resources in the form of books and funding for exploratory trips should be made available to teachers and students in the study of religion. Inviting subject specialists to speak with the class is also encouraged.
- Greater care needs to be given to the preparation, presentation and assessment of research projects. It should be manifestly clear to students that plagiarism is frowned upon and persons simply lifting information from the Internet are easily identified.
- The bias which exists against the study of religion should be vigorously avoided by schools and school administrators. The tendency to offer the subject to the so-called weaker students not accepted to do other subjects should be stopped. Schools are encouraged to see the study of religion as vital to the understanding of the cultural, social and moral context of their lives and the development of the total Caribbean person. The perception of Religious Education as a tool only for persons contemplating Ordained Ministry should be rejected by school administrators.
- Every effort must be made to ensure that the subject is taught by teachers trained in this discipline. The use of *good Church persons*, as the main qualification for teaching the subject, must be strenuously avoided.