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Religion Studies

2016 Chief Assessor’s Report

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## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Sources Analysis

**The more successful responses**

* Used a range of sources, including visits to sacred sites, art, contemporary religious cartoons, appropriate audiovisual film clips or extracts, contemporary religious articles, and photo essays.
* Were designed for students to respond to a maximum of two or three sources; contained a few questions beginning with questions to elicit knowledge and understanding, then included questions to elicit higher-order skills of analysis and evaluation; and did not ask for too many specific features to be demonstrated in the students’ evidence.
* Showed (as moderators noted) that, when students had visited sacred sites away from their own religious culture — such as the Quaker centre, a mosque, a Buddhist or Jewish temple, an Anglican cathedral, or one of the Orthodox churches — the students were clearly interested in responding to what they saw in great depth and detail and included evidence that met the criteria of analysis and evaluation.

**The less successful responses**

* Required students to respond to five or more sources, to respond to cartoons of a political rather than a religious nature, to respond to old sources from past examinations or outdated articles, or to answer several questions that led to descriptive rather than analytical responses.

**General information**

* In previous years, when Religion Studies was assessed through examinations, the questions were allocated marks. This is no longer appropriate because teachers and moderators are making holistic judgments about the students’ evidence using the performance standards from the current subject outline. The evidence for each assessment type is viewed as a whole, rather than assessing each question separately.
* Moderators commented that not all sources analysis task sheets included questions that allowed students to respond at an A or B level.
* Moderators commented that the inclusion of task sheets and sources used (or photos of sources used) assisted the moderators, greatly enabling them to better understand what was being asked of the students.
* Teachers are once again referred to the current subject outline that states the purpose and scope of the sources analysis:

By analysing various sources, students apply their understanding of the concepts, theories, and definitions of religion and spiritualties; the nature of ‘the sacred’ and ‘the profane’; case studies of religion in society; religious issues; or contemporary trends that have been studied.

* Teachers are reminded to use the current year’s subject outline when designing tasks and grading student work.

Assessment Type 2: Folio

**The more successful responses**

* Sometimes related to field trips. The use of tasks related to field trips seemed very effective in engaging all students in broadening their horizons, developing new knowledge and understanding, and, particularly when the task was well scaffolded, providing evidence of analysis and evaluation at the highest level.
* Targeted just a few specific features. Well-scaffolded tasks that targeted just a few of the specific features of the assessment design criteria were the most successful in eliciting responses in the higher grade bands. This was especially evident when teachers had structured questions that almost demanded an analytical response. Many of these tasks also included a question that directed students to examine religion in local and global contexts and these were answered well.
* Allowed scope for diverse abilities. Moderators commended tasks that gave scope for students’ diverse abilities, allowing them to achieve against the performance standards in different ways according to their capabilities. This was particularly evident in folio tasks that required an exploration of the relationship between art and spirituality, music and faith, or social behaviour and religious commandments.
* Focused on one specific feature. A task such as a well-designed essay question that focused on just one specific feature seemed an almost foolproof way of ensuring that students provided evidence above the C level. Some of these essay topics centred on a school’s’ community service programs, the place of religion in Australian history, or visits to places of worship of various traditions.
* Demonstrated considered reflection. Some of the strongest evidence in demonstrating reflection was based on appropriate investigation into a religion or spirituality through listening to a guest speaker, visiting a religious site, or watching a documentary or YouTube clip, and then reflecting in a considered way on the personal meaning of that experience to the adherents.

**The less successful responses**

* Consisted of mainly short-answer questions that were assessing all of the specific features of the performance standards gave no opportunity for any depth of knowledge and understanding and/or analysis in the responses.
* Did not go beyond narrative, recount, or description. Often this was the result of poorly designed tasks which did not demand evidence of analysis or critical evaluation. Assignments that led to narrative, recount, or description often limited students’ achievement to the C grade or less.
* Were a narration of a student’s involvement in a liturgical event, rather than demonstrating features of the performance standards. While many liturgy tasks were very well done, there were also too many that did not go beyond description of the student’s involvement in the liturgy. There were instances when well-designed questions facilitated analytical responses through requiring a reflection on a school liturgy that explained how the liturgy nurtured the religious culture of the school and affected the participants in a visible and tangible way.
* Misinterpreted the assessment design criterion of reflection. Moderators saw that the criterion of reflection was often misinterpreted to mean ‘reflection on the student’s own personal experiences or opinions’. The performance standard at the C grade for the first specific feature of reflection is ‘Considered reflection on the personal significance of religions and spiritualties in traditional and contemporary societies’, which goes beyond the personal opinion of the student and asks for an explanation of the personal significance of religion or spirituality to adherents of the particular religion being studied.

**General information**

* Moderators commented on the range of interesting tasks included in the folios, including excursions, responses to guest speakers, oral and multimodal presentations, and practical tasks.
* Moderators appreciated teachers’ inclusion of highlighted or circled performance standards, as these made the grading decisions transparent.
* While word-counts were generally adhered to in both assessment types, this year there were many more pieces of work that were well over the word-limit. Teachers and students are reminded that any words over the 1000-word limit cannot be read and do not contribute to the assessment grade.
* Surveys or other appendices should not be included.
* An appropriate referencing system should be used.
* Moderators were grateful for good packaging of the materials, which greatly assisted their work and sped up the moderation process. Seeing SACE registration numbers clearly on the front of each assessment type was especially useful.
* Some students’ work was over-packaged in several plastic sleeves, a plastic bag, and a cardboard file envelope. Teachers are requested to use just the one SACE-supplied plastic bag, as over-packaging slows down the work of moderators.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

Investigations were completed at a standard similar to that of previous years.

**The more successful responses**

* Focused on an aspect of contemporary religion or spirituality rather than a topic statement.
* Seemed to have been chosen individually, rather than from a list suggested by the teacher.
* Chose successful questions. For example:
  + How is Mary, Mother of Jesus, depicted in modern art, and what does this mean to believers?
  + What is the significance of the Holy Land for Christians?
  + What are the reasons for the rapid growth in Pentecostal churches?
  + What is the importance of the Shoah to contemporary Judaism?
  + What is the significance of the diminishing priesthood in the Catholic Church?
  + How did Christianity disrupt the Dreaming cultures?
  + Why is contemporary Islam so misunderstood?
  + What is the Islamic interpretation of the verse of the sword (Sura 9:5)?
  + Are both religion and science necessary for a full explanation of evolution?
  + What is the role of dietary practices in Orthodox Christianity?
  + What is the role of music in Christian liturgy and how does it influence the experience of the believer?
  + How and why has the use of consecrated ground for the interment of suicide victims changed in the Catholic Church?
  + How can indigenous spirituality provide a framework for a more sustainable approach to the environment?
* Used focus questions throughout the investigation.
* Linked well to sacred texts and doctrine of relevant religions, demonstrating evidence of understanding and cross analysis.
* Conducted a number of interviews with professionals in the field or topic area, many of whom were in the wider community rather than the immediate school community.
* Did not survey class peers unless pertinent to the question.
* Used capital letters when referring to religious texts (e.g. ‘the Bible’, ‘the Qur’an’).
* Included a bibliography. The best evidence submitted was correctly referenced using one of the approved referencing methods.
* Used consistent referencing.
* Were based on accurate research using both primary and secondary sources.
* Featured analysis of a range of sources, both primary and expert secondary, and a range of perspectives.
* Used expert primary sources, supported by secondary sources.
* Adhered to the structure suggested in the current subject outline.
* Did not rely on teacher-generated formulas.
* Synthesised sources, comparing the perspectives of interviewees with evidence provided by sound, current, and expert secondary sources, identifying bias, and critiquing or supporting the hypothesis or guiding question.
* Adhered to the word-limit.
* Were carefully drafted and edited to ensure the effective communication of ideas, knowledge, analysis, and conclusions.

**The less successful responses**

* Included evidence that was more historical or social rather than religious.
* Focused on aspects of society rather than aspects of religion or spirituality. There are only two specific features under investigation and analysis that do not specifically mention religions and spiritualties, so any investigation evidence that focuses on historical events (such as the Holocaust, or the First World War) does not give the student the opportunity to demonstrate success against the performance standards.
* Were significantly below the maximum word-count.
* Included elements not required by the subject outline. Appendices of any kind should not be included.
* Included incorrect statements, such as ‘Australia has always been a Christian country’.
* Attempted to cover too much breadth, particularly for 1000-word investigations. (e.g. four different religions and their views addressed in regards to divorce or meditation).
* Did not use religious experts as primary sources.
* Recounted their research, as opposed to analysing and critically evaluating their research.
* Consisted of personal opinion. The performance standards under reflection that mention ‘critical reflection on the personal significance of religion’ deliberately include the word ‘critical’ to indicate that there should be more than simply personal opinion.
* Relied on a teacher-generated formula of response. (There were instances where all students in a class used the same focus question or interviewees). Such scaffolding can be limiting for students.
* Relied too heavily on surveys as primary sources of information, which led to a lack of sophisticated levels of knowledge and analysis.
* Did not reveal the expertise or relevance of their sources.
* Did not redraft and edit their work.
* Did not adhere to the maximum word-count.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

Other points to consider:

* Investigations (for external assessment) must be de-identified in regards to student name and school.
* Appendices should not be included in the investigation.
* Word-counts must be adhered to.
* Investigations should show no comments or marking from teachers.

## General Comments

In-house moderation is encouraged when multiple classes of Religion Studies are taught.

Teachers are encouraged to express interest in the various quality-assurance activities (such as marking and central moderation) at the SACE Board.

Religion Studies

Chief Assessor