There was a clear improvement in candidates’ preparation for this demanding examination evident this year. There were still some areas where too many candidates presented what appeared to be prepared answers to a different question, but overall there was much less of this than in the past. The extract below from last year’s report should remind teachers and candidates of what markers expect to see.

The external examination requires candidates to select from or adapt the knowledge and understanding they have gained during the year, in order to present

- a structured and supported discussion of the question posed by the examiner.

Though the use of evidence and analysis is improving, it is still the case that some candidates appear to have entered the examination armed only with knowledge and understanding of the various topic areas in the course.

To break it down specifically for candidates

- **Excellent knowledge** is important. In an exam response knowledge must be relevant or you will get no credit for it. Knowledge/information is only 1 out of 4 of the criteria you are assessed on in the exam.
- A **structured response** to the question posed is required. A response to a different question (e.g. last year’s question) will not be well rewarded. You must attempt to address the question. If there is no deliberate attempt to answer the question and no deliberate attempt to structure the essay you cannot expect to score well.
- **Address stimulus material** if it is provided.
- **There must be a discussion.** Regurgitated information is not a discussion. A memorised discussion will not address the question. A good discussion will demonstrate that you have thought about the material you have studied during the year. That you have drawn links between behaviour and beliefs and values. That you understand the strengths and weaknesses of theories. That you have analysed the implications of theory or belief and identified some of their underlying assumptions. That you can draw conclusions.
- **The discussion must be supported.** Lengthy quotations are certainly not expected in an exam situation but the markers must be convinced that you understand the need to provide evidence for what you are claiming. If there has been no deliberate attempt to provide evidence then you cannot expect to do well.
- **If the marker has to hunt to find demonstration of any criteria you cannot expect more than a bare pass result on that criterion** (if that).

In addition to these remarks candidates should note that the external examination for this course is not an invitation to write creatively. Persuasive techniques such as hyperbole, figurative language and the use of imagery do not generally belong. In addition, it is important that candidates have at least some understanding of words and phrases that they use. Misuse of words or creative language can cause similar problems for the candidate. Both problems can change a good sentence demonstrating sound understanding into a poor sentence demonstrating poor understanding. Consider the following –
Stem cell research is a controversial issue.

Stem cell research is a controversial issue that people have been debating for hundreds of years.

Markers must also be able to read the response to reward candidates appropriately. Illegible writing is one problem. Writing that is too small to read is another, and pencil or faint pen can be a third.

A marker’s comment was not required when fewer than 10 candidates answered a question.

Question 1

This year, the examiner set a quotation from Leunig as the stimulus piece. This quotation and the summary of it was concerned with “the issues of God’s existence and its importance”.

As usual, candidates were expected to use the stimulus as a ‘launching pad’ for their supported discussion centred around the core beliefs of a religious tradition.

This year’s stimulus differed from those in the past in that it directly addressed a core belief (for most of the religious traditions available in this course).

Judaism (6 responses)

There were some very good responses to the stimulus piece as there should have been. There was still too much attention given to practices rather than belief for this section of the paper. Discussion of Shabbat seemed to work better for candidates than discussion of rites of passage. Even so, these belong as illustration in Section A, not as the main focus.

Criterion 1 Generally speaking candidates could have focussed their discussion more on the beliefs of Judaism or linked their discussion more firmly to the stimulus piece.

Criterion 2 Most responses indicated a good understanding of Jewish practices and at least one or two core beliefs related to God.

Criterion 3 This criterion was less well handled than the others with most candidates providing limited evidence or support.

Criterion 4 Candidates who discussed Jewish beliefs about God and linked these to practices tended to do well on this criterion.
Buddhism

Marker 1

The Leunig quotation did not fit discussion of the Buddhist tradition as readily as it fit some other traditions. Many candidates had trouble addressing this stimulus and anchoring their discussion. Nevertheless, most made an attempt and were rewarded for their efforts. More of a problem was the lack of supporting evidence and analysis in many responses.

Criterion 1  Most candidates structured their response and focussed on core beliefs.

Criterion 2  Candidates generally had some good understanding of the Universal Truths and Noble Truths. Discussion of the key concepts of karma and samsara were less evident despite their relevance. Better responses demonstrated understanding of a Buddhist view on God’s existence, tended to focus more on “its importance”, had support for their assertions, and illustrated these assertions with relevant behaviours, attitudes and practices.

Criterion 3  There were far too many cases where this marker had to hunt for an excuse to pass candidates on this criterion. All candidates should include some explicit supporting evidence in their response.

Criterion 4  As for Criterion 3, far too many candidates did not explicitly address this criterion in their response. The easiest, but not only, way to demonstrate analysis in this section of the examination is to link belief to practice. How is a belief demonstrated in the life of a Buddhist? What are the beliefs that underpin key practices? Some of the more sophisticated responses demonstrated high level analysis by addressing complexities around the issue of ‘belief’ in Buddhism, and/or explained the reasons for some of the differences between Mahayanan and Therevadan understandings of the tradition.

Marker 2

The stimulus quotation from Leunig provided the candidates with the challenge of carefully considering what core beliefs they would draw upon in their response. As always the candidates that engaged with the stimulus and used it as a springboard for a detailed but tailored discussion of the core beliefs of Buddhism received the highest ratings across all criteria. The essays that stood out were those that used their sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the tradition to really engage with the way a Buddhist would respond to; firstly, the issue of God’s existence and secondly, its importance. Less sophisticated responses made limited reference to these two elements of the stimulus quotation and provided a prepared response outlining the nature of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Five Precepts and the Three Marks of Existence.

Criterion 1  Strong candidates engaged with the stimulus quote confidently in their introductory paragraph they engaged with the nature of the existence of God and the relative importance or not in the Buddhist adherent’s philosophical thinking.
Whilst it was pleasing that candidates felt they should explore the differences in belief within the religious traditions of Buddhism the distinction needed to be carried lightly to avoid the tendency to stray too far from the demands of the question.

Strong candidates made a link between the first mark of existence – impermanence, and engaged with this core belief. Excellent responses on this criterion used their good understanding of this teaching to engage with the stimulus quotation. Strong candidates were able to extrapolate from the quote that being alive or the very concept that “everything seems to exist” was an opportunity to engage with other Buddhist’s beliefs including discussion of the five skandas or aggregates of each human individual, the concept of anatta or not self, the concept of samsara and of rebirth. Engaging with the stimulus and question not only in the introductory paragraph and concluding paragraph but referring back to the question in support of a sustained discussion within the body of the essay was a fool-proof strategy for success.

Criterion 2
Overall candidates demonstrated good understanding of the core beliefs of Buddhism. Reference and confident use of Pali or Sanskrit language is always pleasing to note. Candidates made excellent use of Buddhist teachings and quotations to support their understanding and knowledge of core beliefs. There was ample evidence of good instruction and of considered up take of the comments on last year’s assessment report. The discriminate use of material is essential; merely listing all of the core beliefs of Buddhism is not an acceptable approach to examination writing in this demanding Level 3 course.

Criterion 3
There continues to be a preparedness of candidates to provide sound credible evidences and in some cases even in-text reference credible web sites, quotes and teachings of the Buddha or Dalai Lama. There has been a pleasing and observable improvement in the quality of good responses over the last few years. Candidates should be advised that a response that merely provides their opinion will not suffice, it must be supported by a text or an authority or an expert opinion to have weight as evidence.

Criterion 4
Strong candidates were able to hold a sophisticated understanding of the core teachings of Buddhism and confidently use that knowledge of the core beliefs of Buddhism to enter into dialogue with the Leunig quotation. Strong responses used their acquired and sophisticated understanding of key concepts to provide responses of great quality that were a pleasure to read.

Christianity

Criterion 1
Most candidates incorporated the stimulus satisfactorily in their response. Stronger responses incorporated all the aspects of the quotation within their response, building argument around the various elements of the statement demonstrating direct links to beliefs to support their argument.

Weaker responses either did not incorporate the stimulus at all, or if they did it was in a cursory manner (e.g. only incorporated the question as to whether God exists or not). The weaker responses tended to write rehearsed essays.
Criterion 2  Strong responses demonstrated a detailed understanding of Christian beliefs, and how they would influence an adherent’s response to the stimulus piece. This was demonstrated through reference to multiple Christian teachings, and detailed explanation of core concepts and the implications for an adherent. Better responses also detailed the differing variants of Christianity, and the implications of these differences.

Weaker responses relied on short examples of belief, such as one line from the Apostle’s Creed, the Ten Commandments, or vague statements about the nature of the Trinity, without elaboration. Several of these responses provided a rote learned response about original sin and salvation, but lacked any discussion and analysis. Some did not provide any evidence and simply launched into an essay about God and what believers should or should not do, without explanation or analysis.

Criterion 3  Stronger responses provided reference to core biblical teaching and provided the appropriate references. This was then backed up by discussion and analysis of the importance and implications for behaviour to the adherent. There were several very strong responses which demonstrated connections between the theory and the practice and provided convincing anecdotes and examples as evidence.

Weaker responses had difficulty with providing evidence beyond the Apostles Creed or the Ten Commandments, or vague notions of original sin and redemption. Where evidence was provided, such as a biblical passage, it was used in isolation and carried no explanation or evidence.

Criterion 4  Strong responses engaged in critical analysis and evaluation in a meaningful, and creative way. The aspect of the stimulus quote, ‘why does it matter?’ was explored in detail and in a convincing manner. Once again, better essays found ways of connecting beliefs to behaviour, and the challenges this may present to an adherent (for example, acceptance of some forms of suffering which may confront the adherent to question the very existence of God). These responses repeatedly engaged with all elements of the question.

Weaker responses lacked meaningful analysis, and fell back on simple, (almost dogmatic) responses. These types of responses lacked the hallmarks of objective academic writing, as they tended to write about personal beliefs rather than presenting a good explanation and analysis of Christianity as a faith.

Islam

Generally candidates showed a solid grasp of the subject matter in their responses but they did not show a flexible grasp of that material. Generally this meant that the two strongest criteria were Criterion 2 and Criterion 3 taking relevance to the topic as a major dimension of relevance.

However the structure and analysis criteria were weaker. Generally candidates did not show much evidence of a planned or organised answer to the questions selected.
The exception to this was the responses to the stimulus question (1) where candidates generally showed quite a flexibility in their responses in addressing the stimulus and question. This marker was pleasantly surprised by the Islam answers which so often have just been a recitation of the Five Pillars. In this case, the knowledge of Islam was well shaped in response to the stimulus question.

Teachers should try to encourage their candidates to explore wide-ranging ways of applying and analysing their unit knowledge so that in an examination context they are more confident to flexibly use the content and principles of the units explored.

**Question 2**

*Markers should not have to guess which ‘aspect’ a candidate is writing about. Nor are candidates at liberty to propose their own ‘aspect’. The choices are clear:*

- Sacred texts
- Rituals
- Structures, practices and festivals
- Lived tradition

*All candidates should clearly address one of these aspects of a religious tradition in their answer.*

**Judaism – Rituals and Judaism**

As usual a mix of answers, some very good. For some reason, a number of candidates only described two rituals in detail and nothing else, often writing about Hannukah which is not really tied to any beliefs. Others only wrote about Rites of Passage and did not mention Rites of Devotion. A fair number of candidates failed to refer to the stimulus.

The best answers tied their description of Rites of Devotion and Rites of Passage to basic beliefs and traditions in Judaism in the context of what it meant to be a Jew.

Spelling mistakes were frequent with some of the worst being BAH for Bar Mitzvah and KIPPER for Yom Kippur. Pilgrimage remains a common spelling error with the vowels mixed up.

**Christianity – Lived Tradition**

Overall, the responses to this question were good. Perhaps, this reflects the fact that the stimulus quote was particularly pertinent to a discussion of the link between faith and action.

Candidates chose a range of individuals (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Teresa, Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King Jr., Sr. Irene McCormack, Helen Prejean) as the focus for their writing. Some candidates discussed several individuals. In such cases, it is important to establish clear links between discussion of each individual and the question itself.

Better responses avoided including lengthy biographies and were astute in choosing only those biographical details that were relevant to the discussion.
Criterion 1
The majority of responses were written in an appropriate format with clear, concise introductions and conclusions which provided a good synopsis of the essay. Overall, responses were well-structured and addressed the question in a logical and sequential manner.

Criterion 2
Candidates demonstrated a good ability to identify and articulate links between faith/belief and action. Better responses included pertinent discussion of this complex interrelationship between religious belief and life choices and actions.

Criterion 3
This criterion was particularly well done. The majority of candidates used a range of evidence (from the individual him/herself and from the Bible) to support their discussions. It is important, however, that candidates recognise the need to be selective in the evidence that they use and avoid constructing paragraphs that are little more than a series of quotes.

Criterion 4
Candidates were generally able to establish clear links between the beliefs of Christianity and the choices that the individual, who was the focus of their writing, made.

Christianity – Ritual

There were only 12 responses to this topic. The following are general comments and should be considered by candidates preparing to respond to this question in future papers.

The majority of responses clearly were dealing with the rituals of Roman Catholic Christianity. Candidates needed to first acknowledge that there are a variety of approaches to ritual within Christianity. Secondly, once this has been acknowledged, it is important that candidates identify that they are going to focus discussion specifically on the rituals of Roman Catholic Christianity.

In light of this, it is also important that candidates choose language carefully (e.g./ not all Christians refer to their worship services as “Mass”; nor do they have Seven Sacraments). A discussion of ritual in Christianity could also include an explanation of the place of rituals of passage, worship and healing.

In general, candidates did not establish clear links between the rituals of Christianity and the life &/or teachings of Jesus Christ and the sacred text (the New Testament, in particular).

Islam

Once again, too many candidates wrote about the five pillars and nothing else. The five pillars are not one of the aspects that candidates are required to address. If a candidate wishes to use one or more of the pillars as illustration they should be clear about i)which of the legitimate ‘aspects’ they are addressing, and ii)how the pillar or pillars might represent that particular aspect. (e.g. the ritual activities associated with the month of Ramadan are good examples of ritual in Islam)

Structures, practices and festivals

Once again too many candidates wrote ‘five pillar’ essays. Others designed their own multi-faceted ‘aspect’ of Islam in the misplaced hope that this addressed the requirements of the question. Some of
these included, ‘the five pillars’, ‘practice, ritual and devotion’, ‘the articles of faith and the five pillars’, ‘modesty and Ramadan’.

That said there were some very good responses and few that were wholly unsatisfactory. The comments below from last year’s report should be read by all candidates.

1. High quality responses always address the question, and any stimulus material regardless of its quality. Good responses have an introduction and then a discussion that leads from the introduction to the conclusion. Excellent responses have something to say about the question or task they have been asked to respond to, and all of the response is relevant.
2. High quality responses discuss, don’t just repeat memorised information. The best responses contain very good understanding and usually include some information that is not contained in nearly every other response. All parts of an excellent response are relevant.
3. Evidence demonstrates the support or authority for what you are claiming. If you offer no support you cannot expect to pass this criterion. If you use pertinent evidence to back up some points you have made you can expect to be well rewarded. Clever use of evidence can contribute to an excellent result on other criteria too.
4. Analysis when we look at Religious Traditions is most successfully demonstrated when practices and behaviours are linked to beliefs and values. Demonstrating understanding of different variants of a religion can also be well rewarded here especially if the candidate demonstrates an understanding of what difference in belief underlies a difference in practice. It can work for highly competent candidates to point out weaknesses, strengths and contradictions inherent in a religious tradition but great care should be taken that such comments are relevant to the question.

**Islam – Rituals**

**Marker 1**

In a discussion of ritual within any religious tradition, it can be useful to begin with an examination of the nature and purpose of ritual itself. It is also useful that particular rituals be linked to the stories and beliefs of a religious tradition. The majority of responses neglected to identify the fact that ritual is essentially ‘belief in action’.

Despite mention in examiner’s reports from past years, the majority of responses focussed discussion around ritual aspects of the Five Pillars. Better responses examined rites within rituals (e.g./ ablution rituals, facing Mecca, adopting the robes of the Hajji) and rites of worship, devotion and passage.

In light of the fact that religious rituals have their source in the founding stories and beliefs of the tradition, it is important to identify these links. This can be done very effectively by using evidence from the Qur’an and the Hadith and by referring to the founding story of Islam.

**Criterion 1**  Most candidates demonstrated competence in this criterion. Introductions were well-structured to clearly convey the focus of the paper. Conclusions tended to be weaker – perhaps, reflective of a lack of time rather than a lack of understanding of the importance of a strong conclusion. Essay format was appropriate and most responses remained focussed on the specific task.
Criterion 2

As with Criterion 1, most candidates did well in this criterion. While the majority of responses focussed on the Five Pillars, better responses examined a range of rites and rituals, incorporated a wide variety of terminology specific to the ritual in Islam and established clear links between aspects of the unit topic and the specific of the question.

Criterion 3

There was a surprising lack of relevant quotations from the Qur’an and the Hadith. To achieve success in this criterion in an essay of ritual in Islam, it is essential to establish clear links between texts and ritual. Likewise, few candidates referred to secondary sources as support for the points that they were developing.

Criterion 4

Better responses established very clear connections between life, beliefs, sacred texts, and ritual as faith in action. This interconnectedness was difficult to establish in essays which focussed on a description of the Five Pillars as the rituals of Islam.

Question 3

Clearly most candidates were familiar with previous comments about answering the question that is asked in this section. Not all though, so these three points need repeating again.

1. When the question asks for one tradition or approach that is what the focus of the answer should be. It should be clear to the marker what (in this year’s case) ‘religious or philosophical ethical framework’ has been selected. Reference to additional frameworks should be very brief and well justified otherwise they are not relevant and can not therefore contribute to the candidate’s award.
2. When the question asks for an examination of tensions and conflicts, this is how analysis should be given.
3. When the question asks for a framework to be applied to an issue, the framework must be applied to the issue.

There are also a few traps that should be avoided by future candidates.

• Avoid writing creatively if possible (see earlier comment).
• Passive euthanasia is controversial.
• Be wary of equating Natural Law with what is ‘natural’.
• Be careful when choosing a ‘Christian’ ethical framework, this can lead to unhelpful sweeping generalisations and thus detract from an otherwise high quality response.

Marker 2

A mix of answers, some very strong but many very weak. The main fault lay with those candidates who did not answer the question, with some referring to a number of ethical or religious frameworks by just describing them. It might be advisable to get candidates to focus on controversial issues where they can look at a range of views rather than choosing rather obscure topics that end up just being described without much reference to how they relate to ethical or religious frameworks or how they provoke opposing viewpoints. The impression was rather that it was an issue that the candidate felt strongly about and little else.
Marker 3

Generally candidates showed a solid grasp of the subject matter in their responses but they did not show a flexible grasp of that material. Generally this meant that the two strongest criteria were Criterion 2 and Criterion 3 taking relevance to the topic as a major dimension of relevance.

However the structure and analysis criteria were weaker. Generally candidates did not show much evidence of a planned or organised answer to the questions selected.

Specifically in Question 3: Ethics, candidates showed little awareness that the ‘tensions and conflicts’ dimension of the topic (and the question specifically restated this) was intended to be an assessment within the chosen ethical viewpoint. Far too many candidates took the tensions and conflicts to be aspects which arose from the ethical issue chosen. Some candidates simply delivered a spectrum of theories applied to one issue – very much different to the context set by the question – and different to the broad skills expected in the topic.

Teachers should try to encourage their candidates to explore wide-ranging ways of applying and analysing their unit knowledge so that in an examination context they are more confident to flexibly use the content and principles of the units explored.

**Question 4**

This topic was on the whole well taught & handled. Some essays lacked clarification by using key terms (Zionism) without explanation &/or lacking specific historical detail (“eventually China took over Tibet” is insufficient particularly as this topic is no surprise.)

More importantly the chosen religious tradition was in too many instances lacking in detail & substance. A balance must be set between the historical challenge itself & the tradition facing this challenge. In particular there was a paucity of detail on Aboriginal religious tradition & Buddhism in some responses. This made a good rating on Criterion 2 & 4 difficult to obtain.

It was refreshing to read essays on Islam & Women & Islam & 9/11. These could have been developed further by analysing the reasons behind the latter & contemporary scenarios (ie women in Iran & Saudi Arabia) in the former topic.

NB: Yes Jesus Christ did exist – check Roman records/any reputable history of the period!

**Criterion 1**

Overall, responses were well structured & written.

**Criterion 2**

Lack of depth in chosen religious tradition marred some otherwise competent essays.

**Criterion 3**

Most responses met this criterion well with good use of historical evidence & the reaction of the chosen tradition to the specific challenge.

**Criterion 4**

This is a complex criterion & demands an in- depth in the chosen tradition as well as the historical challenge in order to ‘analyse & evaluate’ the implications for this tradition.
Question 5

Responses to this question all focussed on Islam and tended to be either very good or barely satisfactory. Candidates should be aware that this topic is not an invitation to write what you think about a particular issue. The question has specific requirements that come directly from the course.

Most candidates looked at gender in Islam. Weaker responses just wrote generally about women in Islam. They needed to

– identify what the challenge was,
– explain how it challenged Islam, and
– detail what responses there have been.

The stronger responses addressed all three points and included rigorous analysis and supporting evidence.

Other candidates looked at radicalisation in Islam which suited the question very well. Nevertheless, the question was not an invitation to for candidates to focus their answer on their own opinions. Responses needed to be factual, supported, rigorous etc.

Question 6 (1 response, no report)

Question 7

In Question 7 on How the Universe came into Being the majority of responses slipped into exploring how science and religion may relate to each other but paid no attention to using the typologies surveyed (normally from Ian Barbour) to show how science might be thought to replace religion, or how there is now way that one realm of explanation can replace another. The candidates thus distracted also failed to actually provide examples of what these explanations actually are.

Question 8

Too many responses to this question wrote competent and interesting accounts of a theodicy or two but paid no attention to the question.

This year’s question asked for an evaluation of one theist and one non-theist world view. The candidates who did not consider a non-theist world view did not provide a satisfactory response. A slight change in the emphasis of the question, consistent with core knowledge in the course, should not cause the problems that it did.

In addition, candidates should be wary of too much emphasis on evil in their responses to this question. The topic is Why do Humans suffer? not The Problem of Evil. Despite the significant overlap these are not the same. Candidates cannot expect to simply replace the word evil with the word suffering and expect the arguments to work. Nor should candidates expect to do well if they simply make the claim that suffering comes from evil and then write a standard Problem of Evil essay.
Criterion 1  Nearly all candidates seem to structure their responses well. Therefore, this criterion was well handled by candidates who attempted to meet the requirements set by the question. These were, i) one theist world view, ii) one non-theist world view, iii) evaluation.

The biggest issue was a failure to evaluate which also lead to poorer than necessary results against criterion 4. The next biggest issue was the failure to restrict the conversation to one world view of each kind. The third issue was the regrettable failure to consider a non-theist world view.

Criterion 2  Again, despite good knowledge and understanding of two major theodicies, a good result on this criterion required a good response to the question.

Criterion 3  There was a much higher proportion of unsatisfactory awards on this criterion than the others. Candidates do not seem to offer supporting evidence in this topic as readily as they do in Section A.

Criterion 4  Critical evaluation or ‘response in action’ would have been good demonstration of this criterion. Both would have been excellent. Too often, neither was present.

Marker 2

Responses to this topic were overall well prepared & written. Too many otherwise good essays failed to identify Augustine & Irenaus’ theodicies as belonging to the Christian tradition & /or to point out that these theodicies are mutually contradictory. A brief overview of key Christian beliefs (not just God’s attributes) would overcome this problem.

This question required also one non-theist response to suffering which unfortunately was ignored by some candidates. Buddhism is acceptable as a non-theist view as is Stoicism.

Hints: Write on one side of paper, use black pen, paragraph for emphasis & learn to spell key terms (eg Noble Truths not Nobel!)

Criterion 1  Most answers were well prepared & written with a clear introduction and coherent exposition and conclusion.

Criterion 2  Depth and detail were lacking in some otherwise good answers. (See General Comments.)

Criterion 3  Most essays endeavoured to describe their chosen world view/evidence of suffering and argue for/against explanations for suffering.

Criterion 4  In some essays, a lack of detail and depth in describing the chosen world views & their responses to suffering made evaluation of these responses more difficult. Some good links were made by thoughtful writers between say Buddhism & Stoicism.
(For the purpose of this question Stoicism was considered a ‘religious’ viewpoint. See The Road Less Travelled (F. Scott Peck) who makes the point that any set of beliefs through which a person views the world is essentially a religious viewpoint.)

**Question 9** (2 responses, no report)
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