2011
School-assessed Coursework Report


This report is provided for the first year of implementation of this study and is based on the coursework audit and Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) statistical data.

GENERAL COMMENTS

In consequence of minor review the study design for Religion and Society has a number of changes in content and emphasis. Overall the new features of the study design were reflected in most of the nine schools in the audit. A small number of the schools continued to use features associated with the previous study design and this should be avoided in future.

Thorough preparation of students for assessment is a benefit for maintaining or lifting performance levels. When schools provide clear guidelines about achieving the outcomes and demonstrating excellence in the assessment tasks then students are greatly advantaged. The VCAA assessment guide provides examples of grade descriptors and further advice for teachers on designing assessment tasks.

Virtually all schools audited provided students with grade descriptors from the new VCAA assessment guide. Several schools adapted the VCAA descriptors to create their own criteria. Both of these approaches allowed students to understand what knowledge and skills they were expected to demonstrate in the task.

Some schools supplied neither a criteria sheet nor a copy of the descriptors used. It is good teaching practice to provide students with a detailed guide to assessment before the date set for the task as this allows students to make adequate preparation for the task. When setting a test it is also good practice to indicate how many marks are being allocated for each question.

The audit material showed that many schools cooperate with one other in sharing ideas for teaching units and in setting assessment tasks. This cooperation can result in improved standards of assessment provided that each teacher critically reflects on material shared and makes any necessary adaptations. Teachers from several schools exchange graded papers for cross-marking within their own school and also with other providers of Religion and Society. In that way teachers can keep track of their own marking standards.

Following the review of the study design the general introduction to Unit 3 has been extended and elaborated. It is now more detailed and informative, especially for indicating the broad context in which the big questions of life can arise.

The technical term ‘core belief/s’ has been eliminated from the study. Most schools in the audit continued to use the term ‘core belief’ but this hang-over is expected to pass. Students can use the term ‘religious belief’ but they should show clear awareness of the particular character of the belief as common to members of the tradition.

A new phrase ‘general investigation’ has been introduced into the study. The term ‘general investigation’ refers to the investigation of religions in general, where ‘religions’ is a generalisation of religions around the world. The nature of general investigations is detailed in each area of study.

In respect of the aspects of religion ‘formal creeds’ are now included under the aspect of Texts and other religious writings.
The audit material showed a range of assessment tasks were used by schools. The study design suggests key knowledge and skills associated with Unit 3: The Search for Meaning can be assessed by using one or more of the following assessment tasks:

- a report in written format
- a report in multimedia format
- an essay
- a case study
- analytical exercises
- structured questions
- a media analysis
- a test
- extended responses
- oral presentation.

Where more than one task is used for any outcome, as a set these tasks should assess each element of an outcome.

**SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

**Area of Study 1: Meaning in religious traditions**

**Outcome 1**

On completion of this unit the student should be able to explain the nature, purpose and expression of religious beliefs generally and for one or more than one religious tradition.

This outcome has a broad scope which covers meaning in religious traditions generally and particularly. In choosing appropriate task/s from the available list, schools need to keep in mind the breadth of knowledge addressed in this outcome. Forms of assessment included multiple choice, short answer test, report, extended response and essay tasks.

Each element of the outcome should be assessed, that is the nature, purpose and expression of religious beliefs generally as well as the beliefs for one or more than one religious tradition about:

- ultimate reality
- the nature and purpose of human life
- the meaning of life and death
- the relationship between ultimate reality and humanity
- the relationship between humans, and
- the relationship between human life and the rest of the natural world.

For each belief, students consider what the belief is, how it is related to each of the things in the above list, how the belief is distinctive for that particular tradition, how each religious belief is expressed through the relevant aspects of religion, and what the beliefs mean for the way members are to lead their lives.

So any one belief studied should be related to all of the things in the list. Students study a range of such beliefs. They must be able to explain, for any one belief, how the belief is related to each element, how it is expressed through the relevant aspects of the religion and what it means for how members are to lead their lives. Their explanation incorporates the distinctive meaning of that belief for the particular religious tradition studied.
Area of Study 2: Maintaining continuity of religious beliefs

Outcome 2
On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse the maintenance of religious beliefs for continuity in religious traditions.

Most of the audited schools noted the change of skill from ‘explain to ‘analyse’. Analysis means to describe the way/s of maintaining continuity, to explain the strengths and weaknesses of the choice of method/s and to apply understanding of relevant aspects of religion.

This shift of emphasis was reflected in the focus of assessment being a consideration of the reasons for maintaining continuity rather than a description of what the continuity was.

Students need to be able to identify the reasons for maintaining continuity generally and also more specifically in regard to the religion/s under study. They need to describe internal and external factors that have affected religions generally, and analyse the various ways of maintaining continuity in religious beliefs; these include reaffirmation, application to new circumstances, reinterpretation and reformulation.

Assessment tasks require students to identify reasons, describe the external and/or internal factors and analyse the way or ways of maintenance under study in the specific tradition. Removed from the study design are the key knowledge of ‘effects of the new applications’ and the key skill to ‘evaluate how current expressions of religious beliefs may have been influenced by reaffirmation, reformulation and/or new applications’.

Area of Study 3: Significant life experience and religious belief

Outcome 3
On completion of this unit the student should be able to explain and draw conclusions about the interplay between religious beliefs and significant life experiences.

The revised study design directs students to study the general relationship between life experiences and religious beliefs and then to study the specific relationship in the case of a group or individual. All the schools in the audit concentrated on studies of particular individuals; the most popular were Oscar Romero and C S Lewis.

The key knowledge in the study design is now more detailed. There is reference to the relationship between a range of significant life experiences and religious belief generally. The range of life experiences in the current study has been unpacked into two key knowledge points. Students can summarise a significant life experience of a person or group within the religious tradition they have studied. Students also outline the belief and understanding held by the person or group prior to their significant life experience.

The current study requires students to ‘explain the process of change in the way religious beliefs are understood by the person or group as a result of their significant life experience’.

The School-assessed Coursework can provide an opportunity for students to focus on and teachers to assess key knowledge and key skills in greater depth. The introduction to the Unit Three: Meaning in religious traditions and to each outcome in the unit help to set contexts and describe the various approaches to the areas of study. Teachers can use the introductions as well as the key knowledge and key skills to assess an outcome. The examination questions also represent a synthesis of these elements of the study design.