Exemplar Book on Effective Questioning

Religion Studies

Compiled by the Statistical Information and Research (SIR) Unit

March 2018

PREFACE

The National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations are set and moderated in part using tools that specify the types of cognitive demand and the content deemed appropriate for Religion Studies at Grade 12 level. Until recently, the level of cognitive demand made by a question was considered to be the main determinant of the overall level of cognitive challenge of an examination question.

However, during various examination evaluation projects conducted by Umalusi from 2008-2012, evaluators found the need to develop more complex tools to distinguish between questions which were categorised at the same cognitive demand level, but which were not of comparable degrees of difficulty. For many subjects, for each type of cognitive demand a three-level degree of difficulty designation, *easy, moderate and difficult* was developed. Evaluators first decided on the type of cognitive process required to answer a particular examination question, and then decided on the degree of difficulty, *as an attribute of the type of cognitive demand*, of that examination question.

Whilst this practice offered wider options in terms of *easy, moderate* and *difficult* levels of difficulty for each type of cognitive demand overcame some limitations of a one-dimensional cognitive demand taxonomy, other constraints emerged. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (BTEO) (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) and the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy are based on the assumption that a cumulative hierarchy exists between the different categories of cognitive demand (Bloom *et al.*, 1956; Bloom, Hastings & Madaus, 1971). The practice of 'levels of difficulty' did not necessarily correspond to a hierarchical model of increasing complexity of cognitive demand. A key problem with using the level of difficulty as an attribute of the type of cognitive demand of examination questions is that, questions recognised at a higher level of cognitive demand are not necessarily categorised as more difficult than other questions categorised at lower levels of cognitive demand. For example, during analyses a basic recognition or

recall question could be considered more difficult than an easy evaluation question.

Research further revealed that evaluators often struggled to agree on the classification of questions at so many different levels. The finer categorization for each level of cognitive demand and the process of trying to match questions to pre-set definitions of levels of difficulty made the process of making judgments about cognitive challenge overly procedural. The complex two-dimensional multi-level model also made findings about the cognitive challenge of an examination very difficult for Umalusi's Assessment Standards Committee (ASC) to interpret.

In an Umalusi Report, *Developing a Framework for Assessing and Comparing the Cognitive Challenge of Home Language Examinations* (Umalusi, 2012), it was recommended that the type and level of cognitive demand of a question and the level of a question's difficulty should be analysed separately. Further, it was argued that the ability to assess cognitive challenge lay in experts' abilities to recognise subtle interactions and make complicated connections that involved the use of multiple criteria simultaneously. However, the tacit nature of such judgments can make it difficult to generate a common understanding of what constitutes criteria for evaluating the cognitive challenge of examination questions, despite descriptions given in the policy documents of each subject.

The report also suggested that the Umalusi external moderators and evaluators be provided with a framework for thinking about question difficulty, which would help them identify where the main sources of difficulty or ease in questions might reside. Such a framework should provide a common language for evaluators and moderators to discuss and justify decisions about question difficulty. It should also be used for building the capacity of novice or less experienced moderators and evaluators to exercise the necessary expert judgments by making them more aware of key aspects to consider in making such judgments.

The revised Umalusi examination moderation and evaluation instruments for each subject draw on research and literature reviews, together with the knowledge gained through the subject workshops. At these workshops the proposed revisions were discussed with different subject specialists to attain a common understanding of the concepts, tools and framework used; and to test whether the framework developed for thinking about question difficulty 'works' for different content subjects. Using the same framework to think about question difficulty across subjects will allow for greater comparability of standards across subjects and projects.

An important change that has been made to the revised examination evaluation instrument is that the analysis of *the type of cognitive demand* of a question and analysis of *the level of difficulty* of each question are now treated as two separate judgments involving two different processes. Accordingly, the revised examination evaluation instrument now includes assessment of difficulty *as well as* cognitive demand.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full name
ASC	Assessment Standards Committee
BTEO	Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
FET	Further Education and Training
IEB	Independent Examinations Board
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QAA	Quality Assurance of Assessment
QCC	Qualifications, Curriculum and Certification
SIR	Statistical Information and Research

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.   INTRODUCTION

The rules of assessment are essentially the same for all types of learning because, to learn is to acquire knowledge or skills, while to assess is to identify the level of knowledge or skill that has been acquired (Fiddler, Marienau & Whitaker, 2006). Nevertheless, the field of assessment in South Africa and elsewhere in the world is fraught with contestation. A review of the research literature on assessment indicates difficulties, misunderstanding and confusion in how terms describing educational measurement concepts, and the relationships between them, are used (Frisbie, 2005).

Umalusi believes that if all role players involved in examination processes can achieve a common understanding of key terms, concepts and processes involved in setting, moderating and evaluating examination papers, much unhappiness can be avoided. This exemplar book presents a particular set of guidelines for both novice and experienced Religion Studies national examiners, internal and external moderators, and evaluators to use in the setting, moderation and evaluation of examinations at the National Senior Certificate (NSC) level.

The remainder of the exemplar book is organised as follows. First, the context in which the exemplar book was developed is described (Part 2), followed by a statement of its purpose (Part 3). Brief summaries of the roles of moderation and evaluation (Part 4) and cognitive demand (Part 5) in assessment follow. Examination questions selected from the NSC Religion Studies examinations of assessment bodies, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and/or the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) are used to illustrate how to identify different levels of cognitive demand as required by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) Religion Studies document (Part 6). Part 7 explains the protocols for identifying different levels of difficulty within a question paper. Application of the Umalusi framework for determining difficulty

described in Part 7 is illustrated, with reasons, by another set of questions from a range of Religion Studies examinations (Part 8). Concluding remarks complete the exemplar book (Part 9).

2. CONTEXT

Umalusi has the responsibility to quality assure qualifications, curricula and assessments of National Qualification Framework (NQF) levels 1 – 5. This is a legal mandate assigned by the *General and Further Education and Training Act (58 of 2001)* and the *National Qualification Framework Act (67 of 2008)*. To operationalize its mandate, Umalusi, amongst other things, conducts research and uses the findings of this research to enhance the quality and standards of curricula and assessments.

Since 2003, Umalusi has conducted several research studies that have investigated examination standards. For example, Umalusi conducted research on the NSC examinations, commonly known as 'Matriculation' or Grade 12, in order to gain an understanding of the standards of the new examinations (first introduced in 2008) relative to those of the previous NATED 550 Senior Certificate examinations (Umalusi, 2009a, 2009b). Research undertaken by Umalusi has assisted the organisation to arrive at a more informed understanding of what is meant by assessing the cognitive challenge of the examinations and of the processes necessary for determining whether the degree of cognitive challenge of examinations is comparable within a subject, across subjects and between years.

Research undertaken by Umalusi has revealed that different groups of examiners, moderators and evaluators do not always interpret cognitive demand in the same way, posing difficulties when comparisons of cognitive challenge were required. The research across all subjects also showed that

using the type and level of cognitive demand of a question *only* as measure for judging the cognitive challenge of a question is problematic because cognitive demand levels on their own do not necessarily distinguish between degrees of difficulty of questions.

The new Umalusi framework for thinking about question difficulty described in this exemplar book is intended to support all key role players in making complex decisions about what makes a particular question challenging for Grade 12 examination candidates.

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE EXEMPLAR BOOK

The overall goal of this exemplar book is to ensure consistency of standards of examinations across the years in the Further Education and Training (FET) sub-sector and Grade 12 in particular. The specific purpose is to build a shared understanding among teachers, examiners, moderators, evaluators, and other stakeholders, of methods used for determining the type and level of cognitive demand as well as the level of difficulty of examination questions.

Ultimately, the common understanding that this exemplar book seeks to foster is based on the premise that the process of determining the type and level of cognitive demand of questions and that of determining the level of difficulty of examination questions, are two separate judgments involving two different processes, both necessary for evaluating the cognitive challenge of examinations. This distinction between cognitive demand and difficulty posed by questions needs to be made in the setting, moderation, evaluation and comparison of Religion Studies examination papers.

The exemplar book includes an explanation of the new Umalusi framework which is intended to provide all role-players in the setting of Religion Studies examinations with a common language for thinking and talking about

question difficulty. The reader of the exemplar book is taken through the process of evaluating examination questions, first in relation to determining the type and level of cognitive demand made by a question; and then in terms of assessing the level of difficulty of a question. This is done by providing examples of a range of questions, which make different types of cognitive demands on candidates, and examples of questions at different levels of difficulty.

Each question is accompanied by an explanation of the reasoning behind why it was judged as being of a particular level of cognitive demand or difficulty, and the reasoning behind the judgements made is explained. These examples of examination questions provided were sourced by Religion Studies external moderators from previous DBE and the IEB Religion Studies question papers, pre- and post- the implementation of CAPS during various Umalusi workshops.

This exemplar book is an official document. The process of revising the Umalusi examination evaluation instrument and of developing a framework for thinking about question difficulty for both moderation and evaluation purposes has been a consultative one, with the DBE and the IEB assessment bodies. The new framework for thinking about question difficulty is to be used by Umalusi in the moderation and evaluation of Grade 12 Religion Studies examinations, and by all the assessment bodies in the setting of the question papers, in conjunction with the CAPS documents.

4.   MODERATION AND EVALUATION OF ASSESSMENT

A fundamental requirement, ethically and legally, is that assessments are fair, reliable and valid (American Educational Research Association [AERA], American Psychological Association [APA] and National Council on Measurement in Education [NCME], 1999). Moderation is one of several quality

assurance assessment processes aimed at ensuring that an assessment is fair, reliable and valid (Downing & Haladyna, 2006). Ideally, moderation should be done at all levels of an education system, including the school, district, provincial and national level in all subjects.

The task of Umalusi examination **moderators** is to ensure that the quality and standards of a particular examination are maintained each year. Part of this task is for moderators to alert examiners to details of questions, material and/or any technical aspects in examination question papers that are deemed to be inadequate or problematic and that therefore, challenge the validity of that examination. In order to do this, moderators need to pay attention to a number of issues as they moderate a question paper – these are briefly described below.

Moderation of the technical aspects of examination papers includes checking correct question and/or section numbering, and ensuring that visual texts and/or resource material included in the papers are clear and legible. The clarity of instructions given to candidates, the wording of questions, the appropriateness of the level of language used, and the correct use of terminology need to be interrogated. Moderators are also expected to detect question predictability, for example, when the same questions regularly appear in different examinations, and bias in examination papers. The adequacy and accuracy of the marking memorandum (marking guidelines) needs to be checked to ensure that it reflects and corresponds with the requirements of each question asked in the examination paper being moderated.

In addition, the task of moderators is to check that papers adhere to the overall examination requirements as set out by the relevant assessment body with regard to the format and structure (including the length, type of texts or reading selections prescribed) of the examination. This includes assessing compliance with assessment requirements with regard to ensuring that the

content is examined at an appropriate level and in the relative proportions (weightings) of content and/or skills areas required by the assessment body.

The role of Umalusi examination **evaluators** is to perform analysis of examination papers after they have been set and moderated and approved by the Umalusi moderators. This type of analysis entails applying additional expert judgments to evaluate the quality and standard of finalised examination papers before they are written by candidates in a specific year. However, the overall aim of this evaluation is to judge the comparability of an examination against the previous years' examination papers to ensure that consistent standards are being maintained over the years.

The results of the evaluators' analyses, and moderators' experiences provide the Umalusi's Assessment Standards Committee (ASC) with valuable information, which is used in the process of statistical moderation of each year's examination results. Therefore, this information forms an important component of essential qualitative data informing the ASC's final decisions in the standardisation of the examinations.

In order for the standardisation process to work effectively, efficiently and fairly, it is important that examiners, moderators and evaluators have a shared understanding of how the standard of an examination paper is assessed, and of the frameworks and main instruments that are used in this process.

5.   COGNITIVE DEMANDS IN ASSESSMENT

The *Standards for educational and psychological testing* (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999) require evidence to support interpretations of test scores with respect to cognitive processes. Therefore, valid, fair and reliable examinations require that the levels of cognitive demand required by examination questions are appropriate and varied (Downing & Haladyna, 2006). Examination papers

should not be dominated by questions that require reproduction of basic information, or replication of basic procedures, and under-represent questions invoking higher level cognitive demands.

Accordingly, the Grade 12 CAPS NSC subject examination specifications state that examination papers should be set in such a way that they reflect proportions of marks for questions at various level of cognitive demand. NSC examination papers are expected to comply with the specified cognitive demand levels and weightings. NSC examiners have to set and NSC internal moderators have to moderate examination papers as reflecting the proportions of marks for questions at different levels of cognitive demand as specified in the documents. Umalusi's external moderators and evaluators are similarly tasked with confirming compliance of the examinations with the CAPS cognitive demand levels and weightings, and Umalusi's revised examination evaluation instruments continue to reflect this requirement.

Despite subject experts, examiners, moderators and evaluators being familiar with the levels and explanations of the types of cognitive demand shown in the CAPS documents, Umalusi researchers have noted that individuals do not always interpret and classify the categories of cognitive demand provided in the CAPS the same way. In order to facilitate a common interpretation and classification of the cognitive demands made by questions, the next section of this exemplar book provides a clarification of each cognitive demand level for Religion Studies followed by illustrative examples of examination questions that have been classified at that level of cognitive demand.

6. **EXPLANATIONS AND EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS ASSESSED AT THE DIFFERENT COGNITIVE DEMAND LEVELS IN THE Religion Studies TAXONOMY ACCORDING TO CAPS**

The taxonomies of cognitive demand for each school subject in the CAPS documents are mostly based on the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001) but resemble the original Bloom's taxonomy in that categories of cognitive demand are arranged along a single continuum. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (BTEO) (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) and the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy imply that each more advanced or successive category of cognitive demand subsumes all categories below it. The CAPS Taxonomies of Cognitive Demand make a similar assumption (Crowe, 2012).

> ***Note:***
> In classifying the type and level of cognitive demand, each question is classified at the highest level of cognitive process involved. Thus, although a particular question involves recall of knowledge, as well as comprehension and application, the question is classified as an 'analysis' question if that is the highest level of cognitive process involved. If 'evaluating' is the highest level of cognitive process involved, the question as a whole should be classified as an 'evaluation' question. On the other hand, if one of more sub-sections of the question and the marks allocated for each sub-section can stand independently, then the level of cognitive demand for each sub-section of the question should be analysed separately.

The CAPS documents for many subjects also give examples of descriptive verbs that can be associated with each of the four levels of cognitive demand. However, it is important to note that such 'action verbs' can be associated with more than one cognitive level depending on the context of a question.

The Religion Studies CAPS document states that Grade 12 NSC Religion Studies examination papers should examine three levels of cognitive demand (Table 1).

TABLE 1: THE RELIGION STUDIES TAXONOMY OF COGNITIVE DEMAND LEVELS FOR THE RELIGION STUDIES NSC EXAMINATIONS

Level of cognitive demand	Type of cognitive demand	Explanation of categorization Questions which require students:
1	Recall (Knowledge)	To **recall** or **recognise explicit** information, details, facts, terms, definitions, procedures **from memory or from material provided.**
2	Comprehension	To discuss, explain or provide proof of outline. To interpret, distinguish, compare and predict.
3	Analysis, Application, Evaluation and synthesis	To investigate, analyse, contrast, categorize, create, predict, plan or propose. To judge, justify or argue. To rate or assess.

Source: CAPS (DBE, 2011.24)

To facilitate reading of this section, each of the above cognitive demand levels in the Religion Studies Taxonomy are explained, and the explanation is followed by at least **three** examples of questions from previous Religion Studies NSC examinations classified at each of the levels of cognitive demand shown in Table 1 above. These examples were selected to represent the **best and clearest** examples of each level of cognitive demand that the Religion Studies experts could find. The discussion below each example question explains the reasoning processes behind the classification of the question at that particular type of cognitive demand (Table 2 to Table 5).

> **Note:**
> Be mindful that analyses of *the level of cognitive process* of a question and *the level of difficulty* of each question are to be treated as two separate judgments involving two different processes. Therefore, whether the question is easy or difficult should not influence the categorisation of the question in terms of the type and level of cognitive demand. Questions should NOT be categorised as higher order evaluation/synthesis questions because they are difficult questions. Some questions involving the cognitive process of recall or recognition may be more difficult than other recall or recognition questions. Not all comprehension questions are easier than questions involving analysis or synthesis. Some comprehension questions may be very difficult, for example explanation of complex scientific processes. For these reasons, you need to categorise the level of difficulty of questions separately from identifying the type of cognitive process involved.

TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS AT LEVEL 1: RECALL (KNOWLEDGE)

Example 1:
Question 1.6, November 2009, P.1: Briefly explain the term *Ubuntu*. (4)
Discussion: To answer this question, candidates have to *recall* and show basic knowledge of the term *Ubuntu* which is central to the African Traditional Religion. This term should be familiar to all Grade 12 Religion Studies' candidates who should have had the opportunity since Grade 10 (i.e. over a period of three years) to become familiar with it when they were taught the different aspects of African Traditional Religion. The term is not 'subject specific' – candidates would have been exposed to it in other subjects as well as in their daily lives, for example, through newspapers or on television. Although the action verb 'explain', suggests that this could be a 'comprehension' question, candidates can simply provide a short definition of *Ubuntu* without necessarily demonstrating deeper understanding of the significance of the concept. Hence the question is classified as a recall (knowledge) question.
Memorandum/Marking guidelines • To show respect and empathy to those with social or emotional needs. • A person is a person through his/her relationships with other people. • The willingness to help other people without setting any conditions. Memo adapted (2 x 2) = (4)
Example 2:
Question 1.4, March 2011, P.1: Define the concept normative source   (4)

Discussion:

Although this question instructs candidates to define a 'concept', the concept 'normative source' is a basic knowledge element in Religion Studies and forms a core part of the curriculum. All candidates should have been exposed to the normative sources (i.e. holy scriptures) of the different religions throughout the FET phase as normative sources are the basis of information about any religion. The concept is central to the theme on the "interpretation of normative sources" within any religion. Thus, the task of answering this question requires *knowledge* of specific terminology or vocabulary of the subject. The definition required is thus not abstract but factual. No deep explanation is required. To answer the question, candidates simply have to *remember* information on the concept 'normative source'. Hence, the question is classified as a recall (knowledge) question.

Memorandum/Marking guidelines

- A normative source refers the written scriptures of the different religions.
- It is the source that sets the standards or norms within a religion.

(2 x 2) = (4)

Example 3:

Question 1.7, November 2009, P.1:

Name the TWO normative sources in Islam (2)

Discussion:

To answer this question Religion Studies' candidates have to *recall* information they should all have learnt in class. Most religions are source-based and Grade 12 candidates should all be familiar with the sources or scriptures used in the different religions. Candidates should have been exposed to the normative sources of the different religions throughout the FET phase as this content forms part of the core curriculum for Religion Studies. They do not have to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the sources as no explanation or discussion of the two normative sources is required. Hence, the question is classified as a recall (knowledge) question.

Memorandum/Marking guidelines
- Quran
- and Hadith (1 x 2)

TABLE 3:   EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS AT LEVEL 2: COMPREHENSION

Example 1:
Question 2.3, November 2011, P.2: Read the statement below and answer the questions that follow: "Many people predicted that Darwin's evolution theory would mean the end of religion. Although it caused division amongst the religious communities, it did not replace religious beliefs." 2.3 Discuss the Big Bang theory and compare it with the creation beliefs of any ONE religion.   (8) (Adapted)
Discussion: Answering this question requires more than recall of factual knowledge or remembering material taught in class. They have to communicate an understanding of both the Big Bang theory as well as the Hinduism view on creation. Candidates then have to compare the two. Thus, the question is classified as making middle order cognitive demands; it requires comprehension.

Memorandum/Marking guidelines

BIG BANG THEORY	HINDUISM
Nobody knows what existed before the big bang	In Hinduism, the universe is the creator
After the big bang, the universe grew to an enormous size	The Creator existed and will always exist
Small temperature changes in the initial explosion led to different levels of density in the universe.	The Creator exists in active or passive state
This later grew to clusters in the universe.	When the Creator is active, creation begins

Example 2:
Question 5, November 2011, P.2: Discuss the central teachings of any ONE religion under the following headings: 5.1 The nature of divinity.   (10) (This is part of a longer question)

Discussion:

This question is classified as making middle order cognitive demands; it requires comprehension. 'Comprehension' questions require candidates to explain ideas or concepts, interpret, summarize, paraphrase or classify. To answer this question and compile descriptions of the central teachings under the different headings, candidates have re-organise information, facts or details which they have learnt about in class in a different way or form (e.g. by summarising the main teachings, restating them in their own words, and consolidating the information under the given headings). Presenting the required details entails recalling knowledge and showing sound understanding of the teachings (facts, principles, procedures and processes) of the religion they have selected by explaining them. The cognitive processes involved in answering the question go one step beyond mere recall of factual knowledge.

Memorandum/Marking guidelines
Question 5, November 2011, P.2:

Discuss the central teachings of any ONE religion under the following headings:

5.1 The nature of divinity (10)

The nature of divinity Christianity:

- Christians believe in the existence of a Supreme and Divine Being known as God.
- God manifests Himself as three persons.
  - God the Father as Creator of the universe.
  - God the Son as Saviour and Liberator of humanity.
  - And God the Holy Spirit as Counsellor of Christians.

Buddhism:

- Most forms of Buddhism accept that powerful beings exist, whom we call God.
- Buddhists teach that everything is impermanent, even the gods.
- Each Buddhist must find enlightenment alone.
- They follow the Buddha's instruction.
- They may pray to the local deity. (5 x 2)

Example 3:

Question 3.2, March 2010, Paper 2:

There are many religious theories of creation. Compare ONE Eastern religious view (Hinduism, Buddhism *et cetera*) with ONE Middle Eastern view (Islam, Christianity, Judaism) of creation. (20)

Discussion:

To answer this question candidates have to choose one Eastern religion and compare its views on creation with the views of one Middle Eastern religion. For this task, candidates must recall the theories of creation from Eastern and Middle Eastern religious viewpoints. They cannot simply present factual information or knowledge relating to two religious views. They have to interpret, summarize, paraphrase and classify both sets of the religious views and **i**dentify similarities and differences between the two views of creation. They have to show knowledge and understanding of principles with regards to two religions, for example, by explaining why the one religious view would reject the other religious view of creation.

Memorandum/Marking guidelines

HINDU VIEW ON CREATION	MIDDLE EASTERN VIEW ON CREATION
According to the Hindu view the universe is the Creator	According to the Middle Eastern view the Creator is male
The Creator has no limitations and thus cannot be declared male or female	In the beginning only the Creator existed
The Creator always existed	In the beginning only the Creator existed.
The Creator exists in an active or passive realm	The universe is an entity apart from the Creator
The creation took place over a long period	The creation took place over six days

(10 x 2)

TABLE 4: EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS AT LEVEL 3: ANALYSIS, EVALUATION AND SYNTHESIS

Example 1:

Question (Created):

Critically evaluate the role of interreligious dialogue in South Africa.   (20)

Discussion:

To answer the question, candidates have to determine the success and failures of organizations involved with interreligious organizations. For this task, they need to recall knowledge of the interreligious dialogue in South Africa, the different organizations involved in interreligious dialogue and the work they are doing. They then have to pass judgement on the quality of work done by these organizations; they have to express and defend their opinions on the usefulness and effectiveness of organizations involved with interreligious dialogue. Candidates thus have to work

at several cognitive levels –recall (knowledge), comprehension, and evaluating. As 'evaluating' is the highest level, the question as a whole is classified as being at Level 3.

Memorandum/Marking guidelines

CRITERIA	MAXIMUM MARK	LEARNERS TOTAL
<u>HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE</u> Inter-religious dialogue during the apartheid years. Examples of organizations that played a role. Examples of people that played a role.	6	
<u>CURRENT INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE</u> What is the current situation? Organizations that play a role. Examples of people that played a role.	6	
Recommendations to promote inter-religious dialogue.	8	

(20)

Example 2:

Question 2, November 2009, p.2:

Read the following statement and answer the questions that follow:

South Africa observes "Sixteen Days of Activism" each year to highlight the problem of violence against women and children.

What can the country's various religious organizations do to deal with the problem of violence against women and children? Write your answer under the following headings:

2.1 Analyse the reasons for the high levels of violence against women in the South African society. (10)

(Question adapted)

Discussion:
To answer Question 2.1 candidate need not only to understand the problem of violence against women and children but also to analyse the reasons for the violence against women. Thus, Question 2.1 requires candidates to engage in more abstract interpretation or reasoning. However, although the action verb in the question is 'analyse' in fact, in analysing the present situation, candidates also have to evaluate or make judgements. Thus, to answer the question, candidates have to work at the lower cognitive levels – 'recall (knowledge)', 'comprehension' – but, as the highest level of cognitive process involved is 'analysis, this question is classified as being at Level 3.

Memorandum/Marking guidelines

- Gender prejudice is prevalent in all communities in South Africa.
  (Refer to statistics).
- This is because of the patriarchal orientation of this society.
  - This orientation brings about the dominance of the male members in the family.
  - The claim to superiority arises from physical, economic and social strength.)
  - Females are seen as inferior to males and do not enjoy equal rights.
  - Children are seen as the responsibility of the mother – absent- father syndrome.
- Abusive relationships result in unstable families and abused children.

The abuse can be emotional, verbal, physical or sexual (rape).   (5 x 2)

Example 3:

Question 3.1.2, March 2009, P.1:
Draw up a proposal to host an inter-religious conference for women in South Africa. Clearly state your objectives in terms of:
- Historical perspective.   (10)
- Aims of the conference.   (10)
- Recommendations.   (10)

Discussion:
This question requires candidates to be creative. To answer it, they have to consider three different aspects of producing a coherent proposal to host an inter-religious conference for women in South Africa. They have to *recall* what they have learnt about inter-religious relationships, *and* apply their *knowledge* and *understanding* of inter-religious relationships to come up with relevant objectives for each of the three aspects. They have to *evaluate* and organise their ideas systematically, but also be creative in putting different elements together to form a coherent whole. Objectives for the three different aspects must be organised and integrated for a specific purpose (*synthesising*). Answering the question requires recall (knowledge), comprehension, analysis, evaluation and synthesis. Candidates have to construct a proposal by explaining, analysing and justifying the objectives selected for each of the bulleted aspects. The question is thus classified as a higher order cognitive task involving synthesising.

Memorandum/Marking guidelines

CRITERIA	MAXIMUM MARK	LEARNERS TOTAL
Historical Perspective: State clearly the status of women in South African society throughout the ages.	10	

The role of women in the freedom struggle. Leadership role of women in religious institutions. Discrimination and gender bias issues.		
Aims of the conference: To create a forum for women from all religions to meet. To open dialogue on common issues affecting women. To address gender bias issues. To search for religious solutions to the vices affecting society. To raise the status of women in society.	10	
Recommendations: Future conferences. Decentralised structures for regular communication. Open channels of communication with government and business. Creation of women empowerment programmes. Leadership roles in religious movements and organisations.	10	

To accomplish the goal of discriminating between high achievers, those performing very poorly, and all candidates in between, examiners need to vary the challenge of examination questions. Until recently, the assumption has been that 'alignment' with the allocated percentage of marks for questions at the required cognitive demand levels meant that sufficient examination questions were relatively easy; moderately challenging; and difficult for candidates to answer.

However, research and candidate performance both indicate that a range of factors other than type of cognitive demand contribute to the cognitive challenge of a question. Such factors include the level of content knowledge required, the language used in the question, and the complexity or number of concepts tested. In other words, cognitive demand levels on their own do not necessarily distinguish between degrees of difficulty of questions.

This research helps, to some extent, explain why, despite that some NSC examination papers have complied with the specified cognitive demand weightings stipulated in the policy, they have not adequately distinguished between candidates with a range of academic abilities in particular between higher ability candidates. As a result, examiners, moderators and evaluators are now required to assess the difficulty level of each examination question in addition to judging its cognitive demand.

Section 7 below explains the new protocol introduced by Umalusi for analysing examination question difficulty.

7. ANALYSING THE LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY OF EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

When analysing the level of difficulty of each examination question, there are six important protocols to note. These are:

1. Question difficulty is **assessed independently** of the type and level **of cognitive demand**.
2. Question difficulty is assessed against **four levels of difficulty**.
3. Question difficulty is determined against the assumed capabilities of the **envisaged** Grade 12 Religion Studies NSC examination **candidate**.
4. Question difficulty is determined using **a common framework** for thinking about question difficulty.
5. Question difficulty entails **distinguishing unintended sources of difficulty** or ease **from intended sources of difficulty** or ease.
6. Question difficulty entails identifying **differences** in levels of difficulty **within a single question**.

Each of the above protocols is individually explained and discussed below.

7.1 Question difficulty is assessed independently of the type and level of cognitive demand

As emphasized earlier in this exemplar book, the revised Umalusi NSC examination evaluation instruments separate the analysis of the type of cognitive demand of a question from the analysis of the level of difficulty of each examination question. Cognitive demand describes the *type of cognitive process* that is required to answer a question, and this does not necessarily equate or align with the *level of difficulty* of other aspects of a question, such as the difficulty of the content knowledge that is being assessed. For example, a recall question can ask a candidate to recall very complex and abstract scientific content. The question would be categorised as Level 1 in terms of the cognitive demand taxonomy but may be rated as 'difficult' (Level 3 Table 7 below).

> *Note:*
> Cognitive demand is just one of the features of a question that can influence your comparative judgments of question difficulty. The type and level of cognitive process involved in answering a question does not necessarily determine how difficult the question would be for candidates. Not all evaluation/synthesis/analysis questions are more difficult than questions involving lower-order processes such as comprehension or application.

7.2 Question difficulty is assessed at four levels of difficulty

The revised Umalusi NSC examination evaluation instruments require evaluators to exercise expert judgments about whether each examination question is 'Easy', 'Moderately challenging', 'Difficult' or 'Very difficult' for the envisaged Grade 12 learner to answer. Descriptions of these categories of difficulty are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5   LEVELS OF DIFFICULTY OF EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

1	2	3	4
Easy for the envisaged Grade 12 student to answer.	**Moderately challenging** for the envisaged Grade 12 student to answer.	**Difficult** for the envisaged Grade 12 student to answer.	**Very difficult** for the envisaged Grade 12 student to answer. The skills and knowledge required to answer the question allow for the top students (*extremely* high-achieving/ability students) to be discriminated from other high achieving/ability students).

Note:
The fourth level, 'very difficult' has been included in the levels of difficulty of examination questions to ensure that there are sufficient questions that discriminate well amongst higher ability candidates.

7.3   Question difficulty is determined against the assumed capabilities of the envisaged Grade 12 Religion Studies NSC examination candidate

The revised Umalusi NSC examination evaluation instruments require evaluators to exercise expert judgments about whether each examination question is 'Easy', 'Moderately challenging', 'Difficult' or 'Very difficult' for the 'envisaged' Grade 12 learner to answer (Table 5). In other words, assessment of question difficulty is linked to a particular target student within the population of NSC candidates, that is, the Grade 12 candidate of average intelligence or ability.

The Grade 12 learners that you may have taught over the course of your career cannot be used as a benchmark of the 'envisaged' candidate as we cannot know whether their abilities fall too high, or too low on the entire spectrum of all Grade 12 Religion Studies candidates in South Africa. The revised Umalusi NSC examination evaluation instruments thus emphasise that, when rating the level of difficulty of a particular question, your conception of the 'envisaged'

candidate needs to be representative of the entire population of candidates for all schools in the country, in other words, of the overall Grade 12 population.

Most importantly, the conception of this 'envisaged' candidate is a learner who has been taught the whole curriculum adequately by a teacher who is qualified to teach the subject, in a functioning school. There are many disparities in the South African education system that can lead to very large differences in the implementation of the curriculum. Thus this 'envisaged' learner is not a typical South African Grade 12 learner – it is an intellectual construct (an imagined person) whom you need to imagine when judging the level of difficulty of a question. This envisaged Grade 12 learner is an aspirational ideal of where we would like all Religion Studies learners in South Africa to be.

> **Note:**
> The concept of the **envisaged Grade 12 candidate is** that of an imaginary learner who has the following features:
>   a. Is of average intelligence or ability
>   b. Has been taught by a competent teacher
>   c. Has been exposed to the entire examinable curriculum
> This envisaged learner represents an imaginary person who occupies the middle ground of ability and approaches questions *having had all the necessary schooling.*

7.4 Question difficulty is determined using a common framework for thinking about question difficulty

Examiners, moderators and evaluators **in all subjects** are now provided with a common framework for thinking about question difficulty to use when identifying sources of difficulty or ease in each question, and to provide their reasons for the level of difficulty they select for each examination question.

The framework described in detail below provides the main sources of difficulty or 'ease' inherent in questions. The four sources of difficulty which must be

considered when thinking about the level of difficulty of examination questions in this framework are as follows.

1. '**Content difficulty** 'refers to the difficulty inherent in the subject matter and/or concept/s assessed.
2. '**Stimulus difficulty** 'refers to the difficulty that candidates confront when they attempt to read and understand the question and its source material. The demands of the reading required to answer a question thus form an important element of 'stimulus difficulty'.
3. '**Task difficulty** 'refers to the difficulty that candidates confront when they try to formulate or produce an answer. The level of cognitive demand of a question forms an element of 'Task difficulty', as does the demand of the written text or representations that learners are required to produce for their response.
4. '**Expected response difficulty** 'refers to difficulty imposed by examiners in a marking guideline, scoring rubric or memorandum. For example, mark allocations affect the amount and level of answers students are expected to write.

This framework derived from Leong (2006) was chosen because it allows the person making judgments about question difficulty to grapple with nuances and with making connections. The underlying assumption is that judgment of question difficulty is influenced by the interaction and overlap of different aspects of the four main sources of difficulty. Whilst one of the above four sources of difficulty may be more pronounced in a specific question, the other three sources may also be evident. Furthermore, not all four sources of difficulty need to be present for a question to be rated as difficult.

The four-category conceptual framework is part of the required Umalusi examination evaluation instruments. Each category or source of difficulty in this framework is described and explained in detail below (Table 6). Please read the entire table very carefully.

TABLE 6:   FRAMEWORK FOR THINKING ABOUT QUESTION DIFFICULTY

CONTENT/CONCEPT DIFFICULTY
Content/concept difficulty indexes the difficulty in the **subject matter, topic or conceptual knowledge** assessed or required. In this judgment of the item/question, difficulty exists in the **academic and conceptual demands** that questions make and/or the **grade level** boundaries of the various 'elements' of domain/subject knowledge (topics, facts, concepts, principles and procedures associated with the subject).
For example:
Questions that assess '**advanced content'**, that is, subject knowledge that is considered to be in advance of the grade level curriculum, are *likely* to be difficult or very difficult for most candidates. Questions that assess subject knowledge which forms part of the core curriculum for the grade are *likely* to be moderately difficult for most candidates. Questions that assess **'basic content'** or subject knowledge candidates would have learnt at lower grade levels, and which would be familiar to them are *unlikely* to pose too much of a challenge to most candidates. Questions that require general everyday knowledge or knowledge of 'real life' experiences are *often* easier than those that test more **specialized** school **knowledge**. Questions involving only concrete objects, phenomena, or processes are *usually* easier than those that involve more **abstract constructs, ideas, processes or modes.** Questions which test learners' understanding of theoretical or **de-contextualised issues or topics**, rather than their knowledge of specific examples or contextualised topics or issues *tend* to be more difficult. Questions involving familiar, contemporary/current contexts or events are *usually* easier than those that are more **abstract or** involve **'imagined' events** (e.g. past/future events) or **contexts** that are **distant from learners' experiences.** Content difficulty may also be varied by changing **the number of knowledge elements or operations assessed**. *Generally,* the difficulty of a question increases with the number of knowledge elements or operations assessed. Questions that assess learners on two or more knowledge elements or operations are *usually* (but not always) more difficult than those that assess a single knowledge element or operation. Assessing learners on **a combination of knowledge elements or operations that are seldom combined** *usually* increases the level of difficulty.
EXAMPLES OF INVALID OR UNINTENDED SOURCE OF CONTENT DIFFICULTY
- Testing obscure or unimportant concepts or facts that are not mentioned in the curriculum, or which are unimportant to the curriculum learning objectives.   - Testing very advanced concepts or operations that candidates are extremely unlikely to have had opportunities to learn.

STIMULUS DIFFICULTY
Stimulus difficulty refers to the difficulty of the linguistic **features of the question** (**linguistic** complexity) and the challenge that candidates face when they attempt to read, interpret and understand the words and phrases in the question AND when they attempt to read and understand the **information or 'text' or source material (diagrams, tables and graphs, pictures, cartoons, passages, etc.) that accompanies the question.**

For example:

Questions that contain words and phrases that require only simple and straightforward comprehension are *usually* easier than those that require the candidate to understand **subject specific phraseology and terminology** (e.g. idiomatic or grammatical language not usually encountered in everyday language), or that require more technical comprehension and specialised command of words and language (e.g. everyday words involving different meanings within the context of the subject).

Questions that contain information that is 'tailored' to an expected response, that is, questions that contain no irrelevant or distracting information, are *generally* easier than those that require candidates to select relevant and appropriate information or **unpack a large amount of information** for their response. A question **set in a very rich context** *can* increase question difficulty. For example, learners *may* find it difficult to select the correct operation when, for example, a mathematics or accountancy question is set in a context-rich context.

Although the level of difficulty in examinations is *usually* revealed most clearly through the questions, text complexity or the degree of **challenge or complexity in written or graphic texts** (such as a graph, table, picture, cartoon, etc.) that learners are required to read and interpret in order to respond *can* increase the level of difficulty. Questions that depend on reading and selecting content from a text *can* be more challenging than questions that do not **depend on actually reading the accompanying text** because they test reading comprehension skills as well as subject knowledge. Questions that require candidates to **read a lot** *can* be more challenging than those that require limited reading. Questions that tell learners where in the text to look for relevant information are *usually* easier than those where **learners are not told where to look**.

The level of difficulty *may* increase if texts set, and reading passages or other **source material** used are challenging for the grade level, and make **high reading demands** on learners at the grade level. Predictors of textual difficulty include:

- **semantic content** – for example, if vocabulary and words used are typically outside the reading vocabulary of Grade 12 learners, 'texts' (passage, cartoon, diagram, table, etc.) are *usually* more difficult. 'Texts' are *generally* easier if words or images are made accessible by using semantic/context, syntactic/structural or graphophonic/visual cues.
- **syntactic or organisational structure** – for example, sentence structure and length. For example, if learners are likely to be *familiar with the structure* of

the 'text' or resource, for example, from reading newspapers or magazines, etc. 'texts' are *usually* easier than when the structure is unfamiliar.

- **literary techniques** – for example, abstractness of ideas and imagery – and **background knowledge required**, for example, to make sense of allusions.
- if the **context** is **unfamiliar** or remote, or if candidates do not have or are **not provided with access to the context** which informs a text (source material, passage, diagram, table, etc.) they are expected to read, and which informs the question they are supposed to answer and the answer they are expected to write, then constructing a response is *likely* to be more difficult than when the context is provided or familiar.

Questions which require learners to **cross-reference different sources** are *usually* more difficult than those which deal with one source at a time.

Another factor in stimulus difficulty is presentation and visual appearance. For example, type face and size, use of headings, and other types of textual organisers etc. can aid **'readability'** and make it easier for learners to interpret the meaning of a question.

EXAMPLES OF INVALID OR UNINTENDED SOURCES OF STIMULUS DIFFICULTY
- Meaning of words unclear or unknown.   - Difficult or impossible to work out what the question is asking.   - Questions which are ambiguous.   - Grammatical errors in the question that could cause misunderstanding.   - Inaccuracy or inconsistency of information or data given.   - Insufficient information provided.   - Unclear resource (badly drawn or printed diagram, inappropriate graph, unconventional table).   - Dense presentation (too many important points packed in a certain part of the stimulus).

TASK DIFFICULTY
Task difficulty refers to the **difficulty that candidates confront when they try to formulate or produce an answer**.

For example:
In most questions, to generate a response, candidates have to work through the steps of a solution. *Generally*, questions that **require more steps in a solution** are more difficult than those that require fewer steps. Questions involving only one or two steps in the solution are *generally* easier than those where several operations required for a solution**.** Task difficulty may also be mediated by the **amount of guidance present in the question**. Although question format is not necessarily a factor and difficult questions can have a short or simple format, questions that provide guided steps or cues (e.g. a clear and detailed framework for answering) are *generally* easier than those that are more open ended and require candidates to form or tailor their **own response strategy** or argument, work out the steps **and maintain the**

strategy for answering the question by themselves. A high degree of prompting (a high degree of prompted recall, for example) *tends* to reduce difficulty level.

Questions that test specific knowledge are *usually* less difficult that **multi-step, multiple-concept or operation questions**.

A question that requires the candidate to **use** a **high level of** appropriate **subject specific, scientific or specialised terminology in** their **response** *tends* to be more difficult than one which does not.

A question requiring candidates to **create a complex abstract (symbolic or graphic) representation** is *usually* more challenging than a question requiring candidates to create a concrete representation.

A question requiring writing a one-word answer, a phrase, or a simple sentence is *often* easier to write than **responses that require more complex sentences, a paragraph or a full essay or composition**.

Narrative or descriptive writing, for example where the focus is on recounting or ordering a sequence of events chronologically, is *usually* easier than **writing discursively** (**argumentatively or analytically**) where ideas need to be developed and ordered logically. Some questions reflect task difficulty simply by **'creating the space' for A-grade candidates** to demonstrate genuine insight, original thought or good argumentation, and to write succinctly and coherently about their knowledge.

Another element is the **complexity in structure of the required response**. When simple connections between ideas or operations are expected in a response, the question is *generally* easier to answer than a question in which the significance of the relations between the parts and the whole is expected to be discussed in a response. In other words, a question in which an unstructured response is expected is *generally* easier than a question in which **a relational response** is required. A response which involves **combining or linking a number of complex ideas or operations** is *usually* more difficult than a response where there is no need to combine or link ideas or operations.

On the other hand, questions which require continuous prose or extended writing *may* also be easier to answer correctly or to get marks for than questions that require no writing at all or single letter answer (such as multiple choice), or a brief response of one or two words or short phrase/s because they **test very specific knowledge**.

The **cognitive demand** or **thinking processes** required form an aspect of task difficulty. Some questions test thinking ability, and learners' capacity to deal with ideas, etc. Questions that assess inferential comprehension or application of knowledge, or that require learners to take ideas from one context and use it in another, for example, *tend* to be more difficult than questions that assess recognition or retrieval of basic information. On the other hand, questions requiring recall of knowledge are *usually* more difficult than questions that require simple recognition processes.

When the **resources for answering** the question are included in the examination paper, then the task is *usually* easier than when candidates have to **use and select their own internal resources** (for example, their own knowledge of the subject) or transform information to answer the question.

Questions that require learners to take or **transfer** ideas, **skills or knowledge from one context/subject area and use them in another** *tend* to be more difficult.

EXAMPLES OF INVALID OR UNINTENDED SOURCES OF TASK DIFFICULTY

- Level of detail required in an answer is unclear.
- Context is unrelated to or uncharacteristic of the task than candidates have to do.
- Details of a context distract candidates from recalling or using the right bits of their knowledge.
- Question is unanswerable.
- Illogical order or sequence of parts of the questions.
- Interference from a previous question.
- Insufficient space (or time) allocated for responding.
- Question predictability or task familiarity. If the same question regularly appears in examination papers or has been provided to schools as exemplars, learners are likely to have had prior exposure, and practised and rehearsed answers in class (for example, when the same language set works are prescribed each year).
- Questions which involve potential follow-on errors from answers to previous questions.

EXPECTED RESPONSE DIFFICULTY

Expected response difficulty refers to difficulty imposed by examiners in a **mark scheme and memorandum**. This location of difficulty is more applicable to 'constructed' response questions, as opposed to 'selected' response questions (such as multiple choice, matching/true-false).

For example:

When examiners expect few or no details in a response, the question is *generally* easier than one where the mark scheme implies that **a lot of details are expected**.

A further aspect of expected response difficulty is the clarity of the **allocation of marks**. Questions are *generally* easier when the allocation of marks is explicit, straight-forward or logical (i.e. 3 marks for listing 3 points) than when the **mark allocation is indeterminate or implicit** (e.g. when candidates need all 3 points for one full mark or 20 marks for a discussion of a concept, without any indication of how much and what to write in a response). This aspect affects difficulty because candidates who are unclear about the mark expectations in a response may not produce sufficient amount of answers in their response that will earn the marks that befit their ability.

Some questions are more difficult/easy to mark accurately than others. Questions that are **harder to mark and score objectively** are *generally* more difficult for candidates than questions that require simple marking or scoring strategies on

the part of markers. For example, recognition and recall questions are *usually* easier to test and mark objectively because they usually require the use of matching and/or simple scanning strategies on the part of markers. More complex questions requiring analysis (breaking down a passage or material into its component parts), evaluation (making judgments, for example, about the worth of material or text, or about solutions to a problem), synthesis (bringing together parts or elements to form a whole), and creativity (presenting own ideas or original thoughts) are *generally* harder to mark/score objectively. The best way to test for analysis, evaluation, synthesis and creativity is usually through extended writing. Such extended writing *generally* requires the use of more cognitively demanding *marking* strategies such as interpreting and evaluating the logic of what the candidate has written.

Questions where **a wide range of alternative answers or response/s** is possible or where the correct answer may be arrived at through different strategies *tend* to be more difficult. On the other hand, questions may be so open-ended that learners will get marks even if they engage with the task very superficially.

EXAMPLES OF INVALID OR UNINTENDED SOURCES OF EXPECTED RESPONSE DIFFICULTY
• Mark allocation is unclear or illogical. The weighting of marks is important in questions that comprise more than one component when components vary in levels of difficulty. Learners may be able to get the same marks for answering easy component/s of the item as other learners are awarded for answering the more difficult components. • Mark scheme and questions are incongruent. For example, there is no clear correlation between the mark indicated on the question paper and the mark allocation of the memorandum. • Question asked is not the one that examiners want candidates to answer. Memorandum spells out expectation to a slightly different question, not the actual question. • Impossible for candidate to work out from the question what the answer to the question is (answer is indeterminable). • Wrong answer provided in memorandum. • Alternative correct answers from those provided or spelt out in the memorandum are also plausible. • The question is 'open' but the memo has a closed response. Memo allows no leeway for markers to interpret answers and give credit where due.

The framework described above does not provide you with explicit links between the different sources of difficulty, or show relationships and overlaps between the different categories and concepts in the framework. This is because it is impossible to set prescribed rules or pre-determined combinations of categories and concepts used for making judgments about the source of difficulty in a particular examination question.

The intention behind the framework is to allow you to exercise your sense of judgment as an expert. The complexity of your judgment lies in your ability as an expert to recognise subtle interactions and identify links between different categories of a question's difficulty or ease. For example, a question that tests specific knowledge of your subject can actually be more difficult that a multi-step question because it requires candidates to explain a highly abstract concept, or very complex content. In other words, although questions that test specific knowledge are *usually* less difficult than multiple-concept or operation questions, the level of difficulty of the content knowledge required to answer a question can make the question more difficult than a multi-step or multi-operation question.

Not all one word response questions can automatically be assumed to be easy. For example, multiple-choice questions are not automatically easy because a choice of responses is provided – some can be difficult. As an expert in your subject, you need to make these types of judgments about each question.

Note:

It is very important that you become extremely familiar with the framework explained in Table 6, and with each category or source of difficulty provided (i.e. content difficulty, task difficulty, stimulus difficulty, and expected response difficulty). You need to understand the examples of questions which illustrate each of the four levels (Table 7 to Table 10). This framework is intended to assist you in discussing and justifying your decisions regarding the difficulty level ratings of questions. You are expected to **refer to all four categories or sources of difficulty** in justifying your decisions.

When considering question difficulty ask:
- How difficult is the **knowledge** (content, concepts or procedures) that is being assessed for the envisaged Grade 12 candidate? (*Content difficulty*)
- How difficult is it for the envisaged Grade 12 candidate to formulate the answer to the question? In considering this source of difficulty, you should **take into account the type of cognitive demand** made by the task. (*Task difficulty*)
- How difficult is it for the envisaged Grade 12 candidate to **understand the question and the source material** that need to be read to answer the particular question? (*Stimulus difficulty*)
- What does the **marking memorandum and mark scheme** show about the difficulty of the question? (*Expected response difficulty*)

7.5 Question difficulty entails distinguishing unintended sources of difficulty or ease from intended sources of difficulty or ease

Close inspection of the framework for thinking about question difficulty (Section 7.4, Table 6) above, shows that, for each general category or source of difficulty, the framework makes a distinction between 'valid' or intended, and 'invalid' or unintended sources of question difficulty or ease. Therefore, defining question difficulty entails identifying whether sources of difficulty or ease in a question were intended or unintended by examiners. Included in Table 6 are examples of unintended sources of difficulty or ease for each of the four categories.

Valid difficulty or 'easiness' in a question has its source in the requirements of the question, and is **intended** by the examiner (Ahmed and Pollit, 1999). Invalid sources of difficulty or 'easiness' refer to those features of question difficulty or 'easiness' that were **not intended** by the examiner. Such unintended 'mistakes' or omissions in questions can prevent the question from assessing what the examiner intended, and are likely to prevent candidates from demonstrating their true ability or competence, and can result in a question being easier or more difficult than the examiner intended.

For example, grammatical errors in a question that could cause misunderstanding for candidates are unintended sources of question difficulty because the difficulty in answering the question could lie in the faulty formulation of the question, rather than in the intrinsic difficulty of the question itself (for example, because of stimulus difficulty). Candidates "may misunderstand the question and therefore not be able to demonstrate what they know" (Ahmed and Pollit, 1999, p.2). Another example is question predictability (when the same questions regularly appear in examination papers or textbooks) because familiarity can make a question which was intended to be difficult, less challenging for examination candidates.

Detecting unintended sources of difficulty or ease in examinations is largely the task of moderators. Nevertheless, evaluators also need to be vigilant about detecting sources which could influence or alter the intended level of question difficulty that moderators may have overlooked.

> ***Note:***
> When judging question difficulty, you should distinguish **unintended sources of question difficulty or ease** from those sources that are intended, thus ensuring that examinations have a range of levels of difficulty. The framework for thinking about question difficulty allows you to systematically identify technical and other problems in each question. Examples of problems might be: unclear instructions, poor phrasing of questions, the provision of inaccurate and insufficient information, unclear or confusing visual sources or illustrations, incorrect use of terminology, inaccurate or inadequate answers in the marking memorandum, and question predictability. You should **not** rate a question as difficult/easy if the source of difficulty/ease lies in the 'faultiness' of the question or memorandum. Instead, as moderators and evaluators, you need to alert examiners to unintended sources of difficulty/ease so that they can improve questions and remedy errors or sources of confusion before candidates write the examination.

7.6 Question difficulty entails identifying differences in levels of difficulty within a single question

An examination question can incorporate more than one level of difficulty if it has subsections. It is important that the components of such questions are 'broken down' into to their individual levels of difficulty.

> ***Note:***
> Each subsection of a question should be analysed separately so that the percentage of marks allocated at each level of difficulty and the weighting for each level of difficulty can be ascertained as accurately as possible for that question.

8. EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF DIFFICULTY

This section provides at least **three** examples of questions from previous Religion Studies NSC examinations (Table 7to Table 10) categorised at each of the four levels of difficulty described in Section 7 (Table 6) above. These examples were

selected to represent the **best and clearest** examples of each level of difficulty that the Religion Studies experts could find. The discussion below each example question tries to explain the reasoning behind the judgments made about the categorisation of the question at that particular level of difficulty.

TABLE 7: EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS AT DIFFICULTY LEVEL 1 – EASY

Example 1:
<u>Question 1.4, 2009, P.1</u>: What does the term *Halaal* mean in the Islamic faith? (2)
Discussion: This question is classified as 'easy' because: **Content difficulty** The question tests only one knowledge element. The term *Halaal* is a basic term used in Islam. It should be familiar to all Grade 12 Religion Studies candidates who should have been exposed to it throughout the FET phase. Candidates would also have been exposed to this term in their everyday life as it is widely used by Moslems. The knowledge that candidates must draw on to answer this question is easy **(content)**. **Stimulus difficulty** The wording of the question is simple and easy to understand. The question does not contain any words requiring technical comprehension. It does not contain any irrelevant information which could distract candidates. Candidates are not confronted with a large amount of text to read and comprehend. **Task difficulty** Answering the question requires recalling basic facts of a learnt definition. **Expected response** The expected response is simple and involves writing only one word or phrase. Two marks are allocated for a word or phrase. So, the mark allocation is a straightforward two marks per fact.
Memorandum/Marking guidelines • The term *Halaal* means permissible for Muslims (1 x 2)

Example 2:
Question 1.1, March 2010, P.1: Complete the following sentences by using the words provided in the list below. Write only the word next to the question number (1.1.1 – 1.1.5) in the ANSWER BOOK. Mahabharata; Baha'u'llah; Torah; Bodhisattva; Iraq; Iran 1.1.1   … is a person who on his or her own merit can enter Nirvana.   (2) 1.1.2   The holy shrine of Karbala is in …   (2) 1.1.3   … is the longest Hindu epic.   (2) 1.1.4   … is the sum total of God's will in Judaism.   (2) 1.1.5   … is the founder of the Baha'i faith.   (2)
Discussion: This question is classified as 'easy' because: **Content difficulty** The question only requires knowledge of basic terminology. Each sub-question tests only one knowledge element. Each of the terms should be familiar to all Grade 12 candidates who should have been exposed to them throughout the FET phase. **Stimulus difficulty** The wording and instructions in the question are clear and easy to understand and follow. The question is tailored to the expected response. It contains guided steps namely: - complete the sentences.   - use the words contained in the list.   - write the question number.   - write the answer next to the number.   Candidates do not have to come up with their own terms. Six optional answers (terms) are provided for them to select from in answering the five sub-questions. Each sub-question consists of a definition of five of the optional terms. **Task difficulty** Candidates only have to choose answers to the five sub-questions from the list of six possible answers. They have to make a simple connection between the statement in the sub-questions and the list of possible answers to complete the sentences. The task requires recall of memorised facts and recognitions of terms and definition. It is a simple 'matching' exercise. All candidates are required to do to answer the question is recognise, match and select the correct answer from the list given. Although six optional answers (terms) are provided for them to select from in answering the five sub-questions, candidates can use a' process of elimination' to help them in completing the task.

Expected response	
Candidates simply have to write one word answers for each of the sub-questions. Two marks are allocated for each correct answer. The marking and mark allocation is thus straight-forward. The envisaged Grade 12 candidate should find it easy to obtain full marks.	
Memorandum/Marking guidelines	
1.1.6 … is a person who on his or her own merit can enter Nirvana. • Bodhisattva	(2)
1.1.7 The holy shrine of Karbala is in ... • Iraq	(2)
1.1.8 … is the longest Hindu epic. • Mahabharata	(2)
1.1.9 … is the sum total of God's will in Judaism • Torah	(2)
1.1.10 … is the founder of the Baha'i faith. • Baha'u'llah	(2)
Example 3:	
Question 1.5, November 2010, P.1:	
Name any TWO branches of Christianity.	(4)

Discussion:

This question is classified as 'easy' because:

Content difficulty
The question test basic Religion Studies' knowledge and content, namely internal differentiations within religions which forms a core part of the curriculum. Only one knowledge element is tested; candidates have to name facts with regards to only one religion. Answering the question requires knowledge that should be familiar to all Grade 12 candidates.

Stimulus difficulty
The question is simply phrased and easy to understand. There is complex wording of the question or irrelevant information.

Task difficulty
The task requires simple factual recall of what has been taught in class. This question requires the candidate to simply retrieve basic information from memory and present this information. Answering the question does not require any explanation, but simply the naming of two branches. There are more than two possible answers and the candidate can recall any two.

Expected response Candidates simply have to write two one word answers for each of the sub-questions. Two marks are allocated for each correct answer. The marking and mark allocation is thus straight-forward. The envisaged Grade 12 candidate should find it easy to obtain full marks.	
Memorandum/Marking guidelines • Catholicism. • Protestantism. • Eastern Orthodox.	(2 x 2)

TABLE 8:   EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS AT DIFFICULTY LEVEL 2 – MODERATE

Example 1:
Question 4.3, 2014 March, P2:   Name TWO religious organizations that are promoting inter-religious dialogue and describe the work done by each organisation.   (20)
Discussion: **Content difficulty**   Candidates need a sound understanding of religious organizations promoting inter-religious dialogue. Two knowledge elements are assessed namely knowledge about specific religious organizations as well as the work they do. The content is moderately difficult for the envisaged Grade 12 candidate.   **Stimulus difficult**   The stimulus is not difficult. The question is straightforward and easy to comprehend.   **Task difficulty**   The task thus goes beyond simple recall of facts or providing learnt definitions. Answering the question requires a combination of knowledge and understanding of religious organizations as well as inter-religious dialogue. These factors make the task moderately difficult for the envisaged Grade 12 candidate.   **Expected response**   Answering the question requires candidates to write extended text on each organization, hence this cannot be classified as an easy question. Furthermore, what makes the expected response moderately difficult is that there are no guided steps contained in the question to assist candidate in structuring their answer in an attempt to obtain the ten marks allocated to the question.

Memorandum/Marking guidelines

Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA)
- IFAPA focus on support in Africa
- They work mostly in Sudan
- They promote inter-religious co-operation
- They create space for religions to work together
- They promote acceptance of different religions

World Council of Religions for Peace
- Their main focus is:
- Conflict and Reconciliation
- Children and families
- Disarmament and security
- Promote human rights
- Education for peace   (10 x 2) = (20)

Example 2:

Question 2.4, 2010, P.1:

Briefly discuss the role of ancestors in the African Traditional Religion.   (10)

Discussion:

Content difficulty
To answer this question, candidates need sound knowledge and understanding of the African Traditional Religion and its belief system. Specifically, they need to know about the function of ancestors within the African Traditional Religion. Although this content is central to the core curriculum for Grade 12, the envisaged Grade 12 candidate would find the content to be abstract.

Stimulus difficulty
Although the question is straightforward and easy to comprehend, there are no guided steps contained in the question to assist candidate in structuring their answer to this ten-mark question. The question does not specify the number of facts that need to be discussed. They have to understand the meaning of the word 'role'. Candidates find it difficult to see a direct link between the word "role" and "function".

Task difficulty
Although the action verb in the question is 'discuss', answering the question requires going beyond simply naming or listing facts; candidates have to recall what they have learnt in class and from their textbooks but they also have to demonstrate a sound understanding of the African Traditional Religion. The fact that candidates have to write extended text using their own words to explain the role of ancestors makes the *task* moderately difficult for the envisaged Grade 12 candidate.

<table>
<tr><td>

Expected response

According to the memo, 10 marks are allocated for writing 5 facts. Candidates have to work out for themselves how many facts to provide as there is no indication of marks allocated per fact in the question itself; they could experience some difficulty in deciding on and ensuring that they have the necessary amount of information or number of fact in their responses.

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

Memorandum/Marking guidelines

- Messengers of the creator.
- Supervisors of the physical world.
- Look after the welfare of the living.
- They reveal themselves through dreams and sometimes through visions to communicate with the living.
- To communicate with God, the living use the ancestors – they are intermediaries   (5 x 2)

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

Example 3:

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

Question 5, November 2011, exam P.2:

Discuss the central teachings of any ONE religion under the following headings:
5.1 The nature of divinity   (10)

(Note: This question is part of a longer question)

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

Discussion:

Content difficulty

To answer Question 5, candidates need sound knowledge of the central teachings of the religion they have selected. Specifically, they need to have knowledge of the five elements covered in each sub-question. Candidates have to understand the meaning of each of the terms and phrases used in the sub-question. The content of the sub-divisions is moderately difficult. In 5.1 the candidate must show knowledge about the manifestation of the Divine Being e.g. in Christianity the Divine Being is manifested as the Trinity. Each part as well as the function thereof should thus be explained. However, the content of each of the sub-questions form part of the core curriculum for Grade 12 and candidates can select the religion that they feel most knowledgeable about, so the content is moderately difficult rather than difficult for the envisaged Grade 12 candidate.

Stimulus difficulty

The stem of the question is easy to understand; however, candidates have to consider the wording of each of the sub-questions carefully as the concepts and terms involved are quite complex and could be confusing for the envisaged candidate. They need to understand the subject specific terminology and phraseology used as terms such as 'divinity', for example, are not explained or elaborated upon in the sub-questions. The sub-questions provide a degree of

</td></tr>
</table>

scaffolding or guidance about how to proceed and approach the task. themselves.

Task difficult

Answering the question requires recall of previously learned material as well as having good understanding of specific aspects of the central teachings of the religion candidates select. The facts under the sub-headings in the question are closely linked and could be confusing. The question as a whole is not as open-ended as Question 2.4, 2010, P.1 in Example 1 above. However, like Question 2.4, 2010, P.1, each sub-question counts for ten marks so a large amount of detail is expected from the candidates in each sub-question and they have to structure their answers to each sub-question.

Expected response

Ten marks are allocated for this sub-question, thus candidates still have to decide for themselves as to how much to write on each aspect. They have to be careful not to repeat facts or information under the different headings (sub-questions). These factors make the expected response moderately difficult.

| **Memorandum/Marking guidelines** |
| 1 The nature of divinity (10) |

The nature of divinity Christianity:

- Christians believe in the existence of a Supreme and Divine Being known as God.
- God manifests Himself as three persons.
  - o God the Father as Creator of the universe.
  - o God the Son as Saviour and Liberator of humanity.
  - o And God the Holy Spirit as Counsellor of Christians.

Buddhism:

- Most forms of Buddhism accept that powerful beings exist, whom we call God.
- Buddhists teach that everything is impermanent, even the gods.
- Each Buddhist must find enlightenment alone.
- They follow the Buddha's instruction.
- They may pray to the local deity. (5 x 2)

NB. Any relevant responses from candidates should be considered and candidates be credited

TABLE 9: EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS AT DIFFICULTY LEVEL 3 – DIFFICULT

Example 1:
Question 2.1, 2010, P.1: Write down the functions that are fulfilled by the uniqueness of a religion.   (10)
Discussion: **Content difficulty** Although Grade 12 candidates should be familiar with the uniqueness of the different religions, to answer the question they have to deduce the *function* of the uniqueness of a religion using their knowledge about the unique features in each religion as basis. Thus, candidates need to deduce the function of uniqueness from the general unique characteristics. **Stimulus difficulty** The question is quite complex for the envisaged Grade 12 candidate to interpret. Specifically, candidates could misinterpret the requirements of the question and concentrate on the unique features of a religion rather than the role or *functions* of the uniqueness. They need to take note of and understand the term 'functions'. **Task difficulty** This task is challenging for the envisaged Grade 12 candidate. They have to structure their answer to the 10-mark question themselves. They have to show advanced levels of knowledge and understanding of the uniqueness of different religions in identifying the functions. They have to analyse the characteristics to determine its function. They have to integrate several elements to form a coherent whole. The question does not provide guided steps to help candidates in formulating their answers. **Expected response** Candidates has to write five facts on the function of uniqueness. The marker must be able to interpret answers/facts and evaluate the logic thereof. Candidates have to write a sustained piece of text for a total of 10marks. They have to decide for themselves about what and how much to write. Examiners have to evaluate the logic of what each candidate has written making the task of marking demanding.

Example 2:

Question 1, 2009, Paper 2:

1.1 Explain the impact of religious apartheid on religious tolerance in South Africa. (15)

Discussion:

Content difficulty

Answering the question requires knowledge of the history and present dynamics of inter-religious relationships in Southern African communities. The candidate has to derive the impact of apartheid on inter-religious relations from the facts w.r.t what happened during apartheid itself. The task requires application of knowledge and to assess the impact thereof on tolerance amongst religions.

Stimulus difficulty

The question is linguistically complex and requires careful consideration. The envisaged Grade candidate could easily misconstrue the instruction and concentrate on explaining the religious tolerance aspect rather than the impact of apartheid on religious tolerance.

Task difficulty

There are no guided steps in the fifteen-mark question to help candidates formulate an answer. They have to make sure that their answer is well-structured and contains all the necessary information and argument. The action verb 'explain' suggests that this question is a comprehension question. Indeed, to answer it, candidates need to have a deep understanding of apartheid and its impact on religious tolerance. They have to recall material on religious intolerance which they should have covered in class, but they also have to apply their knowledge in a specific context, namely in apartheid South Africa. They also have to use other higher order cognitive processes in answering the question. They have to evaluate the impact of apartheid, they have to combine separate ideas (religious intolerance and apartheid in South Africa) to form a new but coherent whole which requires innovativeness and creativity. The task thus requires analysis and synthesis.

Expected response

Candidates have to write extended text using their own words to explain the impact of apartheid on religious tolerance. Fifteen marks are allocated for the

question with no indication of how much to write. Candidates have to work out for themselves how much information to provide. According to the memo they need to assess the situation during apartheid and what its impact was on how religions related to each other. Examiners have to use their judgment when marking the answers making marking demanding.

Memorandum/Marking guidelines

During the apartheid era, the government promoted Christian National Education. In public schools, only Bible education and religious education which was Christian-based was allowed in the school curriculum.

- All other religions were misrepresented and were not given any funding.
- For example, Islam was known as Mohammedanism; ATR was called animism and Hindus were referred to as pagans.
- Customary marriages were not recognised unless it was a Christian marriage.
- Certain denominations of Christianity were promoted by the state in terms of land allocations, appointment of chaplains, youth counsellors etc.
- Apartheid prohibited inter-religious dialogue.
- The only missionary work allowed was Christian missionary work.

Example 3:

Question: Indicate the relation between the terms identity, uniqueness and difference as used in religious context. Elucidate your answer by referring to the unique characteristics of at least TWO religions. **(Question created.)**   (30)

Identity:

It means "individuality" or "personality"

The African religion thus has a certain individuality that distinguishes it from e.g., Christianity. The word identity also has the additional meaning of "dignity".

We hereby affirm the dignity and value of the African Religion.

Identity of a religion could also be determined by the symbols or clothing of each religion.

The Christian symbol is e.g. "Spear and shield" of the African Religion.

Uniqueness:

It means "of which there is one only"/ "having no like or equal".

The African Religion is unique in the sense that it's the only religion where the ancestors keep guard over the living.

Christianity is unique in the sense that it's the only religion with a belief in the Trinity.

Uniqueness thus distinguish religions.

Difference:

It means "being unlike" or "distinction".

Refers to a "point in which things are not the same".

The difference between religions determine the unique characteristics of each religion.

Discussion:

Content difficulty
Various knowledge elements to be taken into account i.e. knowledge of the three terms as well as the unique characteristics.

Stimulus difficulty
Linguistic difficulty in the question i.e. the word "elucidate" would be very difficult for the envisaged Grade 12 candidate.

Task difficulty
Candidates have to analyse the term and demonstrate how they relate to each other. Candidates should also use the unique characteristics of two religions to demonstrate the relation between the three terms.

Expected response
There is no indication of the marks allocated for the discussion of the terms, the relation between terms and the examples of unique characteristics used to demonstrate the said relation.

Note:
During the development of the exemplar book some subject specialist argued that there is a faint line between a difficult and a very difficult question. It was also evident that in some subjects question papers did not have questions that could be categorised as very difficult. In order to cater for this category, subject specialists were requested to adapt existing questions and make them very difficult or create their own examples of very difficult question. However, it was noted that in some instances attempts to create very difficult questions introduced invalid sources of difficulty which in turn rendered the questions invalid. Hence, Umalusi acknowledges that the very difficult category may be problematic and therefore requires especially careful scrutiny.

9.   CONCLUDING REMARKS

This exemplar book is intended to be used as a training tool to ensure that all role players in the Religion Studies Examination are working from a common set of principles, concepts, tools and frameworks for assessing cognitive challenge when examinations are set, moderated and evaluated. We hope that the

discussion provided and the examples of questions shown by level and type of cognitive demand and later by level of difficulty assist users of the exemplar book to achieve this goal.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, A., and Pollitt, A. (1999). Curriculum demands and question difficulty. Paper presented at IAEA Conference, Slovenia.

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, &National Council on Measurement in Education. (1999). *Standards for educational and psychological testing.* Washington, DC: Author.

Bloom, B. S., Hastings, J. T., & Madaus, G. F. (1971). Handbook on formative and summative evaluation of student learning. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Bloom. B. S., Engelhart, M. D., Furst, R. J., Hill, W. H., & Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook 1: Cognitive domain.* New York: David McKay.

Crowe, A.A. (2012). *Standards of South African Senior Certificate Biology Examinations: 1994 to 2007.* Doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa.

Department of Basic Education (DBE): (2009) Religion Studies March Examination Paper 1; Pretoria: DBE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE): (2009) Religion Studies November Examination Paper 1; Pretoria: DBE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE): (2009) Religion Studies November Examination Paper 2; Pretoria: DBE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE): (2010) Religion Studies March Examination Paper 1; Pretoria: DBE

Department of Basic Education (DBE): (2010) Religion Studies March Examination Paper 2; Pretoria: DBE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE): (2010) Religion Studies November Examination Paper 1; Pretoria: DBE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE): (2011) Religion Studies March Examination Paper 1; Pretoria: DBE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE): (2011) Religion Studies November Examination Paper 2; Pretoria: DBE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE): (2013) Religion Studies November Examination Paper 2; Pretoria: DBE.

Department of Basic Education (DBE): (2015) Religion Studies March Examination Paper 2; Pretoria: DBE.

Hofmeyer, J *et al.*, (2013). Shuters Top Class Religion Studies Grade 12 Learner Book. Pietermaritzburg. Shuter & Shooter.