4.2 New Religious Movements, New Age Movements and Religiosity

AQA 7192 · about 60 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Write full sentences for questions worth 4 marks or more. Allocate your time so you can attempt the final 12 mark question.

1 State one methodological difficulty researchers face when studying new religious movements and New Age groups in the UK.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Define Heelas' term 'subjective-life spirituality' as used when analysing New Age movements in Britain.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 Identify and explain two ways Bruce's explanation of social change can account for growth in New Age spirituality.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Explain two practical reasons why someone attracted to New Age practices might prefer workshops and short courses to joining a formal religious group.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 State one piece of evidence sociologists might use to argue that New Age spirituality is becoming more common in the UK, rather than less common.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

6 Discuss how far sociologists would agree that the growth of New Age movements shows that religion is becoming more individualistic in contemporary society.

(Total for Question 6 is 12 marks)

7 Define what sociologists mean by a 'new religious movement' in the study of religion in society.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 Identify and explain two features of a world affirming new religious movement, according to Wallis.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

9 Describe one way that New Age 'self spirituality' differs from traditional organised religion, using Heelas' idea of subjective-life spirituality in a contemporary UK context.

(Total for Question 9 is 3 marks)

10 Describe two reasons, given by Steve Bruce, why people may join new religious or New Age movements.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

11 Outline and explain two reasons why people might join a new religious movement, such as a charismatic sect, drawing on sociological explanations.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

12 Explain two criticisms sociologists have made of the idea that relative deprivation always leads people to join new religious movements.

(Total for Question 12 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · 4.2 New Religious Movements, New Age Movements and Religiosity

Question 1

identifies a difficulty, e.g. gaining access because NRMs may be secretive or distrustful of outsiders **B1**

brief development, e.g. this can limit sample size or bias results towards more open groups **B1**

Answer: One difficulty is gaining access because NRMs may be secretive or distrustful of outsiders, which can limit sample size or bias research towards more open groups.

Question 2

identifies the core idea, e.g. focus on individual experience and self development rather than external doctrines or organisational authority **B1**

development, e.g. spirituality is seen as a resource for personal life and wellbeing rather than collective worship **B1**

Answer: Subjective-life spirituality focuses on individual experience and self development rather than external doctrines or organisational authority, seeing spirituality as a resource for personal life and wellbeing rather than collective worship.

Question 3

identifies Bruce's social change explanation, e.g. rapid modernisation and loss of traditional community ties creating spiritual vacuum **B1**

explains how this leads to growth in New Age spirituality, e.g. people seek new sources of meaning and identity outside traditional churches **B1**

identifies a further developed point, e.g. growing individualism and consumer culture mean people pick spiritual goods to suit personal tastes **B1**

explains further, e.g. New Age offerings fit a consumerist spiritual market and spread through media and workplaces **B1**

Answer: Bruce argues social change such as modernisation and the loss of traditional community ties creates a spiritual vacuum, so people seek new sources of meaning like New Age spirituality. He also notes growing individualism and consumer culture lead people to pick spiritual goods to suit personal tastes, helping New Age practices spread through media and workplaces.

Question 4

identifies a practical reason, e.g. convenience and fit with busy working and family lives **B1**

develops reason, e.g. workshops are short, scheduled and require no long term commitment so fit around jobs and childcare **B1**

identifies a second linked reason, e.g. variety and consumer choice **B1**

develops second reason, e.g. people can try different practices, pick what helps them and avoid organisational obligations **B1**

Answer: A practical reason is convenience for busy working and family lives: workshops are short and require no long term commitment so they fit around jobs and childcare. Another linked reason is consumer choice: people can try different practices and pick what helps them without taking on organisational obligations.

Question 5

identifies a hypothetical indicator, e.g. if comparable UK surveys over time showed increasing attendance at yoga or mindfulness sessions among participants who identify their practice as New Age spirituality **B1**

brief development, e.g. evidence of participants' New Age spiritual identification or meaning would link the hypothetical attendance increase to spirituality; attendance or related business growth alone could reflect secular health or relaxation interests **B1**

Answer: If comparable UK surveys over time showed increasing attendance at yoga or mindfulness sessions among participants who identify their practice as New Age spirituality, this could indicate that New Age spirituality is becoming more common. Evidence of their spiritual identification or meaning is needed because attendance or related business growth alone could reflect secular health or relaxation interests.

Question 6

Level 1 Simple statements about New Age movements or individualism with little development or balance	**1-3**
Level 2 Some relevant knowledge and argument offered, with basic links between New Age features and individualism but limited evaluation or balance	**4-6**
Level 3 Clear argument showing how New Age features support the view that religion is more individualistic, supported by sociological ideas such as Heelas and Bruce, with some counter-arguments considered	**7-9**
Level 4 A well developed balanced evaluation, integrating evidence and sociological perspectives, considering counter-evidence such as communal NRMs, continuing organised religion, and arriving at a supported conclusion	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- Arguments that support the view: Heelas' subjective-life spirituality shows personal inward focus and self spirituality; emphasis on choice, pick and mix spirituality and consumerist spirituality suggests individualised religion; workshops and practices fit individual schedules rather than collective worship.
- Evidence for individualism: growth in mindfulness, yoga, spiritual retail and self-help markets; many describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious', indicating detachment from organised religion.
- Counter-arguments: Wallis' typology shows some NRMs remain communal and world rejecting, emphasising collective commitments rather than individualism; organised churches and denominations continue to provide collective rituals and community for many people.
- Bruce's social change explanation: modernisation and loss of traditional community can drive individual search for meaning, but Bruce also notes institutional decline can lead to both individual spirituality and new communal movements.
- Sociological caution: membership patterns vary by class and age; New Age often attracts middle class people but other NRMs attract marginalised groups, so generalising about 'religion becoming individualistic' risks oversimplification.
- Methodological points: measuring 'individualism' is difficult; survey evidence on beliefs and practices must be interpreted cautiously and may not capture informal communal spiritual networks.
- Conclusion guidance: on balance, many sociologists would argue there is a trend towards more individualised forms of spirituality, especially in New Age movements, but this coexists with continued communal religion and new communal NRMs, so the claim should be qualified rather than accepted without reservation.

Question 7

identifies that a new religious movement is a recently formed group with religious or spiritual beliefs, not part of an established church or denomination (oe)	**B1**
development, e.g. often centred on novel teachings, charismatic leaders or alternative spiritual practices	**B1**

Answer: A new religious movement is a recently formed group with religious or spiritual beliefs that is not part of an established church or denomination, often centred on new teachings, charismatic leaders or alternative spiritual practices.

Question 8

identifies one feature, e.g. emphasis on techniques for personal improvement or spiritual development while keeping ordinary life	**B1**
explains how this shows world affirming, e.g. these groups accept the world and offer tools to succeed within it rather than rejecting society	**B1**
identifies a second feature, e.g. lack of strong communal demands so members can remain part of mainstream institutions	**B1**
explains further, e.g. members can use practices for personal benefit without abandoning jobs, family or social roles	**B1**

Answer: One feature is an emphasis on techniques for personal improvement or spiritual development while continuing ordinary life, showing world affirming character because the group accepts mainstream society and offers tools to succeed within it. Another feature is the lack of strong communal demands, allowing members to remain part of mainstream institutions and use practices for personal benefit without abandoning jobs or family.

Question 9

identifies one difference, e.g. New Age focuses on personal experience and self development rather than external doctrines or institutions	**B1**
development, e.g. practices may include meditation, healing or therapy rather than formal worship	**B1**
further development, e.g. this spirituality is often individualised and tailored to the person's needs	**B1**

Answer: Heelas' New Age self spirituality focuses on personal experience and self development rather than external doctrines or institutions; practices include meditation, healing or therapy instead of formal worship, and the spirituality is often individualised and tailored to each person's needs.

Question 10

identifies reason one, e.g. social change such as rapid modernisation or secularisation can create spiritual uncertainty that attracts people to new forms of religion	**B1**
development of reason one, e.g. people seek meaning and community when traditional structures are disrupted	**B1**
identifies reason two, e.g. relative deprivation or feelings of personal loss in status can motivate individuals to seek new spiritual resources	**B1**
development of reason two, e.g. offering hope of personal improvement or compensation for perceived deficiencies	**B1**

Answer: Bruce suggests social change such as rapid modernisation can produce spiritual uncertainty that draws people to new forms of religion as they seek meaning and community. He also points to relative deprivation or personal feelings of loss in status, which may motivate people to seek new spiritual resources offering hope or compensation.

Question 11

identifies reason one, e.g. marginality: those marginal to society may be attracted to NRMs offering status and belonging	**B1**
develops reason one, e.g. NRMs can provide identity, community and resources to those on margins	**B1**
identifies reason two, e.g. charismatic leadership or spiritual experience can attract people seeking meaning	**B1**
develops reason two, e.g. emotional bonding to a leader or transformative experience motivates commitment	**B1**

Answer: One reason is marginality: people who are marginal in society may join NRMs because such groups offer status, belonging and support. A second reason is the attraction of charismatic leadership or compelling spiritual experience, which can give individuals meaning and emotional commitment to a new group.

Question 12

identifies criticism one, e.g. feeling relatively deprived need not lead to joining an NRM	**B1**
develops criticism one, e.g. people who feel deprived may remain secular or seek change through political action, so joining is not an inevitable response	**B1**
identifies criticism two, e.g. the claim overlooks recruitment opportunities through social networks	**B1**
develops criticism two, e.g. a person who feels deprived may have no contact with an NRM and therefore no opportunity to join; relative deprivation can be non-material, so middle-class self-development is not itself a counterexample	**B1**

Answer: One criticism is that people who feel relatively deprived may remain secular or seek change through political action, so joining an NRM is not an inevitable response. A second criticism is that joining also depends on recruitment opportunities: someone who feels deprived may have no contact with an NRM through social networks and therefore no opportunity to join. Relative deprivation can be non-material, so middle-class people seeking self-development do not by themselves contradict it.