Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCSE
in Religious Studies (5RS14)
Paper 01 - Sikhism

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Unit 14 Sikhism

Unit 14 is a study of Sikhism. This unit allows an in depth study of Sikhism, a religion which is fascinating for both Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike. The course engages the interest of young people, it addresses many Sikh beliefs and teachings in addition to some issues affecting young people today.

There are a number of candidates who appear to have been taught a formula for questions which involves giving a valid reason and then a phrase such as 'by this I mean' or 'Sikhs care about this because' or even 'this is developed by' as an introduction for development and these candidates do not then give any form of development they simply repeat (often rewording) at the reason already given. This is not helpful and leads to incoherent answers rather than the marks which the candidate would want.

Question 1

This question is based on Section One in the specification and each of the sub-questions covers a different bullet point within the specification.

a) This question asked for a definition of Ik Onkar, the vast majority of candidates knew the glossary definition or close to it.

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and then give a reason for why they thought God is the Teacher. However some candidates simply described belief in God which did not answer the question set. Better candidates discussed why they felt God is (or is not The Teacher) and developed their answers with examples. As usual many candidates gave the example and then the reason and this was credited as a developed reason.

c) This question was generally well answered by candidates, the majority were able to explain why Sikhs believe men and women are equal. Some candidates simply did not answer the question. Stronger candidates applied their knowledge to Sikh practice or scripture and easily gained marks. Candidates who set answers out clearly using paragraphs for each reason were a pleasure to read, whereas candidates who relied upon formulaic answer formats were often confused and sometimes incoherent.

d) Candidates who answered this question well gave reasons and were able to develop using several examples of social justice, illustrating how this belief is essential in Sikh life. Low marks were received by candidates who failed to link their reasons to the examples they gave or who simply did not know what social justice was ignoring the question set.

Question 2

This question is based on Section One in the specification; each of the sub-questions covers a different bullet point within the specification.

a) This was a glossary definition question about karma. This question was very well answered by candidates who had clearly learnt the glossary definition in appendix 4 of the specification.

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and then give a reason for why they felt people should reject the caste system. Some candidates revealed their lack of knowledge by failing to refer to the caste system which did not answer the question set. Better candidates used Sikh beliefs and developed their answers with examples from religious texts.

c) This question was generally well answered by most candidates; the majority was able to explain why rebirth is important to Sikhs and developed describing life after death. Some candidates lost marks as they simply did not answer the question, it is very important that candidates are taught to read the questions carefully in order to avoid such errors.

d) This question did not require explicit use of references from Sikh scripture, however candidates who did use them appropriately often received very high marks. Many candidates answered this question well; they gave reasons and were able to develop using several examples from the lives of the Gurus as to why life should involve service to others. Low marks were received by candidates who failed to link their reasons to the examples they gave or who failed to understand what service to others meant.

Question 3

This question is based on Section Two in the specification; each sub-question addresses a different bullet point within the specification.

a) This question asked for a definition of a granthi, the vast majority of candidates knew the glossary definition or close to it.

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether Guru Nanak's visit to Tibet was important in the development of Sikhism. Better candidates were able to refer to specifically Sikh religious teachings and scripture as part of their answer. Some responses came from candidates who tried to base their answers on general visits rather than specifically about Tibet. Those candidates who tried to split their opinion between should and should not accept, frequently became confused and this should not be encouraged as a method of answering b questions.

c) The vast majority of answers to this question about why the Adi Granth is important to Sikhs were very good and candidates were able to answer either by giving a number of reasons, including development using examples. Lower achieving candidates included fewer reasons or gave answers about the Guru Granth. Better answers were concise and clear rather than rambling and vague.

d) This question showed that candidates clearly had good knowledge of the river experience. The best answers were given by candidates who

responded either by giving a number of reasons linked to Sikhism or by developing 2 or 3 reasons with examples from teachings / scriptures.

Question 4

This question is based on Section Two in the specification; each sub-question covers a different bullet point within the specification.

a) This question asked for a definition of panj piare and the vast majority of candidates knew the glossary definition or close to it. However some confused it with pagri. Candidates who do well learn the glossary definitions within the specification (appendix 4).

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether a granthi is important, the better answers disagreed with the statement. Candidates who achieved higher marks were able to refer to specifically Sikh teachings and examples as part of their answer. Those candidates who tried to split their opinion between should and should not accept frequently became confused and this should not be encouraged as a method of answering b questions. A very few candidates did not know what a granthi was and still attempted this question and this could not be credited. Candidate knowledge of key terms is essential.

c) The vast majority of candidates knew the main features of a gurdwara and why they are needed and achieved high marks in this question. Better candidates were able to answer this question by choosing four features and explaining why they are needed in a gurdwara. Lower achieving candidates included fewer reasons or tried to give reasons which were incorrect such as why Sikhs need a gurdwara or describing things that take place in a gurdwara. Better answers were concise and clear rather than rambling and vague.

d) This question tested whether candidates had good knowledge about the visit to Mecca. Some candidates confused this visit with other visits and lost marks but many were able to give reasons why the visit to Mecca was/was not important. The best answers were given by candidates who responded either by giving a number of reasons linked to Sikhism or by developing two or three reasons with examples from Sikh teachings/scriptures. Some candidates failed to refer to the visit to Mecca and just referred to 'visits' in their answer.

Question 5

This question is based on Section Three in the specification; each of the sub-questions covers a different bullet point within the specification.

a) This question asked for a definition of karah prashad, most candidates knew the glossary definition or close to it. Some candidates clearly did not know what it was and left this blank. It is really important for candidates to learn the glossary definition which are provided in the Appendix of the specification.

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether kirtan is important and were able to give two reasons and develop them. Some candidates gave two opposing opinions and as long as they showed that both opinions were their point of view, they could be credited. Less able candidates were not able to think of more than one reason and as such were limited in the marks they could be awarded.

c) This question was well answered by the majority of candidates. It required candidates to discuss the importance of the akand path for Sikhs. Those candidates who knew what the path is did well but there were a significant number of candidates who did not and attempted to answer this question. Candidates should be advised that they should look at the c sub-question which has most marks in a question before they choose which question to do.

d) Most candidates were able to give reasons backing their view about whether Sikhs should celebrate Diwali in di) and reasons for an alternative view in dii). More able candidates used examples and quotations from Sikh teachings. Most were able refer to it as a Hindu festival rather than Sikh and some were then unable to take the argument further.

Question 6

This question is based on Section Three in the specification; each of the sub-questions covers a different bullet point within the specification.

a) This question asked for a definition of diwan, most candidates knew the glossary definition or close to it. Some candidates explained Sikh use of diwan which was irrelevant in an a) sub-question. Candidates should understand that an (a) question will ask for a definition or examples not opinions.

b) This was answered well and most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether the pilgrimage to Amritsar is important and most linked their reasons to the action of gurus. Some less developed answers came from those candidates who discussed 'pilgrimage' in general. Candidates who tried to do two different opinions often gave confused responses and candidates should be encouraged to give two reasons for the same opinion as it makes a more coherent response.

c) Most candidates were able to identify some reasons why the amrit ceremony is important for Sikhs. Lower achieving candidates did not know the ceremony and wrote about amrit in general or rambled. Better candidates were able to develop their reasons why khalsa Sikhs regard amrit ceremony as important with examples of religious life and reference to Guru Gobind Singh.

d) There were some excellent answers to this question which clearly held great interest to the candidates. Answers were mostly based on the history of the langar. The best answers to this question discussed whether langar is worship rather than simply discussing whether it is important. Poorer answers failed to refer to langar accurately and they were not credited.

Question 7

This question is based on Section Four in the specification; each of the sub-questions covers a different bullet point within the specification. It was noticeable that many of questions 7 and 8 were not complete; candidates should be advised to spend about 20 minutes on each question.

a) This question asked for a definition of a kirpan and most candidates knew what it was and were able to describe it - not many candidates used the glossary definition.

b) Better candidates were able to answer this question about ease of following the Sikh life using both the information they had been taught and their personal experience. There were lots of answers agreeing that it is easy and giving positive reasons which were thoughtful and pleasing to read.

c) Most candidates were able to describe why the Nishan Sahib is important to Sikhs and some were able to develop these reasons using specific examples or referring to scripture. Lower achieving candidates either did not know what the Nishan Sahib is or simply said it shows where a gurdwara is and were unable to give any other reasons and as such their marks were reduced. Some candidates gained lower marks as they described the Nishan Sahib without explaining why it is important. Candidates should be encouraged to read questions carefully and not regurgitate pre- learnt responses.

d) Most candidates were able to respond to the quote about whether the panj kakke are needed by Sikhs. Some candidates were able to give their own opinion (usually agreeing) and reasons for it but were unable to explain why others might disagree with their opinion. It is important that candidates are encouraged to fully discuss both their own reasons and those that other people might hold.

Question 8

This question is based on Section Four in the specification; each sub-question is aimed at a different bullet point within the specification. It was noticeable that many of questions 7 and 8 were not complete; candidates should be advised to spend about 20 minutes on each question.

a) This question asked for a definition of sewa, most candidates knew the glossary definition or close to it. Some candidates gave examples as these were given partially correct if there was not also a definition. If the candidate had already gained marks for the definition (partial or full) no additional marks were awarded for the example.

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion as to whether Sikhs should support community cohesion. Many were able to use examples from Sikh scripture to develop their reasons. Candidates who did less well did not know what community cohesion was and these could not be credited.

Candidates who tried to do two opposing opinions often gave confused responses and candidates should be encouraged to give two reasons for the same opinion as it makes a more coherent response.

c) This question was well answered by candidates who had been clearly taught about a Sikh organisation and what it does to relieve poverty and/or suffering in the UK. It was not well answered by candidates who referred to general reasons why Sikhs should help or who discussed work overseas. Candidates who set answers out clearly were a pleasure to read whereas candidates who relied upon formulaic answer formats were often confused and sometimes incoherent. In particular candidates who have been taught set formats and phrases such as 'by this I mean' or 'Sikhs care about this because' merely repeated information they had already given or confused their reason often nullifying a reason already provided.

d) Some candidates left this question blank as they had clearly run out of time. Most candidates were able to respond to the quote and give reasons why the Rahit Maryada might/might not need to be updated. Better responses referred to the teachings in the Rahit Maryada and contemporary issues such as same sex marriage but some candidates confused the Rahit Maryada with the Guru Granth and gained no marks.