

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

GCSE Religious Studies
(5RS15/01)

Unit 15: Buddhism

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Introduction

This is the fourth year that this specification for Edexcel GCSE Religious Studies has been assessed. Numbers of candidates has increased from last year and they have achieved a wide range of performance levels.

2013's paper was the first to be assessed for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar. Candidates generally achieved the mid to higher levels in SPaG, but candidates should be reminded that this will be assessed in Section 1 questions only. Level descriptors for SPaG are available in the general guidance for GCSE Religious Studies. The maximum mark available for SPaG is four marks. Where candidates were awarded on marks for the answers to any of the sub questions they were unable to receive any SPaG marks.

Quality of Written Communication continues to be utilised in 'c' questions across the examination paper.

Candidates seem to have taken on board the various points made in Principal Examiner reports from previous years. Teachers and candidates should continue to note these general points in order to improve candidate's achievement in future years:

- There is a choice of two questions per section, each as four sub questions, candidates can either attempt the sub-questions in the top questions (odd numbers) or the sub-questions in the bottom question (even numbered). Candidates who choose questions from a mixture of the top and bottom questions will not receive marks for all their questions and as such are at a clear disadvantage.
- Candidates are asked to indicate which question they have answered by crossing in a square at the top of the paper, some candidates did not do this they should be reminded to do this as part of examination preparation.
- Space on the examination paper. The amount of lines given is more than adequate for candidates to achieve maximum marks; there is no need for candidates to write more than this. If candidates write more than can be inserted into the allocated lineage they are using up too much time on that particular question and inevitably will place themselves at a disadvantage later in the paper. Almost all the candidates who used extra paper had already achieved maximum marks of that question.
- Timing. There was an increase in the number of candidates who did not complete the final section this year due to timing difficulties. Candidates should be encouraged to spend about twenty minutes per question leaving ten minutes to check through work at the ends of the paper.

a) questions ask for either a definition or examples
Learn glossary definitions to gain full marks. Candidates may need to be prepared to give examples of certain things covered by the key words.

b) questions only need one opinion backed by two reasons. To gain full marks candidates should give two developed reasons, rather than two simple reasons.

c) questions are 'Explain why'... or 'Explain how'... , and are testing AO1

d) questions are divided into two parts di) need the candidates opinion backed by reasons and dii) needs an alternative opinion backed by reasons, one of the reasons used in the whole of d must be religious

1a

The question was either answered correctly or incorrectly, there was little awarding of partial marks. Thorough learning of key words would help candidates in future.

1bcd

b) Although a lot of candidates were able to correctly identify what the 'way of wisdom' is and why it might be important for Buddhists, the question was about 'everybody' and candidates should be encouraged to read the question carefully.

c) A question about the three marks of existence that was attempted well by candidates of all abilities. Candidates were able to explore the various ways in which they are important to Buddhists. What was pleasing was that the question about the three marks of existence was answered in a confused manner last year; most candidates knew what the three marks were and could attempt an answer.

d) The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether the Wheel of Existence is just a picture. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in d(i). Most candidates used non-Buddhist views in one of the sections (while still ensuring there was reference to Buddhism in either part (i) or part (ii), which is perfectly acceptable and helps develop arguments.

2a

This question was generally answered well, with some reference to meditation in the answers, though candidates should learn the key words to gain full marks and identify it as calm and abiding meditation.

2bcd

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether lay people are part of the sangha. Candidates were able to utilise arguments from various schools of Buddhism.

c) Well answered by candidates, who were able to explain why the Tipitaka is important. Some candidates described what the Tipitaka is, and were therefore limited as they did not answer the question set.

d) The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether the five khandas are only important for Buddhists. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in d(i). However, significant minorities of candidates were unsure as to what the five khandas were, or struggled to see why they might be applicable to everyone - not just Buddhists.

3a

As a glossary definition question this question was very well answered by candidates; the majority of candidates who attempted it got full marks.

3bcd

b) Candidates were usually able to state their own opinion and then give at least two reasons for this opinion. This answer tended to get two marks for two simple reasons. However, some were able to develop their answers and gain full marks.

c) The majority of answers to this question focused around a description of Theravada Buddhism, and not around the distinctive features. Candidates should read the question carefully to understand what the question is asking. The language of the question came from the specification and distinctive features should have been focused on in preparation for the examination.

d) The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether the WBO is right to adopt a vow of poverty. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in d(i). There were large numbers, however, who answered about the relevance of the WBO today and focused on beliefs other than the vow of poverty. Candidates should be aware that some questions will be narrow in focus and not to write about everything they know with regard to a topic.

4a

As a glossary definition question this question was very well answered by candidates; most candidates who attempted it got full marks. Though a significant minority identified the answer as 'Siddhartha Gautama' which, as an example, was only worth 1 mark.

4bcd

b) This question was generally very well answered. Candidates were able to compare Mahayana with other forms of Buddhism and support their opinion with reasons.

c) This question was about dhamma and was generally answered very well. Candidates were able to answer from a general view of the dhamma, or using specific examples; either approach was credited and produced some very good answers.

d) Most candidates responded well to the layout of the d question and were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in d(i) and then give an alternative opinion in d(ii). They were able to provide simple comparative reasons as to why death and parinibbana of the Buddha were or were not the most important events of his life.

5a

This glossary definition was not known by a large minority of candidates; a large number left the answer blank.

5bcd

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether Wesak is the most important festival and most gave two reasons. A small minority continue to confuse Wesak and Vassa- candidates must be careful of this as it is a recurring error.

c) This question about how puja takes place in the home was generally answered well. Various elements of puja were credited, from individual meditation to the making of offerings, and use of meditation aids.

d) Most candidates responded well to the layout of the d question and were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in d(i) and then give an alternative opinion in d(ii). They were able to provide simple reasons as to why vipassana is or is not the best type of meditation.

6a

Although generally answered well, some candidates often confused mudra with rupa. This indicates a need to be more precise in the learning of glossary words.

6bcd

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether dhyana should be practiced by everybody. In contradistinction to an earlier question candidates recognized the 'everybody' clause and answered as demanded by the question. This produced some very good responses.

c) Well answered by the majority of candidates, who were able to give several reasons why the New Year is important to some Buddhists. A small minority of candidates focused on why it was not important, which was not asked by the question.

d) This question caused very few problems for candidates, most were able to give three reasons backing their view in d(i) and three reasons for an alternative view in d(ii) about whether rupas are a distraction in meditation.

7a

The definition of sila was not known by a large number of candidates. Candidates should be prepared with all the key words.

7bcd

b) Most candidates were able to give two simple reasons as to why the five pansils should be followed by everybody. Again, however, a small proportion of candidates failed to recognise the 'everybody' clause in the question and needed to expand their answer beyond all Buddhists.

c) A question about the khanti, which was attempted well by candidates of all abilities. Candidates were able to explore the various ways in which it was important to Buddhists, especially in laying the basis for the most actions that a Buddhist performs towards other people and as a preparation for the search for enlightenment.

d) The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether viharas are important to the local area. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in d(i). A large number of candidates only focused on the importance for Buddhists, care should be taken when preparing for examinations that candidates are aware of the benefits for the local area in general. Care should be taken in this regard.

8a

Most candidates who answered this question gained full marks. The language used also suggested that the glossary definition had been learnt by a large number of candidates.

8bcd

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion as to whether metta is important for everyone. In contrast to the earlier question candidates did recognise this question was about "all people" which enable good answers to be constructed.

c) This question was answered generally well by candidates. Some candidates referred to the five pansils and thus could gain no marks. Those who answered well either spoke about the additional pansils generally or explored a couple in detail; either approach was appropriate.

d) Most candidates were able to respond to the quote and developed reasons about a Buddhist's responsibility to themselves and others.

Summary

Candidates generally seemed well prepared by teachers and produced some very interesting answers to the questions posed. This indicated that they and their teachers had not only studied the topic but importantly had linked them to their everyday life and that reflected in the society around them.

Some general points can be made on how best to answer the various question types:

- Maximum marks on the (a) questions are easily gained by learning the Edexcel glossary definitions and this is a constant feature throughout the paper. Candidates who had learnt them performed to a high standard.
- Only the candidate's point of view is credited in (b) questions, there is no point explaining other people's views in this question. The easiest way to gain full marks is for candidates to concentrate on stating their opinion and writing two separate reasons for it, each in a distinct paragraph and to develop each of the reasons with an example or a quote.
- Candidates can gain the higher mark within the level by writing coherently, this mark is the QWC mark and is only lost if the candidate's writing is such that it is not easily understandable by the examiner. (c) Questions test AO1 and so will either ask for candidates to 'Explain why' or to 'Explain how'.
- Many of the (d) questions this year produced interesting answers. However, candidates should ensure that they start by stating their own view and reasons for it in the d(i) part and state reasons why someone might hold a different view in the d(ii) part rather than confusing the two halves.
- At least one of the reasons given in either d(i) or d(ii) must be explicitly religious to go beyond 3 marks. It should be pointed out that (d) questions on this unit always ask for the candidate to refer to Buddhism.

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