

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
in Religious Studies (5RS15)

Unit 15: Buddhism

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Unit 15 Buddhism

Introduction

This is the sixth year that this specification for Edexcel GCSE Religious Studies has been assessed. Numbers of candidates has decreased this year and they have achieved a range of performance levels.

2015's paper was the third 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 utilized 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:

1. 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 form a mixture of the top and bottom questions will not receive marks for all their questions and as such are at a clear disadvantage.
 2. 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.
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1. 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. Any candidate who needs extra space can use that space allocated to other questions as long as they clearly indicate on their paper that this is what they have done.
 2. Timing. 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, for example naming two of the five khandas.

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... questions, 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 generally answered very well. This is a word that is central to other aspects of the specification. Some candidates were only able to get 1 mark by identifying it as a holy book.

1bcd

b) This question had a mixed response. Those candidates who knew what the five khandas are were able to provide two reasons why they may/may not only be important for Buddhists. Candidates should recognise that the question was not about them being important for Buddhists, but only for Buddhists and answer accordingly. Care should be taken by candidates that they develop their reasons and that if they provide reasons on both sides of the argument that both are clearly identified as their view. If both sides are discussed but not clearly identified as their own view only one reason can be credited.

c) A question about the relationship between the lay people and the sangha. This was answered generally very well with candidates exploring the relationship from a variety of different approaches.

d) The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether the three marks of existence do not teach people anything useful. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in di). Some candidates struggled to find reasons to support the statement, indeed, some candidates mixed up the three marks of existence with the three poisons.

2a

This question was answered generally well indicating that candidates had learned the key words to gain full marks.

2bcd

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether the Dhammapada is essential for all Buddhists. They were generally able to develop the reasons given through the use of examples.

c) Well answered by candidates, who were able to explain why the Four Noble Truths are important for Buddhists. Some candidates focused on their importance as a whole while others explored them individually- either approach was valid.

d) The question was generally answered well and required candidates to evaluate a statement about whether morality (sila) only matters if you are a Buddhist. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in di); and also to recognise opposing views in dii).

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. A large number of candidates were able to develop their answers and gain full marks.

c) The majority of answers to this question focused around the distinctive features of Zen Buddhism. When this was attempted there were some excellent answers that recognized a wide variety of distinctive features.

d) The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether the dhamma is out of date. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in di). Candidates generally seemed to have a good ability to use Buddhist arguments as well as arguments that they constructed from their own understanding.

4a

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

4bcd

b) This question was generally very well answered. Candidates were able to explore why the enlightenment may/may not have been the beginning of Buddhism. Answers which disagreed usually used other events in the life of the Buddha to justify their answer which is perfectly acceptable.

c) This question was about why the Mahayana vihara has certain features and was generally answered very well. Some candidates needed to be careful to not just describe the features without linking it to the reasons for the feature.

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 di) and then give an alternative opinion in dii). They were able to provide simple general and Buddhist comparative reasons as to whether everybody should be a Theravada Buddhist. Answers showed a good understanding of the differences between schools of Buddhism.

5a

This glossary definition was known by a large majority of candidates and gained full marks

5bcd

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether vipassana was the best form of meditation; most gave two reasons and were able to relate vipassana to other forms.

c) This question about why the use of rupas might be important was generally answered well. A small number of candidates slipped into description rather than focusing on its importance. Careful reading of the demands of the question would have aided these candidates.

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 di) and then give an alternative opinion in dii). A small number of candidates mixed up mantras and mudras. Candidates should take care.

6a

This was generally answered well and indicated a precise in the learning of glossary words. However, a small number of candidates mixed up Vassa and Wesak. This is a perennial issue and candidates should take care.

6bcd

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether Buddhists should celebrate New Year. This produced some very good responses- some focused on the secular practice, while others referred to its expression in Mahayana communities- both approaches were acceptable.

c) Well answered by the majority of candidates, who were able to give several reasons why samatha meditation is important to some Buddhists.

d) This question caused few problems for candidates, most were able to give three reasons backing their view in di) and three reasons for an alternative view in dii). In a similar way to 5d a small number of candidates mixed mudras with mantras.

7a

The definition of the vinaya was known by a large number of candidates.

7bcd

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion as to whether a Buddhist should help to relieve suffering. The links that candidates made with different teachings enabled some very good answers and reasons to be developed.

c) A question about the vihara in the local area, that was attempted well by candidates of all abilities. Candidates were able to explore its importance to the local community; a majority focused on its importance to the local

'Buddhist' community which was not the intention of the question but was a valid approach and was credited as such.

d) The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether karuna should be shown by everybody. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in di). Candidates were able to draw on other religious traditions to answer the question (while still ensuring a reference to Buddhism across parts i and ii).

8a

Most candidates who answered this question gained full marks. A large number of candidates utilized language outside of the glossary definition but this indicated a confidence with the material.

8bcd

b) Most candidates were able to give two simple reasons why a person's beliefs should affect their choice of job. The most straightforward answers provided examples of where particular jobs supported/ contravened Buddhist beliefs. There were other approaches taken that gained full marks.

c) This question was sometimes answered well by candidates. A small minority of candidates focused on how Buddhists might carry out the work rather than why. Care should be taken in reading the question.

d) Most candidates were able to respond to the quote and developed reasons about whether khanti is only important for Buddhists. Candidates were able to draw on reasons why khanti might be beneficial to others in the community.

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. They can utilize both sides of the debate but only where they clearly indicate them as their own opinions.
- Candidates can gain the higher mark within the level by writing coherently, this mark is the QWC mark and is only lost if the

candidates writing is such that it is not easily understandable by the examiner.

- Candidates should ensure that they start by stating their own view and reasons for it in the (di) part and state reasons why someone might hold a different view in the (dii) rather than confusing the two halves. At least one of the reasons given in either (di) or (dii) must be explicitly religious to go beyond 3 marks. Part ii should also refer to the original quote in the question- sometimes candidates refute their own argument but do not necessarily engage with the debate of the question. It should be pointed out that (d) questions on this unit always ask for the candidate to refer to Buddhism.

