

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel GCSE  
in Religious Studies (5RS15)  
Paper 01 - Buddhism

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## Unit 15 Buddhism

### Introduction

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

This paper was the fourth 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 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.
  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.

### **Question 1**

a) 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 solely as impermanence.

b) This question was answered generally very well. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether the Tipitaka is essential for all Buddhists. They were generally able to develop the reasons given through the use of examples.

c) A question about the Wheel of Existence. This was answered generally very well with candidates exploring the importance from a variety of different approaches including individual aspects of the Wheel as well as the Wheel as a whole.

d) The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether understanding the Four Noble Truths is essential in today's society. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in di) and also to recognize counter arguments in dii).

### **Question 2**

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

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether the sangha is important for Buddhists today. 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 three marks of existence are important for many Buddhists. Some candidates focused on their importance as a whole while others explored them individually- either approach was valid. A minority of candidates mixed up the three marks of existence either with the poisons or the refuges.

d) The question was generally answered well and required candidates to evaluate a statement about whether samadhi (meditation) 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).

### **Question 3**

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

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) This question had a very mixed response. Some candidates were able to provide well developed answers about why the founding of the Sangha is important. A large number of responses dealt with the sangha more generally with comments such as 'it allows lay Buddhists to donate to the monks and nuns.' Unless these answers were linked by the candidate to the founding of the sangha they gained either no marks or level 1 marks.

d) The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether Zen Buddhism is the best path to enlightenment. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in di).

### **Question 4**

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

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether Vajrayana Buddhism is the same as other types of Buddhism; most gave two reasons and were able to relate Vajrayana to other forms.

c) This question about why the four sights are important for Buddhists 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). In exploring whether the life of the Buddha is more important than his death and parinibbana, they were able to use individual aspects or the events(s) as a whole.

### **Question 5**

a) This was generally answered well and indicated a precise in the learning of glossary words. However, a small number of candidates only mentioned 'hand gestures' which only gained 1 mark. There needed to be some indication of symbolic or ritual.

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether Vassa is important for all Buddhists. However, a small number of candidates mixed up Vassa and Wesak. This is a perennial issue and candidates should take care.

c) Well answered by the majority of candidates, who were able to give several reasons why the use of mantras is important to some Buddhists. Some candidates used examples of specific mantras to illustrate their answer.

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).

### **Question 6**

a) This was generally answered well and indicated a precise in the learning of glossary words.

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether dhyana meditation is the same as other types of meditation; most gave two reasons and were able to relate dhyana to other forms.

c) Well answered by the majority of candidates, who were able to give several reasons why Wesak is important to some Buddhists. However, in a similar way to 5b a small number of candidates mixed up Vassa and Wesak. This is a perennial issue and candidates should take care.

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).

### **Question 7**

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

b) Most candidates were able to state their own opinion as to whether khanti (patience) is important for everyone. Candidates were able to draw on Buddhist and non-Buddhist ideas in their answers.

c) A question about the five pansils, which was attempted well by candidates of all abilities. Candidates were able to explore their importance. Some focused on individual pansils to illustrate their answer which is an acceptable approach.

d) The question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether the most important thing a Buddhist can do is to reduce suffering. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in di), but some struggled in part ii to think of reasons as to why it might not be, a large number of these answers actually ended up agreeing with their original point of view.

## Question 8

a) 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.

b) Most candidates were able to give two simple reasons why the five additional pansils are important for lay Buddhists. Some candidates mixed up the five additional pansils with the five pansils which could not be credited. Again, some candidates explored individual pansils which is a valid approach.

c) This question was sometimes answered well by candidates. A small minority of candidates focused on why metta (loving kindness) is important generally which needed greater linking to Buddhism.

d) Most candidates were able to respond to the quote and developed reasons about whether it is easy to live the Buddhist life today. Candidates were able to draw on reasons that reflected their understanding of the tensions between belief and practice.

## 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.

