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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCSE

In Religious Studies A

Paper 2 Study of Second Religion

2D Buddhism

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Non-ERA report 2024 1RA0_2D

Introduction GCSE (9-1) Religious Studies Religious Studies A Paper 2D: Area of Study 2 – Study of Second Religion - Buddhism (Paper code: 1RA0/2D)

The paper contributes to 25% of the overall award.

The assessment consists of two questions and candidates must answer all questions. The details of the assessment content are provided in the specification. Centres are to use this, rather than other published resources when planning the course content.

This area of study comprises a study in-depth of Buddhism as a lived religion in the United Kingdom and throughout the world.

There are two sections:

- Beliefs & Teachings
- Practices

Candidates had studied Buddhism within the context of the wider British society.

Please note: AO stands for 'Assessment Objective' SPaG stands for 'Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar'

Question 1a

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Beliefs & Teachings.

Bullet point 1.6 Fourth Noble Truth, including reference to the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: the nature of The Middle Way – magga; **Buddhist teachings about** the Eightfold Path leading to nibbana; **the Threefold Way**: the nature, purpose and importance of sila (ethics), samadhi (meditation) and panna (wisdom); divergent understandings of the importance Eightfold Path and the Threefold Way for Buddhist life today. *(Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question).*

The question asked was: 'Outline three teachings about the Threefold Way'

Candidates are asked to 'Outline' on (a) items. Therefore, lists can reach a maximum of one mark.

Most candidates were able to show an understanding of the Threefold Way, with more than 50% gaining all three marks. A number of students spent time developing their answers, which is not required in an a) question. A number of students could only offer 1 or 2 elements of the Threefold Way.

Examiner advice: Candidates should write three sentences containing one piece of information in each. There is no need for development: it will not receive credit. Candidates who answer using a list, which is not an outline, can only receive 1 mark according to the mark scheme. If any one element of a list were incorrect it would get 0 marks.

Question 1b

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Beliefs & Teachings.

Bullet point 1.5* Third Noble Truth, including reference to the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: the nature of nirodha and **the cessation of tanha**; Buddhist teachings about the ending of desire; the nature of the cycle of samsara; different understandings of nibbana and enlightenment and their importance for Buddhists today (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was: 'Explain two beliefs about the cessation of tanha'

Candidates are asked to 'Explain two' on (b) items. Therefore, two beliefs are required, and both need to be developed to be awarded 4 marks.

Development consists of a piece of extra information, a reference to a source of wisdom, quotes or examples. The development must be of the beliefs given and to the question asked.

This was a good discriminating question. Candidates familiar with the subject specific vocabulary were able to respond well. Those who had not revised the term found it difficult to access marks on this question.

Examiner advice: Candidates should be encouraged to be familiar with both the requirements of the different styles of questions and the specialist vocabulary on the Specification in order to make efficient use of their time in the exam.

Question 1c

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Beliefs & Teachings.

Bullet point 1.7 Human life: divergent Buddhist understandings of **the nature and importance of The Five Khandas (aggregates)**, including the Khandha Sutta; divergent Buddhist understandings of the nature and importance of sunnata, tathagatagarbha, Buddha-nature; divergent Buddhist understandings of the nature and importance of Arahant and Bodhisattva Ideals; divergent Buddhist understandings of the nature and history of Buddhahood and the Pure Land (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was: 'Explain two teachings about the Five Khandas.'

Candidates are asked to 'Explain two' on (c) items. Therefore, two reasons are required, and both need to be developed for 4 marks. Development consists of a piece of extra information, a reference to a source of wisdom, quotes or examples. The development must be of the reason given and to the question

asked. The reasons then should be supported with a 'reference to a source of wisdom', this must support the reason given and cannot be awarded twice. Therefore, if it is used as development, it does not gain a second mark for the source.

GENERIC advice for centres to what constitutes a source of wisdom

- The candidates do not have to reference a quote or quote it word for word. The source of wisdom can be given as a recognisable paraphrase
- If examiners are unsure they will use a search engine. Enter the gist of the paraphrase and the source
- If the source is attributed to the wrong person/source/ numerical reference it cannot be credited e.g. a Dali Lama quote attributed to the Buddha and the quote is not accredited to them, it is not awarded
- Numerical or generic references on their own are not awarded. The candidate must use the reference correctly ie not just state the name of a sutta.

This was a good discriminating question. Candidates familiar with the subject specific vocabulary were able to respond well. Those who had not revised the term found it difficult to access marks on this question.

Question 1d

The focus of the marking changes from AO1 to AO2 on the d) items.

The candidates are being assessed on AO2: Analyse and evaluate aspects of religion and belief, including their significance and influence.

AO2 constitutes 50% of the overall mark.

The question is 'Evaluate' this statement considering the arguments for and against and reach a justified conclusion – there must be some consideration of the validity of the arguments used / appraisal to gain the higher grades. For higher grades, candidates are also required to build complexity into their responses by building their chains of reasoning. Many candidates produced excellent answers giving reasons for and against but failed to evaluate the credibility of the argument, or include this element of complexity in their analysis of the statement.

Examiner advice: centres should refer to training materials online. Candidates require the religious understanding of the diversity within the religious tradition, and the arguments for and against before they can begin to evaluate.

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Beliefs.

Bullet point 1.2 Dhamma: The nature and different meaning of dhamma – **dependent origination/conditionality**; the nature and importance of paticca-samuppada and the Three Marks of Existence, including reference to the Story of Nagasena and the Chariot in the Milinda Panha: suffering – dukkha, anicca – no

fixed self and anatta – soul or essence; the implications of belief in dhamma for Buddhists today (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was (d) "Dependent origination is the most important belief in Buddhism."

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you must:

- refer to Buddhist teachings
- reach a justified conclusion

d) items are marked using levels and awarding is carried out using 'best fit' according to the level descriptors.

In response to this question candidates were aware of the discussion around dependent origination in comparison to other Buddhist beliefs. Some took the opportunity to focus on the contrast of other beliefs, where their knowledge of dependent origination was less strong and were able to access marks in this way.

Question 2a

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Practices

Bullet point 2.8 Festivals and retreats: the divergent nature, history, **purpose and importance of festivals and retreats in Buddhism**; divergent understandings of the origins, meaning and features of celebration of specific festivals and retreats, including Wesak, **Vassa/Rain Retreat** and Kathina, with reference to the Anapanasati Sutta, and Uposatha days in Theravada Buddhism; Hanamatsuri and Obon (Japanese), Parinibbana Day in Mahayana Buddhism, and Lama Tsong Khapa Day in Tibet. (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was 'Outline three ways Buddhists may celebrate Vassa.'

a) items are point marked – Outline requires three outlined points.

This question was accessible, with most candidates achieving either 2 or 3 marks.

Question 2b

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Practices

Bullet point 2.2 Chanting: **the nature**, purpose and role **of chanting in Buddhism as a devotional practice** and to gain mental concentration, including Dhammapada 1–2, confidence and joy; the divergent understandings of the importance of chanting in Buddhist life today, with reference to Theravada Buddhism, including Tiratana: Dhammapada 190, and Mahayana Buddhism, including Nam Myoho Renge Kyo (*bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was 'Explain two features of chanting in Buddhism'

Candidates are asked to 'Explain two' on (b) items. Therefore, two features are required, and both need to be developed to be awarded 4 marks.

Development consists of a piece of extra information, a reference to a source of wisdom, quotes or examples. The development must be of the feature given and to the question asked.

This was an accessible question, with nearly 60% of candidates achieving full marks. Most were able to describe practices associated with chanting, however a number of candidates only attempted to offer one feature.

Examiner advice: Refer to the specification bullet point and cover all the different parts of it. These bullet points are the basis of question setting.

Question 2c

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Practices

Bullet point 2.5 How and why objects of devotion are used within different Buddhist places of worship, buddharupas, including reference to Vakkali Sutta, shrine, Bodhi tree; divergent understandings of why devotional objects are important in Buddhism today (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was: 'Explain two reasons why a Bodhi tree may be important to Buddhists'

Candidates are asked to 'Explain two' on (c) items. Therefore, two reasons are required, and both need to be developed to be awarded 4 marks. They must also correctly use a source of wisdom in their answer which must be identifiable, relevant and linked to the reason given in the answer.

Most candidates were able to show knowledge and understanding about the importance of Bodhi trees, with most candidates making reference to the Buddha's enlightenment.

Examiner advice: Centres struggling to find sources of wisdom should refer to the specification and/or previous mark schemes.

Question 2d

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Practices

Bullet point 2.7 Death and **mourning rituals and ceremonies: the divergent celebration and significance of the ceremonies in Buddhist communities and to Buddhists**; the distinct significance of the rituals associated with death and mourning in Theravada communities and in Japan and Tibet, with reference to the Tibetan Book of the Dead (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was “The only purpose of Buddhist funerals is to remind others of life’s impermanence.”

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you must:

- refer to Buddhist teachings
- refer to different Buddhist points of view
- reach a justified conclusion.

This question engaged candidates of all abilities and produced a wide range of marks. All candidates should be encouraged to answer every question because every mark is important. Candidates frequently explored the rituals used by some communities to either highlight impermanence or the function of certain practices to the benefit of those that have died. Some were able to expand answers with appraisal.

Key advice from the examiner.

- Centres must teach to the specification, making sure candidates are prepared for all parts of the bullet points in preparation for the questions
- When tackling a) questions, candidates should write three sentences containing one piece of information in each. There is no need for development: it will not receive credit.
- The explain questions require two developed points, however, students should also be prepared to describe where indicated on the specification.
- The (d) items need an understanding of religion and belief, as well as the ability to evaluate the arguments in order to reach a conclusion. Centres may wish to consider the differentiation of teaching to enable some students of different abilities to concentrate on learning the information needed before embarking on the evaluation.
- Candidates should be directed to read the bullet points in the (d) question and understand that they guide them to which viewpoints they should be providing. Centres may wish to consider identifying on the specification the different traditions/viewpoints within Buddhism identified that could be used to answer these questions. The diversity within the religion is the key factor in appraising the arguments. Why do they not all agree?