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Examiners' Report June 2010

GCE Religious Studies 6RS04/1C

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June 2010

Publications Code UA024657

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General comments on Unit 4

This was the first year of this examination 6RS04. The Legacy Spec paper 6584 had the same content as 6RS04 but this new exam has a different mark allocation between the two Assessment Objectives. The legacy paper had a breakdown of 25 marks for AO1 and 15 marks for AO2 whereas 6RS04 has 30 marks available for AO1 and 20 marks for AO2. There are also differences in the level descriptors between the papers with, for example, AO1 having 5 levels in this new specification compared to 4 in the legacy specification.

It is of paramount importance for candidates to examine the passage on the exam paper. Candidates must relate what they have learned and apply it to the extract and not treat it in a cursory fashion nor ignore the selected text. There are very many ways of examining a passage and there is no preferred method. What is essential is an explicit focus on the text, whatever method is used to examine it. There was evidence of some candidates writing several paragraphs of material that was not linked to the question. This is not a recommended strategy.

The examination is divided into two parts. AO1 is examined in part (a) and is worth 30 marks and AO2 is examined in part (b) and is worth 20 marks. This division is on the paper to assist candidates to structure their answers and to enable them to make sensible use of their time in the allocation of material. In most cases candidates had the required examination technique to make effective use of their material. However, a few candidates spent a disproportionate amount of time on AO1 at the expense of AO2 and vice versa. There is no necessary requirement to follow the structured division as seen in the question. However, for candidates creating a holistic answer, there is a tendency to pay inadequate attention to AO2, especially in relation to the implications aspect of part (b). Candidates who run together AO1 and AO2 are credited where they achieve these, although candidates may penalise themselves with partial answers by using this approach.

Assessment Objective 1:

There was evidence of sound subject knowledge with a thorough exposition of the passage. Some candidates examined the passage in the question paper and then illustrated key ideas by the way they navigated their way through the whole passage of the anthology. This enabled candidates to incorporate various scholars and themes that were referenced in the whole article as a means of a more detailed analysis of the passage itself. A number of candidates had a strong working knowledge of the other two anthology texts and were able to link these in their answers.

At the lower levels candidates presented a more descriptive and basic account of the passage akin to a simple comprehension test. Some outlined the full article but with insufficient attention to the passage on the question paper. This may have displayed their knowledge of the anthology but not an understanding of the selected passage.

Assessment Objective 2:

The better quality answers were those that expressed view points with confidence and authority, supported by reason and evidence. Some candidates outlined their own views and were able to ally or contrast them with various scholars they had examined in their other units. Good quality work on the implications in part (b) consisted of academically rigorous approaches with pertinent examples.

At the lower levels for AO2 some candidates presented partial answers. For example, some expressed opinions giving their views on the extract but did not write about the possible implications.

Specific comments option 1C - Buddhism

Assessment Objective 1:

The better answers made full use of other areas of the specification, demonstrating a full grasp of the concepts De Silva raises. For example, some candidates made use of the *Questions of King Milinda* to identify the problems raised by anatta, rebirth and moral accountability. Others made effective use of a version of the Euthyphro debate to raise issues about the nature of good and bad in Buddhism. They asked whether something was good because of the merit produced or did it produce good merit because the act was good? Other candidates focused on the psychological dimension of Buddhist ethics in which wholesome actions produce positive mental traits. The passage clearly provided ample material through which many candidates explored the key components of Buddhist ethics.

A number of candidates seemed to completely ignore the question and simply wrote all they could about the life of the Buddha and Buddhist practice with little or no regard to the question. Some candidates wrote about Smart's dimensions with little or no reference to the text on the examination paper. It is essential to provide answers which are pertinent to the passage.

Many candidates seemed to confuse the importance of karma within the Buddhist tradition; believing that good karma eventually leads to Nirvana. Candidates often failed to make the distinction between wholesome acts (kusala) and unwholesome acts (akusala). There are many good resources on this topic, Damien Keown's "*A Short Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*" is an excellent and succinct introduction to the topic, which is accessible to A Level students.

Assessment Objective 2:

Weaker responses failed to justify their points of view and these candidates simply wrote that they agreed or disagreed, giving little or no justification. Many of these candidates simply described their own beliefs and faith system. The best responses were from students who fully explored the implications of the belief in karma and freewill. For example, some candidates questioned whether or not karma and freewill were indeed compatible. They argued that the effects of karma in future lives was tantamount to a form of determinism, in which freewill could not be achieved. In its crudest form, this meant that some would be re-born as animals in which there was little freewill. Other candidates questioned whether or not an individual can make a completely volitional choice and raised the issue of moral culpability as a weakness in the argument.

Grade boundaries

Raw mark boundaries

Max Mark	a*	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
50	43	38	33	28	24	20	16	0

Uniform Mark Scale boundaries

Max Mark	a*	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	0

a* is only used in conversion from raw to uniform marks. It is not a published unit grade.

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Order Code UA024657 Summer 2010

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