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Examiners' Report
June 2017

GCE Religious Studies 8RS0 4A

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Introduction

This specification was examined for the first time this year.

The examination contained four questions- with the final question having a part 'a' and a part 'b'.

Questions 1 and 4a were designed to test AO1.

Questions 2, 3 and 4b were designed to test both AO1 and AO2.

Some candidates displayed an excellent detailed knowledge and understanding of specific religious teachings and practices and were able to look at other points of view objectively. At the same time, there were candidates who appeared to have only limited knowledge and understanding of the specification, and who sometimes wrote a great deal of general knowledge surrounding a topic, without directly addressing the specific question.

These will be explored in greater detail as this report considers each question.

Question 1

This question required candidates to explore the beliefs about the Five Precepts. In the context of this specification and the exam paper the instruction 'explore' asks candidates to demonstrate understanding by investigating different reasons, concepts and ideas.

The vast majority of candidates were able to correctly identify what the Five Precepts were. Some candidates demonstrated a superficial knowledge or a narrow range of the key religious ideas and beliefs only, and this limited them to level 2. Occasionally, candidates explored other aspects of the specification such as the Noble Truths or Three Poisons. Careful revision will help candidates as they prepare for the examination.

This response is used to show the level of detail needed to gain 8 marks in the question.

SECTION A

Answer ALL questions. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

1 Explore Buddhist beliefs about the Five Precepts.

Buddhists believe that they must follow the five moral precepts. They abstain from; false speech which includes lying, gossip and slander; indulgence in intoxicants such as drugs and alcohol, ^{including the ritual drink} ~~sexual misconduct~~ ^{some drink} previously in vedic traditions; sexual misconduct which includes rape, pedophilia and other immoral sexual acts; Taking life and Theft. Buddhists would commit to living their life in such a manner that would allow them to fulfil these five moral precepts. This may be through their jobs - ^{i.e.} a Buddhist would not become a prostitute or soldier in order to abstain from sexual misconduct or taking life. Buddhists do this in an effort to decrease tanha which could lead to the cessation of Dukkha and becoming an arhat in their or a later life.



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Examiner Comments

This example gained 8 marks and shows an understanding of the Five Precepts and also uses the Five Precepts to address a broad range of key religious ideas and beliefs. Each of the Five Precepts is explored with some examples of the implications for Buddhists. The last part of the answer begins to show a depth of understanding that goes beyond a narrow range to a broad range.



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Examiner Tip

There were some candidates who over answered the question. Care should be taken with time management. This response shows a good level of detail to gain the 8 marks.

This response gains Level 3, 7 marks. In comparison to the previous example this answer shows the difference within the levels of response, and in particular the differences between two Level 3 responses.

SECTION A

Answer ALL questions. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

1 Explore Buddhist beliefs about the Five Precepts.

Buddhist beliefs on the five ^{Precepts} principle is essential in Buddhism because it is rule on how a Buddhist should live their life in accord to the Buddha. The 5 precepts is a is followed as I ~~under~~ 'I wish to abstain from', this quote reminds what he/she must not do. I wish to abstain from sexual misconduct for e.g. explains how Buddhist/monks cannot have sex, or commit any sexual misconduct (this includes masturbation, penetration, sex) another the second precept 'I wish to abstain from drugs and alcohol'. This precept explains to Buddhist that they cannot drink

alcohol or take drugs as it clouds the mind with poison which leads to the three poisons (anger, greed, craving) which causes suffering. Third Precept I wish to abstain from life, this is the idea that Buddhist cannot take a life from another Buddhist as it causes suffering, death is suffering, which was what the Buddha experience when going through the 4 sights.

(Total for Question 1 = 8 marks)



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Examiner Comments

In this response the candidate clearly outlines the Five Precepts and explores the various implications for a Buddhist today. In a similar way to the previous example this response shows a broad range of religious ideas and beliefs. The depth of understanding is also good as they can see the implications of following the Five Precepts -- some of the elements are inaccurate however.

The major difference seems to be the inaccuracy, especially in the use of specialist language. This response uses terminology such as poisons and Precepts which is very positive. In the last section the use of 'suffering' is clearly identified and linked well with the answer. Some use of Buddhist terminology, e.g. dukkha, would have shown a wider range of specialist language.



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Examiner Tip

As suggested in the comment above the inclusion of material that is inaccurate can hinder the candidate from gaining the highest level. Make sure the material used is appropriate, accurate, and sustained throughout.

Question 2

This question asked candidates to assess the significance of the founding of the sangha. 'Assess', as used in this question, requires a reasoned argument of factors to reach a judgement regarding sangha's importance/relevance to the question context. Within this question, as with all questions, the level descriptors are key in marking the answers provided.

Within a large number of responses to this question there was an issue for candidates in identifying what the question was asking. The question focused on the founding of the sangha which comes from section 2.1 of the specification, Candidates often answered about the significance of the sangha itself with no reference to its founding. Some candidates were able to link the sangha today with the importance of the founding, but the vast majority did not and as such were very limited in the marks they could be awarded, if any at all. This highlights the need for candidates to read the question very carefully. There are elements of the specification that necessarily address topics that overlap -- candidates need to be aware of the demands of the question.

This answer is a comprehensive response to the question and is awarded a Level 3 - 9 marks.

2 Assess the importance of the founding of the sangha.

The Buddha founded the Sangha after giving his first sermon in Deer Park, Sarnath, an event regarded in retrospect as "the turning of the wheel of the Dharma." His first sermon was given to his five ascetic companions, after which one of them, Kondanna, gained "stream entry", or sotapanna, the first of the four stages of arakantship. As such, he was the first monk to be ordained and the first member of the Sangha.

The founding of the Sangha is very important to Buddhists as it created a "community of like-minded people", which is the literal translation of the word Sangha, who could be a source of support and guidance for all Buddhists on their journeys to enlightenment.

The nature of the modern sangha includes four parts, the Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunis, lay men and women. In the modern sangha one can see how important it's founding

was, as the role of the sangha is to maintain Buddhism as a living tradition and maintain harmony in the Buddhist community. However, some argue that the founding of the sangha is not very important as ultimately the journey to enlightenment is an individual one, and understanding the dhamma and the Buddha's teachings relies solely on one's own personal, not communal commitment. In this sense, the founding of the sangha can be seen as important in combination with other sources of guidance, such as the Buddha, and the dhamma.

Ultimately, whilst the founding of the sangha led to the maintenance of Buddhism as a living tradition, it is not the most significant aspect of Buddhism, especially with regards to the individual Buddhist; Nhat Hanh summarises this in his idea that we can "find in ourselves the Buddha, the dhamma and the sangha."



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Within this response there is clear evidence of the candidate meeting all of the requirements for Level 3. There is a wide range of knowledge shown - the first paragraph uses information about the events of the sangha but is able to use them to construct a reasoned judgement that shows a logical chain of reasoning based on the knowledge demonstrated. The final paragraph shows how an exploration of the sangha today can be linked to the founding of the sangha. They link the founding with its existence today. This candidate concludes with an alternative viewpoint. This enables them to assess its significance in greater detail, and to provide evidence-reasoned judgements. This is a very clear and coherent response.



ResultsPlus Examiner Tip

This candidate is very clear in linking their response to the question. This is important and shows that the candidate is very clearly answering the question rather than going off on tangents. It would be useful for all candidates to bring the points they are making back to the question being asked at various points through the response.

Question 3

This question asked candidates to assess the significance of the five khandas. This question was generally not answered well, and was often left blank. The Five khandas are clearly delineated in the specification and are a key belief in elements of Buddhism. It is important that all areas of the specification are revised in preparation for the exam. Some candidates spoke about the five khandas which was perfectly fine. The specification uses Pali spellings of words, and it is the Pali that will always be used in the exam. Teachers and candidates are at liberty to use the Sanskrit transliterations, but candidates must know the Pali spellings in preparation for the exam.

Some candidates when answering this question also merely gave information about what the five khandas are. As such they are limited to Level 1 as indicated in the mark scheme for just using AO1 knowledge in their response.

This response is awarded a level 3 - 7 marks.

3 Assess the significance of the Five khandas.

~~The Five Khandas~~

The Five Khandas are: form or matter, consciousness, mental formations, sentience and sensation. ~~They are all considered~~

They are all, some may agree, significant to Buddhists as they most of them are what we should strive to distance ourselves from as they they go against the key concept of anatta (no self)

which is what Buddhists are taught to not only realise, but ~~dismiss~~ dismiss from their lives.

However, others may agree that the Five Khandas are not as important to Buddhists as other concepts, such as the Noble Eightfold Path or

the Four Noble Truths, as they do not aid our realisation of any truth of the ultimate reality or the path to that truth. The Five

khandas are merely concepts which make up the physical and mental body of the human being, and are interpreted by

the monastics as something we should reject as there is, in Buddhism, no self and no permanent being.

Overall, it is clear that the Five Khandas are not that significant

to Buddhists to a great extent as they are merely 'goals' one should achieve by realising their falsehood rather than tools which could be used to achieve Enlightenment such as the Noble Eightfold Path.



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Examiner Comments

To some extent, after a brief introduction to what the five khandas are, this response argues for and against their significance. In doing so they deconstruct the information which leads to a basic chain of reasoning. The range of knowledge that they use is included appropriately but is not necessarily wide, and their inaccuracy in suggesting that the belief in the five khandas goes against the self cannot be credited. As such the response clearly meets all the criteria for a level 2 mark. However, the judgements that they reach show coherence and reasoning which explore a very wide range of the elements in the question. As such the response is able to move into level 3 and is awarded 7 marks.



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Examiner Tip

Candidates should ensure that the chains of reasoning are clearly deconstructed. This relies on a wide range of accurate knowledge. There is not sufficient material in the rest of the response to make this a more secure level 3.

Question 4

Question 4 is split into two sections: a and b. These questions will be linked in theme but are looking for different things. The 'a' question will always be 'Explore'. This follows the same format as question 1, and 8 AO1 marks are available. In the context of this specification and the exam paper the instruction 'explore' asks candidates to demonstrate understanding by investigating different reasons, concepts and ideas. This question asked candidates to explore the use of the Tipitaka. A large number of candidates just outlined the contents of the Tipitaka and made little or no attempt to link it to the use, and as such they were limited in the marks they could gain. This shows the need to read the question carefully and ensure that the response is answering the right question rather than the one we have assumed when seeing a key word that we recognise.

Question 'b' always asks candidates to 'Analyse'. In the context of the specification and exam paper this requires candidates to "Deconstruct information and/or issues to find connections and provide logical chains of reasoning in order to make judgement's regarding their important/relevance to the question context.' In this 5 marks are available for AO1 and 15 for AO2. In practice these are assigned in the context of the levels of response. It is important, as with all other questions, that the levels of response are used in practice exam questions. This question required candidates to analyse the significance of the Tipitaka as a source of wisdom. The responses to this question were very varied.

For question a this response gained a Level 3- 7 marks.

For question b this response gained a Level 4- 18 marks

SECTION B

Answer ALL questions. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

4 (a) Explore the use of the Tipitaka.

* merely out of reverence for me."

(8)

The Tipitaka, also known as the Pali Canon, is the ~~the~~ scripture that Buddhists use as a source of ~~the~~ the Buddha's teachings to help them reach enlightenment. It consists of three baskets: the ~~the~~ Abhidhamma, the Suttas and the Vinayas. The Abhidhamma contains philosophical analysis and ethical concepts developed by bhikkhus (monks) from the Buddha's teachings and his life. It is used by Buddhists to ~~make~~ help understand ~~the~~ ~~the~~ Siddhartha Gautama's teachings of the Dhamma (sublime truth). The Vinayas are 227 precepts, or rules, that Buddhists take, which are all linked with parables. Upon becoming a Buddhist, one must take 5 precepts and then an extra 5 more for novice monks; fully-fledged bhikkhus must take all 227. Also, bhikkhunis ~~(nuns)~~ (nuns) must take an extra 8 precepts, as the Vinayas are there to create social cohesion, but they are also a product of their time, so the purpose of these extra precepts is to subordinate women. Finally, the Sutta basket contains many stories of the Buddha's life, each are linked to ~~teachings~~ ^{teachings} and they are used as guidelines to help achieve enlightenment. In Mahayana Buddhism, they follow the Tipitaka ~~but~~ and the Buddha himself said "Examine and accept my words and accept them, but not *"

(b) Analyse the significance of the Tipitaka as a source of wisdom.

(20)

The Tipitaka, or the Pali Canon, is a source of wisdom for most Buddhists and it consists of three baskets: the ~~the~~ Abhidhamma, the Suttas and the Vinayas, ~~to these~~ which are all approached and used in different ways for both wisdom and as a source of authority. In this essay, it will ~~be~~ argued that the Tipitaka has some relevance as a source of wisdom, but it is not the ^{only and} most important thing to learn from in comparison to the sangha and the Buddha himself, which are two of the three refuges.

Many scholars may disagree with this ~~view~~ view and state that the Tipitaka is the most important source of wisdom for Buddhists by far, as it ~~has~~ preserves the teachings of the Buddha and even offers philosophical analysis as part of the Abhidhamma. However, ~~it~~ it is more the role of the sangha to preserve the teachings of the dharma and the traditions of Buddhism, especially within the monastic community of the fourfold sangha, for they teach lay Buddhists on their path to enlightenment - granted, using the Tipitaka. Moreover, ~~the~~ Tipitaka to look at the

Tipitaka alone as a source of wisdom is unreliable, as the Abhidhamma ~~is~~ does not come directly from the Buddha as it is just full of interpretations. In fact, none of arguably, none of the Tipitaka comes directly from the Buddha as it came from the bhikkhus (monks) chanting his teachings for a while before they were finally written down onto palm leaves. Thus, there may be some ~~misinterpretations~~ misinterpretations in at least some parts of the Tipitaka and this makes it less significant as a source of wisdom on its own.

Siddhartha Gautama

Furthermore, the ~~Tipitaka~~ Buddha himself said "You must examine ~~my~~ my words and accept them, but not merely out of reverence for me." Therefore his ~~teachings~~ teachings in the Tipitaka are clearly not to be blindly accepted, nothing ~~it~~ carry less weight, ~~in comparison~~ compared to other scriptures from religions, such as the Qur'an and the Bible; these are seen as direct words of God and must be accepted. However, some scholars may argue against this and state that this is a weak point as it is to do with ~~the~~ ^{its} authority, and not its significance as a source of wisdom. In fact,

it could be arguable that the Tipitaka is more valid ~~the~~ to learn from as a religious scripture as its ^{truths} can be tested against ^{one's own} logical reasoning, ~~meditations~~ meditation and life experiences, thus ~~making~~ helping Buddhists to reach their own personal conviction of the dhamma. This makes it ~~more~~ more important when looking for a source of wisdom than other religious scriptures which ~~as~~ contain ~~the~~ less understandable teachings that people must blindly follow ~~them~~ without question.

To conclude, ~~that~~ the Tipitaka is ~~to~~ not ^{to} be held in too high of a regard, as it is ^{as a source of wisdom} merely an instrumental tool that, along with everything else, will be left behind upon entering nibbana. It is also not referred to too much by Mahayana Buddhism and Buddhists still manage to attain Buddhahood without the Tipitaka, making it less significant than the dhamma.

~~This is because the Tipitaka~~ However, it still preserves the dhamma and contains philosophical analysis of the Buddha's teachings, therefore making the dhamma accessible ~~to~~ and Buddhists are ~~thus~~ thus enabled to actually learn ~~for~~ and understand the dhamma. This makes the Tipitaka

~~very significant~~ significant to an extent because
~~in order~~ the Buddha stressed to his disciples
that ~~he who sees the dhamma sees me, and~~
~~he who sees me sees the dhamma~~, therefore
in order to reach ~~the~~ nibbana, one must
~~not~~ only be able to understand the
dhamma, rather than blindly accepting it.



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Examiner Comments

In the 'a' question the candidate is able to utilise the information they provide about the three baskets and link them to their use. As such this can be credited as a way of addressing a broad range of key religious beliefs and ideas. Without linking them to the use, this, by itself, would be a narrow range of knowledge. This response uses language to link the response back to the question. The answer shows a wide range of knowledge and comprehensively develops key religious ideas, to show a depth of understanding. The approach this candidate took was to explore different baskets which is a perfectly valid way of answering the question. For the response to question 'b' the candidate shows a wide range of knowledge about the significance of the Tipitaka. Specialist language and terminology are used with felicity throughout. The candidate is also able to draw on different schools of Buddhism and some element of scholarship. They are able to critically deconstruct the information providing logical chains of reasoning that are always tied to the question about the significance of the Tipitaka as a source of wisdom. Throughout the answer there is an appraisal of the evidence provided. Sometimes candidates may do this in a concluding paragraph which would be fine; in this example the candidate does his throughout and then brings it together at the end. The conclusion could have been slightly more comprehensive but this is a minor point.



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Examiner Tip

For the 'a' question, and perhaps at the risk of repetition it is important to link the points being made to the question being asked. For the 'b' question the candidate could have explored the nature of the Tipitaka as a source of the dhamma. This would have led to a fuller range of knowledge. In this example the candidate is not really disadvantaged by this as they are able to argue persuasively about the difference; in other examples, however, candidates responded with 'The Four Noble Truths are a better source of wisdom' forgetting that they are found within the Tipitaka. This answer shows a precision necessary for a high level response.

Question 'a' is awarded level 2- 5 marks

Question 'b' is awarded Level 3- 13 marks

SECTION B

Answer ALL questions. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

4 (a) Explore the use of the Tipitaka.

(8)

The Tipitaka, ~~or pali canon~~, is (three baskets), or pali canon, is the Buddhist scripture containing the key teachings and beliefs of Buddhism. The Tipitaka is made up of ~~the~~ three sections. The first is the Vinaya, which contains the monastic code: rules for monastic Buddhists to follow. This is therefore used to keep order within the sangha. All Buddhist monks follow the Vinaya, and receive sections of it to remind them of their code. Another section is the Suttas, which contains stories of the Buddha's ~~life and~~ life and Buddhist teachings. The suttas are used in varying ways by Buddhists, with some attempting to model their life on the Buddha's, citing his status as a human who attained enlightenment and reached nibbana, and others preferring to attempt to find their own individual path to enlightenment. The third and final section of the Tipitaka is the Abhidhamma, which contains analysis of the Buddha's ~~teachings~~ teachings. This section is unsurprisingly used to help Buddhists interpret the Buddha's teachings and ~~help~~ make these teachings more applicable to the lives of lay and ^{monastic} Buddhists alike.

(b) Analyse the significance of the Tipitaka as a source of wisdom.

(20)

The Tipitaka is the main scripture followed by Buddhists. Whilst the Tipitaka is acknowledged by all to be a key part of the Buddhist religion, ~~there~~ there are varying views on the extent to which it should be used, the extent to which it holds relevance for ordinary Buddhists, and in particular, the extent to which it is significant as a source of wisdom. This ~~is~~ essay will argue that, whilst the Tipitaka ~~is~~ does hold a certain degree of wisdom, this does not transcend the Buddha's own teaching to find your own path to enlightenment and to revere only the Dhamma. Moreover, Buddhists are free to use the Tipitaka as they wish, but should not overlook the ~~fact~~ ^{ultimate} fact that the only ~~ultimate~~ ^{ultimate} truth is the dhamma.

Some would ~~be~~ place great significance on the Tipitaka, arguing that it provides not only a code to help monastic Buddhists live their lives (Vinayas) but also analysis of the Buddha's teachings to make them more accessible to lay Buddhists (the Abhidhamma). The

Suttas can be seen as applicable for all Buddhists. What is more, without the ~~Tips~~ Tipitaka, the dhamma would surely be harder to follow. However, the dhamma was ~~was~~ revealed by the Buddha, and the Tipitaka was not written by the Buddha but by members of the first Buddhist Council. This not only undermines the validity of the contents of ~~the~~ the Tipitaka, but also distances the text from the real teachings of the dhamma. The dhamma remains forever embedded in the Buddha's own work a ('He who sees the dhamma sees me, he who sees me sees the dhamma'), but the written version in the Suttas is brought into question, as is its analysis in the Abhidhamma.

~~It would~~ It could be argued that the Tipitaka is important as a source of wisdom because it provides a path for all Buddhists to follow. This could be supported by T. Bikkhu's statement of 'we are all united by the path.' However, this is undermined by the fact that the Buddha himself argued that everyone should find their own path to enlightenment, in which

case the Tipitaka provides unnecessary rigidity. Perhaps the Mahayana approach is preferable, in which Upaya (~~skillful~~ (skillful means)) allows certain Buddhists to put rules aside in favour of a more moral outcome. * In any case, Buddhists should find their own path to enlightenment, for which the 'wisdom' of the Tipitaka is not needed.

In addition, far more important than the Tipitaka is the Dhamma itself. Whilst some may argue that the Tipitaka provides ~~knowledge~~ (knowledge of the dhamma), it is inherent in the very idea of the ultimate truth that it is eternal, and therefore always has existed and always will, regardless of the Tipitaka.

To conclude, the Tipitaka is a source of wisdom, but is less significant than ~~other key~~ other key components of Buddhism. Buddhists should be free to find their own path to enlightenment, and the Dhamma is a far greater source of wisdom, and is the only ultimate truth.

* For example, in the parable of the ~~Burning~~ Burning house.



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The response to question 4a is very limited in its exploration of the use of the Tipitaka. It is a very detailed response about the contents of the Tipitaka but the use has to be searched for - it is used as a source of wisdom; to help understand teachings; used as guidelines. These are almost incidental to the answer and should have formed the framework for the points that are being made. As such the candidate is only able to address a narrow range of key religious ideas but does show a depth of understanding, thus gaining a level 2.

The response to 'b' is clearly structured but lacks the depth of the previous response. This candidate uses a range of knowledge in answering the question and begins to make basic chains of reasoning. There is less obvious developments of appraisal of evidence - the conclusion utilises new information which is very positive but it is merely briefly mentioned briefly. Each of these points, such as the place of the Tipitaka within Mahayana, had great potential for exploration. A further example is the line on the first page about 'granted they use the Tipitaka'- this is an important point that was left unexplored- as such the judgements are supported by an attempt to appraise evidence.



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Here a clearer structure to the answer that responds to the question would have enabled this candidate to gain a higher level in their mark.

For question 'b' the conclusion could be better as a drawing together of the points being made throughout rather than relying on new information to extend it. This led to a lack of depth.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Address the question directly and specifically
- Make sure care is taken with time management
- Make sure the material used is appropriate, accurate and sustained
- Read the question carefully
- Don't rely solely on general knowledge -- analyse the topic logically.

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