

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

GCSE Religious Studies (5RS15)
Buddhism

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Question 1(a) was either answered correctly or incorrectly, there were few partially correct answers given. In 1(b) although a lot of candidates were able to correctly identify the three marks of existence, a small minority confused these with elements of the four noble truths, or the three poisons. Part (c) was a question about the way of meditation (samadhi). This was attempted well by candidates of all abilities. Candidates were able to explore the various ways in which it was important to Buddhists, especially in laying the basis for the achievement of enlightenment. The part (d) question required candidates to evaluate a statement about whether the Dhammapada is relevant today. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in (d)(i). Candidates did tend to focus around its relevance for Buddhists today, which did enable some to achieve marks across both parts of the question, although it would have been acceptable to use non-Buddhist views in one of the sections, while still ensuring there was still reference to Buddhism in on either part (i) or part (ii).

For question 2(a) most candidates were able to name two of the five khandas, but there were some who seemed to not have knowledge of what to five khandas are. In 2(b) most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether the Four Noble Truths are the most important Buddhist teachings. This type of question enabled candidates to compare with other Buddhist teachings, rather than just exploring their importance in general. Part (c) was well answered by candidates, who were able to explain why the Wheel of Existence is important. It was less well answered by candidates who described what the Wheel of Existence is and did not link it to importance. In contrast to previous exams few candidates mixed the Wheel of Existence up with the cycle of samsara. The part (d) question required candidates to evaluate a statement about whether the Tipitaka should only be used by monks and nuns. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in (i). A large number of candidates were also able to construct counter arguments.

As a glossary definition question, question 3(a) was very well answered by candidates; the majority of candidates who attempted it were awarded full marks. Question 3(b) was not answered well, by a large number of candidates. The question focused around whether all people should follow the dhamma. Most candidates answered whether all Buddhists should follow the dhamma, in doing this the question wasn't completely addressed. This highlights the importance of candidates reading the question carefully. The majority of answers to this part (c) question focused around a description of a Thervada Vihara, and not around the distinctive features or the reasons for them. As with part (b) candidates should read the question carefully to ensure they understand what the question is asking. The language of the question came from the specification and the reasons for certain features should have been focused on in preparation for the examination. In contrast to other parts of the specification, this part does not refer to distinctive features, and so any features found in a Theravada Vihara were acceptable.

In part (d) the question required candidates to evaluate a statement about whether people can learn nothing from the ascetic practices of the Buddha. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in (d)(i) and a large number of candidates were also able to construct counter arguments.

As with question 3(a), question 4(a) was very well answered by candidates and most candidates who attempted it achieved full marks. Candidates were usually able to state their own opinion and then give at least two reasons for this opinion in question 4(b). Candidates answering this question tended to get two marks for two simple reasons. However, some were able to develop their answers and gain full marks. Those who gained higher marks tended to focus on comparing the similarities between Theravada and other types of Buddhism. Part (c) was about the distinctive features of the Western Buddhist Order (now renamed Triratna). A number of candidates wrote about shared beliefs. The distinctive features most candidates focused on were the founding, and the fact that it is in the west. The distinctive features is a specification phrase, and candidates should be prepared to answer such a question. Most candidates responded well to the layout of the part (d) question and were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in (i) and then give an alternative opinion in (ii). They were able to provide simple reasons as to why all the four sights are or are not the beginning of Buddhism.

In question 5(a) this glossary definition was not known by a large number of candidates, a large number either left the answer blank or defined another key word "dana". Candidates should be careful when reading the question to ensure they provide the correct definition. However, most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether Vassa is relevant for today in answer to part (b) and most gave two reasons. This part (c) question about how puja takes place in the vihara was generally answered well. Various elements of puja were credited, from individual meditation to the more expected communal worship. Again 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 (i) and then give an alternative opinion in (ii). They were able to provide simple reasons as to why samatha is or is not the best type of meditation.

Although generally answered well some candidates often confused mala with mandala in response to question 6(a). In part (b) most candidates were able to state their own opinion about whether rupas serve any purpose for Buddhists. A large number developed their reasons by reference to specific rupas or features of the rupas. This produced some very good responses. Part (c) was well answered by the majority of candidates, who were able to give several reasons why the mantras are used by many Buddhists. A small minority of candidates mixed mantras up with mandalas or mudras. Care should be taken to differentiate between them. This part (d) question caused very few problems for candidates, most were able to give three reasons backing their view in (i) and three reasons for an

alternative view in (ii) about whether mudras are a distraction in meditation. Some candidates focused on mudras performed by the worshipper rather than the mudras on the buddharupa; this was an acceptable approach and often provided more developed reasons. A small minority of candidates mixed mudras up with mandalas or mantras as also noted in part (c).

Most candidates knew the glossary definition for vihara in question 7(a). This question generally gained full marks. In part (b) most candidates were able to give two simple reasons why living the Buddhist life might or might not be easy today. However, a majority were unable to develop these reasons. Candidates need to be prepared to expand on the simple reasons they give in part (b) questions as this is the only way to achieve full marks on this type of question. Part (c) was a question about the metta (loving kindness), that was attempted well by candidates of all abilities. Candidates were able to explore the various ways in which it was important to Buddhists, especially in laying the basis for the most actions that a Buddhist performs towards other people. The part (d) question needed candidates to evaluate a statement about whether the five additional pansils should be optional for monks and nuns. Most candidates were able to state their own opinion and give reasons for it in (i). A large number of candidates were also able to construct counter arguments. Some candidates mixed up the five additional pansils with the five pansils, so it is important candidates are aware of the difference.

Most candidates who answered this question 8(a) gained full marks. The language used also suggested that the glossary definition had been learnt by a large number of candidates. A few candidates listed the three jewels themselves and gained full marks for this alternative approach. In part (b) most candidates were able to state their own opinion as to whether karuna (compassion) is important for everyone. In contrast to the earlier question candidates did recognise this question was about "everyone" which enabled good answers to be constructed. This part (c) question was not generally well answered by candidates. Most candidates were only able to give basic descriptions of the work of one Buddhist organisation. Some candidates referred generally to a vihara, but did not focus on its work to relieve suffering. In answer to part (d) most candidates were able to respond to the quote but were not able to give coherent reasons as to why Buddhists are or are not responsible for community cohesion.

Summary

Candidates generally seemed well prepared by teachers and produced some very interesting answers to the questions posed. This indicated that they 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:

- Part (a) questions ask for either a definition or examples and learning the glossary definitions is one way to achieve full marks on this question. The question may require candidates to give examples of certain things covered by the key words, for example this year's question 2(a) asked candidates to name two of the five khandas.
- Part (b) questions only need one opinion (the candidate's) backed by two reasons. To gain full marks candidates should give two developed reasons, rather than simple reasons. One way of approaching this is for candidates to give their reason, write two separate reasons for it, each in a distinct paragraph and to develop each of the reasons with an example or a quote.
- Part (c) questions are 'Explain why...' or 'Explain how...' questions, and are testing AO1. Candidates can gain the higher mark within the level by writing coherently and therefore meeting the Quality of Written Communication descriptor in the level.
- Part (d) questions are divided into two parts (d)(i) asks the candidates to give their own opinion backed by reasons and (d)(ii) requires an alternative opinion backed by reasons, one of the reasons used in the whole of (d) must refer to Buddhism otherwise the candidate cannot go beyond 3 marks for the whole of (d).

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:

- 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 be able to access full marks for the question.
- The number of lines given is more than adequate for candidates to achieve maximum marks. 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.
- Candidates should be encouraged to spend about twenty minutes per question leaving ten minutes to check through work at the ends of the paper.

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