

Support for centres with AO2: some suggestions for teaching

NB the nature of this information is for developing AO2. What follows are NOT definitive answers – lines of argument are suggested in order to demonstrate the skills of AO2, but the WJEC strongly advises further development and for teachers and candidates to apply their own ideas and evaluation in response to the materials already provided.

For the skills of AO2 it is important to remember that what is being assessed are skills of evaluation and not simply knowledge and understanding of content. The six bullets for each Theme are listed beneath the AO1 content. They are NOT questions in themselves but rather indications of the areas of debate that may arise in a typical AO2 question statement. In addition, as AO1 material is studied the whole purpose of AO2 is to approach an understanding of the AO1 material in a critical and evaluative way that is very much a rigorous and academic discipline.

One of the most common features of a Principal Examiner's report is the regular comment that candidates just **present lists of views** in support of and/or challenging an argument often in response to a question expecting an evaluation. So, for instance, a typical mark scheme may list bullets of points to consider, but to repeat them does not demonstrate AO2. How the points are **USED** and **DEVELOPED** by the teacher and candidate to form critical analysis and evaluation is crucial and transforms any suggested material into academic debate that mirrors the AO2 Band descriptors.

There is nothing wrong with preparing your considerations and reflections of a topic in response to the 'Issues for evaluation and analysis' section of the Specification; however, what is important is **making sure that there is some form of personal analysis or commentary throughout the answer** that can then be **used to form a reasonable conclusion**.

Evaluation and analysis skills present themselves as a constant dialogue between the voice of the evidence or the views that you are selecting, and that of your own voice, with the end result of you having the final word that states clearly your position [conclusion(s)].

Buddhism

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Buddhism Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The first bullet point is to consider the relative importance of the Pali Canon in Buddhism.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The Pali Canon consists of the Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. It is therefore very important as being the key source of wisdom and authority for Theravada Buddhists. It also has a wider readership within Buddhism, and many Mahayana texts draw upon it.
2. The Patimokkha - in the Vinaya Pitaka - are recited today by the monastic sangha of Theravada every two weeks. Monks and nuns may also memorise the Patimokkha. This shows the continuing importance of the Pali Canon.
3. The Dhammapada – sayings of the Buddha – is one of the best-known and most popular Buddhist texts particularly amongst 'convert' Buddhists in the West. It is found in the minor writings of the Sutta Pitaka - therefore suggesting the continuing importance of the Pali Canon.
4. Much of the Pali Canon taken as a whole is of relevance only to the monastic sangha. This is true of the Vinaya Pitaka. In addition, the abstract and complex teaching in the Abhidhamma Pitaka means that it is only of relevance to monks, nuns and scholars who are pursuing dhamma studies at a higher level. This suggests, therefore, that it is of limited overall importance. However, many ideas in the Abidhamma are developed in Mahayana texts.
5. Buddhists of other traditions such as Mahayana, Vajrayana and Tibetan Buddhism give less importance to the Pali Canon and instead focus on other sources of wisdom and authority such as the Lotus Sutra or the Heart Sutra.
6. Buddhists who follow Pure Land, Nichiren and Zen Buddhism would attach little importance to the Pali Canon as, in order to achieve enlightenment or rebirth, what is required is recitation of the nembutsu, daimoku or the sudden realization made possible through the use of koans.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. How reliable a source is the Pali Canon given that it was written down some 300 years after the death of the Buddha?
2. Conversely, to what extent should the oral tradition between the death of the Buddha and the written form of the Pali Canon be relied upon as preserving key parts of the teaching?
3. Does the fact that key Buddhist teaching on the four Noble Truths is found in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta from the Pali Canon make the Canon of vital importance to all Buddhists?
4. Most Buddhists are united in going for refuge to the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha. Since the Pali Canon provides the source for information about the historical Buddha, the teaching of the Buddha and the rules for the sangha, does this not make the Pali Canon of absolute importance to the majority of Buddhists?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The Pali Canon is of importance mainly to the monastic sangha and has helped preserve Buddhist beliefs and practises over the centuries.
2. Buddhists who are laypeople have very little need of the whole of the Pali Canon and so its overall importance is limited.
3. The Pali Canon is only important for Theravada Buddhists and has no real importance for other Buddhists.
4. All teachings are 'but fingers pointing to the moon' – so only of provisional importance, or relevant only to particular periods of history.

Buddhism

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Buddhism Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The second bullet point is to consider the significance of the Vinaya for the sangha.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The Vinaya's significance can be seen in that it is regarded as the oldest part of the Tripitaka with the Buddha himself establishing rules for the Sangha.
2. The belief that the Patimokkha have been recited since the time of the Buddha – that is before any of the Tripitaka was committed to writing – provides a direct link for the monastic sangha with the historical Buddha himself.
3. The Patimokkha - in the Vinaya Pitaka - are recited today by the monastic sangha of Theravada every two weeks. Monks and nuns may also memorise the Patimokkha. This shows the continuing significance of the Vinaya. Through the course of over 2500 years, Buddhism has survived due to the continuation of the monastic sangha which in large part has been maintained due to close observance of the Vinaya Pitaka.
4. The lay sangha do not need the full Vinaya for their own needs.
5. Mahayana developments valued the details of the Vinaya less – in many Mahayana schools monks and nuns marry, (and are sometimes called priests).
6. Triratna describes 'commitment' (i.e. beliefs) as more important than 'lifestyle' (the Vinaya directs the lifestyle of monastics).

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. How useful is the Vinaya Pitaka for the sangha as a whole – that is for lay people who are not monks or nuns?
2. Has the Vinaya Pitaka outlived its usefulness in terms of the sangha in the 21st century and in light of convert Buddhist practice in the West?
3. Does the Vinaya Pitaka focus so strongly on the monastic tradition and the Patimokkha that there is no room for key developments such as those found in Socially Engaged Buddhism?
4. Do the Patimokkha in the Vinaya Pitaka reinforce what might be seen as misogyny given the 227 rules for monks and the 311 for nuns?
5. Does the Vinaya Pitaka remain an invaluable yardstick which preserves the sangha from corruption and which maintains a pure ideal to which all Buddhists might aspire?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The Vinaya Pitaka's significance has been proven since it has withstood the test of time and is still relevant to the monastic sangha today.
2. Conversely, the Vinaya Pitaka has served its usefulness and a new approach is needed for the monastic life in the 21st century and for 'convert' Buddhists. The Vinaya is deeply patriarchal, and therefore profoundly problematic.
3. As with any sacred text or source of wisdom, given its age, the Vinaya remains an invaluable and thus significant work of reference for all the sangha.

Buddhism

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Buddhism Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The third bullet point is to consider the teachings in Mahayana Sutras as representative of reality.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Taken as a whole, the Mahayana Sutras portray a universe of demons, kings, asuras, devas, celestial bodhisattvas, multiple realms etc. which is not representative of reality as understood in the scientific paradigm.
2. The Mahayana Sutras describe a tier of bodhisattvas whose aid can be called upon which detract from focus on a person achieving enlightenment through their own efforts.
3. The Sukhavati Pure Land Sutra with its account of the creation of the Pure Land and other Buddha world does not appear to be at all representative of reality as understood in any scientific paradigm except perhaps the parallel world theory in quantum mechanics,
4. The Heart Sutra's explanation that all is empty (sunya) of inherent existence (svabhava) might be seen as consistent with a scientific understanding of reality as for example via particle physics.
5. To be fully representative of reality, there arguably has to be some concept of origination with regard to the universe such as the Big Bang theory – this is wholly lacking in the Mahayana Sutras.
6. The question might arise of what is meant by the term 'reality' in the first place, and whether there is a category mistake in trying to find such a Western concept in Buddhist texts.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. How far should the Mahayana Sutras as a whole be read as metaphorical/mythical accounts which are not concerned to represent reality?
2. To what extent would the Mahayana Sutras survive the type of scrutiny suggested by the Kalama Sutta in terms of their approach to reality?
3. Does the Heart Sutra stand apart in its insistence on sunya and is in this way fully representative of reality as understood from a scientific perspective?
4. How far could it be argued that the Mahayana Sutras simply describe a spiritual reality which exists but which is outside of the limits of empirical research?
5. To what extent are some key passages from the Mahayana Sutras – such as the Parable of the Burning House – clearly representative of reality?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Ultimately asking how representative of reality the Mahayana Sutras might be is attempting to do what is questioned in the Parable of the Poisoned Arrow i.e. idle speculation.
2. The Heart Sutra and the Lotus Sutta are both central to Mahayana Buddhists and are often chanted in their entirety or in extract form. For those who do this, the Sutras are clearly representative of reality.
3. As a result of the development of rationalism and the scientific paradigm, the Mahayana Sutras cannot possibly represent reality.
4. The sutras can be readily demythologized – bodhisattvas representing the working of compassion in the universe, for example.
5. If Nagarjuna's notion of the equality and mutuality of nirvana and samsara is accepted, reality is unlikely to conform to unenlightened, discriminative thinking such as that of the scientific paradigm

Buddhism

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Buddhism Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fourth bullet point is to consider skilful means as a key to understanding Buddhism's diversity

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Skilful means makes clear that a wide variety of techniques can achieve the purpose of enlightenment.
2. The Parable of the Burning House shows that skilful means are key because it underlines how the urgency of the human condition and the distracted state of sentient beings requires a variety of vehicles to achieve enlightenment.
3. The Parable of the Burning House indicates that the Buddha's teaching is provisional and this explains Buddhism's diversity.
4. Conversely, ekayana (one path/vehicle) would seem to indicate that ultimately there is no diversity since all paths lead into the one bodhisattva path.
5. Skilful means helps elucidate the saying from the Shurangama Sutta that none of the diverse paths is the truth as such, but all are like fingers pointing to the moon.
6. Conversely, more mundane factors may be seen as key to Buddhism's diversity such as the focus on compassion and greater inclusion in Mahayana as opposed to more monastic Theravada.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. To what extent is the diversity within Buddhism caused not by skilful means, but by different goals such as enlightenment, compassion and bringing an end to suffering?
2. How far is the understanding of skilful means an accurate reflection of the teaching in the Parable of the Burning House?
3. Is the Theravada understanding of skilful means – shaping the dhamma to be appropriate to the audience – at odds with the Mahayana understanding – that the dhamma is provisional and any/all skilful means to achieve enlightenment are permissible?
4. Is the key to understanding Buddhism's diversity to be found in the disputes and splits within Buddhism from the time of the second Council at Vesali onwards?
5. Is the concept of skilful means a development of the empirical approach suggested by the Kalama Sutta and by the Parable of the Raft in the Sutta Pitaka (Majjhima Nikaya 22)?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The Parable of the Burning House and the use of the different vehicles fully explains the diversity within Buddhism as being due to skilful means.
2. There remains a tension between the path and the goal and whether different paths can lead to the same goal e.g. Pure Land and Tibetan Buddhism.
3. The Buddha from the outset adapted and adopted a variety of methods to help all sentient beings achieve enlightenment, and as with the Parable of the Poisoned Arrow, it is important that the focus remains on the destination and not on the various routes.

Buddhism

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Buddhism Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fifth bullet point is to consider the relative success of Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh in ensuring the relevance of Buddhism in the modern world.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh are seen by many as the key faces and voices of Buddhism ensuring that it remains relevant in the modern world.
2. Through international travel, interviews and by making themselves entirely accessible to all forms of modern media, the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have ensured the continuing relevance of Buddhism.
3. As authors of numerous best-selling populist books on Buddhism, both the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have brought Buddhism to a mass audience including many young people.
4. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have given Buddhism a platform on the world stage in political/social matters e.g. peace and the environment.. They are the most well-known representatives of socially engaged Buddhism.
5. Some would argue that conversely, the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have only ensured that a very simplistic and populist form of Buddhism - lacking in depth and substance - has become acceptable in the modern world.
6. The beliefs of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh are only representative of a minority within Buddhism. They have therefore not made Buddhism as a whole, relevant in the modern world.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. To what extent are the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh expert exponents of skilful means in their presentation of Buddhism?
2. Regardless of how representative they are of Buddhism as a whole, are the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh making Buddhism relevant in the modern world by being fingers pointing at the moon?
3. Whilst they represent Tibetan Buddhism and Vietnamese Thien (Zen), how far are the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh successful in making the tenets of Theravada or Pure Land Buddhism relevant in the modern world?
4. Could the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh be seen as outstandingly successful in making Buddhism relevant in the modern world because of the way they connect and communicate e.g. the Dalai Lama and Russell Brand, Thich Nhat Hanh and Oprah Winfrey?
5. How far are the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh engaging and attractive media celebrities rather than advocates of Buddhism in the modern world?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Whilst only fully representative of their own Buddhist traditions, the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have been very successful in making key Buddhist teaching accessible in the modern world.
2. The modern media world requires a simple message and an engaging messenger both of which are provided by the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh.
3. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh are both very recognizable figures in the modern world, but that does not mean that what they have to say regarding Buddhism is fully listened to or understood.

Buddhism

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Buddhism Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The sixth bullet point is to consider the extent to which the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have developed new and innovative expressions of Buddhism.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have not developed new and innovative expressions of Buddhism – rather they have used skilful means and adapted traditional Buddhism to fit in with the modern world.
2. Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama have been leading proponents of Socially Engaged Buddhism which is aimed at giving to Buddhism a new and innovative expression.
3. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have only given new and innovative expressions of Tibetan Buddhism and Thien (Zen) – not of Theravada, Pure Land or Nichiren Buddhism.
4. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have only developed new and innovative expressions in a very small area of Buddhism e.g. mindfulness, meditation, the search for happiness.
5. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have simply presented traditional expressions of Buddhism to a modern world which has not really heard about them before. They seem new and innovative whereas in reality they are not.
6. New and innovative expressions of Buddhism require a new understanding of what is key to Buddhism. Through their understanding of kindness, compassion and non-harming, this has been achieved by the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Rather than new and innovative expressions of Buddhism, have the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh only presented a very much simplified expression of Buddhism for the masses?
2. Simply by making the message of Buddhism accessible to the widest possibly global audience, have not the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh indubitably presented a new and innovative expression of Buddhism?
3. Is there very much that is actually Buddhist in what the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have written and said in terms of the importance of smiling, walking and being kind?
4. Are new and innovative expressions of Buddhism to be found elsewhere - not in what individuals have to say, but in movements such as Socially Engaged Buddhism?
5. Should the two figures be separated in terms of what they have achieved and first place by far be given to the Dalai Lama who, for example, has founded the Mind and Life Institute which is a new and innovative expression of Buddhism, and is de facto leader of Tibetan Buddhists of a number of schools?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh are effective communicators of Buddhism, but there is nothing new or innovative in what they have to teach.
2. The shift from abstract and metaphysical ideas such as karma, rebirth and even enlightenment, towards kindness, compassion and non-harm is a new and innovative expression of Buddhism for which the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh are responsible.
3. Both the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have simply continued to use skilful means and to provide more fingers pointing to the moon.

Theme 2: Significant historical developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The first bullet point is to consider extent to which Japanese Buddhism is unique.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Japanese Buddhism is unique partly because of the influence of Daoism and Confucianism on Chinese forms which were exported to Japan, and the influence of Shinto on the development of Buddhism in Japan.. It is also unique because of the way in which it became aligned with different strands of society in imperial Japan e.g. Tendai, Shingon and then Pure Land, Nichiren and Zen.
2. Japanese Buddhism is unique because of the way in which it aimed to make Buddhism have a mass appeal that was not reliant on the monastic sangha i.e. the populism of Pure Land, Nichiren and Soto Zen.
3. Whilst there might be some unique aspects of Japanese Buddhism, most of the beliefs, teachings and practices can be seen to have similarities with Buddhism in other countries e.g. chanting mantras, focused forms of meditation, bodhisattvas etc.
4. Japanese Pure Land Buddhism is unique because of its emphasis on Other Power rather than Self-Power and its belief in Amida/Amitabha Buddha who can be called upon for help and for rebirth in the Pure Land.
5. Japanese Nichiren Buddhism is unique because of its focus on one text - the Lotus Sutra - rather than on a range of the many other Buddhist texts and sources of wisdom.
6. Japanese Zen Buddhism is unique because of its advocacy of the possibility of enlightenment (satori) being achieved instantly by taking a leap into an intuitive understanding of reality.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. To what extent is Buddhism's enculturation in Japan any more or any less unique than, for example, Buddhism's enculturation in Tibet and its absorption of Bon?
2. Are some aspects of Japanese Buddhism – such as Pure Land and the recitation of the Nembutsu – identifiably Buddhist?
3. How far is Nichiren Buddhism unique given its focus not on the Buddha or on a Bodhisattva but on the Moji-mandala gohonzon containing the daimoku?
4. To what extent is Zen Buddhism unique in that it puts almost exclusive emphasis on meditation ? Zen monks and nuns spend a considerable number of hours each day mediating. Whilst meditation is found elsewhere in the Buddhist world, it is not to the extent as found in Zen.
5. Is Japanese Buddhism in its essentials very much like other expressions of Buddhism as can be seen through the numerous daibutsu constructed in Japan since the 7th century?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Japanese Buddhism is unique because there is a clear demarcation between the different Buddhist schools which is not found everywhere.
2. Each of the three forms of Buddhism – Pure Land, Nichiren and Zen – have elements of typical Buddhist beliefs, teaching and practice.
3. More than any other form of Buddhism, Pure Land and Nichiren are unique because they aim to make the path to enlightenment simple, clear and wholly accessible to everyone
4. All Japanese forms of Buddhism trace their philosophical roots to Nagarjuna, who is sometimes described as the second Buddha

Theme 2: Significant historical developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The second bullet point is to consider the importance of koan, nembutsu and daimoku as expressions of Buddhist teachings.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The koan (Zen), nembutsu (Pure Land) and daimoku (Nichiren) taken together are valid expressions of Japanese Buddhism and can be seen in terms of ekayana (one path/vehicle) as all seeking enlightenment.
2. The koan is an important expression of Buddhist teaching as it enables the mind to take a leap into an intuitive understanding of reality and thus bring about satori (enlightenment).
3. The nembutsu is an important expression of Buddhist teaching as it enables the person to be reborn in the Pure Land from where enlightenment can be achieved or Buddhahood, meaning that other sentient beings can be helped to achieve enlightenment.
4. The daimoku is an important expression of Buddhist teaching insofar as it enables a person to take refuge in the Lotus Sutra which in Nichiren is regarded as the culmination of Buddhist teaching and the one yana. Chanting may help to bring about enlightenment.
5. The koan, nembutsu and daimoku are not expressions of Buddhist teachings as they aim to bring about enlightenment in easier ways than those practiced by the Buddha or Theravada: following the dasa sila and the Noble Eightfold Path or achieving the paramitas and the Bodhisattva path of Mahayana.
6. The koan, nembutsu and daimoku each in their own way appear to contradict the Buddha's final saying that perfection should be attained through one's own diligence and self-discipline. The nembutsu, for example, appears to rely on an external power – that of Amida Buddha.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. To what extent are the koan, nembutsu and daimokudaimoku further and valid expressions of skilful means in Buddhism?
2. How far do the nembutsu and daimokudaimoku reflect the favoured Buddhist tradition of reciting mantras in order to gain punna?
3. Might the koan - if linked with zazen - be seen simply as a further refinement of the process of samatha and vipassana meditation in providing a person with insight into reality?
4. Can the koan, nembutsu and daimoku only be fully understood against the background of Buddhists today living in the age of mappo and thus requiring easy practice to achieve enlightenment?
5. Are the koan, nembutsu and daimoku simply evidence of how syncretism (the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions/cultures/schools of thought) worked when Buddhism spread outside India?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The koan, nembutsu and daimoku are each valid expressions of Buddhist teachings as they focus on recognizing one's present flawed condition and on seeking a way of enlightenment.
2. The koan, nembutsu and daimoku are very far removed from anything taught by the historical Buddha and their connection with Buddhist teachings is tenuous.
3. The koan, nembutsu and daimoku are all valid expressions of Mahayana Buddhist teachings which focus on sunyata, skilful means and ekayana as found in the Lotus Sutra.

Theme 2: Significant historical developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The third bullet point is to consider the extent to which there is a close relationship between Buddhism and science.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. That there is a close relationship between Buddhism and science can be shown by the fact that Buddhism can be understood as being based on empirical data rather than on blind faith as explained by the Kalama Sutta.
2. This relationship can also be seen in what are considered to be scientifically proven benefits of meditation.
3. Teachings regarding sunyata that form is emptiness and emptiness is form, and into anicca that everything is impermanent have been seen as entirely compatible with research into sub-atomic physics.
4. Conversely, the close relationship is based on a selective understanding of Buddhism. It is contradicted by Asian Buddhist worldviews populated with a diversity of beings and realms.
5. The origins of Buddhism are to be found in a pre-scientific age with a very limited understanding of what is understood by science today. Therefore, there cannot be a close relationship.
6. There is required 'belief' and 'faith' for all Buddhists in enlightenment for which there is no scientific proof.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. To what extent is the overall lack of requirement for creedal belief in Buddhism outside of the three refuges which gives it the appearance of having a close relationship with science?
2. Could it be argued that the doctrine of pratitya-samutpada – dependent origination – provides strong evidence that Buddhism has a very close relationship to science?
3. How far could it be argued that the Dalai Lama's Mind and Life Institute and his encouragement of neuroscience suggests that there is a close relationship between Buddhism and science?
4. Is it the lack of belief in a creator God which impresses people with the belief that – unlike other world religions – there is a close relationship between Buddhism and science?
5. Could it be argued that the concept of anatta strengthens the relationship between Buddhism and science because science generally accepts the notion that the 'self' is simply a linguistic construct?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The close relationship between Buddhism and science is more apparent than real.
2. Buddhism is unique compared to some other world religions since it has not presented objections to scientific discovery or research.
3. Certain aspects of Buddhism are of great significance in terms of its close relationship with science in particular meditation/mindfulness and brain functionality.

Theme 2: Significant historical developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fourth bullet point is to consider Ways in which scientific worldview and Buddhism are incompatible.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Some Buddhist worldviews populated with a diversity of beings and realms are incompatible with a scientific worldview.
2. Key Buddhist texts such as the Lotus Sutra and Sukhavati Pure Land Sutra present worldviews which are incompatible with science.
3. There is no compatibility at all between the scientific worldview and key Buddhist beliefs such as rebirth and kamma.
4. Conversely, the pragmatic approach found in the Kalama Sutta presents words from the Buddha himself encouraging what has become a scientific world view.
5. Buddhist practices such as samatha have a noticeable psychological and physiological effect and as such are entirely compatible with the empirical research required by a scientific worldview.
6. Buddhism is compatible with a scientific worldview as evidenced by the Dalai Lama's encouragement of science and his founding of the Mind and Life Institute.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Whilst Theravada might seem compatible with a scientific worldview, can the same be said for Pure Land Buddhism with its belief in Amida appearing at the moment of death, entrance to a Pure Land etc.?
2. Does the general lack of supernatural miracles in the life of the historical Buddha indicate its compatibility with science? According to the Majjhima Nikāya he is able to do supernatural miracles, but 'despises' them and enjoins his followers not to indulge in them as vain displays.
3. If having a scientific worldview is dependent on empirical research then could it be argued that Buddhism is compatible with a scientific worldview given what is taught in the Kalama Sutta?
4. Could it be argued that whilst philosophical Buddhism might be seen as compatible with a scientific worldview this is not Buddhism as generally understood by the majority of its practitioners?
5. Whilst it is argued that Buddhist meditation and mindfulness have scientifically measurable effects, to what extent are such findings still relatively untested and unproven?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Buddhism should be seen as being reliant on a belief/faith system which is incompatible with a scientific worldview.
2. It has to be recognised that there are many 'Buddhisms' and whilst some are compatible with a scientific worldview, others are not. A 'psychologised' reading of the six realms is possible (and common amongst western converts).
3. Buddhism is fundamentally incompatible with a scientific worldview because it has nothing to say on the fundamental question of the origins of the universe which, as most scientists would accept, involves acceptance of the Big Bang Theory.

Theme 2: Significant historical developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fifth bullet point is to consider the legitimacy of Western presentations of Buddhism as atheistic and secular.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Presenting Buddhism as atheistic and secular is legitimate given that there is no belief in an overarching creator God.
2. The essential teaching of Buddhism as found in the three lakshanas and the Noble Eightfold path can be regarded as atheistic and secular since there is no mention at all of God.
3. Presentations of Buddhism as atheistic and secular are entirely consistent with the teaching found in the Kalama Sutta.
4. Whilst the teaching of the historical Buddha might be seen as atheistic and secular, he also taught the concept of karma leading to rebirth. The concept of rebirth requires a religious metaphysic.
5. Pure Land Buddhism in particular with its reliance on the outside agency and power of Amida/Amitabha Buddha cannot be described as atheistic and secular.
6. It is only philosophical Buddhism which might have elements of apparent atheism and secularism in it. As practiced by the majority of Buddhists, it has all the identifiable features of any other world religion. The parable of the Poison arrow does not given negative answers to metaphysical questions (i.e. it does not say there is no God). It simply says those questions are not worth asking.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. To what extent is Batchelor's presentation of Buddhism as atheistic and secular an accurate presentation of Buddhism?
2. Could the Heart Sutra with its teaching that all is empty of inherent existence and that form is emptiness and emptiness is form be regarded as atheistic and secular?
3. How far is the concept of anicca atheistic and secular, since logically it precludes the existence of any fixed and eternal deity?
4. Have Western presentations of Buddhism distorted Buddhism to fit within an atheistic and secular spectrum?
5. Might it be argued that in its original form, Buddhism was entirely atheistic and secular but that over time and in order to distinguish itself from Jainism and Hinduism, it took on the attributes of religion? Conversely, could it be argued that Buddhism was religious, but in order to appeal in the west it has to be repackaged as rational?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Batchelor presents a legitimate argument that Buddhism does not require any religious trappings and is in essence atheistic and secular.
- 2... Presentations of Buddhism as atheistic and secular are legitimate as long as it realised that these are like fingers pointing at the moon.
- 3... Buddhism does require faith or serene commitment (sradhdha) to things outside the realm of the empirical such as bodhisattvas. This cannot be seen as atheistic and secular.

Theme 2: Significant historical developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus

The sixth bullet point is to consider the question of whether Buddhism is a religion.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. In all its characteristics, Buddhism presents Smart's seven dimensions of religion: practical and ritual, experiential and emotional, narrative or mythic, doctrinal and philosophical, ethical and legal, social and institutional, material.
2. Post mortem existence is, arguably, an entirely religious concept. Buddhism clearly teaches samsara and rebirth indicating that it is a religion.
3. Apart from some Western 'convert' Buddhists, the vast majority of Buddhists see Buddhism as a religion which impacts deeply on their spiritual lives. This religious affirmation of Buddhism by its practitioners cannot be lightly ignored.
4. The defining characteristic for a religion is belief in an omnipotent creator God. Buddhism has no such belief.
5. In general, religion's concern is with the person's ontological existence which is linked to an immortal soul created by God and destined for eternal life. This is entirely lacking in Buddhism which demonstrates it is not a religion.
6. Religions teach that a person's behaviour is subject to judgment by God who then determines their reward and punishment. By contrast in Buddhism, karma and samsara teach that this is wholly determined by the person.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Might it be argued that the question about Buddhism being a religion or not is related to one of the avyakata since the Buddha refused to state whether the world is eternal or not?
2. If in all its key features Buddhism appears to be a religion, then does that not make it a religion?
3. Does the question raise the problem of using 'Buddhism' in the singular when in reality this is a Western construct covering a wide range of 'Buddhisms' some of which are religions and some of which are not?
4. To what extent could the Buddhist practice of taking refuge be seen as a religious one in that Buddhists look outside themselves for comfort, reassurance and hope?
5. How far could it be argued that the Buddha himself is regarded and treated in exactly the same way in puja, as other religions regard and treat God?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The issue of whether Buddhism is a religion has only been raised due to the influence of Western secular humanism.
2. Buddhism only became a 'religion' over time as a result of competing with other faith systems in places where it became established.
3. Trikaya (three 'bodies' of the Buddha) and belief in Vairocana Buddha as the primordial Buddha convey all that religions teach about an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God.

Theme 3: Significant social developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The first bullet point is to consider the extent to which Buddhism's openness means it is in danger of losing its own identity.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The history of Buddhism is one of syncretism in that it has always adopted, adapted and absorbed other belief systems with which it comes in contact e.g. Bon in Tibet.
2. Buddhism has increasingly become a broad umbrella term which covers so many variants of belief that its identity is in danger of being lost.
3. Buddhism can be seen – particularly in the West – as a non-exclusivist religion which means that people of other faiths might regard themselves as quasi-Buddhist without subscribing to key Buddhist concepts.
4. The Parable of the Burning House, the concept of ekayana and the analogy of fingers pointing at the moon suggest that Buddhism's identity will always remain intact in terms of its focus on compassion and enlightenment.
5. Buddhism is not in danger of losing its own identity as it maintains its coherence through the refuges: the Buddha, the dhamma and the sangha.
6. Many Buddhists would accept that openness can only bring benefits as it means the possibility of learning what is good in other religions – as found in Rock Edict 12 of the Emperor Ashoka - so that there can be a cross-fertilisation of ideas.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. If Buddhism is rooted in the historical Buddha and is preserved in sacred texts and sources of wisdom of authority does this mean that it cannot be in danger of losing its identity?
2. Is the problem of Buddhism's identity more an issue of how different Buddhist traditions might seem to be at variance with each other rather than being an issue of openness?
3. Could it be argued – using the Parable of the Raft (Majjhima Nikaya 22) - that Buddhism does not seek to have an 'identity' as such since it is only one means among many to achieve an ultimate goal?
4. Might it be argued that in a multi-faith and pluralist society, Buddhist leaders are reluctant to state any clear boundaries between Buddhism and other belief systems, and that this makes it in danger of losing its own identity?
5. To what extent might it be argued that this is not an issue at all, as in some respects Buddhism is not sufficiently open to outside influences but instead tries to preserve an outdated and conservative identity?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. If openness is defined as lack of restriction and accessibility, then this can never harm the identity of Buddhism as it is what Buddhism aspires towards.
2. It is precisely Buddhism's openness to outside influence which has made it so successful in moving from India to the rest of the world.
3. Through being so open, Buddhism is losing its own identity and is becoming bland and anodyne in teaching generalities about compassion and meditation.

Theme 3: Significant social developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The second bullet point is to consider the value of experience compared to other potential sources of authority in Buddhism.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The Kalama Sutta encourages each person to undertake a searching, pragmatic and empirical approach to Buddhism which does not require or rely upon any source of authority apart from personal experience.
2. All potential sources of authority in Buddhism are outweighed by experience since each person has to show their own diligence, follow their own path and ultimately be their own refuge. It was the Historic Buddha's own experience – which drove his search for and attainment of Awakening.
3. The value of removing one's own dosa (hatred), lobha (greed) and moha (delusion/ignorance) through personal experience has far more value than any other potential source of authority in Buddhism. The Buddha's last words were "Behold, O monks, this is my last advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation."
4. It is only experience which provides a person with an understanding of the challenges of skilful means and this has the most authority for Buddhists.
5. Sacred texts might be regarded as having ultimate authority by some Buddhists since personal experience can only give limited guidance which lacks depth, insight and expertise.
6. Some Buddhists might argue that an instructor – be it a senior monk or nun, a lama or a Zen master – has much more authority than personal experience.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Should Buddhists follow the example of the Buddha who spent his formative years rejecting received authority and focusing on personal experience?
2. Might it be argued that potential sources of authority in Buddhism have limited value since they are only amongst many fingers pointing at the moon which might help but might hinder?
3. Is it only personal experience which is valuable since all other forms of authority - such as found in sacred texts – only have provisional value?
4. Could it be said that personal experience alone is insufficient and that guidance is always needed from other sources of authority?
5. To what extent are any sources of authority in Buddhism only provisional since what is ultimately required is that the person applies and adapts them through life based on their own personal experience?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Buddhism is not based on authoritative dogmas about what should or should not be done or believed, but rather on the person finding all of this out for themselves.
2. The wisdom of Buddhist practitioners should have greater authority since it is they who can guide and direct personal experience.
3. It is idealistic and unrealistic to suggest that personal experience should have more value than significant and recognised sources of wisdom and authority.

Theme 3: Significant social developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The third bullet point is to consider the unique nature of British Buddhism in comparison with Buddhism found in other countries.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. British Buddhism is unique because as a minority religion (2011 census 0.4% of the population) it attempts to place Buddhism within the context of Britain which might be termed as Christian (2011 census 58.8% of the population).
2. Whilst 'convert' British Buddhism may be said to have a unique nature such as Triratna, the same cannot be said of 'heritage' British Buddhism such as Amaravati or the Soka Gakkai International Nichiren centre in Taplow.
3. 'Convert' British Buddhism which finds expression in Triratna is unique as the concept of the monastic sangha is largely rejected, chants are in English, and the dhamma is presented in a simplified and accessible form.
4. 'Convert British Buddhism' is unique because the term includes exponents and followers of secular/atheistic Buddhism such as Stephen Batchelor who would not be considered truly Buddhist in other countries.
5. Some forms of Buddhism in Britain may not be 'unique' because they try hard to replicate all the Asian forms and ceremonies such as Amaravati Monastery – and the International Zen Association of the UK.
6. British Buddhism is unique because it has to find its expression largely amongst lay people given that there are very few viharas, Buddhist temples and monasteries in the UK.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. How far is British Buddhism similar to Buddhism in other Western European countries which also have a mix of 'heritage' and 'convert' Buddhists?
2. To what extent might British Buddhism be seen as unique in comparison with some other parts of the Buddhist world, given that it is entirely egalitarian, and women have an equal position to men?
3. Is it worth noting the distinction made by some Buddhists groups themselves with regards to 'British Buddhism and Buddhism in Britain'? Triratna is referred to as a form of British Buddhism, whereas the London Buddhist Vihara is seen as Sri-Lankan Buddhism in Britain.
4. Could it be argued that British Buddhism is unique because in comparison with Buddhism in other countries, it has to exist alongside increasing secularisation and increasing numbers of those who are Humanists?
5. Is British Buddhism no more and no less unique than Buddhism found in other countries since Buddhism always adapts itself to the context of the country in which it is found?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Given that within 'heritage' British Buddhism Buddhist beliefs, teachings and practices are largely preserved it cannot be regarded as unique.
2. 'Convert' British Buddhism is historically very recent and so it is still in the process of establishing its own unique identity.
3. British Buddhism is unique because its nature is being formed by new factors ranging from secularism to the green movement, from gender equality to LGBTQ rights.

Theme 3: Significant social developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fourth bullet point is to consider comparative legitimacy of 'convert' Buddhism with 'heritage' Buddhism.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The issue stated above has to be rejected since all forms of Buddhism have legitimacy when they ascribe even in the most general terms to the tenets of the Buddha.
2. 'Convert' Buddhism may not have the same legitimacy as 'heritage' Buddhism because the medium of dhamma instruction is in English which through translation simplifies key but complex terms such as 'anicca'.
3. Whilst the widest range of beliefs, teaching and practices may be preserved in 'heritage' Buddhism, it is only a simplified and condensed range which is possible within 'convert' Buddhism.
4. 'Convert' Buddhists in Britain do not have easy access to the monastic sangha which has preserved traditions, or to monks, nuns, lamas, Zen masters etc. This raises questions as to its comparative legitimacy.
5. 'Heritage' Buddhism places everything in context - such as meditation within the context of the moral life, following the dasa sila and the Noble Eightfold Path, achieving the paramitas and the Bodhisattva path of Mahayana. However, 'convert' Buddhism may take things out of context in order to find only what suits the individual and their milieu (personal social environment) best.
6. Teachings such as sunyata and skilful means suggest that all forms of Buddhism have legitimacy if their goal is to alleviate suffering and to show the path to enlightenment.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Could it be argued that 'convert' Buddhists have a great deal of legitimacy since they have made the choice to become Buddhist rather than just inheriting that belief from their families as is the case with 'heritage' Buddhists?
2. Is 'convert' Buddhism in Britain no more and no less legitimate than 'heritage' Buddhism which was adopted and adapted in Tibet, China and Japan?
3. Has 'convert' Buddhism sacrificed some of the key aspects of 'heritage' Buddhism in order to give itself populist appeal?
4. To what extent is 'convert' Buddhism focused simply on meditation, mindfulness and popular Buddhist religious artefacts?
5. How far could it be argued that some forms of 'heritage' Buddhism have little legitimacy from the perspective of a 21st century Western liberal democracy built on the foundations of scientific discovery, human rights and capitalism?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Throughout its history there has never been 'Buddhism' only 'Buddhisms' and 'convert' Buddhism is a continuation of that history.
2. It is too early to state whether or not 'convert' Buddhism has comparative legitimacy because in Britain it is still in the process of establishing a significant presence and a significant voice.
3. 'Convert' Buddhism has comparatively little legitimacy since it has shown itself too ready to adapt itself, and be limited by the requirements of a pluralist, multi-faith and capitalist society.

Theme 3: Significant social developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fifth bullet point is to consider the comparative significance of features which contribute to the popularity of Buddhism in Britain.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The popularity of Buddhism in Britain is due to the continued exposure that holiday-makers both young and old have had to countries such as Thailand where Buddhism is the dominant religion.
2. Buddhist iconography - particularly in the form of the Buddha rupa which appears in a huge variety of forms from garden ornaments to indoor objets d'art - has played a significant part in making Buddhism identifiable and popular.
3. Mass media – particularly the internet - is a significant feature which has made Buddhism popular in Britain since people can have instant access to all schools of Buddhism, Buddhist teachers and Buddhist sacred texts and sources of wisdom and authority, which were previously unattainable.
4. Conversely, the most significant feature in the popularity of Buddhism in Britain is due to Britain being a multi-faith and pluralist society.
5. The most significant feature in the popularity of Buddhism in Britain is that unlike all the other major world religions, belief in an omnipotent creator God is not required.
6. The most significant feature in the popularity of Buddhism in Britain is its apparent rationalism, emphasis on self-reliance and its teaching that enlightenment can occur in this life.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. To what extent is the popularity of Buddhism less to do with its teachings and more to do with an idealistic and limited concept of Buddhism as just being about exotic images and meditation?
2. Whilst Buddhism may be popular in abstract terms, how far has this made a significant impact in terms of 'convert' Buddhism?
3. Does the popularity of Buddhism in Britain have more to do with the way in which it provides an alternative to conventional religions which might be seen as dogmatic and prescriptive?
4. How far has the increased opportunity to study Buddhism in schools and colleges at examination level been a significant feature in its popularity in the Britain?
5. Could it be argued that travel is the key feature in making Buddhism popular whereby individuals such as Lama Shenpen Hookham or Sangharakshita were able to study for a number of years in Tibet and India before bringing Buddhism back to Wales and England?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The most significant feature of Buddhism's popularity is its apparently secular nature and the possibility of embracing atheistic humanist Buddhism.
2. Buddhism's popularity in Britain is due to the fact that it appears to provide clear and serious answers to spiritual questions which are not provided by conventional religions.
3. Buddhism's popularity in Britain is due to the fact that it is seen as exotic and is understood in an idealistic way which fits in with the zeitgeist of the age.

Theme 3: Significant social developments in religious thought

Buddhism Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The sixth bullet point is to consider the extent to which Buddhism aligns with feminism.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Buddhism is fully aligned with feminism as it teaches that all human sentient beings are able to achieve enlightenment regardless of gender.
2. Unlike other world religions, Buddhism has a focus on what might be termed feminist virtues such as community, compassion, connection, peace, balance, interdependence, etc. Patriarchy is a source of suffering for women (and men) and if Buddhism's main aim is to counter suffering, it must align itself with feminism.
3. Particularly within Mahayana, Buddhism is fully aligned with feminism with regard to dominant and positive iconography and belief in bodhisattvas such as Guanyin, the female form of Avalokitesvara.
4. Conversely, Buddhism is not aligned with feminism because the Buddha himself reflected the misogyny of his time in his reluctance to ordain Mahapajapati and her women companions as nuns.
5. Theravada Buddhism is not aligned with feminism as it preserves the patriarchy of Buddhism found in the lack of recognition given to nuns and in the Eight Garudhammas – particularly the first. Also Dragon King's daughter in Lotus Sutra, where both feminist and patriarchal readings possible. It is not as simple as Theravada=anti-feminist and Mahayana = feminist.
6. The Patimokkha in the Vinaya Pitaka suggest that Buddhism is not aligned with feminism given the 227 rules for monks and the 311 for nuns.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. To what extent is the issue of Buddhism being aligned with feminism more a case of the culture in which Buddhism finds expression rather than in Buddhist beliefs?
2. How far is Buddhism through its exposure to the West moving rapidly through the work of Sakyadhita to align itself fully with feminism?
3. Can Buddhism ever fully align itself with feminism given the relative lack of opportunity for women to achieve significant and visible leadership roles in the different Buddhist traditions?
4. Could it be argued that the doctrine of sunyata which teaches that form is emptiness and emptiness is form, suggests that there is no place for gender differentiation in Buddhism?
5. In what ways does the story of the transformation of the Dragon King's Daughter in the Lotus Sutra indicate that Buddhism is or is not aligned with feminism?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Outside of the monastic sangha and cultural impositions, Buddhism aligns itself fully with feminism since women are entirely equal with men in seeking for and being able to achieve enlightenment.
- 2... Buddhism cannot be fully aligned with feminism because of its inherent patriarchy which is only being challenged due to Western influence.
- 3... The prevalence of powerful female figures in Mahayana Buddhist iconography and belief demonstrates that Buddhism more than other world religions has been and remains aligned with feminism.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Buddhism Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The first bullet point is to consider the unique nature of Vajrayana Buddhism.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Vajrayana Buddhism (diamond or thunderbolt vehicle) is found in Tibet, Tibetan communities in exile, Himalayan Kingdoms, and western traditions with Tibetan lineages. It developed very late in the history of the development of Buddhism, only becoming established in the region in around the 7th-8th century CE
2. However, it was profoundly influenced by pre-existing religious practices (Bön and shamanism), and in some cases these were absorbed into the religious system (e.g Bön deities as dharma-protectors).
3. Vajrayana ideas are not unique as they can be traced back to the philosophy of Nagarjuna . Vajrayana – like all Mahayana Buddhism strongly emphasizes compassion, wisdom and skilful action.
4. Vajrayana, unlike other forms of Buddhism, was founded by the mahasiddhas. However, like many others it is based on the Sanskrit corpus and has Buddhahood as its aim.
5. Vajrayana has tantric or esoteric forms – meaning that knowledge/teaching is transmitted from teacher to disciple through empowerment (abhiṣeka) only after some initiation. Only Japanese Shingon Buddhism is also tantric/esoteric. It is a rare approach in Buddhism.
6. Vajrayana is sometimes thought to be a ‘third vehicle’ – additional to Theravada and Mahayana.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. The extent to which the esoteric aspects of Vajrayana make it unique.
2. The extent to which the practices (mudra, mantra, mandala, yidam visualisation, empowerment, etc.) are found in other forms of Buddhism
3. The role of leaders like the tulkus, the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama – merger of religious/secular responsibilities – extent to which found elsewhere in Buddhism
4. Idea of reincarnation much stronger in Vajrayana – how close is this to Pali notions of rebirth?
5. Vajrayana is highly ritualistic – is this similar/dissimilar to other forms of Buddhism?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Shingon in Japan is esoteric too, but otherwise esotericism is rare in Buddhism.
2. Differences between religious systems can be explained by skilful means
3. Unique nature of Vajrayana is questionable, it is no more unique than Pure Land, Nichiren or Zen.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Buddhism Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The second bullet point is to consider the centrality of practices as expressions of Buddhist ideas.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Mantra focus is found elsewhere in Buddhism – Pure Land nembutsu, & Nichiren Daimoku.
2. Mudra appear throughout Buddhist iconography. However, the practice is unique to Vajrayana (although palms together 'gassho'- gesture is pan-Buddhist)
3. Is it possible that practices express Buddhist ideas better than teachings/metaphors/narrative, because they are embodied and repeated?
4. The idea that practices, shared by the sangha, may provide a container for the passing on of the dharma from one generation to the next.
5. According to the Pali texts the Buddha did not teach many practices and was largely anti-ritualistic in his approach.
6. Practices are understood as skilful means, meaning that they may be appropriate for a particular community at a particular time in history but do not have universal valence.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. There are questions around the influence of religions other than Buddhism when assessing the extent to which a practice is understood as Buddhist.
2. How well do these practices communicate Buddhist ideas and transmit the dharma?
3. To what extent is it significant that these practices were not taught by the historical Buddha
4. IF these practices are important, why is it that only a minority of Buddhists practice them?
5. To what extent can practices 'embody' ideas?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The extent to which Buddhism is about teachings and beliefs as well as about practices
2. The Buddha said, I teach but two things, dukkha and release from dukkha. This questions the relevance of the practices of mudra, mantra and mandala
3. Practices are skilful means, what matters is not what they are – they are fingers pointing to the moon. What matters is whether they help.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Buddhism Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The third bullet point is to consider the extent to which the contemporary Mindfulness movement can be considered to be Buddhist.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. It can be considered as Buddhist because the Noble Eightfold Path refers to Right Mindfulness.
2. Buddhist meditation traditions such as samatha have always had the same goal as that espoused by the contemporary Mindfulness movement.
3. One of the goals of Buddhism is to alleviate human suffering. This is precisely the goal of the contemporary Mindfulness movement which skilful means would suggest makes it Buddhist.
4. Conversely, the contemporary Mindfulness movement is simply a form of mindlessness i.e. escaping from the human condition rather than facing its reality in terms of the three lakshanas.
5. The fact that the contemporary Mindfulness movement is espoused by its founder Jon Kabat Zinn as being non-Buddhist indicates that it should in fact not be considered as Buddhist.
6. Thich Nhat Hanh recommends the practice of mindfulness through slow walking meditation and through smiling. He is a renowned Buddhist teacher which suggests that mindfulness is Buddhist

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Is the contemporary Mindfulness movement the best tradition of Buddhist meditation for the modern world?
2. Since the contemporary Mindfulness movement is an excellent mechanism for removing dosa (hatred), lobha (greed) and moha (delusion/ignorance), should it not be seen as Buddhist?
3. Does the contemporary Mindfulness movement fit more easily within the secular self-help movement rather than having anything to do with Buddhism?
- 4... How far does the contemporary Mindfulness movement only address one very small aspect of Buddhism without any reference to key teachings such as the three laksahanas or pratityasamutpada, karma and rebirth?
5. Could the contemporary Mindfulness movement be regarded as a vehicle such as those commented upon in the Parable of the Burning House?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The contemporary Mindfulness movement is Buddhist because it is in essence a form of Buddhist meditation focusing the mind on the present moment.
2. The contemporary Mindfulness movement is not Buddhist because it does not require or address any key Buddhist beliefs and teachings.
3. An individual's suffering has to be treated with compassion which is what Buddhism calls for - the contemporary Mindfulness movement addresses a significant problem, particularly in the West, and provides a compassionate path to alleviate this problem.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Buddhism Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fourth bullet point is to consider the extent to which the contemporary Mindfulness movement offers an antidote to suffering.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Buddhism teaches that suffering is caused by dosa (hatred), lobha (greed) and moha (delusion/ignorance). An effect of mindfulness is that the mind is focused and calmed in order that these three might be removed.
2. The contemporary Mindfulness movement may offer an antidote to suffering through its focus on detachment from external stimuli and desires. This would correspond with tackling the cause of suffering as revealed in the second Noble Truth: tanha.
3. At some levels suffering is caused by 'the monkey' mind asking the same type of questions in the Parable of the Poisoned Arrow. The contemporary Mindfulness movement aims to bring quietness and stillness to the overly active questioning mind.
4. The contemporary Mindfulness movement sidesteps the causes of suffering by focusing only on the treatment of the symptoms. In this way suffering is just postponed and not properly addressed.
5. The fact that the contemporary Mindfulness movement finds ready acceptance in the world of business and education indicates that it is concerned mainly with helping to calm people and make them more productive rather than deal with their pain.
6. It is no more and no less helpful in being an antidote to suffering than any other type of self-help therapy ranging from self-hypnosis to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Does the contemporary Mindfulness Movement anywhere have 'being an antidote to suffering' as its real goal?
2. If the contemporary Mindfulness movement has been scientifically proven to help in cases of addiction and areas related to palliative health care, does this not show that it offers an antidote to suffering?
3. To what extent does the contemporary Mindfulness movement serve only as a temporary sticking plaster to alleviate suffering rather than as an antidote?
4. Aside from the physical, most people's suffering can be attributed to what goes on in the mind. Does the contemporary Mindfulness movement at least begin to address suffering in the mind in a way which has been neglected in the past?
5. Should skilful means be applied to the contemporary Mindfulness movement and recognize that it has a significant role to play as an antidote to suffering?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The enlightenment of the Buddha enabled him to teach about the end of suffering and it might be the case that, if engaged in fully, the contemporary Mindfulness movement might help as an antidote to suffering.
- 2... The contemporary Mindfulness movement has relied too much on mass-marketing and people's interest in the latest self-help fad to be of any significant use at all as an antidote to suffering.
- 3... The Kalama Sutta could be applied to show that from empirical evidence, the contemporary Mindfulness movement works as an antidote to suffering. If it didn't it would not be so popular.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Buddhism Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fifth bullet point is to consider is social justice as a requisite for the observance of Buddhist teachings.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Buddhist teachings focus on the removal of dukkha in all its forms and on karuna (compassion). These demonstrate that seeking social justice is a requisite.
2. The presence and removal of dosa (hatred), lobha (greed) and moha (delusion/ignorance) in society needs to be addressed through attention to social justice. Only then can Buddhist teachings be observed.
3. Taken as a whole following the dasa sila, the Noble Eightfold Path or achieving the paramitas and the Bodhisattva path of Mahayana all imply the need for attention to the happiness and welfare of others. This suggests that social justice is a requisite.
4. Buddhist teachings have never shown active concern with social justice as the presence of dukkha in society is one of the lakshanas – a universal truth. Focusing on social justice as a requisite is a denial of this truth.
5. Enlightenment and a positive rebirth are the goals of Buddhist teachings and these are achieved through focus the self. Thus, social justice is not a requisite.
6. The focus on social justice has been largely taken up through Western influence and 'convert' Buddhism. Whilst it might be a requisite here, with regard to Buddhism overall, it is not.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. To what extent does the absence of social justice in the dhamma demonstrate that it is not a prerequisite for Buddhist teachings?
2. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh – two very significant Buddhist leaders have emphasised the importance of social justice as a requisite. Should not their authority as sources of wisdom in this area be recognised?
3. Buddhists should of course work for peace, but 'social justice' also implies action against inequality in society and capitalism itself. Could it be argued that therefore 'social justice' is too broad a term here?
4. How far could it be argued that as the Buddha taught in the Andha Sutta (AN 3.29) social justice has to be addressed as a requisite because it is only when a person has their basic needs satisfied that they can then focus on the dhamma?
5. To what extent could it be said that belief in pretas (hungry ghosts) who are suffering because of being corrupt, selfish and greedy, indicates that avoidance of this fate through working for social justice is a requisite in Buddhist teachings?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Buddhism is concerned with the 'whole' person who is part of the complex web of structures which make up modern society. Therefore, social justice has to be an important requisite for observance of Buddhist teachings.
2. Buddhist teaching is entirely focused on self-knowledge and self-empowerment and therefore social justice is not a requisite.
3. Buddhists in past centuries from Theravada, Mahayana, Pure Land, Nichiren and Zen, have shown full observance of Buddhist teachings without having any interest in social justice.

The sixth bullet point is to consider is social engagement as a distraction on the path to Awakening.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Social engagement provides an easy distraction from the diligence required by the historical Buddha in his final words: 'All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Strive with earnestness.'
2. Social engagement is a way of avoiding what is required on the path to Awakening: the removal from the person of dosa (hatred), lobha (greed) and moha (delusion/ignorance).
3. No Buddhist school - Theravada, Mahayana, Pure Land, Nichiren and Zen – explicitly states that social engagement is an important part of the path to Awakening.
4. In Theravada, the monastic sangha relies upon the well-being of laypeople for support as bhikkus follow the path to Awakening. Therefore, given this symbiotic relationship, social engagement with the concerns of laypeople is essential.
5. The task of Bodhisattvas is to show compassion to all sentient beings as they journey towards Awakening. That journey is only possible if there is compassionate engagement with any issues in society which prevent that journey from taking place.
6. Social engagement is not a distraction on the path to Awakening because it simply means addressing key issues covered in the dasa sila such as harming others, misuse of sex and addiction to substances which cloud the mind.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Could it be argued that focusing on social engagement is doing what the Buddha advised against – focusing on the fingers pointing to the moon, rather than on the moon itself.
2. Might it be said that social engagement provides a new 'yana' (vehicle) for the modern age which is part of the ekayana (one path/vehicle) leading to Awakening?
3. The issues addressed by social engagement are infinite, but a person's life is finite. Might it be said that urgent priority must therefore be given instead to the person's Awakening?
4. To what extent is social engagement already present in the path to Awakening through key aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path such as right action and right livelihood?
5. How far would it be true to say that because Awakening can never occur in isolation - since Buddhists in their past, present and future are part of society – that therefore, social engagement is essential?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. In the modern world Buddhists are fully involved in the world and can no longer just be part of the 'Forest Tradition'. Social engagement is therefore a necessary part of the path to Awakening.
2. The 'monkey mind' – the mind is unsettled and restless, social engagement is just another distraction for the Buddhist mind – particularly in the West – on the path to Awakening.
3. Dana (generosity) is a central Buddhist virtue and practice on the path to Awakening. Putting dana into practice today requires full social engagement.