



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel Level 3 GCE Religious Studies

Advanced Subsidiary

PAPER 4: Study of Religion

Option 4A: Buddhism

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8RS0 4A AS Buddhism

Introduction

This paper enabled candidates to respond to their in-depth study of Buddhism. They were able to explain the beliefs, values and teachings, sources of wisdom and authority, and the practices that shape and express religious identity within Buddhism. A number of responses showed that candidates were able to write extended responses well. There was clear evidence of knowledge and understanding (AO1) of Buddhism, demonstrating a thorough study of the of the key ideas from the specification. Most candidates were able to assess and analyse (AO2) the concepts that were examined, some candidates showing an outstanding level of scholarship. Most candidates managed their time well which is most encouraging. Where candidates did not perform so well, their responses were less detailed and the AO2 questions contained more AO1 skills than AO2.

Q1 Explore the key teachings of the Three-fold Way. (8)

Many responses to this question scored well as they illustrated a sound understanding of the Three-fold Way. Many candidates focused on the three elements of sila, samadhi and prajna, thus explaining a wide range of teachings. The most effective responses displayed a wide range of knowledge, especially about the three elements, and these were developed effectively. Some candidates wrote about the links between the Three-fold Way and the Noble Eightfold Path, this was relevant to the question. Weaker responses gained lower marks. A few candidates did not know the Three-fold Way and wrote about the Three Poisons. Some wrote generally about the Three-fold Way not identifying the elements this provided a narrow range of knowledge and understanding rather than delivering the breadth or depth of knowledge and understanding required by the question.

Q2 Assess the importance of the distinctive practices of Theravada Buddhism. (9)

Most candidates were able to access this question and recognised the distinctive practices of Theravada Buddhists. Some candidates answered with reference to the differences to Mahayana Buddhists and this resulted in good use of comparison leading to assessment and analysis (AO2) . Most candidates presented an item of knowledge and understanding (AO1) before analysing it (AO2) and continued to do so throughout the response. Some candidates began with a paragraph of content and description, illustrating AO1 and then used the rest of the response to assess and provide counter arguments. Both approaches are legitimate, but the best answers were those that integrated their AO2 material throughout their AO1 right from the start of their essay, thus achieving the focus on AO2 required.

Many candidates provided knowledge and understanding based on the concept that Theravada Buddhism concentrates on the individual and the

role of the Tipitaka giving examples of these. They then countered it with opposing arguments that this might be selfish or difficult to apply accurately. Sadly a few candidates offered limited responses which indicated a lack of understanding and gave answers simply about Bodhisattva versus the Arahant ideal.

Q3 Assess the importance of meditation as part of the Noble Eightfold Path. (9)

Candidates responded extremely well to this question, and it led naturally to AO2 as candidates of meditation within the Eightfold Path to other elements of the Path. There were secure and detailed responses that considered the strength or otherwise of the various elements of the Eightfold Path and the value of meditation. Responses often discussed why meditation is important to Buddhists and its role in Buddhist life.

Weak responses simply discussed why meditation is important for Buddhists without assessing this concept or spent too much time detailing the parts of the Eightfold Path without making judgements or deconstructing their content.

Q4 (a) Explore the status of the Tipitaka. (8)

There were many strong responses to this question. Candidates frequently began with an explanation of what the Tipitaka is, and demonstrated a clear understanding of why Buddhists may use the scriptures and the differing views that Buddhists have about its value. The best responses showed a wide range of knowledge with good development usually referring to scriptural teachings.

Candidates with weaker knowledge and understanding usually ran out of information so their answer was very brief showing a narrow range of knowledge and unable to achieve more than Level 1.

Q4 (b) Analyse the significance of the Abhidhamma Pitaka for understanding the teachings of the Buddha. (20)

This question was a wonderful discriminator of candidate's religious skills. It allowed candidates to approach the value of the Abhidhamma Pitaka in any way they wished. The majority, however, focused on the limitations of the scriptures in today's world and the value of the other parts of the Tipitaka as an alternative. Candidates accurately used specialist language and terminology. The strongest responses considered the content of the Abhidhamma Pitaka and made links to the role of the Buddha and contrasted this to

Weaker responses simply discussed the Tipitaka and left much of the space empty with little use of AO2 skills.

Summary

Based on the performance on this paper students should:

- Apply material specifically to the question asked.
- Write concisely and use evidence to support arguments
- Learn and use specialist language and terminology
- Ensure that answers requiring AO2 limit the amount of AO1 material given.
- Remember that contrasting arguments to an idea is an effective way to show AO2 skills
- Be familiar with the requirements of the specification
- Practice answering exam questions in the time given

