



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Religious Studies (8RS0)
Paper 4A Buddhism

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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. Many candidates were able to show good knowledge and understanding (AO1) of Buddhism, demonstrating the key ideas studied in the specification. Most candidates were able to assess and analyse (AO2) the beliefs that were studied in this paper, some candidates showed an outstanding level of understanding for a one-year study of Buddhism. Most candidates managed their time well and answered all questions in detail. Where candidates did not perform so well, their responses were less detailed and the AO2 questions contained more AO1 information than AO2.

Q1 Explore key beliefs about the Three Poisons. (8)

Most responses to this question scored well. The answers indicated that candidates had a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Three Poisons. Candidates were usually able to identify each of the Three Poisons and most then explain Buddhist beliefs about each of them. Thus, they were specifically addressing the question asked. The most effective responses addressed a broad range of key Buddhist ideas and beliefs about the Three Poisons, as required by the level descriptors in the mark scheme. The best answers including discussing the Three Poisons as a whole and as represented in the Wheel of Life.

Weaker responses tended to name each the poisons and give a narrow range of knowledge and understanding rather than delivering the breadth or depth of knowledge and understanding required by the question. A few candidates confused them with the three jewels – candidates need to be familiar with Buddhist specialist terminology.

Q2 Assess the significance of the three refuges. (9)

Most candidates responded well to this question they were clear about the significance of the three refuges for Buddhists. Many candidates described each of the three refuges showing knowledge and understanding (AO1) and then attempted to analyse them (AO2) and continued to do so throughout the response. Some candidates began with a paragraph of information about the three refuges illustrating AO1, and then used the rest of the response to analyse. 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. Some candidates answered by describing three refuges, these candidates only fulfilled AO1 and therefore gained low marks. Sadly a few candidates answered about different Buddhist concepts (sadly some swapping three poisons from Q1 and this question and gaining no marks on Q1 & 2) candidates should be familiar with the key terms used in the specification.

Q3 Assess the view that dhyana is the most effective form of meditation. (9)

Most candidates responded well to this question they were clear about the role of mediation and the different types of meditation that are used by Buddhists. There were some secure and detailed responses that considered whether dhyana meditation was the most effective form but many focussed on alternative types especially vipassana, these answers did not focus on answering the question and gained fewer marks. The best responses discussed how effective different forms were and were able to show a wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology.

Weak responses wrote that they knew about meditation in general rather than dhyana meditation or gave limited information, mostly without any analysis.

Q4a Explore the key emphases of Mahayana Buddhism. (8)

There were many strong responses to this question which only assessed AO1. Candidates were able to reveal their knowledge and understanding addressing a broad range of key religious ideas and beliefs about Mahayana Buddhism. Candidates were not required to comment on the development of Mahayana Buddhism but many of the better answers did so.

Candidates with weaker knowledge and understanding usually ran out of information so their answer was very brief showing a knowledge and understanding that addressed a narrow range of key religious ideas and belief and as such they were unable to achieve more than Level 1.

Q4b Analyse the centrality of Buddha Gautama in Buddhism. (20)

This question was a wonderful discriminator of candidates' religious studies skills. Candidates quite rightly gave the correct amount of time to this question allowing them to show both AO1 and AO2 skills. Candidates were able to show their depth of understanding of centrality of Buddha Gautama in Buddhism. The majority of candidates focussed on the important of Buddha Gautama in developing Buddhism and his teachings they then developed their arguments and assessed the significance of Buddha Gautama by discussing the relevance of the dhamma and the sangha. Candidates accurately used specialist language and terminology. The strongest responses were able to critically deconstructs religious information about the Buddha leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning, they were then able to contrast this with information about other Buddhist concepts.

Weaker responses simply discussed the life of the with little use of AO2 skills. Sadly some candidates still ran out of time and they should plan time according to how many marks are available.

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

