



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2025

Pearson Edexcel Advanced Subsidiary level
In Religious Studies (8RS0)
Paper 4A Buddhism

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8RS0 4A Advanced 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. 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 the main sections of the Tipitaka. (8)

Most responses to this question scored well. The answers indicated that candidates had a thorough knowledge and understanding of the sections of the Tipitaka. Candidates were usually able to identify each of the sections within the Tipitaka by name, and most were able to explain the content of each section. The most effective responses explored the content and use of the sections as well as the importance of them in Buddhist life, thus addressing a broad range of key Buddhist ideas and beliefs as required by the level descriptors in the mark scheme. The best answers included discussion of the Tipitaka as a whole and included examples of the types of material within each section.

Weaker responses tended to name each of the sections 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 were unable to name all three sections.

Q2 Assess the importance of the concept of the Buddha as a cosmic presence that influences the world. (9)

Most candidates were able to access this question. Many candidates were able to give a description of the way the Buddha influences the world today showing some knowledge and understanding (AO1) and most then attempted to analyse them (AO2) and continued to do so throughout the response. Some candidates recognised that this was specifically about the Buddha as a cosmic presence rather than about the historical Buddha. These began with a paragraph of information about the Buddha as a cosmic presence and explained this is mainly a Mahayana concept, this illustrated AO1, and these candidates often 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 the Buddha, these candidates only fulfilled AO1 and therefore gained low marks. Sadly a few candidates failed to attempt the question. It is important that candidates are familiar with all of the content within the specification.

Q3 Assess the importance of the Buddha's life as an ascetic. (9)

Most candidates responded well to this question and were familiar with the time the Buddha spent as an ascetic and were able to analyse the impact this had on his life and teachings.

There were some secure and detailed responses that considered whether his period as an ascetic was the most important part of the Buddha's life, but many focussed on other events; these answers did not specifically answer the question and gained fewer marks. The best responses were able to show a wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology. Weak responses wrote that they knew about the life of the Buddha in general rather than asceticism or gave limited information, mostly without any analysis (AO2).

Q4a Explore the practice of meditation in Buddhism (8)

There were many strong responses to this question which was very wide. Candidates were able to reveal their knowledge and understanding of meditation in Buddhism. Candidates were not required to comment on the use of meditation by the Buddha but many of the better answers did so.

Candidates with weaker knowledge and understanding usually ran out of information after giving a definition of what meditation is, 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 significance of vipassana meditation. (20)

This question was a good discriminator of candidates' religious studies skills. Most candidates gave the correct amount of time to this question allowing them to show both AO1 and AO2 skills, those that ran out of time gained lower marks as a result. Candidates were able to show their depth of understanding of vipassana meditation for Buddhists. Most candidates focussed on the significance of vipassana meditation in reaching enlightenment, they then developed their arguments and assessed the significance of vipassana meditation by discussing alternative forms of meditation. Better candidates accurately used specialist language and terminology. The strongest responses were able to critically deconstruct religious information about vipassana meditation leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning, they were then able to contrast this with information about other Buddhist concepts.

Weaker responses did not know what vipassana meditation was and generally described meditation gaining some LO1 marks.

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 all of the requirements of the specification
- Practice answering exam questions in the time given