



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In Religious Studies A (1RA0)
Paper 2: Area of Study 2 – Study of Second
Religion
Option 2D - Buddhism

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The paper contributes to 25% of the overall award.

The assessment consists of two questions and candidates must answer all questions. The details of the assessment content are provided in the specification. Centres are to use this, rather than other published resources when planning the course content.

This area of study comprises a study in-depth of Buddhism as a lived religion in the United Kingdom and throughout the world.

There are two sections:

- Beliefs and Teachings
- Practices

Candidates had studied Buddhism within the context of the wider British society.

Question 1a

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Beliefs and Teachings.

Bullet point 1.3 First Noble Truth, including reference to the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: **the nature of dukkha**; Buddhist teachings about suffering; the different types of suffering as pain, fabrication and change; the importance of suffering for Buddhists today. (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was: 'Outline three Buddhist beliefs about the nature of dukkha'

Candidates are asked to 'Outline' on (a) items. Therefore, lists can reach a maximum of one mark.

Many candidates were awarded 3 marks. Many took the approach of giving individual beliefs. Others approached the question more broadly, focusing on the impacts of dukkha.

Examiner advice: Candidates should write three sentences containing one piece of information in each. There is no need for development: it will not receive credit. Candidates who answer using a list, which is not an outline, can only receive 1 mark according to the mark scheme. If any one element of a list were incorrect it would get 0 marks.

Question 1b

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Beliefs and Teachings.

Bullet point 1.2 Dhamma: The nature and different meaning of dhamma – dependent origination/conditionality; **the nature and importance of paticca-**

samuppada and the Three Marks of Existence, including reference to the Story of Nagasena and the Chariot in the Milinda Panha: suffering – dukkha, anicca – no fixed self and anatta – soul or essence; the implications of belief in dhamma for Buddhists today. (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was: 'Explain two reasons why paticca-samuppada is important for Buddhists.'

Candidates are asked to 'Explain two' on (b) items. Therefore, two reasons are required, and both need to be developed to be awarded 4 marks.

Development consists of a piece of extra information, a reference to a source of wisdom, quotes or examples. The development must be of the reason given and to the question asked.

Most candidates were able to show their understanding of dependant origination and many students gained full marks. There were a range of approaches, which were generally valid. The majority of answers made specific reference to all things being linked to each other.

Examiner advice: Candidates should be encouraged to be familiar with the requirements of the different styles of questions in order to make efficient use of their time in the exam.

Question 1c

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Beliefs and Teachings.

Bullet point 1.5* Third Noble Truth, including reference to the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: **the nature of nirodha** and the cessation of tanha; Buddhist teachings about the ending of desire; the nature of the cycle of samsara; different understandings of nibbana and enlightenment and their importance for Buddhists today. (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was: 'Explain two Buddhist teachings about the nature of nirodha.'

Candidates are asked to 'Explain two' on (c) items. Therefore, two teachings are required, and both need to be developed for 4 marks. Development consists of a piece of extra information, a reference to a source of wisdom, quotes or examples. The development must be of the teaching given and to the question asked. The reasons then should be supported with a 'reference to a source of wisdom', this must support the teaching given and cannot be awarded twice. Therefore, if it is used as development, it does not gain a second mark for the source.

GENERIC advice for centres to what constitutes a source of wisdom

- The candidates do not have to reference a quote or quote it word for word. The source of wisdom can be given as a recognisable paraphrase
- If examiners are unsure they will use a search engine. Enter the gist of the paraphrase and the source
- If the source is attributed to the wrong person/source/ numerical reference it cannot be credited e.g. a Dali Lama quote attributed to the Buddha and the quote is not accredited to them, it is not awarded
- Numerical or generic references on their own are not awarded. The candidate must use the reference correctly ie not just state the name of a sutta.

Most candidates were aware of the nature of nirodha and why it is considered important, describing the cessation or renouncing of craving and desire.

Question 1d

The focus of the marking changes from AO1 to AO2 on the d) items.

The candidates are being assessed on AO2: Analyse and evaluate aspects of religion and belief, including their significance and influence.

AO2 constitutes 50% of the overall mark.

The question is 'Evaluate' this statement considering the arguments for and against and reach a justified conclusion – there must be some consideration of the validity of the arguments used / appraisal to gain the higher grades. Many candidates produced excellent answers giving reasons for and against but failed to evaluate the credibility of the argument. Formulas and writing frames restricted the flow of the arguments restricting student's progression to the higher levels. Many candidates used words that implied appraisal, such as strong/weak argument, but were unable to follow this up with genuine evaluation.

Examiner advice: centres should refer to training materials online. Candidates require the religious understanding of the diversity within the religious tradition, and the arguments for and against before they can begin to evaluate.

Candidates were assessed on Section One: Beliefs and Teachings.

Bullet point 1.6 Fourth Noble Truth, including reference to the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: the nature of The Middle Way – magga; Buddhist teachings about the Eightfold Path leading to nibbana; **the Threefold Way: the nature, purpose and importance of sila (ethics), samadhi (meditation) and panna (wisdom)**; divergent understandings of the importance Eightfold Path and the Threefold Way for Buddhist life today. (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was (d) "Sila is the most important aspect of the Threefold Way."

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against. In your response you should:

- refer to Buddhist teachings
- reach a justified conclusion

d) items are marked using levels and awarding is carried out using 'best fit' according to the level descriptors.

In response to this question candidates were aware of the discussion around the concept of sila, discussing ideas around its relative importance compared to the other aspects of the Threefold Way. Stronger candidates made specific reference to meditation and wisdom, whilst weaker candidates commented more generally. There were attempts at appraisal, but often a suggestion of either strength or weakness was not supported with solid argument.

Question 2a

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Practices

Bullet point 2.1 Meditation: the nature, **purpose and significance of meditation in Buddhism**; the different types of meditation: samatha (concentration), metta bhavana (loving kindness) and vipassana (insight); meditative practices, including mindfulness breathing and zazen, divergent understanding of the nature and importance of visualisation of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, including Amitāyus Meditation Sutra; how the different practices are used by Mahayana and Theravada Buddhists and the benefits from their use. (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was 'Outline three purposes of meditation for Buddhists.'

a) items are point marked – Outline requires three outlined points.

This question was accessible, with the majority of candidates achieving full marks. Most highlighted that meditation provided an opportunity to be calm and show devotion to the Buddha. Many references were also made to different forms of Buddhist meditation.

Question 2b

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Practices

Bullet point 2.3 Mantra recitation: divergent understandings of the nature, purpose, role and importance of mantra recitation with reference to Theravada Buddhism, including Namō Buddhaya ("Homage to the Buddha"), and Mahayana Buddhism; the nature and purpose of using sacred syllables, devotional articles, offerings and **mala beads, and why they are used** in different schools of Buddhism (*bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was 'Explain two reasons why a Buddhist might use mala beads.'

Candidates are asked to 'Explain two' on (b) items. Therefore, two reasons are required, and both need to be developed to be awarded 4 marks.

Development consists of a piece of extra information, a reference to a source of wisdom, quotes or examples. The development must be of the reason given and to the question asked.

Many candidates responded well to this question, offering reasons related to the benefit of allowing the mind to focus on chanting/prayer rather than counting repetitions, allowing the practitioner to concentrate more on their spiritual development.

Examiner advice: Refer to the specification bullet point and cover all the different parts of it. These bullet points are the basis of question setting.

Question 2c

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Practices

Bullet point 2.7 Death and mourning rituals and ceremonies: the **divergent celebration and significance of the ceremonies in Buddhist communities** and to Buddhists; **the distinct significance of the rituals associated with death and mourning in Theravada communities and in Japan and Tibet**, with reference to the Tibetan Book of the Dead. *(Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question).*

The question asked was: 'Explain two ways that death and mourning rituals may be significant for Tibetan Buddhists.'

Candidates are asked to 'Explain two' on (c) items. Therefore, two ways are required, and both need to be developed to be awarded 4 marks. They must also correctly use a source of wisdom in their answer which must be identifiable, relevant and linked to the way given in the answer.

Most candidates were able to show knowledge of Tibetan sky burials, with many being able to develop their responses by linking the practice to belief. Many candidates focused on more widely used Buddhist mourning rituals for the second part of their answers.

Examiner advice: Centres struggling to find sources of wisdom should refer to the specification and/or previous mark schemes.

Question 2d

Candidates were assessed on Section Two: Practices

Bullet point 2.8 Festivals and retreats: the divergent nature, history, **purpose and importance of festivals and retreats in Buddhism**; divergent

understandings of the origins, meaning and features of celebration of **specific festivals and retreats, including** Wesak, Vassa/Rain Retreat and Kathina, with reference to the Anapanasati Sutta, and Uposatha days in Theravada Buddhism; Hanamatsuri and Obon (Japanese), **Parinibbana Day in Mahayana Buddhism**, and Lama Tsong Khapa Day in Tibet. (*Bold indicates the part of the bullet assessed by the question*).

The question asked was (d) "The most significant of all Buddhist festivals is Parinibbana Day."

Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against.

In your response you should:

- refer to Buddhist teachings
- refer to different Buddhist points of view
- reach a justified conclusion

This question engaged candidates and produced a wide range of marks. All candidates should be encouraged to answer every question because every mark is important. Candidates who did well explored the importance of a number of different Buddhist festivals, highlighting links and similarities between them and comparing this with individual practice. Many references were made to the life and example of the Buddha. Some were able to expand answers with appraisal. Many candidates did not gain more than level two because they did not consider the value of the arguments given in answering the question.

Key advice from the examiner.

- Centres must teach to the specification, making sure candidates are prepared for all parts of the bullet points in preparation for the questions
- When tackling a) questions, candidates should write three sentences containing one piece of information in each. There is no need for development: it will not receive credit.
- The explain questions require two developed points, however, students should also be prepared to describe where indicated on the specification.
- The (d) items need an understanding of religion and belief, as well as the ability to evaluate the arguments in order to reach a conclusion. Centres may wish to consider the differentiation of teaching to enable some students of different abilities to concentrate on learning the information needed before embarking on the evaluation.
- Candidates should be directed to read the bullet points in the (d) question and understand that they guide them to which viewpoints they should be providing. Centres may wish to consider identifying on the specification the different traditions/viewpoints within Buddhism identified that could be used to answer these questions. The diversity within the religion is the key factor in appraising the arguments. Why do they not all agree?

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