



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In Religious Studies (4RS1) Paper 2A

## **Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications**

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications are awarded by Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at [www.edexcel.com](http://www.edexcel.com) or [www.btec.co.uk](http://www.btec.co.uk). Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at [www.edexcel.com/contactus](http://www.edexcel.com/contactus).

## **Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere**

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your candidates at: [www.pearson.com/uk](http://www.pearson.com/uk)

Summer 2024

Publications Code 4RS1\_2A\_2406\_ER

All the material in this publication is copyright

© Pearson Education Ltd 2024

## **Principal Examiner's Report for Paper 4RS1\_2A Buddhism**

### **General Introduction**

Once again this year there has been a large entry of candidates for what is now called 4RS1\_2A Buddhism, following the decision to split Paper 2 into its component religions.

Here are a few initial general observations about this year's Paper, some of which will be exemplified further later in the Report.

- Candidates are required to answer all questions in the paper, and this seemed to be generally well understood.
- Candidates usually wrote appropriate amounts in their responses, within the spaces provided. A significant number of candidates, however, did use extra paper.
- On this Paper, the different question types have different demands. For example, a) questions test Assessment Objective 1 whereas the c) questions are much more directed towards testing AO2.
- The majority of this year's candidate cohort appeared well prepared for the examination in terms of their knowledge, understanding and willingness to engage with questions as written.
- There was little evidence of candidates being unable to complete the paper in the allocated time. Sometimes, when candidates did fail to finish the Paper, it may have been because they spent too much time on questions, such as a) questions, that did not need as much development.

Teachers and Centres may well find it helpful to look at the Principal Examiner's Report for each of the other religions, as there may be points made there about a specific question that will have more general application.

### **Comments on specific question types**

#### **a) Questions**

These questions are worth up to 4 marks, 2 each for two developed responses. The command word is always 'Outline', though it is important to look for the further indicator of what is being requested. This could therefore be 'Outline two ways', 'two features', 'two reasons', or a number of other similar terms. The key requirement for gaining full marks is development. In each case the response must be developed in a way that furthers the understanding of the response given, and which responds to the question.

## **b) Questions**

These questions are worth up to 6 marks, and the marks are awarded in accordance with two Levels: Level 1 being worth up to 3 marks, and Level 2 from 4 to 6 marks. The requirements for these levels can be found in the current Mark Scheme, and they do not change from one series to the next. In order to gain marks in the higher Level 2, candidates must demonstrate the ability to develop their responses (for 4 marks) and, furthermore, to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the topic (for 5 or 6 marks).

## **c) Questions**

These questions are worth up to 10 marks, and the marks are awarded in accordance with four Levels: Level 1 being worth up to 3 marks, and Level 2 from 4 to 6 marks, Level 3 allocates 7 or 8 marks, and Level 4 allocates 9 or 10 marks. The requirements for these levels can be found in the current Mark Scheme, and they do not change from one series to the next. In order to gain marks in the higher Levels 3 and 4, candidates must demonstrate the ability to develop their responses, demonstrate a deeper understanding of the topic, and also the ability to evaluate two points of view to arrive at a justified conclusion.

Currently the rubrics for c) questions allow candidates to refer to other religions. It is important for candidates to be aware that such references can only be rewarded when there is a clear attempt to explain why the experience of another religion might be significant for the religion being examined.

## **General issues per question type that may restrict candidates' marks**

On a) questions, the most usual weakness in candidate responses is the lack of development, where only one or more simple responses are given. Such responses cannot earn more than 2 marks in total. Another occasional weakness is when candidates give features, for example, when they are asked for reasons. It is important to pay attention to that changeable key word.

On b) questions, many candidates do develop their answers and achieve Level 2, 4 marks. However, there is then a tendency for these simply developed responses to be multiplied, rather than explained in greater depth, thereby candidates limiting themselves to 4 marks.

On c) questions, again many candidates do develop their responses. However, an answer that says that some believers would propose arguments a, b and c, but other believers would argue x, y and z – without any attempt to demonstrate a deeper understanding or to evaluate the different points of view – is unlikely to go beyond the top of Level 2.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses of approaches to specific questions:**

### **Section 1 focuses on Origins and their impact on the community**

#### **1a 'Outline two ways the sangha provides support to Buddhists.'**

This question was well understood by candidates, who interpreted the sangha both as the monastic community, and as the wider community of all Buddhists, and answered from both perspectives. Many pointed to the monastic sangha as a source of wisdom and advice. Also it was pointed out that the lay community can help the monastic sangha, such as with alms, thus creating a synchronous relationship.

#### **1b 'Explain how many Buddhists use the Tripitaka in their lives.'**

This proved a more challenging question for some candidates. Most knew what the Tripitaka is, in the general sense, but not all of them had the depth of knowledge or understanding to do more than describe aspects of its contents. The more able candidates were able to develop their responses, to distinguish what may be applicable to monks and nuns, and explain how applying the teachings might aid all Buddhists on their journey to enlightenment.

#### **1c Discuss the suggestion that 'Understanding the significance of the four sights is all a Buddhist needs to reach enlightenment'.**

There were some very good answers to this question, with many candidates able to explain how different aspects of the Four Noble Truths, for example, and their emphasis on the reality of suffering, may be thought to have their roots in this early experience of the four sights of the Buddha. Simpler answers tended to describe the experience, and then explain that there are other sources of guidance on the path to enlightenment. This is a correct approach, but is more likely to lack development, and the depth of understanding that could lead to marks in the higher levels.

### **Section 2 focuses on Celebration and Pilgrimage**

#### **2a 'Outline two reasons Nirvana Day is important for some Buddhists.'**

Most candidates were aware of Nirvana Day and what it commemorates. Better answers focused on these specifics, focused on the parinirvana of the Buddha, whilst some weaker answers were more general and descriptive, and could have applied to almost any religious festival.

### **2b 'Explain why going to Kapilavastu is important for some Buddhists'.**

Not all candidates were aware of the significance of Kapilavastu in the life of the Buddha, being the location of the Buddha's early life, and some mistook it for other places of pilgrimage. Of those who were aware, a number focused on what Buddhists might do at Kapilavastu, rather than on why the place itself, or these actions, might be thought important. This would often have been the difference between being awarded Level 1 or Level 2 marks.

### **2c Discuss the suggestion that 'Buddhists do not need to go on pilgrimage'.**

Many candidates were aware of the different points of view within Buddhism about the value of pilgrimage. Some pointed out that the Buddha himself recommended it, for example, whilst others pointed to some of the risks of pilgrimage, such as treating the Buddha as a god. This was a question in which some candidates drew parallels with the practice in other religions, especially Islam where Hajj is one of the Five Pillars. This was potentially a fruitful line of discussion, provided it led to a greater understanding of pilgrimage for Buddhists, such as the notion that Buddhism is less likely to prescribe spiritual activities. This could be, for example, because it tends to see the journey to enlightenment as fundamentally a personal one.

## **Section 3 focuses on Worship and Practice**

### **3a 'Outline two features of Buddhist death rituals'**

Most candidates were aware of the variety of death rituals within the diverse Buddhist community, though, perhaps not surprisingly, many answers tended to focus on Tibetan sky burials! The question looked for features, and many candidates were able to provide such features and also develop them with explanation or further description.

### **3b 'Explain why the appearance of viharas may differ between Buddhist communities'.**

This proved to be the most challenging question on the Paper. Although many candidates were aware of differences, and could describe them, fewer could go deeper into the question of why such differences exist. Those that did were able, for example, to explain why countries without strong Buddhist roots might build simpler viharas, or even adapt other buildings. Others were able to talk about cultural differences in the diverse Buddhist community worldwide, and how that might influence architectural styles.

### **3c Discuss the suggestion that 'Rites of passage are essential aspects of a Buddhist's life.'**

This was also a challenge for some candidates who simply did not understand the term 'rites of passage'. Some, for example, focused on the word 'passage' and took it as a reference to passages in sacred texts. Although it may not be a term that is widely used within the Buddhist community, the specification term is used across the different religions, and it is important that candidates are aware of its common meaning, concerning rituals related to birth, coming of age, marriage and death. Those who were aware of the meaning of the term often provided very good answers, for example about whether or not marriage is considered to be a religious undertaking, and why it has few associated rituals in some Buddhist traditions.

### **Summary and Recommendations to Centres to improve candidate performance.**

- Candidates should be encouraged to develop their responses. On Paper 2 they will always add value to their response if they further describe, illustrate or explain their answer.
- Candidates are reminded that any number of simply developed responses to b) questions can gain only a maximum of 4 marks, and that a demonstration of depth of understanding is required to gain the higher marks.
- In b) and c) questions, some description can help to develop a response, such as description of pilgrimage sites or aspects of worship. However, to gain higher marks, answers must be followed by an attempt to draw out their deeper meaning.
- Candidates should only spend time explaining the point of view of another religion if they are confident they can show how that helps to provide a better understanding of the religion being examined.

