



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel A level
In Religious Studies (9RS0)
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. A number of responses showed that candidates were able to write extremely well, they had clearly shown improvement in the structure of their arguments since AS Level. There was good concise 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 scholarship. 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 significance of the Tipitaka. (8)

Most responses to this question scored well. The answers indicated that candidates had a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Tipitaka. Candidates were usually able to identify the three baskets and most then explain how they are used by Buddhists. Thus, they were specifically addressing the question asked. Some were able to make use of examples of how Buddhists may not need them, showing how relevant this paper is. The most effective responses addressed a broad range of key religious ideas and beliefs, as required by the level descriptors in the mark scheme.

Weaker responses tended to name each the baskets 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 did not know anything beyond that they were scriptures and some confused them with the three jewels – candidates need to be familiar with Buddhist specialist terminology.

Q2 Assess the importance of the stages and perfections of the Bodhisattva path. (12)

This question was accessible to most candidates, they recognised what the Bodhisattva Path was, many candidates then struggled to assess the stages and perfections even though the specification states in Topic 5 'The stages and perfections of the Bodhisattva path, including their place in particular traditions'. Many candidates described the journey of a Bodhisattva showing knowledge and understanding (AO1) and attempted analysing it (AO2), and continued to do so throughout the response. Some candidates began with a paragraph of information about a Bodhisattva illustrating AO1, and then used the rest of the response to. 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 role and journey of a Bodhisattva, these candidates only fulfilled AO1 and therefore gained low marks. The best candidates considered the stages in a Bodhisattva path and the importance of the perfections within Mahayana Buddhism with opposing arguments, for example, the role and stages of an arhat within Theravada

Buddhism. Sadly a few candidates offered responses which indicated a lack of understanding as to what the Bodhisattva Path was and focused on what a Bodhisattva is.

Q3 (a) Clarify Buddhist ideas about meditation shown in this passage. (10)

Candidates responded well to this question they were confident in their understanding of meditation; most candidates were able to select information and use it appropriately to support their answer. There were secure and detailed responses that considered the link between meditation and the dhamma. Responses often discussed the emphasis on the way that Buddhist teachings require the use of meditation to be fully accessed.

Weak responses either ignored the passage completely and wrote that they knew about meditation or gave limited information, mostly copying chunks.

Q3 (b) Analyse the importance of meditation as part of the Eightfold Path. (20)

There were many strong responses to this question. Candidates frequently began with an explanation of the Eightfold Path and that meditation is just one part of the path, some comparing this other part of the Eightfold Path. It was clearly lined to Bullet 3.3 in the specification 'The place and context of meditation as part of the eight-fold path, links to wisdom and morality'. Candidates were able to demonstrate clear understanding that there are differing views about the importance of meditation as part of the Eightfold Path and to assess them.

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 Evaluate the importance of the application of the First Precept in the modern world. (30)

This question was a wonderful discriminator of candidates' religious studies skills. Candidates were able to show their depth of understanding of the precepts and their use in today's world. The majority of candidates focussed on the First Precept and developed their arguments and assessed the significance of the First Precept by discussing the relevance of the other precepts. Candidates accurately used specialist language and terminology; terms such as panca sila, loving kindness and skilfulness were all used accurately. The strongest responses considered the reasoning behinds the First Precept its use in practices such as vegetarianism and contrasted them with arguments that the whole of the precepts should be observed. Some candidates referred to the concept that the First Precept is not a rule it is a guideline as evidence in their answer, strengthening their judgements and enabling connections throughout the response.

Weaker responses simply discussed what the First Precept is with an overemphasis on the how it is applied with little use of AO2 skills. Sadly some candidates were unaware of what the First Precept is.

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

