



GCSE

Religious Studies A

8062/11 Paper 1 Buddhism

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

Students performed well over the paper this year and they had been prepared well by centres. They found the questions straightforward and accessible both on the ‘Beliefs’ and the ‘Practices’ sections. Only a minority failed to make at least an attempt at all the questions. Legibility of a writing style was more difficult to read this year than in past years and this may have affected their opportunity to pick up full marks for SPaG.

It was very pleasing to see an increase in the use of both Pali and Sanskrit terms which is a major feature of the Buddhism specification. The teaching of the key terms is a crucial element of this specification and assisted with the sources of authority or sacred text responses in particular too. Centres need to be mindful that a source of authority in Buddhism such as the Dhammapada must be cited to enable the fifth mark to be awarded on the 1.4 and 2.4 questions. Some of the better responses offered both depth and detail and, in the evaluation, responses were well focused too. It is pleasing to see a less formulaic evaluation response from many students such as FARM or Drearer. It is also relevant to note that arguments in favour of a statement and other points of view do not have to be of equal measure to achieve the top of level 4. 1.5 was completed to a higher level than 2.5, though there could still be timing issues for students here as 2.5 is the last question on the exam.

The inclusion of the word ‘generosity’ as one of the six perfections certainly aided the weaker students to say something rather than nothing on their 2.5 responses. Evaluation was at times freely expressed and with a level of maturity and insight which was pleasing to see as well as the ability to make links between the different areas of this specification which is totally credit worthy.

1.1

The correct response to the question, asking for the meaning of anatta, was option B –no fixed self. Some students confused by the difference between anatta and anicca gave option A – impermanence as their response. Just over three quarters of students answered correctly.

1.2

Students seemed to know the Five Aggregates (skandhas) or not as there were not many responses achieving 1 mark. Some students left the question unanswered. Some students gave examples of other numerical teachings in Buddhism; very popular were two of the Five Precepts, but also two of the Three marks of Existence. This suggests that the terminology of the Five Aggregates (skandhas) was perhaps unfamiliar or at least not retained by these students. Those that correctly answered often successfully used the English translations of these words, for example, form or body, sensations, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.

1.3

This question proved to be accessible with the response requiring understanding of Right Speech and how it influences Buddhists today. Some students wrote very general responses about the Eightfold Path which were credited provided that some aspect of the influence of Right Speech could be found.

Fuller explanations made some good links to Buddhist ideas about reducing suffering and showing metta (loving kindness) as well as karuna (compassion) in the way that Buddhists conduct themselves when speaking to others. This demonstrates that many students possessed a secure understanding of the connections between specific teachings and many other Buddhist core beliefs as well as the ability to apply them to a Buddhist's everyday life.

1.4

It was pleasing to see how many responses demonstrated a secure grasp of how the concept of Nibbana (Nirvana) differs from monotheistic notions of heaven. It was also pleasing to note how many students showed depth and breadth of knowledge with references to Pure Land and other Mahayana traditions as well as the ability to use of variety of relevant quotations to support Buddhist beliefs about Nibbana (Nirvana). Sometimes Nibbana (Nirvana) can be viewed as a more abstract concept to define and explain but there were some good explanations of its meaning from all the main Buddhist traditions which was encouraging. References to the Pure Land tradition were very well articulated. Some students could have been more explicit when including references to sacred writings or another source of Buddhist belief and teaching, using the phrase 'The Buddha taught ...' or 'The Buddha said'.

1.5

A number of students were able to access the higher levels in this response by demonstrating interest and engagement with this question. The question was phrased in such a way that it was open to a variety of different responses with a number being very impressive and of an advanced level standard. These included points of view such as: much depends on what school of Buddhism is considered; what type of life is the best way for a Buddhist to live; which aspects of the Buddha's life should or should not be followed; has society changed so much that the example of the Buddha is no longer one to follow today; is it better to follow the example of the Buddha or the teaching of the dharma or the example provided by the Sangha.

Students generally possessed a secure knowledge of the life of the Buddha. Many responses seen referenced his asceticism to suggest it is not the best way to live. A clear understanding of how Buddhists today regard the historical Buddha as someone they respect but do not worship as well as the instructions the Buddha gave to his followers, was also communicated well.

2.1

The question asked, 'Which of the following is not one of the Five Moral Precepts?' to which the answer was 'Do not be jealous'. Around 80% of the exam entry achieved a mark on this question which is very pleasing.

2.2

Generally, this question concerning Wesak was answered well by students suggesting good teaching of this important Buddhist festival. It is however useful to remind students to keep answers to two-mark questions simple and not to over complicate them. Only two short points of knowledge are required.

2.3

Most students wrote some excellent answers demonstrating detailed knowledge of how Buddhists might use shrines, for example to meditate, as well as explaining the meaning and significance of different objects that can be found on a Buddhist shrine, linking the symbolism of fresh flowers to the Buddhist teaching about impermanence.

Some students worked on writing about two contrasting reasons, such as comparing the importance of a shrine at home from a temple, and it is important to note that contrasting can simply mean different. Thus, an attempt was made to state ‘on the one hand they are important...’ but ‘on the other hand they are not important...’ Some students did not explicitly focus on the shrine as opposed to the shrine room or the experience of going to a temple.

2.4

Most of the responses students gave had an understanding of meditation and samatha meditation in particular. With these responses, students were often able to find a suitable quotation such as ‘never from this place will I move until I have gained supreme enlightenment’ as a reason why Buddhists might practise samatha meditation in following the example of the Buddha under the Bodhi Tree. Many students also possessed a secure conceptual understanding of samatha meditation as opposed to vipassana meditation, and also how samatha mediation relates to vipassana meditation. This allowed students to explain the reasons why it is practised, further gaining development marks.

Some students did not include specific references to sacred writings or another source of Buddhist belief and teaching which was a requirement of this question and therefore could not gain the fifth mark.

2.5

The way this question was worded, with the example of ‘generosity’ given, meant that many of the responses were able to provide at the very least a reasoned consideration of why the perfection of generosity might or might not be easy to develop. For students who may have initially struggled with the six perfections or paramitas, including the example of ‘generosity’ gave them a starting point to work from.

Students who accessed the higher levels demonstrated a thorough and detailed knowledge of the six perfections and were thus able to provide well-argued responses such as comparing and contrasting different perfections as well as suggesting it depended which Buddhists were being referred to, whether lay or of the monastic Sangha. These students were also able to draw upon knowledge of all the six perfections, analysing how individually as well as collectively they can be developed, particularly as a significant part of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.