



GCSE

Religious Studies

8062/11 Paper1: Buddhism

Report on the examination

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General Introduction

The paper was comparable to last year. It was clear that centres had prepared their students well for the examination. However, statistics indicated that students did not perform as well in the multiple-choice questions as in previous years. There were comparable performances on both the Practices section and the Beliefs section. For some students it appeared that they ran out of time. For others, they tended to struggle more on the question on Sunyata (emptiness) though this appeared to be the only question that some students struggled with. Very few students quoted from sacred texts or other sources of authority so it would be useful for centres to revisit even some of the more difficult authoritative texts as reference points.

Question specific comments

Beliefs section

1.1

Only approximately 50% scored accurately on the 'Beliefs' multiple-choice question. The correct answer to the word for the Eightfold path in Buddhism was B – Magga.

01.2

This question was generally well answered with many students showing a wide range of knowledge and understanding. Bodhisattvas seemed to have been taught very well by many centres with students achieving full marks for their understanding. Most students were able to note that bodhisattvas can be earthly or transcendent and equally can be either enlightened or stay in the cycle of samsara to help others become enlightened. A few students gave the names of bodhisattvas, but it was pleasing to see the accompaniment of 'they are full of wisdom' or 'they are compassionate'. Some students referenced the Mahayana tradition but a few just did not know what a bodhisattva was which, on the full course, potentially studied for two years, was surprising.

01.3

Sunyata was clearly understood by many students with some impressive responses and with particular reference to the Mahayana tradition. Many students were also able to link their responses to the Three Marks of Existence also, i.e. – anicca, anatta and dukkha as well as Paticcasamuppada (Pali) or Pratityasamudpada (Sanskrit) which is dependent arising. Links were also made to relevant sacred texts, such as the Parable of Nagasena and the Chariot and the story of Kisa Gotami. It is pleasing to see how students seem to have been encouraged to draw out how beliefs influence Buddhists today, considering how it affects individuals and their actions. Some students were able to successfully link sunyata with the Five Skandhas or aggregates and then cleverly connect this to the concept of sunyata meaning that everyone and everything is therefore connected, potentially resulting in a sense of universal compassion. A number of students did not understand the Buddhist concept of emptiness at all and instead wrote about emptiness being a problem that needed to be resolved.

01.4

It was very pleasing to see the secure knowledge and understanding that many students seem to have these days about the life of Siddhartha Gautama. Many were able to identify what the ascetic life was alongside some of the features of the ascetic life which were important such as the ways in which Siddhartha Gautama was able to advance in his understanding and practice of meditation leading to his successful confrontation with Mara. Some can and do include quotations to support what they are writing and the five mark question is the place to do it. However, as with other years, reference to relevant teaching or a source of authority seem to have been lacking on the whole. Perhaps the most common reference was the Buddha's comment as he sat under the Bodhi tree 'I will not leave this place until I have achieved full awakening.' That Siddhartha's ascetic experience was a mistake, showing the importance of a middle way between a life of indulgence in the palace and the austerity of his asceticism, was a common response although there was some confusion with regard to when this began. In these cases, students wrote about the four sights rather than the ascetic life which followed. That said, many students were also able to identify that the six years spent by Siddhartha Gautama were key because they enabled him to find the Middle Way.

01.5

The nature of the statement in this question was to encourage students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and the ability to evaluate the Three Marks of Existence. Some students took full use of the breadth of the question to show how much they knew about different parts of the Dhamma (Dharma) which were then used to support or counter the viewpoint that the Three Marks of Existence are the most important part. Positive marking ensured that a wide interpretation was given to the Dhamma (Dharma). However, some students showed confusion as to what the Three Marks of Existence might be with more than a few making reference to the three jewels, treasures or refuges. Some students approached the question by isolating the first mark of existence, dukkha, and discussing how that in itself was more important than the other two and more important than anything else in the Dhamma (Dharma). It was pleasing to read some higher-level responses which indicated a deeper consideration of the question as to who the Three Marks of Existence might be most important to such as the monastic Sangha or the lay Sangha, Theravada Buddhists or Mahayana Buddhists such as Pure Land Buddhists. Equally, many students were able to use their understanding of many aspects of the Buddhist Dhamma (Dharma) such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path as well as the Six Paramitas in the Mahayana tradition to good effect. Interestingly, some students related their response to the gaining of positive kamma / karma or as a way of achieving nibbana / nirvana. A grasp of the meaning behind the Three Marks of Existence would help a full understanding of how to gain a favourable rebirth or enlightenment.

Practices section

02.1

64% scored accurately on the 'Practices' multiple-choice question. The correct answer was B – Puja to describe a worship ritual in Buddhism.

02.2

This question proved to be very straightforward for most students and they were able to give a full range of possible answers to this question, showing a secure understanding of Buddhist worship at home, suggesting some of the practical benefits of having a shrine at home, but also the spiritual benefits, such as their karma that might be earned by maintaining a shrine, particularly at home. As with question 1.2, most students used their time wisely by not providing lengthy and detailed reasons as these are not required for this question. The most common words that occurred in responses were ones such as worship at home being 'personal' or 'convenient in the absence of a temple' or being a 'sign of 'devotion/dedication' to the Buddha.

02.3

Overall, this question was well answered. Most students were able to suggest that festivals united the Buddhist community or that they enabled the community to celebrate the life of the Buddha. A pleasing number of students named festivals such as Wesak, Parinirvana Day or Kathina and then wrote about how these were important in commemorating the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha or the largest alms giving ceremony of the Buddhist year. This question gave students a number of opportunities to suggest why festivals are important for different reasons: focusing on the life and teachings of the Buddha and giving thanks, a more personal reflection on a Buddhist's own spiritual journey as well as the importance of the Sangha meeting as a community. This clearly was another topic students had securely learnt. As with question 1.3 it was helpful when students identified two reasons, however if a student wrote a more holistic response this was of course credited with positive marking.

02.4

For the majority of students, the Five Moral Precepts were clearly known and as required in the question, two of them were identified and an explanation given on how these might be practised by Buddhists. Some students listed all five of the precepts without going into further development so therefore limited the marks they could receive. That said, this question allowed for students to quote the precepts and then be credited for reference to sacred writings. It was notable that many students were able to use some of the key terms in the precepts such as 'abstain from taking intoxicants which tend to cloud the mind'. It was pleasing to see references made to vegetarianism as an option for living when mentioning the first precept as well as examples of stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, perjury and gossip as further development of the other precepts. A minority of students were not able to identify the five moral precepts and showed confusion with other concepts such as the five skandhas.

02.5

This question proved to be very accessible for nearly all students. It was pleasing to see how many students had picked up on the beginning of the statement phrase 'In today's world....' This

enabled them to offer many credit worthy points on the central importance of meditation to a Western, multi – faith, urbanised world. Some of the higher quality responses showed great depth and breadth in reflecting on the difficulty for many Buddhists with regard to meditation such as busy life schedules and a social life with the inclusion of mobile phones that may not give room for any meditation practices. Many students noted that in the age of the Internet and social media, guides to meditation were widely available through a variety of apps etc, and this might aid a Buddhist in their practice. Some students were able to discuss ways in which meditation is at the heart of the Buddhist Dhamma (Dharma), for example the Noble Eightfold Path. From this, some of the responses were able to discuss whether or not this meant that meditation was difficult or not and equally, whether it had to be undertaken if somebody wanted to be a Buddhist. There was some impressive evidence of students grappling with the question in a mature fashion by, for example, querying for which Buddhists the difficulty in meditation might be most felt. Thus, a useful contrast could be made between monastic Buddhists who lived in such a way which removed many difficulties as opposed to lay Buddhists living normal everyday lives whereby time might be a premium. It was also pleasing to read responses which identified different types of meditation with some such as vipassana being much more difficult than others such as samatha or mindfulness. This question proved successful in allowing students to regularly make evaluative judgements throughout their responses and some easily achieved a level 4 mark in doing so. Once again, some time related restraints may have hindered the more able students in providing a conclusion at the end of their evaluation, although most were able to do so.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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