GCSE
RELIGIOUS STUDIES
8061/1

BUDDHISM

Mark scheme

Sample assessment materials

First exam in June 2026

V1.0

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Mark schemes are prepared by the Lead Assessment Writer and considered, together with the relevant questions, by a panel of subject teachers. This mark scheme includes any amendments made at the standardisation events which all associates participate in and is the scheme which was used by them in this examination. The standardisation process ensures that the mark scheme covers the students' responses to questions and that every associate understands and applies it in the same correct way. As preparation for standardisation each associate analyses a number of students' scripts. Alternative answers not already covered by the mark scheme are discussed and legislated for. If, after the standardisation process, associates encounter unusual answers which have not been raised they are required to refer these to the Lead Assessment Writer.

It must be stressed that a mark scheme is a working document, in many cases further developed and expanded on the basis of students' reactions to a particular paper. Assumptions about future mark schemes on the basis of one year's document should be avoided; whilst the guiding principles of assessment remain constant, details will change, depending on the content of a particular examination paper.

No student should be disadvantaged on the basis of their gender identity and/or how they refer to the gender identity of others in their exam responses.

A consistent use of 'they/them' as a singular and pronouns beyond 'she/her' or 'he/him' will be credited in exam responses in line with existing mark scheme criteria.

Further copies of this mark scheme are available from aqa.org.uk

Mark Schemes for GCSE Religious Studies

This paper requires expert markers who have wide knowledge and understanding of the particular subject content of the Specification. With the exception of the multiple-choice question, many of the questions asked have many different creditable answers and students are able to bring to their answers their own knowledge, understanding and background. They will offer details, arguments and evidence which the examiner, with the help of the mark scheme, will need to judge as creditable or not. It is therefore important that the examiner has a good understanding of the principles and spirit of the mark scheme in order to be fair and consistent when marking students' answers. The Content included is designed to be as helpful as possible but in many cases is not exhaustive. So Content sections are introduced by the sentence:

Students may include some of the following points, but all other relevant points must be credited:

This is to remind examiners that there may well be additional correct answers which, with their expertise, they will be able to allow. With all questions if an examiner has any doubt about answers being creditworthy they should consult their team leader.

Structure

The mark scheme for each question shows:

- the question; Each question is printed in full before its target and mark scheme. It is always important that examiners remind themselves of the exact question being asked. In particular, they will need to do this in instances where the answer appears to be 'straying' from the question set or perhaps offers a valid alternative not included in the mark scheme
- target; The target provides the specific assessment objective which the question is testing. It reminds examiners of the skills the question is designed to test, e.g. knowledge and understanding, evaluation
- the total marks available for the question and if Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar is assessed
- the typical answer(s) or content which are expected
- generic instructions related to the question target of how to award marks (i.e. levels of response grid).

Themes papers guidance (Specification A and Short Course)

In questions where students may choose religions from which to illustrate their answer, there may be some general Content, i.e. credible comments which students will make which could be applied to any religion or perhaps to a secular viewpoint as well. Where these are appropriate they are usually given first. The mark scheme will also include, under separate headings, Content sections for each of the six religions allowed within the Specifications.

General Guidance

.../.. means that these are acceptable alternative answers in the mark scheme, e.g. Guru Har Krishan/Guru Tegh Bahadur/Guru Gobind Singh.

Answers may include specialist terms, in Hebrew or Arabic for example. If this is the case, the mark scheme will usually indicate this by providing in brackets the English as well, e.g. 'Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement)'. In such questions, answers will be credited whether provided in the original language or in English.

Some mark schemes use bullet points to separate content. Each bullet point refers to a different possible 'belief' or 'teaching' or 'way', depending on the question. Obliques (.../...) used within the bullet point indicate different ways in which the point may be expressed and points which may be made to give the further detail or development needed for the second mark.

Where a student has crossed out a complete answer, it should be marked if it remains legible, unless an alternative is provided in which case only the alternative should be marked. When part of an answer is crossed out, then only what remains should be considered.

In questions where credit can be given to the development of a point, those developments can take the form of:

- example or evidence
- reference to different views
- detailed information.

1-mark multiple-choice questions

Such questions have four alternatives and the one correct answer will be given together with the correct letter, e.g. 'Answer: D Trinity'.

1-mark short-answer questions

The principle here is provided in the mark scheme: 'Any one from:' If students give **more than** the one answer required by the question:

- **award for the first answer only, wherever they appear**
- if a student gives more than one answer on the first line and another answer/other answers on the second line, the 'first answer' will be the **first one** on the first line and **only this one** should be considered for marks. Other answers must be ignored.

4 and 6-mark answer questions

Examiners should take care to note the target of the question. Clear information is provided for these types of question on how to award marking points. Examiners should carefully read the additional instructions provided for each type of question (e.g. for influence questions the final sentence in the general guidance box reminds the examiner that the second mark (detailed explanation) awarded in each case must show clear 'influence').

12-mark answer questions

The 12-mark questions test Evaluation skills (AO2). The mark scheme for these answers is based on Levels of Response marking in which the examiner is required to make a judgement on the completed answer taken as a whole.

Level of response marking instructions

In GCSE Religious Studies, differentiation is largely achieved by outcome on the basis of students' responses. To facilitate this, level of response marking has been devised for many questions.

Level of response marking requires a quite different approach from the examiner than the traditional 'point for point' marking. It is essential that the **whole response is read** and then **allocated to the level** it best fits.

If a student demonstrates knowledge, understanding and/or evaluation at a certain level, he/she must be credited at that level. **Length** of response or **literary ability** should **not be confused with genuine religious studies skills**. For example, a short answer which shows a high level of conceptual ability must be credited at that level. (If there is a band of marks allocated to a level, discrimination should be made with reference to the development of the answer.)

Examiners should **refer to the stated assessment target** objective of a question (see mark scheme) when there is any doubt as to the relevance of a student's response.

Level of response mark schemes include either **examples** of possible students' responses or **material** which they might use. These are intended as a **guide** only. It is anticipated that students will produce a wide range of responses to each question.

It is a feature of levels of response mark schemes that examiners are prepared to reward fully responses which are obviously valid and of high ability but do not conform exactly to the requirements of a particular level. If examiners have any doubt about what level to award a response, they should consult their team leader.

Level of response mark schemes are broken down into levels, each of which has a descriptor. The descriptor for the level shows the average performance for the level. There are marks in each level.

Before examiners apply the mark scheme to a student's answer they should read through the answer and annotate it (as instructed) to show the qualities that are being looked for. They should then apply the mark scheme. It may be necessary to read the answer more than once to be sure of assigning the correct level.

Step 1 Determine a level

Start at the lowest level of the mark scheme and use it as a ladder to see whether the answer meets the descriptor for that level. The descriptor for the level indicates the different qualities that might be seen in the student's answer for that level. If it meets the lowest level then go to the next one and decide if it meets this level, and so on, until you have a match between the level descriptor and the answer. With practice and familiarity you will find that for better answers you will be able to quickly skip through the lower levels of the mark scheme.

When assigning a level you should look at the overall quality of the answer and not look to pick holes in small and specific parts of the answer where the student has not performed quite as well as the rest. If the answer covers different aspects of different levels of the mark scheme you should use a best fit approach for defining the level and then use the variability of the response to help decide the mark within the level, i.e. if the response is predominantly Level 3 with a small amount of Level 4 material it would be placed in Level 3 but be awarded a mark near the top of the level because of the Level 4 content.

Step 2 Determine a mark

Once you have assigned a level you need to decide on the mark. The descriptors on how to allocate marks can help with this. The exemplar materials used during standardisation will help. There will be an answer in the standardising materials which will correspond with each level of the mark scheme. This answer will have been awarded a mark by the Lead Examiner. You can compare the student's answer with the example to determine if it is the same standard, better or worse than the example. You can then use this to allocate a mark for the answer based on the Lead Examiner's mark on the example.

You may well need to read back through the answer as you apply the mark scheme to clarify points and assure yourself that the level and the mark are appropriate.

Indicative content in the mark scheme is provided as a guide for examiners. It is not intended to be exhaustive and you must credit other valid points. Students do not have to cover all of the points mentioned in the Indicative content to reach the highest level of the mark scheme.

An answer which contains nothing of relevance to the question must be awarded no marks.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG)

Spelling, punctuation and grammar will be assessed in 12-mark questions.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) will be assessed against the following criteria:

Level	Performance descriptor	Marks awarded
High performance	• Learners spell and punctuate with consistent accuracy • Learners use rules of grammar with effective control of meaning overall • Learners use a wide range of specialist terms as appropriate	3
Intermediate performance	• Learners spell and punctuate with considerable accuracy • Learners use rules of grammar with general control of meaning overall • Learners use a good range of specialist terms as appropriate	2
Threshold performance	• Learners spell and punctuate with reasonable accuracy • Learners use rules of grammar with some control of meaning and any errors do not significantly hinder meaning overall • Learners use a limited range of specialist terms as appropriate	1
No marks awarded	• The learner writes nothing • The learner's response does not relate to the question • The learner's achievement in SPaG does not reach the threshold performance level, for example errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar severely hinder meaning	0

Qu	Part	Marking guidance	Total marks
01	1	Which **one** of the following is the book which contains stories from the life of the Buddha? **A** Jataka Tales. **B** Dhammapada. **C** Tipitaka. **D** Pali Canon. **Target: AO1:1** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, including beliefs, practices and sources of authority. Answer: A Jataka Tales.	1
01	2	Give **one** reason why Buddha rejected his life of wealth. **Target: AO1:1** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, including beliefs, practices and sources of authority. Any one from: • He saw the Four Sights • The prophecy was fulfilled • He wanted to find a solution to suffering • He was disillusioned with his own life of luxury.	1

01	3	Explain **two** ways in which learning about the life of the Buddha influences Buddhists today. **Target: AO1:2** Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief: influence on individuals, communities and societies. **First way** Simple explanation of a relevant and accurate influence – 1 mark Detailed explanation of a relevant and accurate influence – 2 marks **Second way** Simple explanation of a relevant and accurate influence – 1 mark Detailed explanation of a relevant and accurate influence – 2 marks Students may include some of the following points, but all other relevant points must be credited: • the Buddha is the blueprint for enlightenment – Buddhist monks follow his example to reach enlightenment themselves, e.g. leave their families, follow the middle way between greed and self-denial. • the Buddha proved humans could be enlightened – this gives Buddhists confidence that they can be enlightened; gives them a reason to follow the path • the Buddha's experiences help people to make sense out of experiences today: the Four Sights show that old age sickness and death are part of life and Buddhists should always be mindful of them, and the Buddha's life showed that wealth cannot bring happiness – Buddhists look for fulfilment and happiness in mental attitude rather than possessions.	4

01	4	Explain **two** Buddhist teachings about nibbana/nirvana. Refer to sacred writings or another source of Buddhist belief and teaching in your answer. **Target: AO1:1** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, including beliefs, practices and sources of authority. **First teaching** Simple explanation of a relevant and accurate teaching – 1 mark Detailed explanation of a relevant and accurate teaching – 2 marks **Second teaching** Simple explanation of a relevant and accurate teaching – 1 mark Detailed explanation of a relevant and accurate teaching – 2 marks **Source of authority** Award 2 marks for a response which names and applies a relevant source of authority to the question. Or Award 1 mark for a response naming a relevant a source of authority. Or Award 1 mark for application of a relevant source of authority to the question without naming it. Students may include some of the following points, but all other relevant points must be credited: • the goal of Buddhist faith: This is the end of all cravings, of greed, hate and ignorance, and the end of rebirth. Buddha's first sermon • can be reached in this life or after death: Buddha reached Nirvana at enlightenment but then lived for 45 years teaching others how to find the way; Nirvana is peace of mind – those who have reached it experience life as all others do but do not respond to it in the same way. Life of the Buddha • cannot be described: All the words people could use come from their experience of this life, but Nirvana is not part of this material world. Questions of King Milinda.	6

01	5	‘For Buddhists, ‘impermanence (anicca) is the most important of the Three Marks of Existence.’ Evaluate this statement. In your answer you should: • refer to Buddhist teaching • give reasoned arguments to support this statement • give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view reach a justified conclusion. **Target: AO2** Analyse and evaluate aspects of religion and belief, including significance and influence.	12

Levels	Criteria	Marks
4	A well-argued response, reasoned consideration of different points of view. Logical chains of reasoning leading to judgement(s) supported by knowledge and understanding of relevant evidence and information. **References to religion applied to the issue.**	10–12
3	Reasoned consideration of different points of view. Logical chains of reasoning that draw on knowledge and understanding of relevant evidence and information. **Clear reference to religion.**	7–9
2	Reasoned consideration of a point of view. A logical chain of reasoning drawing on knowledge and understanding of relevant evidence and information. OR Recognition of different points of view, each supported by relevant reasons/evidence. **Maximum of Level 2 if there is no reference to religion.**	4–6
1	Point of view with reason(s) stated in support.	1–3
0	Nothing worthy of credit.	0

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No marks awarded	• The learner writes nothing • The learner's response does not relate to the question • The learner's achievement in SPaG does not reach the threshold performance level, for example errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar severely hinder meaning	0

Students may include some of the following evidence and arguments, but all relevant evidence and arguments must be credited:

Arguments in support

- impermanence is a fundamental principle of the Buddhist faith/it is the principle of life that everything changes/humans have no control over birth, growth and decay and so need to come to terms with this
- impermanence causes suffering and the Buddhist faith addresses this, impermanence operates on all levels of life and even in inanimate things so it is a constant reminder of powerlessness

		• an understanding of impermanence motivates Buddhists to do something to improve the quality of life – to achieve enlightenment, etc. **Arguments in support of other views** • Dukkha is a more important mark of existence – unless people understand that life is unsatisfactory, they are not likely to search for a solution/everyone suffers and it is a basic feature of life/the entire doctrine of the Buddhist faith rests on principles which will eliminate suffering/it is the issue which began the Buddha's quest for enlightenment (the four sights)/human nature involves attachment and craving – this is basic to all humans and leads directly to suffering • no fixed self (anatta) is arguably the most important because it addresses the issue of the identity of the person and the illusion of self as the main barrier to enlightenment • all three are equally important because they are parts of a whole view of the meaning of life and without any one of these, the underlying principles which Buddhism addresses are incomplete etc.	