
GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES A

Paper 1 Buddhism

Report on the Examination

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Buddhism: Beliefs**Question 01.1**

Most students correctly identified anicca, option D, as the correct term for impermanence. Some students selected anatta.

Question 01.2

In the main, this question was very well answered by students. Some students appeared to be confused over the term 'ascetic' and in light of some of the responses may have confused the term with 'hedonistic' as they discussed Siddhartha Gautama's life in the Palace. Credit was still gained however, as some responses identified the same reasoning for leaving the Palace as to becoming an ascetic ie to find the answer to suffering. Popular responses included the point that Siddhartha Gautama was no nearer achieving enlightenment being an ascetic, and he was near death the longer he remained an ascetic.

Question 01.3

There were many detailed and relevant responses to this question which accurately identified some of the key influences the Buddha experienced through witnessing the four sights. Students could respond to this question by choosing two of the four sights and explaining how these influenced the Buddha's teachings or they could take a more global, holistic approach considering all four sights and their influence together. Both were creditworthy approaches. Some students spent too much time explaining the four sights and what they were rather than how any of the sights influenced the Buddha's teachings. Responses need to focus on exactly what the question is asking.

Question 01.4

Credit was given for an approach that interpreted the stages of the Eightfold Path as wisdom, ethics and meditation or as separating each of the stages of Right Understanding or Viewpoint through to Right Concentration. Many students referenced relevant and accurate sacred writing or another source of Buddhist belief and teaching so many responses were able to achieve full marks. There were some excellent responses here with detailed and developed answers on each stage selected by the students.

Question 01.5

This question was particularly well answered by many students as they showed a pleasing range of sophisticated responses to this question which reflects great credit on teachers. Students who had been taught to read the question carefully before responding gained some benefit as they were the ones that could hone in on some strong, salient points to support what they were saying. Many referred to Buddhist teachings and gave both reasoned arguments in support of the statement as well as justified conclusions. Many identified the Four Noble Truths as the essence of the Buddha's teachings, the first he gave and what they seek to do. It was surprising to see a number of responses which did not recognise the Noble Eightfold Path as the Fourth Noble Truth. The counter arguments were well argued though and it was clear that many students had studied much on Mahayana Buddhism and were able to bring in some of the major teachings of the Mahayana tradition such as karuna and metta as well as the Bodhisattva ideal. The 12 mark

question was a new question type for students and schools and colleges. Many fared well, although some responses lacked the depth and development needed to access the higher level marks.

Buddhism: Practices

Question 02.1

This question was not so successfully completed as 01.1 with some students highlighting all three incorrect options, none more than another.

Question 02.2

In the main, this question was not well answered. Responses tended to gain full marks or no marks, and those who knew the six perfections had no difficulty in achieving two marks. It is advised that clarity regarding which Buddhist teaching is which needs to be re-emphasised to students as many responded with stages of the Noble Eightfold Path whilst others saw the six perfections as the Five Precepts. Some responses guessed at 'compassion' being one of the six perfections. That said, wisdom, morality and meditation are three of the six perfections as well as the three trainings or disciplines of the Noble Eightfold Path so credit could still be given if responses had included these.

Question 02.3

Many students offered some detailed and relevant responses to accurately identify two meditation practices. Most chose Samatha and Vipassana but there were also some very good responses that referred to metta and Zen meditation practices. Very few chose Tibetan Buddhist options. However, students could have responded by taking a broader and more generalised look at meditation practices which was also creditworthy. Because of the wide ranging nature of this question, many students found it accessible and it was particularly pleasing to see some quite difficult technical Buddhist terms being spelled correctly by students.

Question 02.4

Wesak is probably the best known and most significant festival for Buddhists. Many students recognised it as the most important festival and some of the most successful responses were very detailed and identified why this festival was important for Buddhists. Some of the weaker responses simply wrote about the festival and not why it was important, perhaps not clearly focusing enough on the command word 'explain' – it is important that responses focus on the actual question set and the command word. Many responses included the significance of the offerings, honouring the Buddha and the release of caged birds and the significant link between these and the Buddha's teachings.

Question 02.5

This question was not quite as well answered as 01.5 although students clearly had some good ideas as to whether or not Buddhists could act with compassion on each and every occasion. Some students seemed to find this question the most challenging on the paper although students who spotted the words 'impossible' and 'always' in the question title homed in on these two words to good effect. As with 01.5, many responses referred to Buddhist teachings and gave both reasoned arguments in support of the statement as well as justified conclusions. Some of the

stronger arguments looked at the modern world and how difficult some situations are for Buddhists. Many responses focused on compassion versus actions but few related this to kamma (karma). A few considered karuna as one of the four sublime states and then went on to give some current affairs knowledge and understanding such as the situation in Myanmar with Rohingya Muslims. Counter arguments were strong too which included following the Buddha's example and Mahayana Buddhists trying to practice compassion as much as they could to follow the example of the bodhisattvas, which gathered credit as the responses unfolded. Weaker responses sometimes were prevented from achieving the high level marks by extended exemplification of scenarios which might lead to a lack of compassion eg what about if a Buddhist was robbed in the street....' etc.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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