

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/06 Summer 2022 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

Advance Information for Summer 2022 assessments

To support student revision, advance information was published about the focus of exams for Summer 2022 assessments. Advance information was available for most GCSE, AS and A Level subjects, Core Maths, FSMQ, and Cambridge Nationals Information Technologies. You can find more information on our [website](#).

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Paper 6 series overview

The paper is one of three components that candidates need to sit in order to gain the A Level. Candidates need to attempt three out of the four questions. All of the questions attract the same number of marks. There are two assessment objectives; AO1 attracts 40% of the marks and AO2 attracts 60%; therefore, candidates' responses will be judged more on the argument, analysis and evaluation rather than their subject knowledge.

Overall, most of the candidates seemed well prepared for the paper and there were some excellent responses, some of which went well beyond the expectations for candidates at this level. Candidates used their knowledge and analysis/evaluation skills appropriately to respond to the questions on the paper. For example, the majority of candidates understood the key terms and concepts in the questions and could explain, analyse and evaluate them in relation to the topic and in relation to broader Buddhist concepts. Candidates did this by taking an idea like the Four Noble Truths and showing how the concepts within it, such as craving, link to other concepts not directly mentioned in the question, such as the three fires. By doing this, candidates demonstrated the depth of their knowledge and also how well they had been prepared by centres beforehand. However, a small number of candidates did not seem to have the knowledge required to respond to the questions, particularly Questions 1 and 4 on the nature of sunyata and the Dalai Lama.

Misconception



The Dalai Lama is not the leader of Buddhism, or the Buddha. He also does not lead Mahayana Buddhism, and is not a book, teaching or a god.

Paul Knitter and Stephen Batchelor are important to some western Buddhist groups but they are not leaders in the same way that the Dalai Lama is.

Also, some candidates appeared to have prepared responses to some of the questions and they tried to make these prepared responses fit the question. In some cases, this was successful but more often it was not.

To do well on this paper, candidates needed to demonstrate that they understood the concepts within the questions and how these fit into a broader set of Buddhist ideas.

Assessment for learning



All concepts within Buddhist thought are inter-related, and in fact can only be fully understood when seen in relation to Buddhist thought as a whole. Therefore, any analysis or evaluation needs to see the strengths and weaknesses of both the concept itself and the concept within the wider Buddhist context. Please see Exemplar 3.

Candidates also need to make sure that they demonstrate a clear line of argument when outlining their analysis. This might be stated as an opening to each paragraph or by part of each point made. The levels of response state that for an excellent response there needs to be an excellent line of reasoning, well-developed and sustained, which is coherent, relevant and logically structured. Where candidates did have this clear line of argument their responses attracted higher marks. Please see Exemplar 2.

Candidates who did well generally were precise in demonstrating their understanding, they used examples to illustrate their ideas and their argument flowed logically and coherently. Candidates who did less well generally struggled to explain concepts clearly, they may not have used examples or the examples that they used were not appropriate to the question.

Assessment for learning



Using examples is an excellent way for a candidate to demonstrate their understanding of a concept. Candidates can use the examples they find in textbooks or online to show their understanding of a concept.

Alternatively, candidates can choose to use their own personalised examples, and the responses that attract the highest number of marks tend to have well thought out and precise personalised examples in them. Unfortunately, the responses that score less well are often let down by the use of an inappropriate example or one which clearly demonstrates that a candidate has not understood the concept. Please see Exemplar 3.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:

- demonstrated a holistic understanding of sunyata and the two levels of truth. They could demonstrate through exemplification their detailed understanding. They showed a range/depth of examples of how sunyata views conventional and ultimate language. The conclusion shows insight into the issue
- showed a holistic understanding of the complexity of the debate surrounding female ordination and could show this through a range/depth of examples. Concepts are clearly understood and used within the discussion to analyse whether all women should have the same opportunity as men to gain full or temporary ordination
- had a holistic understanding of the Four Noble Truths and how they link to a range of other Buddhist concepts to form a coherent set of teachings. They contrasted this with a discussion about whether some concepts can be or are more essential and why this is the case. There may have been some discussion about who they are essential to
- showed a holistic understanding of the role of the Dalai Lama. The focus may not be just on the current Dalai Lama and not just analyse whether the Dalai Lama's importance is diminished by his exile or enhanced by his celebrity status. There may have been a more comprehensive view of religious leadership within Buddhism.

Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:

- are not sure what sunyata means and have said something general about emptiness and language being empty. They might have used inappropriate examples or incorrectly linked sunyata to western ideas of Meta Ethics or Religious Language
- can explain that women are treated differently to men in terms of ordination but candidates have included a limited amount of information or few appropriate examples. There is no distinction between permanent and temporary ordination
- have a limited understanding of why the Four Noble Truths are essential and/or have presented a limited discussion around which other concepts may also be essential
- have shown a limited understanding of the importance of the Dalai Lama and/or included limited references to Buddhists today.

Question 1*

- 1* 'The idea of sunyata suggests that words are merely conventions and therefore have no value.'
Discuss. [40]

Fewer candidates attempted to respond to this question than the other three. Those that did attempt it on the whole seem to be well prepared and there were a greater proportion of excellent responses here than for any other question. There were some outstanding responses with candidates using their knowledge to construct clear and complex arguments. (Please see Exemplar 1 for more details.) Successful responses discussed the concepts of the two truths linking in the ideas of samsara and nirvana, while also extending the concept of sunyata to other dharma such as the Four Noble Truths, the poisoned arrow; or evaluating the concept of sunyata in light of Buddhist ethics and the potential impact that this might have in the world. As a result of this their responses tended to have a more developed expression of either the depth and/or scope of Buddhist philosophy. Nagasena's chariot analogy in his responses to the questions by King Milinda has been well used by candidates in this question and is an excellent example to use. Common problems were responses focusing on sunyata and ignoring the part of the question about the value of words. A few included very little information about Buddhist teachings on sunyata beyond that it means 'emptiness', but managed a logical discussion about the value of words. The responses which were given fewer marks tended to focus around only one of the previously mentioned ideas; thus their responses were less substantial in scope and depth.

Exemplar 1

The Heart Sutra is one of the primary texts that teach the importance of sunyata stating "form is emptiness, emptiness is form". This led to Nagarjuna also coining the idea of the Two Truths Doctrine. The Ultimate Truth is that of sunyata - all things are empty. The conventional truth is the provisional existence that we accord to the world. Therefore, for Nagarjuna all words are

merely conventions. Nagarjuna does not, however, entirely claim that words are therefore meaningless. Instead, they act as a tool for Buddhist to realise the Ultimate Truth. This can be seen when Nagarjuna succinctly writes in the *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā* that "the Conventional Truth is necessary to teach the significance of the Ultimate Truth". J.L. Cozfield gives the example of a table arguing that the Ultimate Truth would see the table as merely a collection of its parts and so, the table is of emptiness. However, we must then ask what this emptiness is - nothing. And so the conclusion we come to is a middle way between the Truths. "that the table must be seen as conventional, and as dependent".

Therefore, the conclusion to be made from Nagarjuna's Two Truth Doctrine is that words may ultimately be meaningless, but we must still accord them a conventional Truth in order to understand the Ultimate and thereby attain enlightenment.

Exemplar 1 is from a response to Question 1. The candidate has shown a very high level of understanding of the question and made excellent use of it in their first paragraph. This is an excellent example of how the response is fully focused on the question. It also demonstrates excellent knowledge, understanding and a clear line of argument, with analysis and evaluation. This response was given full marks.

Question 2*

2* Assess the view that all female Buddhists ought to undergo a period of ordained life.

[40]

This was one of the more popular questions on the paper. It was generally well answered, with a wide range of achievement. Most candidates are aware of the story of the Dragon King's Daughter, but showed little confidence as to what to do with it. Many seem to think Kisagotami achieved enlightenment spontaneously without being ordained. Many candidates were able to identify and thus include core knowledge into their responses and so did reasonably well in terms of the AO1 – making reference to historical precedence with the lineage of the bhikkhuni and the ordination of the Buddha's stepmother. Although AO1 was good, candidates did not always critically engage with the topic. This often resulted in their evaluations not being of the same standard as their AO1 content. Although often giving an appropriate line of argument, many candidates wanted to discuss the sexism that they argued was inherently 'present and visible' within Buddhism; leading to many not fully focusing on the question and seemingly answering a question that they seemed more prepared for on the topic of Buddhism being sexist or misogynistic. This led many candidates to argue that ordination should not be something that female Buddhists ought to do as they may face greater hardships, without exploring the consequences that these hardships may incur, such as not being able to fully engage with the Buddha's dharma. Something that seemed to be missed by a number of candidates was the phrasing of 'period', thus something that the candidates could have discussed in greater detail, linking to the common practice of males going through a short period of ordination in order to introduce them to the faith. Most are able to give fairly detailed accounts of the issues regarding ordination in different countries. There was some confusion as to the position taken by the Dalai Lama regarding female ordination.

Exemplar 2

Maha-parinibbana Sutta just before his death. Here, he clearly declares "the Sangha, if it wants, may abolish the lesser and minor training rules". This teaching is a clear acknowledgement from the Buddha that some of his teachings are merely *upaya-kamsalya* (skillful means) and that as the Sangha progresses and frees itself from the grip of the "prevailing Indian view", it must discard of rules that are not consistent with Buddhist doctrine, such as the eight *gorudhammas*. Therefore, it is clear that the Buddha himself believed that within the monastic Sangha, women should be able to live the same ordained life as monks etc.

Exemplar 2 is from a candidate response to Question 2. The candidate in this example has shown both a very high level of understanding of the topic and also a clear argument. The understanding can be seen in the way the candidate uses the information they have; there is no unnecessary explanation, the content is precise and examples and quotes are woven into the response. The point being made is supported with evidence and also challenged using evidence. This shows excellent analysis and evaluation which are essential for gaining the highest marks for AO2.

Question 3*

3* To what extent are the Four Noble Truths essential for all Buddhists?

[40]

This was one of the more frequently answered questions. Many of the candidates were able to explain what the Four Noble Truths are while making some reference to interconnected teachings and practices. The responses which attracted the highest marks often considered different groups to whom they may or may not be important. For example, if lay Buddhists are not attempting to gain enlightenment in this lifetime then the Four Noble Truths may be less important. Candidates also mentioned Stephen Batchelor and secular Buddhism in this context. Some contrasted the Four Noble Truths with other teachings such as the Three Marks of existence, although the responses judged to be very good or excellent went on to show how they are connected to the Four Noble Truths showing an integrated whole. Others contrasted their importance with ideas such as sunyata and the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Responses that attracted fewer marks usually fell into one of the two categories: not exploring the interrelated concepts that reside within the Four Noble Truths, e.g. not recognising the ideas of anicca and anatta when discussing dukkha; or not looking at the different form of craving when discussing the second noble truth. The other noticeable oversight was when candidates did not refer to different Buddhist traditions, for instance discussing the importance of the Four Noble Truths for Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, with reference to the practice of the arhat and the Bodhisattva. This led to many candidates not fully engaging with the idea of 'all Buddhists'.

Exemplar 3

The Four Noble Truths can be essential for all Buddhists seeing as samadaya and tanha ~~tanha~~ can prove to demonstrate an understanding to our desires. Tanha is our craving to which Buddhists believe we're ignorant too. They call this ignorance Avajya, which creates an understanding of why we continue to crave if it leads to our suffering. This is essential for Buddhists to understand the link between suffering and craving seeing as the Buddha implies and highlights that craving causes suffering. The Buddha uses the example of the Mustard seed to demonstrate the cycle of suffering caused by craving and how our ignorance allows us to not acknowledge it. In the story of the Mustard seed, a mother converses with the Buddha desperately trying to save her ill son.

The Buddha replies saying that she can effectively save her son if she finds a Mustard seed. This leads the mother to desperately knocking on everyone's door in her village, to which everyone tells her they haven't got any. In this, the Buddha teaches the mother that craving is poisonous and creates suffering in which we, as humans, completely indulge in. This can be proven to be completely essential for Buddhists to understand the craving we desire to cause us suffering. However, some may argue that this is impossible, seeing as we may not think in every moment that we are suffering from our cravings. However, using the example of eating another bar of chocolate because you crave the taste, can cause your body suffering through indigestion. Simple examples, like eating chocolate, proves that we are driven by craving desires, and that those cravings causes suffering.

Exemplar 3 is from a response to Question 3. The candidate in this example has made excellent use of concepts surrounding those in the question. This shows a higher level of understanding (AO1 skill) and added to this is the use of an example to support the point being made. The candidate has made good use of the idea of craving and linked it to ignorance (a concept not specifically linked to the Four Noble Truths). By making this link the candidate is showing their wider knowledge of Buddhist thought. The examples are also good. The story of the mustard seed is used well here to show craving. (This is the most used example by candidates but many did not use it as well as the candidate has done in this example.) The better example is at the end of the paragraph where the candidate talks about chocolate. This is an appropriate personal example and also shows that the candidate understands the concepts they are writing about.

Question 4*

4* Assess the significance of the Dalai Lama for Buddhists today.

[40]

After Question 1 this was the most infrequently answered question. Candidates who answered this question would often reference the work of Knitter and 'Double/Dual Belonging'. However it was not something that necessarily helped a candidate's overall argument as a lot of their time was spent explaining this, which is something they did not need nor have to do.

The more successful responses tended to provide brief but intuitive references to the Dalai Lama (his life, teaching of Buddhism in the west or his focus on Loving kindness). They then went on to evaluate the relevance of the figure to the practice of Buddhism today, making reference to the perception that various groups within Buddhism have of the figure. Although not reflective of the mark given, most candidates did indicate that the Dalai Lama has significance due to the impact that he has had on delivering Buddhism to the west, or his 'celebrity' status. Many candidates compared the significance of the Dalai Lama to other Buddhist leaders who have had an impact on the understanding of Buddhism in the west for instance Stephen Bachelor or Thich Nhat Hanh. The responses which attracted the higher marks often talked about the balance between traditionalist and modernising trends in the Dalai Lama's life and teaching and discussed the extent to which he is significant in the east and the west, contrasting the two. Some suggested that his seemingly contradictory statements may be the result of upaya.

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