



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Religious Studies 4050

Unit 12: Buddhism

405012

Report on the Examination

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Unit 12: Buddhism

General Comments

For the third year of this relatively new specification, students had been well prepared for this examination. Clearly there was the full ability range entered and clearly many students had been very well taught. What was particularly pleasing again was to see the sheer depth and detail students put into many of their responses. Technical terms had been learned and very good knowledge and understanding shown of all aspects of the specification on the Buddhist faith. Credit should again go to the students and their teachers for the preparations made to sit this exam and for the way students are able to demonstrate their ability to utilise and apply a wide range of Buddhist beliefs, practices and teachings. There appeared to be no timing issues with the paper. The quality of part B responses in the main were very good.

Part A

Question A1: The Dhamma (Dharma)

Part (a) proved to be a good starter for most students, and on the whole was very well answered, with many achieving full marks. Students who scored full marks knew exactly what to respond to on the Four Noble Truths. Students seemed to enjoy this question as a good starter and a confidence booster for the rest of the examination.

Some students could not distinguish between anatta and anicca for their responses to part (b) though many acknowledged that they knew anatta was one of the three marks of existence or signs of being.

Most students responded in depth to part (c) with many stating that the Buddha's teaching was neither gloomy nor upbeat but rather realistic. They then went on to link what they said with the Noble Eightfold Path which was commendable. Some acknowledged that whether you think the Buddha's teaching was gloomy or not might depend on the way you judge your life though everyone suffers at some point. Many acknowledged too that the Buddha taught about the remedy for suffering in our lives (sukkah).

Question A2: Attitudes to Life

Many students revealed a good and varied grasp of the precepts they were required to respond to. Not all students correctly responded to 'misuse of the senses' which in the main relates to a person's sexual conduct but responses to 'Do not take intoxicants' were well thought-through and responded to for part (a). Many students achieved full marks for part (b) on abortion and the Buddhist response. Of course they are not required to offer a variety of views on three mark evaluation questions, though many did, as they had plenty to say. Examiners saw a wide variety of responses to part (c). Most students knew what to write about when faced with the term karuna and had clearly learned how Buddhists might be able to show karuna in their everyday existence. This section of the paper reaped some good marks with a number of students scoring full marks, clearly finding the questions set in A2 accessible.

Question A3: The Sangha

Many students offered superb responses in part (a). Very few made generalisations or did not know what they were talking about. If this question had been a 6 mark question, many would still have scored full marks with some pleasing depth and detail in the majority of responses. In part (b) some students clearly had not heard of the term ‘engaged Buddhism’ and therefore randomly guessed at what it might mean. Others who had studied engaged Buddhism were able to respond with authority and detail, with some very good examples of Buddhism in action in specific areas of the world and named Buddhists. This was all very impressive. The equality question for part (c) proved to be popular with students. What was most impressive about many of the responses was how students explored not just Buddhism from 2,500 years ago but looked at the contemporary position of men and women in lay Buddhism and contrasted this well with the monastic community.

Question A4: Worship and Festivals

Part (a) rarely troubled students. Many responded with some excellent detail about worship in the home. One or two students even contrasted different styles of Mahayana and how this might work regarding aspects of worship in the home. Some students focused on kasinas, others on the Buddhara but there was plenty of variation in the responses and all equally credit worthy.

Some students got confused in part (b) with festivals such as Songkran and Kathina and others simply generalised about any festival, Buddhist or not! Those that had revised Wesak specifically knew plenty of accurate detail as to how different Buddhists remember the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha. Whether temples are important to Buddhists or not provided some interesting responses. Not all students stayed on task and some went off and wrote about temples in a more general way without touching on their importance. It is a timely reminder for students to focus on the question asked, rather than the general topic area, when responding to AO2 questions.

Part B

Question B5: Global Issues and the Dhamma (Dharma)

This question was less popular overall than B6. Part (a) proved to divide the students between those who just simply generalised about race, religion and the Buddhist faith and others who gave specific examples to support what they were trying to say. Whilst marks could be awarded for generalisations if on task, access to the higher levels needs to be retained for those who do actually answer the question set. Equally some students either tackled just race or just religion so a maximum of level 4 could only be achieved as the question asked for both elements. At the top end, some students mentioned race, how racist remarks would be breaking the fourth precept and some even mentioned how bhikkhus and Bhikkunis are encouraged from all races today. Some students dwelt on how the Buddha did not want to form a separate Sangha for women and how the Buddha did not favour one religious group over another

B5 (b) responses tended to be weighted towards an agreement with the statement in the question set due to the fourth precept in the main and the general standard of attitude and ethic Buddhists tend to show. Some offered a detailed response with some analysis related to how Buddhists are expected to speak to one another. Some students discussed the lesser of two evils and the impression that there were far more important precepts and general ethical codes Buddhists should abide by rather than the ‘speaking of falsehoods’.

Part (c) was an area students found a little more difficult. Many just spoke about the Eightfold Path and not much about Nirvana. The better responses recognised that the Buddha often spoke of nirvana in the negative and some even referred to nirvana as not the same as extinction but rather a change in attitude where all thoughts of self and selfish actions disappear. Even at the weaker end of the spectrum, many students acknowledged that nirvana was a state of mind rather than a place and teaching at schools and colleges seems to be effective in this regard.

In part (d) there were some well-balanced responses, with the more able students often writing about the conflict that might arise for Theravada Buddhists that they should 'tread their own path with diligence' which some said suggested that this was the most important goal for Buddhist. Others reflected on a question set in part A about 'Engaged Buddhism' and tended to bring this in again which was a useful reference point for a discussion on the value of the environment and environmental projects for many Buddhists.

Question B6: The Life of the Buddha and the Dhamma (Dharma)

Those students who had revised the Buddha's life were very comfortable with this question and many wrote at length on three of the four questions in this section based on the Buddha's life. The question on the Tipitaka was probably less successful out of the four set. Some students did fail to move beyond showing more than an elementary knowledge and understanding of actual stories surrounding the Buddha's birth in part (a). They clearly knew the facts but for some, the question became an opportunity to merely story tell and yet the question asked for the significance of the stories. For those that tackled the question in the way it was intended when set, responses were very good in the main with some excellent points made about the Buddha being special as a human being due to the miraculous stories of his birth but not as a divine figure. Declaration by Siddhartha that he would experience no more rebirths and the predictions of Asita featured highly in the more competent responses. The evaluation question in part (b) provoked some excellent responses. There were often clearly sustained lines of argument both in favour and against the statement made on the paper, perhaps indicating how some people see all elements of the Buddha's life having their worth as opposed to just one aspect. On the other hand, many students aligned themselves with the statement suggesting that the Buddhist faith would not exist if the Buddha had not witnessed the Four Signs or sights as he did. Some of the more able took an interesting view regarding the symbolism suggested through these signs in the Buddha's life and how iconic they were to Buddhists. They then went on to contrast the life of sensuality the Buddha lived with the life of asceticism for six years following the Four Signs.

Students who knew their Buddhist scriptures well responded with some depth and detail regarding each element of the Tipitaka. When discussing the importance, many considered the importance of scriptures as the Sangha developed and also the early years of Buddhism when codes of discipline were being flouted. The weaker students earned some credit even if they merely stated what each of the three baskets was concerned with rather than the importance. They often achieved a Level 3 because importance was implicit in their response even in a generalised way in part (c).

There were some well-balanced responses to the evaluation question in part (d), which followed on nicely from part (c). Students considered the value of following an example of the Buddha and compared this intelligently with the fact that no scriptures were written down until approximately 500 years after the Buddha died. Very few offered unsupported opinion or no relevant evaluation. Some students took a more global view and looked at, as part of their response, whether any aspect of Buddhism could be considered as more important than another and the religion with all its varied elements when taken as a whole is the attraction of this faith for many. Many also gave a competent Buddhist perspective in their conclusions.

Some of the best answers considered whether, because the scriptures in Buddhism do not come from a divine source, they have as much relevance to Buddhists today as the example the Buddha gave in his life.

Some responses were a little one-sided, which made it difficult for students to access the higher levels. As with last year, those students who had paced themselves well were able to write at length offering well balanced analysis, concluding with their personal view. The less able gave more subjective responses but were still able to score mid-level marks. Examiners were pleased to see, at the top end, such mature and thoughtful reflection in response to this evaluation question comparing the goal of the Buddhist faith with an ethical issue and, generally, students had lots to say.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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