



Mark Scheme (Pre-stand)

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Religious Studies (9RS0)
Paper 4A: Buddhism

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Paper 4A: Buddhism – Mark scheme

Question number	Answer
1	8 marks AO1 AO1 will be used by candidates to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and specialist language and terminology when responding to the question. Candidates may refer to the following. • Buddhists regard the Tipitaka as a sacred text. • It contains the Vinaya Pitaka that monks and nuns must follow. • The Sutta Pitaka is the basket containing the Buddha's teachings, sermons and sayings used in readings and puja. • The Abhidhamma Pitaka explains in detail Buddhist philosophy. • Some Buddhists would argue that the Tipitaka explains all the dhamma and take refuge in it.

Level	Mark	Descriptor
	0	No rewardable material.
Level 1	1–2	• A narrow range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected but are unlikely to be used appropriately or accurately (AO1). • Knowledge and understanding addresses a narrow range of key religious ideas and beliefs with some inaccuracies (AO1). • Provides a superficial understanding of key religious ideas and beliefs (AO1).
Level 2	3–5	• A range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected most of which are used appropriately with some inaccuracies (AO1). • Knowledge and understanding addresses a narrow range of key religious ideas and beliefs (AO1). • Develops key religious ideas and beliefs to show a depth of understanding (AO1).
Level 3	6–8	• A wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are carefully selected and used appropriately, accurately and sustained throughout (AO1). • Knowledge and understanding addresses a broad range of key religious ideas and beliefs (AO1). • Comprehensively develops key religious ideas and beliefs to show a depth of understanding (AO1).

Question number	Answer
2	4 marks AO1, 8 marks AO2 AO1 will be used by candidates to underpin their analysis and evaluation. Candidates will be required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding when responding to the question, and in meeting AO2 descriptors described below. Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO1. • Theravada Buddhists believe there are Five khandas. These are the strands that make up a being. • They are important because the Buddha described the Five khandas in his First Sermon. • Theravada Buddhists believe the Five khandas are constantly changing. AO2 requires candidates to develop their answers showing analytical and evaluative skills to address the question. Such responses will be underpinned by their use of knowledge and understanding. Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO2. • Theravada Buddhists understand that the Five khandas explain anatta. Therefore, they can explain what happens at the end of a life. • The khandas are important as they are linked to the Buddha's teaching about suffering. They explain that because a person is constantly changing it is possible to overcome suffering. However, they do not explain how this might be caused to happen. • Theravada Buddhists teach that the impermanence of the khandas can be used to teach why there is more suffering, The Buddha taught that it is within the nature of the khandas to cause stress because of change. Therefore, khandas must be used skilfully to overcome desire. • Theravada Buddhists believe that the Five khandas constitute the bunches or aggregates that form a human. However, some other Buddhists believe that all things are without form and that dependant origination explains impermanence. Candidates who show achievement only against AO1 will not be able to gain marks beyond the top of Level 1.

Level	Mark	Descriptor
	0	No rewardable material.
Level 1	1–4	• A narrow range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected but are unlikely to be used appropriately or accurately (AO1). • Information/issues are identified (AO2). • Judgements are supported by generalised arguments (AO2).
Level 2	5–8	• A range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected, most of which are used appropriately with some inaccuracies (AO1). • Deconstructs religious information/issues which lead to a simplistic chain of reasoning (AO2). • Judgements of a limited range of elements in the question are made (AO2).

Level 3	9–12	A wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are carefully selected and used appropriately, accurately and sustained throughout (AO1).
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Level	Mark	Descriptor
		- Critically deconstructs religious information/issues leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning (AO2). - Constructs coherent and reasoned judgements of the full range of elements in the question (AO2).

Question number	Indicative content
3(a)	10 marks AO1 AO1 will be used by candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding and specialist language and terminology when responding to the question. Candidates may refer to the following. - Mahayana Buddhists recognise that there are many Buddhas, each has three bodies of expression. - The Three Bodies explain the multidimensional nature of a Buddha. - The trikaya explains that there is uniformity between all Buddhas. - Each body shows a stage in enlightenment. - Trikaya explains that all kayas are linked and changing.

Level	Mark	Descriptor
	0	No rewardable material.
Level 1	1–3	- A narrow range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected but are unlikely to be used appropriately or accurately (AO1). - Knowledge and understanding of key religious ideas and beliefs is superficial (AO1). - Knowledge and understanding addresses a narrow range of key religious ideas and beliefs with some inaccuracies that are not directly linked to the extract (AO1).
Level 2	4–6	- A range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected most of which are used appropriately with some inaccuracies (AO1). - Knowledge and understanding of key religious ideas and beliefs is detailed, however it is not fully developed (AO1). - Knowledge and understanding addresses a narrow range of key religious ideas and beliefs and are linked in most cases to reference from the extract (AO1).
Level 3	7–10	- A wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are carefully selected and used appropriately, accurately and sustained throughout (AO1). - Knowledge and understanding of key religious ideas and beliefs is detailed and fully developed (AO1). - Knowledge and understanding addresses a broad range of key religious ideas and beliefs and are fully linked to references from the extract (AO1).

Question number	Indicative content
3(b)	5 marks AO1, 15 marks AO2 AO1 will be used by candidates to underpin their analysis and evaluation. Candidates will be required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding using specialist language and terminology when responding to the question, and in meeting AO2 descriptors described below. Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO1. • It is generally accepted that Mahayana Buddhism developed from a number of religious ideas. • Early Mahayana Buddhist ideas are believed to have come from the Buddha on Vulture Peak. • Mahayana Buddhist scriptures are said to have been written around the first century BCE. AO2 requires candidates to develop their answers showing analytical and evaluative skills to address the question. Such responses will be underpinned by their use of knowledge and understanding. Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO2. • Around the second century BCE to first century CE Mahayana Buddhism was distinct and included adapted Mahasamghika ideas about monastic rules. However, other than discussions at the Buddhist councils it is not clear how this came about. • Mahayana Buddhism is explicitly mentioned in the Lotus Sutra which was written around the second century BCE to first century CE. Therefore, it can be assumed that it was regarded as 'the Great Vehicle' at this point. • Mahayana Buddhism developed in the area around India, East Asia and China around the first two centuries CE, with ideas about Bodhisattva and Buddha nature. However, other forms of Buddhism continued to develop elsewhere. • It can be argued that little detail is known about the development of Mahayana Buddhism. However, it is clear that Mahayana Buddhists teach that the Buddha used Upaya to adapt his teachings to those listening. • Some Buddhist may argue that the development of the various forms of Mahayana Buddhism is varied and deserve to have different titles. However, most accept Mahayana Buddhism has distinct beliefs. Candidates who show achievement only against AO1 will not be able to gain marks beyond the top of Level 1.

Level	Mark	Descriptor
	0	No rewardable material.
Level 1	1–4	• A narrow range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected but are unlikely to be used appropriately or accurately (AO1). • Information/issues are selected (AO2). • Makes basic connections between a limited range of elements in the question (AO2). • Judgements are supported by generic arguments (AO2).
Level 2	5–8	• A limited range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected, some of which are used appropriately with some inaccuracies (AO1). • Deconstructs religious information/issues (AO2). • Makes connections between a limited range of elements in the question (AO2). • Judgements of a limited range of elements in the question are made with little or no attempt to appraise evidence (AO2).
Level 3	9–12	• A range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected, most of which are used appropriately with some inaccuracies (AO1). • Deconstructs religious information/issues, which lead to a simple chain of reasoning (AO2). • Makes connections between many but not all of the elements in the question (AO2). • Judgements of a limited range of elements in the question are made, which are supported by an attempt to appraise evidence (AO2).
Level 4	13–16	• A wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are carefully selected, most of which are used appropriately and accurately throughout (AO1). • Deconstructs religious information/issues leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning (AO2). • Makes connections between a wide range of elements in the question (AO2). • Constructs coherent and reasoned judgements of many but not all of elements in the question, which are supported by the appraisal of some evidence (AO2).
Level 5	17–20	• A wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are carefully selected and used appropriately, accurately and sustained throughout (AO1). • Critically deconstructs religious information/issues leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning (AO2). • Makes connections between the full range of elements in the question (AO2). • Constructs coherent and reasoned judgements of the full range of elements in the question, which are fully supported by the comprehensive appraisal of evidence (AO2).

Question number	Indicative content
4	5 marks AO1, 25 marks AO2 AO1 will be used by candidates to underpin their analysis and evaluation. Candidates will be required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding using specialist language and terminology when responding to the question, and in meeting AO2 descriptors described below. Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO1. • The four sights led to the Buddha's understanding about the reality of life. • The four sights provide the basis for all the Buddha's later teachings. • When the Buddha saw an old man he recognised that all beings age. AO2 requires candidates to develop their answers showing analytical and evaluative skills to address the question. Such responses will be underpinned by their use of knowledge and understanding. Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO2. • Buddhist teachings about the four sights show that after leaving the palace and witnessing them, the Buddha could not continue with his life as a prince. Therefore, it was a pivotal event changing his life. • The four sights are important as it can be argued that upon seeing these the Buddha understood that suffering is universal. However, other accounts of the life of the Buddha recount events which included suffering. • Some Buddhists consider the four sights important in the life of the Buddha as upon seeing them he realised the impermanence of all things. As a result, it can be argued that his teachings were all based on this concept. • Some Buddhists would argue that the four sights were instrumental in the Buddha's abandonment of his rich lifestyle. He recognised that everyone, even the wealthy, are subject to old age and death. As a result, his teachings reflect that material goods are not the route to enlightenment. • Some Buddhists would argue that the four sights are the beginning of Buddhism as from this point he left his princely life behind. However, others might argue that Buddhism did not begin until the Buddha taught the Middle Way and the route to enlightenment.
	Candidates who do not show links with another area of their course of study will not be able to gain marks beyond the top of Level 4.

Level	Mark	Descriptor
	0	No rewardable material.
Level 1	1–6	• A narrow range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected but are unlikely to be used appropriately or accurately (AO1). • Information/issues are identified (AO2). • Makes basic connections between a limited range of elements in the question (AO2). • Judgements are supported by generic arguments (AO2). • Judgements made with no attempt to appraise evidence (AO2). • Conclusions are provided but are simplistic and/or generic (AO2).
Level 2	7–12	• A limited range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected, some of which are used appropriately with some inaccuracies (AO1). • Deconstructs religious information/issues (AO2). • Makes connections between a limited range of elements in the question (AO2). • Judgements of a limited range of elements in the question are made (AO2). • Judgements made with little or no attempt to appraise evidence (AO2). • Conclusions are provided, which loosely draw together ideas but with little or no attempt to justify (AO2).
Level 3	13–18	• A range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are selected most of which are used appropriately with some inaccuracies (AO1). • Deconstructs religious information/issues, which lead to a simplistic chain of reasoning (AO2). • Makes connections between many but not all of the elements in the question (AO2). • Judgements of some of the elements in the question are made (AO2). • Judgements are supported by an attempt to appraise evidence (AO2). • Conclusions are provided, which logically draw together ideas and are partially justified (AO2).
Level 4	19–24	• A wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are carefully selected, most of which are used appropriately and accurately throughout (AO1). • Deconstructs religious information/issues leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning (AO2). • Makes connections between a wide range of elements in the question (AO2). • Constructs coherent and reasoned judgements of many but not all of elements in the question (AO2). • Reasoned judgements are supported by the appraisal of some evidence (AO2). • Convincing conclusions are provided which fully and logically draw together ideas and are partially justified (AO2).

Level 5	25–30	• A wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology are carefully selected and used appropriately, accurately and sustained throughout (AO1). • Critically deconstructs religious information/issues leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning (AO2). • Makes connections between the full range of elements in the question (AO2). • Constructs coherent and reasoned judgements of the full range of elements in the question (AO2). • Reasoned judgements are fully supported by the comprehensive appraisal of evidence (AO2).
		• Convincing conclusions are provided which fully and logically draw together ideas and are fully justified (AO2).