

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/04 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 responses 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 4 series overview

J625/04 is the GCSE Religious Studies paper that focuses on beliefs, teachings and practices in Buddhism. It is marked out of 63 with each of the two questions marked out of 30 with an extra 3 marks for spelling, grammar and punctuation (SPaG) available on Question 1. All parts of all questions are compulsory.

Candidates are assessed on AO1 (knowledge and understanding) on parts (a)-(d) on each paper while on part e they are assessed on a combination of AO1 and AO2 (analysis and evaluation).

Half of the 30 marks available for each question (excluding the 3 SPaG marks) are in part (e) and candidates therefore need to be well prepared for this in order to perform well in the question. In order to gain good marks in part (e) questions candidates need to make references to sources of wisdom and authority such as the teachings of the Buddha or to figures who are respected within the religion such as the Dalai Lama. They also need to discuss the similarities and differences that exist within Buddhism as these are related to the issues raised by the question (in this case the comparative importance of Rain Retreats to Monastic and Lay Buddhists; and of the importance of the Buddha to modern Buddhists). Candidates should identify where ideas have universal or near-universal importance to Buddhists and where there are significant differences. These differences could be between different schools of Buddhism (Mahayana, Theravada, Pure Land, etc.), between Buddhists in different countries, between lay and monastic Buddhists or within other groups such as rural/urban Buddhists or different genders. Candidates should also evaluate the arguments they present rather than simply stating different arguments without further comment. For example, candidates could suggest a counter-argument to the one they have just given or suggest why an argument is weak or strong. There was some evidence that candidates had been taught a 'formula' for part (e) questions which tended to include phrases such as 'this is a strong/weak argument because...' or, 'however my argument is still valid because...'. These can be useful, but only if what follows is actually a reason why the argument is strong or weak. Sometimes what follows is an unrelated point or something such as 'because everyone is entitled to their opinion.' These phrases can be useful in supporting candidates to give a critical and evaluative response, but their use does not guarantee a high AO2 level.

Candidates were generally very well prepared for this paper and most had a good knowledge of the different forms of Buddhism and of the key technical terms in Sanskrit and/or Pali. Some candidates had an exceptionally high level of knowledge. There was a general assumption that Theravada Buddhism was 'stricter' and that other forms, particularly Tibetan were 'more relaxed' or liberal and this did lead to some misunderstanding about Mahayana or Tibetan approaches to a number of topics. The traditions are different, but both Theravada and Mahayana contain traditional, conservative and more liberal elements, and this did not always seem to be well understood. Most candidates attempted all of the questions and the majority of candidates seem to have completed the paper comfortably in the time allowed.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read the question carefully before responding • responded to the exact question asked rather than on the general subject • on part (e) (evaluation questions) used a genuinely discursive style, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments they used, rather than just stating them • provided a clear conclusion to part (e) questions that gave a reasoned judgement and were not merely a summary of their essay • gave as much detail as possible and used relevant examples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gave a generalised response on the topic that had been asked rather than focussing on the specific question • left questions blank rather than making an attempt • listed reasons for and against the statement in part (e) questions rather than developing an argument • gave a formalised conclusion that summarised their response but added nothing new to it • used formulas that they had clearly been taught such as 'This is a strong argument because...' but did not then follow this with a connected idea relating to their previous argument.

Question 1 (a)

1 (a) Name **three** of the Six Perfections/virtues (paramitas).

1

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2

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3

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[3]

Most candidates were able to name three of the six perfections. Some confused these with other numbered groups within Buddhism such as the three poisons, or the three refuges. Some candidates included loving kindness (karuna) which is one of the ten perfections but is not included in the six.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Describe **one** feature of a Buddhist pilgrimage site you have studied.

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[3]

Most candidates referred to Bodh Gaya and correctly identified it as the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. Most then made reference to the Bodi tree and its significance to pilgrims. Other sites such as Lumbini, Sarnath, and Kusingagar were referenced, usually accurately, although there was some confusion as to what happened at each site. A common mistake was to describe in detail the story of the Buddha's life that was experienced at this site rather than to describe a feature of the site and its significance to pilgrims. This was evidence of a failure to read the question carefully. Some candidates gave generalised features such as a stupa, and where this was well explained and clearly relevant to places of pilgrimage in general it was given.

Misconception

 Some candidates believed that the Rain Retreat was a place of pilgrimage and gave it as their response to this question - which negatively impacted their response to Question 1(e).

Question 1 (c)

(c) Describe **one** characteristic of a Bodhisattva.

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..... **[3]**

Almost all candidates wrote about the compassion of a bodhisattva as evidenced by their decision to remain within samsara until all beings reached enlightenment. There did seem to be a common misunderstanding that Buddhism teaches that all of humanity will be enlightened together so that individual enlightenment is impossible. A small number of candidates did not know what a bodhisattva was and guessed that it was a place or a ritual, but this was uncommon and the majority of candidates gained full marks for this question.

Question 1 (d)

(d) Outline the relationship between suffering and the three poisons/fires.

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[6]

This question was less well answered. Most, but not all candidates could name the three poisons. Some gave the same one twice by different names (such as jealousy and anger, or anger and hatred). Most candidates were able to explain the relationship between craving and suffering but were less sure of the connection between the three poisons and craving. The best responses looked at each of the three in turn, clearly explaining the ways in which it linked to craving, suffering and samsara. The connection between greed and tanha was generally well explained, although candidates struggled a bit more with some of the others. The less successful responses described the three poisons and their links to animals in the Tibetan Wheel of Life but did not go beyond this description to engage with the question.

Focus on the question

Many candidates gave a generalised response about how to escape samsara, but did not focus on the three poisons. Others described the three poisons in detail but did not fully explain their connection to suffering or craving. Some explained that they had to be overcome to escape samsara but did not explain why. The question is on the relationship between suffering and the three poisons, and this should be the focus of the response.

Question 1 (e)

- (e) 'The Rain Retreat (Vassa) is more important for lay Buddhists than it is for Buddhist monks and nuns.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Buddhism.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar **[3]**

This question was not generally well answered. Most candidates understood the difference between the lay and monastic sanghas but many were unclear about the nature of the Rain Retreat, describing it as a physical retreat to a particular place, often described as a pilgrimage. This made it difficult for some candidates to fully engage with the question. Much of the discussion revolved around the fact that monks and nuns engage in meditation and puja all the time, so get less benefit from a particular time in which to do so. The most successful responses discussed the interdependence between the lay and monastic communities and the opportunities that Vassa provides to enhance this, arguing that it was equally important to both because of this co-dependence. There was some discussion about the Theravada position that only monastics can be enlightened and the Mahayana view that all contain the Buddha Nature and where this was done well it was successful. However, there were frequent misunderstandings of the differences with some asserting that as Mahayana Buddhists were more relaxed it would not matter as much to them. Overall, this is significantly less well answered than Question 2(e) and candidates did not, on the whole, demonstrate a confident grasp of the subject matter.

Exemplar 1

Others may disagree with this statement, as Buddhist bhikkhus should, it may be argued, undertake ~~the~~ retreats, in order to take a break from the pressures of monastic life. Additionally, it may be argued that other sacred places are more notable for Buddhists, including Bodh Gaya and Sarnath Deer Park, where the Buddha became enlightened and where the Buddha gave his first teaching to his fellow five ascetics after becoming enlightened (as documented in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta) respectively. As these sites are more personal to the Buddha, it can be argued that Vassa does not hold as high a significance to lay Buddhists. Lay Buddhists may prioritise these destinations over the Rain Retreat, contrary to what a monk may think.

Exemplar 1 shows a misunderstanding that was remarkably common, namely that the Rain Retreat is a specific place of pilgrimage comparable to Bodh Gaya or Sarnath. This necessarily has a fundamental impact on the candidate's understanding of what happens at the Rain Retreat and consequently of its comparative importance to lay and monastic Buddhists. Many candidates had only a very vague idea of what the Rain Retreat was, and a surprising number shared this idea that it was a place of pilgrimage.

Misconception



Some candidates believed that the Rain Retreat was a place of pilgrimage.

Question 2 (a)

2 (a) State the **three** different types of suffering.

1

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2

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3

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[3]

Most candidates were able to give three kinds of suffering either in English, or Pali, or both. Some had difficulty spelling the Sanskrit/Pali terms and this did have some impact on whether the response could be given, usually because the spelling was too close to another word which meant something different. Imprecise responses such as 'mental suffering' tended not to be given unless given a greater context. Some candidates gave three causes of suffering such as sickness, old age, and death. These were not given as the question is asking for a precise piece of technical knowledge.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Describe **one** ritual associated with death and mourning.

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[3]

This question had the highest number of candidates responding with clear, precise, and detailed responses and the largest number of full marks. A large majority of candidates talked about Tibetan Sky Burials although others mentioned the Tibetan Book of the Dead, and Obon. While Obon is not strictly a ritual it was given provided there was sufficient development, since it does involve ritual practices. Others described practices such as whispering in the ear of the dying, pouring water into a cup until it overflowed or using a walking stick to demonstrate vulnerability.

Question 2 (c)

(c) Describe what Buddhists mean by Samatha meditation.

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..... [3]

This was not generally very well answered. Most knew that Samatha had something to do with calming the mind and focussing on breathing. A few were aware that Samatha is specifically used as a preparation for vipassana. However, many gave very general responses about being quiet or praying or the use of mudras and some confused Samatha with vipassana or metta bhavana. There were a number of general responses that included chanting, burning incense, or reading scripture.

Responses should be detailed and specific

Many responses to this question were vague and lacked detail that was specific to Samatha meditation.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Describe the consequences of immoral conduct for Buddhists.

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..... [6]

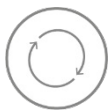
Many candidates gained lower marks on this question because they described what Buddhists mean by immoral conduct in great detail but did not then explain what the consequences of this were. Some made a very general allusion to 'bad karma' but did not go beyond this at all. The best responses looked at the consequences in terms of being trapped in samsara and/or being born in one of the lower realms. Some spoke about specific punishments for the monastic sangha laid out for particular transgressions. Some however were very vague, referring simply to guilt.

Exemplar 2

In Buddhism morality is really important. For example lay Buddhists have 5 precepts and monastic Buddhists have even 10. These precepts are an important guideline for morality. Moreover morality is one of the 6 paramitas and part of the 8-fold path. Therefore consequences are bad karma, which is really important to reach the next of the 6 Brahma states and Nirvana. Some consequences might also be a dismissal from your monastery or a

Exemplar 2 is typical of responses where the candidate has given a detailed and accurate account of what Buddhists mean by immoral conduct but has then given only very brief and generalised attention to what the consequences of this might be, and therefore largely ignores the question set. This response only reaches Level 1 as most of the detail in the response is not directly relevant.

Assessment for learning



Make sure that candidates read the question carefully and focus on the actual question asked rather than on the general topic.

Question 2 (e)*

(e)* 'The Buddha is not important for Buddhists in the modern world.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Buddhism.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

Candidates responded to this question better than they did to Question 1(e). They generally made good use of their knowledge of Buddhism and produced some well thought out and reasoned responses. Some candidates argued that the popularity of pilgrimage and rupa-puja demonstrated the continued importance of the Buddha, which was good as it showed an awareness of Buddhism as a lived and embodied tradition rather than purely intellectual and dogmatic. Some successfully contrasted Theravada and Mahayana traditions and suggested that Buddha Nature renders the historical Buddha less important. Some contrasted the importance of the historical Buddha with that of Amida Buddha in Pure Land Buddhism or the Dalai Lama as potentially being a more useful source of wisdom for modern Buddhists. The best responses were genuinely evaluative and discursive and had a reasoned conclusion.

Exemplar 3

Tibetan Buddhists would argue that the Buddha is not as important now since they have another leader: the Dalai Lama. He is very influential in the Tibetan tradition and could be more important since he is alive now and active in the modern world. He is vocal on issues such as climate change and ^{states} states that Buddhists have a 'universal responsibility' (due to dependent origination). The Dalai Lama means the Buddha is less important in the modern world.

Exemplar 3 is a good response showing a reflective and detailed response to the question. The candidate begins by addressing the significance of the question and why it matters. The second paragraph gives a detailed and coherent argument for the Dalai Lama having more relevance to modern Buddhism for modern Buddhists and particularly Tibetan Buddhists. The Dalai Lama is more aware of ecological issues and other things that were not important in the time of the Buddha. It goes on in following paragraphs to add that the Buddhist teachings as a whole, including those of the Dalai Lama, would not exist without the Buddha. In this way the response demonstrates genuine evaluation and does not merely list opposing ideas.

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