



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies 1061

RSS11 Islam 2 *The Life of the Prophet*

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - January series

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Dr Michael Cresswell Director General.

RSS11 Islam 2 *The Life of the Prophet*

General comments

Questions 1 and 2 were the most popular but a good number of candidates attempted Question 3. Answers were generally very well-informed but many were more narrative and summary than explanation, and this limited the number of marks that could be awarded.

Question 1 (Topic 1 *Jahiliyyah*)

Part (a)

This was a very popular question, and there were some very good answers to it. The great majority of candidates confined their answer to the pre-Islamic period as expected, but credit was also given if they included comments about the changing situation during the Prophet Muhammad's career. The command word used for the question was 'Examine', but some candidates did little more than summarise the key points. This limited the marks that could be awarded. When asked to 'examine' candidates must show both knowledge and understanding, and unpack the ideas that they are presenting.

The factors that naturally attracted the most attention were those social evils criticised in the earliest verses of the Qur'an and those that directly affected, or were in some way significant for, the later development of Islam. In the best answers, there was a good balance between the two and some attention to the positive elements in pre-Islamic culture as well as those that were heavily criticised. Some weaker answers offered the religious background as well, with little relevance to the question. Comments on the political context were usually relevant and creditworthy.

Part (b)

There were some excellent answers to this question which gave a thoughtful response to the issue raised. Most candidates recognised that the claim that the Prophet's message was a reaction to the social situation that the Prophet found himself in could be balanced by the idea that the religious situation was a stronger factor, or that his message was a response to the call of God. Some candidates stated points of view rather than offering and justifying a conclusion relevant to the question.

Question 2 (Topic 2 *Makkah 610-622 CE*)

Part (a)

This was a very popular question but one that attracted a lot of narrative answers which lacked explanation. Candidates should be aware that there are differing understandings of the nature of the Prophet's religious experience within Islam, and may also wish to consider some interpretations of it from non-Muslims. The narrative was generally very well known and candidates were able to give a good account of the Prophet's reaction. Again, however, attempts at any explanation of that reaction were more limited.

Part (b)

There were some very thoughtful responses to this question which showed clear awareness, not only of the immediate response from the Makkans, but also the longer term response later in the Prophet's career. Some candidates explained why the Makkans opposed him rather than providing any actual evidence that they did. The better answers referred to the persecution of the Muslims as evidence to support the claim, and pointed to the minority support for Islam to

reach a relevant conclusion. Questions asking 'to what extent' are looking for an answer, justified by evidence and argument of the kind: 'wholly, partly or not at all'. Few candidates responded in this way.

Question 3 (Topic 3 *Madinah 622-632 CE*)

Part (a)

On the whole, this question attracted well-informed answers that tended towards narrative rather than to explanation or to comment. Candidates were familiar with some of the Prophet's roles and some were able to describe the functions he performed in them. This separated the very good answers from the rest.

Part (b)

Some candidates had not included an explanation of Muhammad's role as military leader in part (a); any relevant material they happened to include in their answer to this section could not be credited to the earlier part. Other candidates appeared to rush into their answers without any clear plan and simply commented on the importance of various roles without reaching any conclusion about the most important of them. Many candidates offered a convincing argument to support the view that, without military success, the early Muslim community would not have survived and would not have become attractive to the people of Madinah and beyond. The most common counter-argument was that all aspects of Muhammad's role were important, because none would have been successful without the others.

Question 4 (Topic 4 *The death of the Prophet, the emergence of the Caliphate and of the Sunni / Shi'a divide*)

There was only one response to this question. Both parts of the question appeared to be accessible.