



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (1061)

RSS11 Islam 2 *The Life of the Prophet*

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - June series

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RSS11 Islam 2 *The Life of the Prophet*

General comments

There were some excellent answers to all the questions on this paper, with some candidates paying close attention to the exact wording of the questions and making good use of scholarship. In contrast, other answers were too general. They related to the topic of the question but paid scant attention to what was actually asked. Few candidates appeared to have run out of time, but a number wrote more in answer to the second part of each question than in their responses to the first part of each question. The length of the answer should normally relate to the number of marks available, so the answer to the first part of each question would be about twice as long as the answer to the second part of each question.

Question 1 (Topic 1 *Jahiliyyah*)

Question 01

Weaker answers focussed on the religious and social context of the Jahiliyyah period in general, or wrote generally about Makkah without referring to its importance in any way. The Specification explicitly requires candidates to consider the importance of Makkah as a regional centre of pilgrimage and trade, but not all candidates made any direct reference to these aspects. The best answers, however, were very impressive.

Question 02

The issue raised for discussion in this question was one of those identified in the Specification and some candidates had clearly discussed it and prepared a response. Others appeared to be coming to it for the first time. Some candidates took a theological approach and argued that God must have chosen Makkah as the place for the Prophet's birth for a good reason, and then suggested the advantages of this from their point of view. Others argued that it would have made no difference where Muhammad was born, since that would also have worked according to God's plan. Most candidates suggested that Makkah provided a crossroads of people and ideas which allowed Muhammad to understand his calling and become known to others. This was often balanced by the argument that it was Madinah not Makkah which guaranteed the Prophet's success.

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

Question 03

Many candidates were able to give a clear summary of the main themes of the teaching but some referred to the teaching given in Madinah as well. Few answers made good use of material from the Qur'an. Long quotations are not expected, but candidates should be able to refer to the message the Prophet brought in more than general terms. The question asked candidates to 'examine' the main themes, but a number simply outlined or summarised which limited the marks that could be awarded. Candidates should be aware of the requirements of each command word used in examination questions.

Question 04

The best answers compared Muhammad's role as a 'Warner' with his role as a 'Messenger'. Many candidates, however, described Muhammad's role as a 'Warner' rather than assessing whether or not this was his most important role at the time, and some debated whether 'Warner' was his only role, which was not the issue raised. Other candidates also referred to his role in Madinah, which was not relevant in the answer to this question.

Question 3 (Topic 3 *Madinah 622-632 CE*)**Question 05**

This was the least popular question on the examination paper. The best answers showed a good awareness of the different groups that made up the Umma in Madinah, and made good use of a variety of technical terms. Candidates referred to the constitution of Madinah as establishing the relationship between the different groups and clearly understood that loyalty to Islam and to the Prophet had replaced loyalty to the family in the new society. The theme of the brotherhood and sisterhood of believers was well-developed. In weaker responses, candidates did not seem to understand the idea of the **nature** of the community. This is a word used in the Specification and candidates should expect to find it used in examination questions. Some candidates wrote generally about the main events of the period. In such answers there were usually some relevant points, but in general those answers only accessed the lower levels of the mark scheme.

Question 06

A number of candidates found this to be a challenging question. Candidates seemed to be unaware that for some Muslims the Madinan Umma, ruled by the Prophet on God's behalf, is the 'blueprint' for the ideal Muslim society, and that it is of major importance in the Maliki school of law in Sunni Islam. Many candidates, however, were able to relate the model of the Madinan Umma to today, and to give a reasoned view of its continuing importance. There was some good understanding of different views among Muslims.

Question 4 (Topic 4 *The death of the Prophet, the emergence of the Caliphate and of the Sunni / Shi'a divide*)**Question 07**

There were some well-prepared answers to this question, but some candidates wrote about the succession of all the four rightly-guided caliphs and did not focus on the question. Others did not address the second part of the question, but among those who did there was some very good understanding of the Shi'a view of succession.

Question 08

This question allowed candidates to consider more than just the 'crisis' about the succession to Muhammad. Generally, the most successful answers were those where the candidates had taken time to plan. Many showed how some aspects of the crisis were resolved in the fairly short term, e.g. the withholding of tax, and used the current strength of the Umma to suggest that the answer was self-evident. Others, understandably, concentrated on the Sunni / Shi'a split and offered various views about whether this is a crisis that has still not been resolved, some suggesting that the division had not been a crisis at some points in Muslim history even if it was seen to be so today.