

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2022

Pearson Edexcel Level 3 GCE

Religious Studies

Advanced

PAPER 4: Study of Religion

Option 4D: Islam

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Introduction

This paper generally saw a higher level of responses which demonstrates that candidates benefitted from the advanced information provided. Many candidates utilized good use of scholarship and had a sound understanding of the ideas relating to the questions. There were good uses of AO2 skills (assessment and analysis) and most candidates managed their time well. In the few instances where a candidate did not perform well, this was mostly due to lack of AO2 skills and time management. This highlights the importance of following the published guidance on how long they should spend on each question and developing AO2 skills. The lowest scoring candidates did not utilise AO2 skills appropriately and had an emphasis on narrative instead of analysis.

Q1 Explore beliefs and practices relating to Hajj. (8)

This question saw a variety of responses most of which scored very highly well. Coincidentally, the exam took place close to the Hajj season which could explain why candidates did so well here. Many candidates highlighted key details around the events that take place in Hajj such as Tawaf (circumambulation), the jamarat (stoning the devil), running between Safa and Marwa, the day of Arafat and the Eid celebration that takes place. Many candidates balanced Islamic legal rulings such as Ihram and Islamic spirituality within their answers such as becoming “pure” within the Hajj ritual. The strongest answers also highlighted the contemporary issues around cost and difficulties with visa requirements for accessing Hajj. Again, coincidentally, this was the first year that Saudi Arabia introduced a lottery system for Western pilgrims and candidates did explore this idea.

Weaker responses either ran out of time or did not apply correct time management for this question. The weakest responses were from candidates who only managed to write a few sentences. This stresses the importance of adequate time management for each question of the paper.

Q2 Assess the significance of the martyrdom of Husain for Shi’a history and practices. (12)

Once again, this was generally a strong response from candidates. Most candidates were able to link the battle of Karbala with contemporary Shi’a practices and belief systems including the belief of Adalat (divine Justice). The strongest candidates managed to debate the importance of Karbala with the importance of the succession of leadership for the Muslim community once Muhammad passed away. These candidates argued that Ali being passed over as leader was of greater significance as it tied to the belief of Imamate and many of the events that followed. Candidates were very good at listing different rituals such as matm and the mourning in Ashura for the Shi’a community to the martyrdom of Hussain. There were also arguments made that the events have been politicised and used for political status with the Iranian government being used as an example.

Weaker responses did not develop much analysis and instead gave long descriptions of what took place at Karbala and focussed on an account of its history. Centres should work on ensuring candidates understand the requirements for these questions.

Q3 (a) Clarify the ideas illustrated in this passage about the Qur'an as revelation from Allah. (10)

Candidates again performed well on this question. Strong candidates used the extract as a springboard for bringing in ideas around the Qur'an as revelation from Allah. Many candidates utilised the verses of Tahaddi where Allah challenges people to present a similar Qur'an. Candidates highlighted this as a miracle. Candidates also pointed to some of the prophecies found in the Qur'an for evidence of divine origin such as the victory of the Persians even though they had been defeated.

Weaker responses did not give this question adequate time or ran out of time. The weakest responses only managed to write a few sentences for this question. Weak responses also did not use ideas beyond the passage and only reinterpreted the verses that were provided. Anthology style questions require a particular skill set of being able to draw on taught content relevant to the extract from areas of learning.

Q3 (b) Analyse the claim that the Qur'an is the source of authority for all Muslim belief and practice.(20)

This was a good discriminator and provided a range of responses amongst candidates. Most candidates focussed their AO2 content around debates between the authority of the Qur'an and the Hadith literature. These were generally very good answers. Candidates highlighted the differing interpretations of the Qur'an ranging from Quranist (Quran only) groups, traditionalist groups where Hadith literature is used as a means of interpretation and groups where reason is given supremacy over the Qur'an. Many examples were given but the most common was the idea that the Qur'an mandates praying but does not highlight the details on how to pray. The strongest candidates made use of the verses of the Qur'an which stress that Muhammad is an example and should be followed and also utilised the Madhaahib (schools of law) as an authority for Muslims.

Weaker responses were lacking in their AO2 content and instead had long narratives around how the Qur'an was revealed. Other weak responses seemed to run out of time or did not utilise time management effectively. This meant that there was inadequate brevity for being able to articulate higher scoring answers.

Q4 Evaluate the impact and interpretation of Shari'ah law within Islam. (30)

Considering this may have been the first attempt of sitting an exam for most candidates, they did very well. This question provided a range of arguments to tackle the question, most of which worked well. Many candidates put forward the individual tools of Shari'ah law and critically analysed them whilst linking this to the idea of interpretation. Candidates who did not analyse the tools of Shari'ah law still scored highly by instead analysing different interpretations of Shari'ah law. These included critiques of the Quranist, literalist, misogynistic and feminist interpretations. Many candidates used ISIS as an incorrect interpretation of Islam and highlighted the consequences that take place when sound scholarship is not used.

Weaker responses again lacked the level of analysis required for this question. There were excellent descriptions of Shari'ah law but this would not be adequate to reach high marks in this style of question. Weak responses also ran out of time or did not manage their time adequately. This was a theme found across the paper. Frustratingly, some strong candidates had their marks capped due to

their lack of synoptic link. This is a requirement for this question and candidates need to ensure that they understand this.

Summary

Based on the performance on this paper students should:

- Apply material carefully to the question and avoid simple narrative style answers
- Balance time in an answer that includes AO2 marks between content and assessment/analysis to avoid lengthy narrative before AO2 marks can be accessed
- Practice developing higher marks in anthology questions by using the anthology extract as a springboard into other ideas
- Ensuring that synoptic links are adequately where needed
- Develop skills to present a line of argument, such as after presenting strengths or weaknesses offer conclusion and verdicts on the success or otherwise of these rather than simply present them as a point of view

