



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RSS11 Islam 2 The Life of the Prophet

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

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General Comments

There were many well-informed answers to the questions set. Questions 1 and 2 were the most popular but Question 3 was tackled by very few candidates. Answers to all questions would have been improved by closer attention to the wording of the question and the use of examples.

Answers to AO2 questions were often longer than expected or required. In contrast some answers to part (a) questions were relatively short and lacked depth or breadth. Candidates should remember that part (a) is worth double the marks of part (b) and that it is worth spending longer on this part of the question.

Very few candidates combined their answer to (a) and (b), signalling this at the beginning of the answer by writing (e.g.) 1a/b in the margin. Answers to part (a) and part (b) should be totally separate because AO1 marks can only be awarded for part (a) answers and AO2 marks for part (b) answers. Part of the skill involved is that of judging what is relevant to each part.

Question 1 (a)

There were some very well-informed answers to this question, and some made good use of scholarship – both Muslim and non-Muslim. Lengthy quotations from such scholarship are not necessary, but it can be helpful to report the views of scholars and then explain or comment on them.

The question asked for an explanation of the meaning of jahiliyyah. Some well-informed answers simply outlined the social, political and religious context of Muhammad's work with little or no attention to how these represented 'jahiliyyah'. The introduction to the answer sometimes stated that 'jahiliyyah means days of ignorance' but there was then no indication of how the situation showed that ignorance. This meant that even good answers sometimes presented limited evidence of how far the term was understood, and that limited the marks that could be awarded.

The best answers identified, for example, ignorance about the nature of God, then outlined the beliefs of the day and explained why they are considered ignorant. In dealing with social evils, like alcohol and gambling, they explained why they are seen as signs of ignorance, often referring to the Qur'an in support of their explanation. Such answers remained focused on the question, while those that offered a general description of the background often included irrelevant material.

Question 1(b)

There were some very thoughtful responses to this question and clear evidence that candidates had discussed the issue prior to the examination. There were different interpretations of the phrase 'the coming of the Qur'an'. For example, some took it to mean the first revelation in 610, others to the completion of the revelation in 632, either was acceptable. The most common debates centred on the Qur'an as the source of truth removing the ignorance that had been present before, and contrasted this with the continuing 'ignorance' of much of the world both then and now. There was good use of present-day evidence to support the idea that jahiliyyah continues.

Question 2(a)

There were many good answers to this question. Some candidates failed to notice that it asked about **both** how **and** why Muhammad was opposed in Makkah, and dealt with only one aspect. This limited the marks that could be awarded. The best answers considered whether the opposition was for religious, political, social or economic reasons, or a combination of any or all

of these, and gave good support for the ideas presented, including reference to the views of scholars.

Question 2 (b)

There were some interesting responses to this question, and again it was obvious that candidates had discussed the issue in preparation for the examination. In support of the claim, many focused on the idea that he was rejected by, and ejected from, Makkah, and contrasted his achievements there with those of the Madinan period. Disputing the claim, others focused on the nature of Muhammad's mission in Makkah, pointing out that he had successfully carried out his role as a 'warner', and that the persecution and rejection he suffered is seen as the will of God. Some very good answers balanced the apparent failure of these years with the quality of the people who had accepted Islam to argue that the years were not completely years of failure.

Question 3 (a)

This was not a popular question, but those who chose it appeared to find it straightforward. Most answers centred on the integration of the emigrants with the Muslims from Madinah, and then the expansion of the Umma through conflict with Makkah and alliances with other groups. Some were aware of the role played in the development of the umma by the continuing revelation of the Qur'an, while others focused more on the role of the Prophet as a political and military leader.

Question 3 (b)

There were some good answers to this question. Some usefully focused on the motive of those who gave their loyalty to Muhammad, especially his long-term opponents from Makkah, to argue that many of the members of the Umma were not spiritually committed to Islam. They also used the wars of re-conquest after Muhammad's death to support their argument. Others focused on the meaning of Umma to argue either that the true Umma was spiritual, or that since Islam is a complete way of life, the Umma could not be purely spiritual.

Question 4 (a)

Some of those who tackled this question simply outlined the whole of the Prophet's life with little attention to what he had achieved. In this topic the focus needs to be on the situation by 632, and what had been achieved overall in the 23 years of Muhammad's prophetic career. This is particularly important for an understanding of the events that followed the death of Muhammad, and for an assessment of his importance in Islam.

Question 4(b)

There were some good answers to this question, and they showed a good awareness of some of the divisions in the Muslim world today. In contrast, other answers showed little sign that they understood that there were differences of opinion among Muslims. One useful line of debate separated the importance of Muhammad the Prophet from the importance of Muhammad the man. This was used to argue that while Muhammad the Prophet was vital, knowledge of Muhammad the man was both less certain and less important.