



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2011**

**Religious Studies**

**RSS11**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit L Islam 2 The Life of the Prophet**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General Comments

There were some very pleasing responses to this paper, and some answers were clearly focused on the question set. Questions 1 and 2 remained the most popular but there were also a good number of responses to Question 3. Few candidates appeared to have any difficulty in managing their time, but a few found it difficult to communicate their meaning clearly, often because their handwriting was illegible in places. As will be seen in the following comments, some candidates offered general, narrative, answers to questions which asked for more than an outline of some events in the Prophet's life; this limited the marks that could be awarded. Some also offered an explanation of a point of view rather than a debate in response to AO2 questions and this also limited the marks that could be given.

### Question 1 *Jahiliyyah*

This was the most popular question on the paper.

- 01** Many candidates were able to answer this question very well, and some scored full marks. They showed good knowledge and understanding both of the teaching given in Makkah between 610 and 622 and of how it challenged both existing beliefs and the way of life. Many candidates, however, simply summarised some existing beliefs and stated key facts about the way of life and then stated that the message rejected all of them. Such responses did not answer the question fully.
- 02** The issue arising specified for study is 'How far was the message/religion brought by Muhammad new? Was it a complete rejection of the beliefs and values of the day?' Most candidates were very well informed and argued that Muhammad rejected many of the existing beliefs and values (e.g. polytheism /shirk and the idea that a person's worth was based on their birth) but not all those beliefs and values (e.g. the monotheism of the Hanifs). Others tried to speculate about the life of Muhammad before his call to be a Prophet. Where relevant, and where clearly based on accepted traditions, this was credited but it was generally a very limited approach.

### Question 2 *Makkah 610-622 CE*

Another very popular question, but, in general, one answered less successfully than question 1.

- 03** A considerable number of candidates simply outlined what happened between 610 and 622 with little attention to the question set. The best answers traced the development of Islam from the call of the Prophet through the private and public preaching, the impact of the Qur'an and the gaining of reverts /converts, to the Hijrah. They commented on the types of people attracted to Islam and the price they paid for their loyalty to the Prophet and his message, and suggested why that development was so slow. Some included material that had also appeared in their answer to Question 1 – this was, as always, credited where relevant.
- 04** There were some very good answers to this question. Most used the persecution of the community, and the relatively low number of people who had accepted Islam, to argue that Muhammad had achieved very little, and the quality of the first Muslims and the limited nature of the task given to the Prophet to argue that he had achieved everything expected of him.

### Question 3 *Madinah 622-632 CE*

- 05** There were many good answers to this question and some candidates scored full marks. Others simply outlined events between 622 and 632 without paying attention to the question. Many candidates drew on their knowledge of a wide range of roles fulfilled by the Prophet and were able to illustrate these with reference to specific incidents in his career. These included the drawing up of the Constitution of Madinah and the treaty of Hudabiyah. In some answers, Muhammad's role as Prophet was ignored.
- 06** This was also well answered by many candidates. Some very good answers debated whether Muhammad and the Muslim community would even have survived if he had not been a strong military leader, but then argued that his role as Prophet and diplomat were equally important for his success. Others dismissed his military role without debate, which made their answers one-sided and limited what could be awarded.

#### **Question 4 *The death of the Prophet and after***

**07** There were some very good answers to this question and some candidates dealt successfully with all three aspects – the election, the role and the status of the Caliph – and explained both the Sunni and the Shi'a attitudes. Others gave an account of the election of the first Caliph but did not deal with the other two elements of the question at all and a few answers gave very little relevant information.

**08** The best answers attached a clear meaning to both 'a political community' and 'a spiritual community'. In weaker answers it was not always clear what the candidates understood these two phrases to mean. Some of the best answers focused on a key question – did the new members of the community accept only the law of Islam as enforced by the Caliph or faith in God and in Muhammad as God's messenger? Some also discussed the nature of the Umma, arguing that if only believing and practising Muslims make up the Umma then it can be considered spiritual; however, if all those who accepted the authority of the Caliph were the Umma then perhaps, for some of them, the Umma was only a political community.

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