



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2012**

**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 excellent answers which were well-informed and based on careful reading of the questions, but also some evidence of 'prepared' answers which did not fit the question set. In general many answers would have benefited from greater, but very selective, use of material from the Qur'an, hadith or biographies of the Prophet to support the points made.

### Question 1 *Jahiliyyah*

- 01** This was the most popular question on the paper and there were some very good responses to it. The best answers focused on the key words 'importance' and 'social' and selected material relevant to the question while many weaker answers simply wrote about the Jahiliyyah period in general, which limited what could be awarded. Some answers were clearly informed by scholarship and/or good knowledge of various verses from the Qur'an, while others appeared to be a summary of a popular textbook and paid little attention to the actual question asked. In many cases too much was written on the religious background to the Prophet's career, little of which was relevant, and some students had very little to say about the importance of Makkah as a religious and trading centre.
- 02** This issue is highlighted in the specification and students were expected to have discussed it prior to the examination. Some students, however, did not appear to understand it. Many focused on how Muhammad built a good reputation for himself before his call – but this needed relating to the fact that he was born in, rather than lived in, Makkah to be completely relevant. Counter arguments which suggested that his place of birth was irrelevant were generally stronger and focused both on the apparent 'failure' of Muhammad's mission in Makkah when contrasted with his success in Madinah, and on the idea that the Hijrah represents the rejection of superiority by birth and replaces it with equality through faith.

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

- 03** This was another popular question. The best answers focused on the main themes and illustrated and explained the key points of the teaching given. However, many answers would have been much improved by showing a much greater awareness of material from the Makkan suras. Some answers offered a summary rather than unpacking the ideas as required by the command word 'examine', which limited the marks that could be awarded. Some students simply outlined the Prophet's career in Makkah and while it was usually possible to find some relevant points in such answers much of the material was simply irrelevant.
- 04** Informed discussions of this issue generally considered the impact of the idea of judgement on Muhammad's audience in Makkah, and the importance of Muhammad's role as 'Warner'. Counter arguments often focused on the importance of other themes, especially Tawhid, and on Muhammad's wider role as an 'announcer'. There were some very thoughtful responses, but some had not included the theme of judgement in response to 03 and found very little to say in response to this question.

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

- 05** Although this question was tackled by fewer students, there were some very good answers. In addition to identifying the different groups that made up the Ummah, many commented on the relationship between them, especially between the Ansar and the Muhajirun, and some usefully referred to the Constitution of Madinah.
- 06** There were some very pleasing answers to this question in which students showed a good understanding of the meaning of 'political' and were able to consider the nature of

the community in that light. Many argued that the various battles, the inclusion of the Makkans after 630, and the alliances made between Muhammad and outlying tribes, were politically based, and used events after the death of the Prophet to support their case. This was countered in various ways, including the argument that Islam is a complete way of life in which the political and spiritual are merged.

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

- 07** This was also tackled by fewer students. There were some very good answers which focused on the question set but other answers tended to outline the events after the death of the Prophet without any attention to 'how' and 'why' Shi'a Islam developed. The best answers drew on mainstream tradition and scholarship, but a few answers reported opinion as fact and were therefore less accurate.
- 08** This was a deliberately open question which invited a range of responses, and allowed students to refer to more divisions than those between Sunni and Shi'a Islam. Most argued that divisions had weakened, and continue to weaken, the community and rejected out of hand any suggestion that they were a source of strength. Such answers were often an explanation of a point of view rather than a debate of an issue. Others argued that when divisions were overcome, the community became stronger, for example when the authority of the Caliph was established through the Ridda wars, and some suggested that many of the divisions / differences that have appeared in Islam are both permitted and beneficial because they allow Islam to be practised in different climates and different societies.

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