



**General Certificate of Secondary Education  
June 2011**

**Religious Studies A (4050)**

**Unit 8: Islam**

**405008**

***Report on the Examination***

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## Unit 8: Islam

### General Comments

Examiners' overall impression of this year's paper is that candidates were well prepared for the examination and handled the questions competently. Most candidates made an attempt at all questions, and there were very few not attempted. The questions were fair and challenging and candidates' responses showed that their knowledge was generally good. It was obvious that many practice questions had been done prior to the examination.

AO1 questions elicited some good quality answers on the Five Pillars, worship and personal lifestyle in Part A. The weakest answers were often found in Question A4 on justice, equality and zakah. It is possible that in some centres, more time had been spent teaching the parts of the specification which focused on the religion in terms of the beliefs and practices as opposed to the parts which focused on issues. This meant that the quality of answers in Question A4 was of a lower standard in comparison to the rest of Part A. Also, of the three questions set in A4, two of them were AO2 and required application of an issue in relation to worship, for example, equality in relation to prayer and helping the poor in relation to zakah. This is a higher level skill and could be an area for teachers to focus on in the future. The AO1 questions in Part B were again well handled, and candidates achieved well.

AO2 questions were, in many cases, answered superbly, with candidates showing a high level of understanding and insight. It was pleasing to see evidence of some real evaluation. At the same time, less able candidates also managed to include some valuable points in their answers. Obviously, good practice in the classroom is to use past examination questions for candidates to work and revise from. However, on occasions candidates needed to make sure they read the question carefully and answered the one actually set, rather than the one they have practised before. This problem was particularly evident in Questions A2(d), A3(c), B5(b) and (d) and B6(b) and (d.)

### Part A

#### Question A1 The Five Pillars

Answers were generally good in all parts of this question. Part (a) saw marks across the range with the better answers focused on the importance of shahadah rather than just what it is.

Part (b) saw the higher quality answers focus on the purpose of salah, for example 'to keep Muslims in touch with Allah' or 'the rewards that prayer brings', rather than what salah actually is.

In part (c) the emphasis of the answer should have been on how zakah is given as opposed to why it is given or what it is. Good answers included mention of zakah being collected by the mosque, being given directly to the poor or being collected as a tax in Muslim countries.

Part (d) on the status of Hajj saw many extended answers which were very well constructed and personal insight came across very strongly. Strong answers compared hajj with the other Pillars concluding that in fact they are all equal as the diagram on the paper in the stimulus material shows. There was the misconception, though, that Hajj was not compulsory.

### **Question A2 Worship**

Again, there were few problems here when candidates read the questions properly. In part (a) the phrase ‘the importance of’ was sometimes ignored and therefore answers did not fit the question. Many repeated the statement, ‘the adhan calls Muslims to prayer,’ rather than saying it is important so that prayer is not missed.

Part (b) was answered well with the best answers including the Imam being the prayer leader, good role model, teacher, lead the Friday sermon, conducts ceremonies etc.

Part (c) saw the same issues as part (a), in that the phrase ‘the purpose of’ was sometimes ignored so that answers focused on describing the Madrassah rather than what the question required.

As mentioned in the general comments, candidates need to read the questions carefully. Part (d) said, ‘It is possible to be a good Muslim without attending the mosque,’ not, ‘You cannot be a Muslim without attending the mosque.’ Although similar, the phrase ‘good Muslim’ was the key to this year’s question. Unfortunately, many failed to address this. Answers which concentrate on not being a Muslim if not attending the mosque were of course able to gain some credit, but often not at Levels 5 and 6. Also, in AO2 responses, use of actual teachings was clearly evident in the better answers; this was pleasing to see.

### **Question A3 Personal Lifestyle**

Answers to part (a) were excellent, with many answers including far more than the two marks required.

Part (b) answers were also excellent, with many Qur’anic teachings being used. The best example of answers where teachings were quoted and applied competently were seen here.

Part (c) saw some well thought out answers, but the specification and textbooks do distinguish between hijab (headscarf and modest dress) and purdah (the concealment of women), and candidates are expected to know the differences.

### **Question A4 Justice, Equality and Zakah**

Good use of actual teachings and religious practices, of which there are plenty, was generally lacking in responses to part (a), and so marks in Levels 2 and 3 were most commonly awarded. Examples used could have been ‘equal as the teeth on a comb,’ ‘no Arab can claim merit over a non Arab, nor black over white,’ the story of Muhammad allowing Bilal the black Ethiopian to call the adhan, and reference to racial equality in Muhammad’s last sermon. A common mistake was to ignore the actual question about *racial* prejudice.

Part (b) saw good quality answers which cited zakah as not just the giving but also the more personal ideas about greed, purification, and worldly values for the giver.

Part (c) saw a mixture of answers, some focusing on ‘equality’, others on praying side by side; this meant that many candidates gained 2 out of 3. However, many did not connect the two and therefore failed to gain the third mark available.

## Part B

### Question B5 Family Life

This question was more popular than B6 and was generally answered very well. Examiners saw some very good knowledge and understanding of polygamy and homosexuality in parts (a) and (c). Answers to parts (b) and (d) were weaker, with a general lack of real evaluation. Many answers simply described arranged marriage and divorce instead of addressing the specifics of the questions in an evaluative way. Where candidates did address AO2, however, examiners saw some superb answers.

Part (a) saw most candidates score 3 marks or more on polygamy. Many answers were a series of points and in some cases the only thing lacking was a little more depth of development to hit the Level 6.

Part (b) answers were often AO1 in nature, with candidates failing to demonstrate the evaluation skills necessary for AO2. Answers often simply stated that an arranged marriage was organised by the parents in the best interests of the child, whereas in a love marriage the couple falls out of love and in the main end up divorcing. The question was looking for an evaluation of which way is best and some criteria for making that judgement.

Part (c) saw some excellent answers. Many quotations were used; references to the Prophet Lot and Islamic Law, but also to cultural attitudes to homosexuality and the way Muslim families might deal with this issue in the modern western world were included. There were many positive attitudes, with reference being made to the storyline in the BBC series *Eastenders*. Television can be a useful tool, and this has obviously opened up homosexuality in Islam as an issue that can be discussed and is no longer as taboo as perhaps it once was. Many references to Queer Jihad were also seen. This is not an easy topic, especially for many students who are part of the faith, but they dealt with the issue in as very mature way and produced some interesting and balanced answers.

Part (d) repeated the pattern of part (b) with answers mainly divided into two areas: firstly, that divorce is wrong and, secondly, how divorce is carried out. There was little real evaluation of whether it should never be agreed to.

### Question B6 Beliefs and Sources of Authority

In some cases answers to part (a) focused on a description of the life of Muhammad rather than choosing events which highlight his importance.

Part (b) faltered, with candidates expressing why the Qur'an itself is important rather than whether the receiving of Qur'an was the most important event in Muhammad's life; a comparison with at least one other event in his life was necessary here. Candidates who did this referred to the difficulties of his upbringing and the making of the man, the Hijrah, and the attempts to conquer Mecca and set it up as the city of the worship of Allah. High quality answers made reference to the fact that the receiving of the Qur'an was just the start.

Part (c) clearly differentiated between candidates; those with clear knowledge went into detail about Caliphates, hidden imams, their authority and roles. Some candidates, however, got the two groups confused, and others appeared not to know what Sunni and Shi'a are. This was perhaps a more demanding question, but directly reflected the requirements of the specification.

Part (d) saw some hesitation about what the shari'ah is, its origins, and its real purpose, so many of the answers seen were very much generalised. Many of the better answers compared the Shari'ah with the Qur'an and Hadith and their relevance for Muslims today.

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