



**General Certificate of Secondary Education  
June 2012**

**Religious Studies 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 students were again well prepared for the examination and handled the questions competently. Answers were maturely written especially in some sensitive topic areas. Most students made an attempt at all questions, and there were very few not attempted. Students generally understood the demands of the questions and their responses shared that their knowledge was generally good. The six mark evaluation questions provided some superbly argued answers as techniques continue to improve. The Part B choice of essay seemed fairly balanced this year. It appeared that there were questions to entice students to either choice but in each case there were challenging questions for them to handle.

AO1 questions to the value of 2 and 3 marks showed students have good knowledge and have been trained well to understand how marks are awarded. This indicates that mark schemes are being well used in schools and colleges to prepare students. Students appear to have a better understanding of the language of the questions and what was required. A2 (a), A2(b), A3a and A4a were done very well. A1(a) and (b) proved more difficult which is surprising as they are the two key events in the life of Muhammad.

AO2 3 mark questions were handled well particularly in the section on Prayer. There is again growing evidence that students are being well prepared in terms of the technique and are being taught to include at least 3 well explained reasons in agreement, or disagreement or a combination of both in response to the statement provided.

AO2 6 marks evaluation questions provided some excellent answers both in terms of the quality of the argument and its support and the coherence in which it was presented. A1(c) and A3(c) saw some of the highest quality answers of the whole paper and were impressive. Students found question A4(c) more difficult which perhaps indicates that there needs to be more clarity in the teaching of Muslim dress.

### Part A

#### A1: Beliefs and Sources of Authority

A1(a) This proved to be quite a difficult question for some students who misread the question and focused on Muslim practices today rather than on the importance of the event itself. The stimulus picture of the cave on Mt Hira should have been a help here. Schools and colleges need to remind students that the pictures or images are there to help students. Better answers frequently referred to the first time Muhammad was spoken to by Allah, meeting with Angel Gabriel, the beginning of his prophethood, the night the Qur'an began to be revealed, the start of a new era of Islam. It is worthy of note that the whole of the Qur'an was not revealed in a single night.

A1(b) Where students knew what the Hijrah was, this proved a very straight-forward three marks. They simply described the events of the night itself with reference to a plot to kill Muhammad resulting in him having to escape, Ali staying in Muhammad's bed as a decoy, being chased over the hillside, hiding in a cave with the birds nest and spiders web. Other students did not know what the Hijrah referred to so chose to write about the Hajj, the night journey to heaven or Hajara searching for water. Others described life in Mecca without actually referring to the actual night itself or described how Islam developed in Madinah. It was interesting to note a significant number of students thought that Muhammad just chose

to leave Mecca and described the Hijrah as if Muhammad was going away for a while to a more pleasant place.

A1(c) The majority of students scored highly on this evaluation with Level 4 and above being achieved by a range of abilities. They compared the value of Holy Books and Prophets with a good range of ideas – a human with a book; the written word of Allah with the words of the Prophet, a book being here forever whereas Prophets die; books being hard to understand whereas Prophets can explain things in human terms. Conclusions brought the two together showing how Islam needed both. There is clear evidence that schools and colleges continue to improve with evaluation techniques and even weaker students are now able to do this well if they have sufficient knowledge and understanding to support their argument. Further development needs to focus on evaluation conclusions in terms of technique as many students simply repeat chunks of what they have already said instead of making a new point or summarising what is said in a way which adds further to it.

## **A2: Prayer**

A2(a) The majority of students achieved 2 marks here by giving two ideas associated with preparation – call to prayer, wudu, removal of shoes, head covering or giving one idea which they then developed – wudu, with the process then explained.

A2(b)(i) Again 2 marks were easily achieved here by giving two ideas about Salah – its compulsory nature, one of Five Pillars, completed five times a day and done mainly at the mosques

A2(b)(ii) The question on ‘du’a prayer’ proved slightly more difficult and students either knew it or didn’t. Where they did, answers included reference to private / personal prayer, asking for help / forgiveness, use of a believer’s own language as opposed to Arabic and the fact that it can be done at any time.

There was some confusion in some answers with students mixing up the two types of prayer.

A2(c) This question needed careful reading. Some students appeared to answer their own question here, with answers evaluating whether prayer should take place in a mosque as opposed to anywhere else. Whilst there was some credit given here, the central focus of the question was the meaningfulness of prayer and whether more meaning was applied if prayer was carried out in the mosque. More able students referred to intention (niyyah) explaining that this concept is central to prayer as opposed to the place where it takes place. There was reference to the rewards given for the effort of attending mosque in acquiring good deeds for the afterlife.

A2(d) In the main students disagreed with this statement and provided several reasons why this was the case. They argued their case by referring to one of Five Pillars, the fact that it was instructed by Muhammad, the requirement reduced to five after Muhammad’s night journey, keeping in constant touch with Allah, allowing avoidance of sin. Some students tried to balance their answers by agreeing and disagreeing although this was not required in a 3 mark answer. Agreement referred to time being spent doing other good things like charity work, and that repetition is not necessary. It was also pleasing to see knowledge of Islamic diversity with some students referring to the Shi’a tradition of praying 3 times a day.

### **A3: Family Life**

A3(a) In the main students here referred to parental involvement, what the parents were looking for in terms of suitability and compatibility, and the need for agreement of the couple and the dowry agreement which all produced answers gaining full marks. Some students were sidetracked by the issue of debating arranged marriages as opposed to forced marriages. Also some answers discussed the nikkah (the actual marriage ceremony) rather than the arrangement of it.

A3(b) Level 3 and 4 marks were consistently achieved with this question. Schools and colleges had obviously prepared their students well here. Knowledge of Shariah Law was demonstrated and the effect that adultery has on the Muslim family and society.

A3(c) This question presented students with a difficult perspective in that it chose to put forward an idea that actually opposes mainstream Islamic belief with the idea that homosexuality should be accepted. It was really pleasing to see how answers were written sensitively and maturely and were often balanced in agreement and disagreement. References were made to Shariah Law, the story of Prophet Lot, Allah's creation, teachings on equality and fairness, modern views and changes in society's ideas and the issues that a homosexual might face within the family. Organisations like 'Queer Jihad' were referred to indicating the existence of pressure groups fighting for the rights of homosexuals in countries where Islamic Law is applied strictly. Schools and colleges need to be applauded in their teaching of this topic as there were some excellent Level 6 answers.

### **A4: Personal Lifestyle and Justice and Equality**

A4(a) 2/2 was the most common mark with answers giving a definition of halal as being allowed or permitted and developing that with an example which in the main was a food reference or one relating to the animal killing process. It was good to see good quality 2 marks answers refer to halal in its wider sense of 'any allowed practice' and an example to go with it. Schools and colleges need to teach students that, with 2 marks questions that use the phrase 'Explain briefly' or 'What is meant by', they do need to put two ideas or develop one idea, or give an example in their answers to pick up the second mark. Some students only gained 1/2 because they only made one simple statement which did not sufficiently 'explain'.

A4(b) The question asked for students to 'Explain **types**' and therefore those answers that only referred to a single type could only access 2 of the 3 marks. Answers were sensitively written looking at the real problems that some Muslims face in relation to prejudice towards them. Modern issues of media presentation in the wake of 9/11 and 7/7 allowed reference to terrorism and dress codes might lead to name calling and difficulties of not being able to practice traditions within the work place. It was heartening to see that students referred to these ideas as being unacceptable in a modern UK society. References to the situation in France gained no marks with this question which specifically referred to the UK.

A4(c) Of the 6 marks evaluation questions in Part A, students found this one the most difficult. There does seem to be a lack of clarity as to distinctions between Purdah and Hijab. Schools and colleges need to be clear that 'purdah' has a wider definition in relation to ways in which women's modesty is protected whereas the word 'hijab' is now widely used for the headscarf. Answers centred around the necessity of purdah whereas the better answer discussed whether dress amounted to modesty or whether modesty was more about intention, thoughts and actions.

## Part B

### **B5: Beliefs and justice and Equality**

B5(a)(i) – There were some superb answers here where students knew what Tawhid included ideas about oneness, beyond understanding, unborn, transcendent, all seeing etc. Really the question was about describing beliefs about Allah. Some students confused Tawhid with Shahadah. Although Tawhid and Risalah make up the Shahadah, this led to answers being side tracked and discussions about Muhammad and his value rather than a simple focus on Tawhid.

B5(a)(ii) – These answers produced some excellent descriptions of Akhirah, the effect that this belief has on the life of a Muslim and the importance of it as it determines all thought and actions. Some comparisons were made between Akhirah and Tawhid and Risalah, whilst others used the Five Pillars as an alternative. Some students chose to explain the importance of Akhirah for Muslims and compared this with people who do not believe in the afterlife which obviously was irrelevant.

B5(b) This was not an easy question but students dealt with it well on the whole. It was clear that some students had covered the topic and others had not. Good answers included details relating to teachings of Muhammad, the suggestion that it was easier to understand than the Qur'an, and the fact that the hadith provides guidance for life. This is a topic schools and colleges may need to look at in a little more detail which would provide students with greater confidence in addressing similar questions.

B5(c) Good knowledge and understanding was shown with this question. Good answers included the role and value of women in the home, the role she plays in the Islamic education of children, the right to be respected and the nature of marriage as a partnership. All answers were written very positively, in the sense that the role was dealt with in terms of being valued in its own right and not as one less valued than that of men.

B5(d) A great diversity of answers were seen here. Most answers described the Muslim belief in equality with reference to Qur'anic quotations. Alternative views ranged from a discussion between belief not being enough, that it is more equality in action that matters, to others comparing equality versus justice in the making of a good Muslim. A third way was to compare how equality makes a person a good Muslim as opposed to carrying out the beliefs and actions of the Five Pillars.

### **B6: The Five Pillars and Worship**

B6(a)(i) The key word in this question was 'purpose'. Many students discussed what sawm was, rather than the purpose of it. Some managed indirectly to pick up marks to the value of Level 2. Good answers showed clear reference to empathy with the poor, being more spiritual, more focus on Allah, religion at the centre of life, purification and generally the leading of better life.

B6(a)(ii) – This question resulted in a general explanation of one of the festivals followed by the other which Level 4. However, Levels 5 and 6 were seen to a lesser extent here. There was a real lack of reference to the idea that generally Eid ul Adha is the more spiritual and serious of the two festivals. Answers tended to say that more people are able to celebrate Eid ul Fitr from a person level as opposed to Eid ul Adha being special only for those actually on Hajj.

B6(b) This was a well answered question to Level 3 or Level 4 – it was a lack of detail that prevented Level 4 in description and explanation of the chosen feature. Schools and colleges need to note that there are main features – dome, minaret, mihrab, minbar and

qiblah and that different rooms would not be considered 'main features'. Most students however demonstrated good knowledge and understanding here.

B6(c) Aids to worship was a phrase occasionally misunderstood by students referring to helping the poor in Africa. Those who knew the term discussed prayer beads, prayer mats, desks or seats for reading the Qur'an, or calligraphy which provided good answers.

B6(d) This was a well answered evaluation question with most students being able to discuss the relative value of learning in the home as opposed to the mosque. Many brought in the role of the mother at home and her key role in teaching her children. Many included the access to modern technology as an aid at home. Level 6 answers did not occur often but when they did, they discussed the diversity of what can be learnt in the home as opposed to in the mosque – for example, the idea that the home teaches Islam as a way of life, attitudes and thoughts whereas the mosque teaches more about the study of the religion. Less able students interpreted learning as praying and therefore discussed praying in the mosque as opposed to praying at home, responses which limited the credit given.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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