

Examiners' Report January 2007

GCE

GCE O Level Islamiyat (7568)

This Examiners' Report relates to Mark Scheme
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Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Report on Candidates' Responses | 3 |
| General Comments | 9 |
| Statistics | 11 |

Introduction

The number of candidates entered for the January examination showed another slight decrease. 237 candidates were entered and 233 actually sat the examination. Nevertheless, the appeal of the examination appears to be widening, with entries received from centres in Beijing, Auckland and Tashkent. African centres seem to prefer the summer examination. There was again an absence of Shi'ah candidates.

There was no obvious difference in standards compared to previous years; similar demands and challenges were made of candidates. Some of the discussion questions on this paper were particularly testing, requiring careful thought. Many of the candidates appeared to be well-prepared. Section One was generally well-answered; popular essay questions were 4 and 7; particularly high marks were available in Question 12, where, as anticipated, candidates wrote confidently about wudu and prayer. Skills of knowledge, understanding and evaluation were much in evidence. Sometimes, however, comments were limited in their scope: although it is perfectly valid, for example, to refer to the authority of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, comments could profitably range more widely than this. As usual, the majority of scripts exhibited a good standard of grammar and legibility. However, a number of candidates did not allow sufficient time to finish all the required questions.

Report on Candidates' Responses

Section One: The Qur'an and Hadith

For a third successive year, high marks were scored on this section. Questions 2 and 3, were on the whole, confidently and accurately answered. However, there were some occasional weaknesses.

Question 1

- (a) In part (iii), a positive example was needed and also a deed: 'telling the truth', for example did not qualify. Some candidates created limited answers by using words taken from the Surah - however there are available alternatives.
- (b) In part (i), some candidates gave God's relationship to human beings but neglected the relationship of human beings to God; they are two halves of one whole, e.g. 'king - servants'. Few spotted that this Surah is about inner evil (as opposed to al-Falaq).
- (c) Most answers to this question were accurate.

Question 2

- (a) In part (ii), many candidates spoke about praying for guidance, etc, but the key point was that the Prophet forgave the people of Ta'if.
- (b) In part (ii), simply referring 'to keeping away from evil' was considered too vague a benefit, especially as there are so many suitable alternatives.
- (c) In part (ii), generally candidates were unsure why Muslims dislike superstition.

Question 3

- (c) In part (i), reference to 'Psalms' was not considered a sufficient response and the best response to part (ii) was that given in the Mark Scheme.
- (e) In part (i), not many candidates noted that the Shahadah is the Muslim Declaration of Faith; credit was given to those who described it as the First Pillar of Islam.

Section Two: The Life, Teaching and Achievements of the Prophet

Question 4

There was a reason why Halimah took over the infant Prophet from his mother: it was not just a question of 'Arab tradition' as some candidates wrote; Halimah acted as the Prophet's wet nurse, i.e. she suckled him. Only a few candidates observed that the desert environment was beneficial to the Prophet; he grew in health and strength. Teachings were needed in part (b), such as those suggested in the Mark Scheme; some candidates accurately gave these, but frequently others overlooked them. Some candidates produced anachronisms, i.e. they ascribed practices to the Prophet's time which belonged more appropriately in part (c), the key word of which was 'today'. Unfortunately some candidates wrongly concentrated on the Prophet's teaching in this part. However, in general, candidates answered Question 4 well.

Question 5

Question 5 was not a popular question, although most candidates who tried it answered part (a) well. Unfortunately candidates then proceeded in part (b) to repeat that information as examples of 'the pledges'. A few candidates correctly noted that the acknowledgement of monotheism and the opposition to adultery but not many candidates went much further than that. There were no comments about the rights of women or the sanctity of property - yet these steps taken by the Prophet were morally well ahead of his time. Tentative explanations were given in part (c); no candidates commented on, for example, that it might be necessary for Muslims today to migrate for the same reason that the Prophet did, i.e. to escape persecution.

Question 6

This was a more complex question than it initially looked. Relevant points are as follows:

- (a) In part (i), the basic necessities were given but no example was provided. In part (ii) there was widespread confusion between 'justice' and 'the right to justice'. Finding and using an appropriate example, such as that mentioned in the Mark Scheme, would have helped to resolve this confusion. In part (iii), the comment on the Mark Scheme was not given but some candidates did manage to score both marks here.
- (b) Answers were generally limited to the Jews siding with the Quraish, their expulsion and the execution of their men. In other words, candidates were unable to score many marks on the 'why' of this question.
- (c) Usually the issue of conscience as a guide to conduct was sensibly discussed by candidates.

Question 7

This was a popular and well-answered question. Even the profits from the caravan were mentioned in part (a). The battle itself was well-known and many candidates earned full marks for their accounts. A good number of candidates also rightly remarked in part (b) that the faith of the archers was weak, accurately suggesting why this was so; time and again, however, the connection between testing and the failure at Uhud in part (c) was not seen.

Question 8

Not many candidates attempted this question and those who did had difficulties with part (a), where in the main answers were limited to the large crowd accompanying the Prophet, the performance of the rites and a reference to the Sermon at Arafat. It was clear that most candidates were familiar with the Final Sermon, except for the teaching about 'other faiths' in part (b)(iii) which in fact was not concerned with compulsory conversion (see Question 6) but with the finality of Islam. 'No new faith will be born', said the Prophet, and 'all those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others.' The point about the worldwide Ummah, given under part (b)(ii) was also missed.

Section Three (For Sunni Students)

Question 9

Only a minority of candidates attempted this question. The key phrase in part (a) was 'what the Qur'an teaches' which was unfortunately not covered by some candidates. The best responses were those who referred to the Light of God guiding believers away from sin and evil, rightly equated with 'darkness'. There were few, if any, quotations from the Qur'an in part (b), even though they were specifically required for the question. The best answers to part (c) observed that belief in Allah and kindness to others were not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, one produces the other.

Question 10

This was a popular question and generally answered well by candidates but with some weaknesses. For example, there were no mentions of the guardian angels in part (a) and few seemed to be aware that in part (b)(ii) descriptions of Paradise and Hell were needed in discussions of life after death. Instead, repeated what they had already written about life before death in Question in part (b)(i). Often answers to part (c) were limited to the witness of the Qur'an and/or the Prophet. The better answers concerned themselves also with the final point in the Mark Scheme, that simple justice demands the conclusion that life continues after death, that beyond the present life there is some kind of judgment to be faced.

Question 11

Most candidates who attempted this question were able to answer part (a) accurately. Some interesting examples were given in response to part (b), although there was some confusion here regarding which were examples of ijma and which of qiyas. Where possible, credit was given. The most popular qiya examples were those of laws relating to intoxicating drinks and nail polish. The second prayer call and birth control were often suggested as ijma examples - these needed explanatory comment to earn both marks. Other examples (with such comments) are indicated in the Mark Scheme. Part (c) provoked some useful discussion; arguments for and against the statement were used.

Question 12

The majority of those who selected this question scored well. Frequently, full marks were gained on part (a) and many earned high marks on the other two parts as well. One or two minor issues remain: the spiritual meaning of the word wudu was not emphasised enough in answers to part (b)(i) and responses to part (b)(ii) were not always confined to rak'ah but widened to salah in general, thus producing some confusion with part (c). Wherever possible, the cross-credit system was applied, but marks were not awarded twice for repeating the same information.

Question 13

There were more good answers received for this question, even though the question itself was not particularly popular. Answers to part (a)(i) were nevertheless limited, with some candidates failing to get beyond stating that Abu Bakr's faith was strong. Comments on his character were somewhat fuller. The Khalifah's main achievements seemed well known - at least three of the six listed in the Mark Scheme were generally given. However, note that the question asked only to 'outline' the main achievements of Abu Bakr's reign as First Khalifah. Some candidates spent too much time on this particular question.

Question 14

Inadequate knowledge of the contents of the Qur'an weakened the part (a) answers of many who attempted this question. Making provision for children was especially overlooked and other points, such as transmitting the faith - which appeared in part (b) - were given instead. In fact, the straightforward part (b) question seemed to create all sorts of difficulties: what was needed was a description of some features of the Prophet's life, followed by the application of these points to family life in general. For example, the Prophet treated his daughters well; the lesson to be learned from his behaviour is that families in general should care for the welfare of the 'weaker' sex, be they mothers, wives or sisters. Opinions about parents in part (c) were polarised: either parents did bring their children up properly or they did not (in which case material things were usually held to blame). There was little or no thought given to possible alternative views, such as those suggested in the Mark Scheme. Teachers of this topic may find it useful to pick up on these variants for future discussion and debate.

Section Four (for Shi'ah Students)

Only one candidate attempted this section.

General Comments

As the Question 14 Mark Scheme refers to advice and counselling, that seems as good a point as any to begin these general comments. Too often it appears that candidates fail to achieve their full potential because they have not thought out thoroughly what exactly the question wants to know. The result is that simple points are not elaborated when should be and discursive answers, where they should be limited, are too are too expansive. Once again a failure to read the questions carefully enough would appear to be the chief cause.

Question 4, for example, required an outline of the part played in the Prophet's life by Halimah, Khadijah and Aishah. Clearly only two marks could be awarded for each of these, yet some candidates attempted to write their entire biographies. In contrast, the second part of the same question required a statement of teaching - with suitable comment - but, as was stated in the body of this report, these were frequently overlooked - and some chosen examples were anachronistically applied to the Prophet's lifetime. Equally, the third part of Question 4 wrongly concentrated on the Prophet's teaching, when a short but relevant discussion concerning the present rights of women was required.

The general lesson that can be learnt from the example of Question 4 (and others which could be cited) is that candidates should spend time thinking out what the question wants to know; taking note of the wording of the question - 'Describe...', 'Explain...', 'Outline...', 'State and comment on...' etc - is an important aid in this regard. Candidates should be encouraged to hone this skill; correctly applied, it can produce dramatic results.

It is clear from the many excellent responses to Section One that the majority of candidates have a considerable fund of religious knowledge at their disposal. Unfortunately, that knowledge is not always put to good use. Perhaps all candidates should consider more carefully the delivery of their knowledge. The present examination produced many instances of this, e.g.

- the nature of pledges in Question 5;
- the Prophet's relationship with the Jews in Question 6;
- the Prophet's pilgrimage to the Ka'bah in Question 8;
- the details of life after death in Question 10;
- the meaning of Wudu in Question 12;
- the faith of Abu Bakr in Question 13.

Section 3 particularly requires knowledge of the Qur'an - see Questions 9, 10 and 14, where the Qur'an is specifically mentioned - and other sources of Islamic law: there can be little doubt that most candidates have this knowledge; unfortunately, some candidates fail to focus completely on answering the question set.

Continuing the theme of the importance of careful focus and thought, the third part of most of the essay questions demand comment, opinions and general reasoning. It seems that more practice in answering this type of question is needed, for in many instances candidates are not scoring more than half of the allotted marks. Reference to the Mark Scheme will show that giving alternative points of view (not necessarily opposing points of view) can be the way to garner the rest of the marks. Good examples from the presentt Question Paper are Questions 4(c), 9(c) and 14(c). Sometimes as in Question 6(c), 11(c) and 13(c), one point of view is emphatically stated but the alternative position is not. It is clear that the majority of candidates have opinions on some some of these issues: they should be encouraged to discuss them and, where it is sensible to do so, to consider other points of view. One cautionary note - teachers should advise their students not to miss the point of such questions, for to do so can result in two or more pages of irrelevant material, losing precious time and unfortunately gaining very few marks.

Statistics

GCE O Level Islamiyat Grade Boundaries

| Grade | A | B | C | D | E |
|-------------------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Raw boundary mark | 67 | 59 | 51 | 46 | 39 |

Note: Grade Boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject depending on the demands of the question paper

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