

ISLAMIC STUDIES

Paper 8053/9013

Paper One

General comments

Overall, this year's performance in the examination was similar to the previous year.

Although some of the responses seemed to be of a higher standard, there were also a significant number of responses below the level required. There were even a few cases of zero marks awarded for some questions, which could be attributed to factors such as misreading of the questions, lack of sufficient preparation or poor time management. It is important that these problems are addressed so that candidates are able to answer questions as expected of them.

Some of the answers were given only in bullet or numbered points, rather than essays in continuous prose. These candidates were obviously looking for certain 'topics' or 'themes' and therefore did not pay attention to the actual reading of the question or to a full response.

In many scripts, the conclusions did not reflect the crux of the question. It is important that candidates are able to conclude their answers properly, so that the Examiner is able to make sense of the whole discussion.

As mentioned in previous reports, in questions asking for agreement or disagreement with a claim, the Examiners are looking for a definite stand with adequate supporting discussion. The candidate is therefore expected to make a clear indication of his/her position giving reasons for that position. In most cases, this was found to be lacking.

Also, there was still a problem with lack of relevant Qur'anic and Hadith quotations to support points made in answers. Although some candidates were able to do this effectively, there was still room for improvement for a large majority. At this stage of the candidates' education, probably in preparation for higher studies at university, candidates should recognise the need to support their views with relevant references.

Finally, the problem of only a basic level of critical thinking still exists. Islamic scholarship has always demanded critical thinking, and at this level candidates should try to start making use of this principle.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) Although this question was very popular, many did not read it carefully. It asked for a discussion of 'religious beliefs and practices' of the people of Mecca at the time the Prophet was born. However, instead of focusing on the religious beliefs and practices, many candidates, after mentioning one or two points on beliefs, strayed into a discussion of socio-political practices.
- (b) In this part, the discussion was meant to focus on any two of those practices referred to in the previous part. However, because many candidates had drifted into a discussion of socio-political rather than religious beliefs and practices, this part was generally poorly answered. The question demanded Qur'anic critique of those two selected beliefs and practices. In many cases, there weren't enough relevant Qur'anic quotations. The answers were often too general to make any meaningful impact.

Question 2

This was another popular question, and many of the candidates who attempted it did reasonably well. The question asked for specific instances of the persecution endured by the Prophet and his followers, as well as an explanation of how the Prophet dealt with these.

- (a) In this part, a general description of specific incidents of the persecution process was required. Particular names were, therefore, of crucial importance. In many cases, such names were lacking and candidates simply wrote about persecution in general without details to illustrate the points being made.
- (b) Here, candidates were expected to explain the reaction of the Prophet to the persecutions. This was generally well answered with some specific examples given. Many candidates did quite well here.

Question 3

This question was popular and was attempted satisfactorily, with many supplying interesting details. However, many candidates missed the opportunity to achieve higher marks because they did not focus on the significance of each event in the development of the early Muslim community.

- (a) The importance of the Battle of Badr to the early Muslim community cannot be ignored. Many answers were very good on details of the Battle, its remote and immediate causes and the outcome, but fell short on the significance. The battle boosted the confidence of the Muslims that the God they worshipped was capable of helping them defeat their enemies. It gave them new impetus about the power of faith over idolatry, and strengthened their commitment to Islam and their affection for the Prophet. It gave them reassurance that they were not alone.
- (b) Most candidates described the Battle of Uhud correctly, providing some interesting details. However, yet again, the significance of the event was not emphasised. It was expected that candidates would at least mention that it showed the human side of the Prophet, that it brought into fore the question of obedience to Allah and His Messenger and the consequences of disobedience.
- (c) Again, on the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, most candidates gave satisfactory details and showed that they had studied the topic. However, the significance should have clearly shown the reflection of the whole episode of the Prophet's life/personality. Some of the issues expected include: the Prophet's diplomacy, his foresightedness, pragmatism, trustworthiness and his readiness to compromise on issues that do not affect the essence of Islam.
- (d) On the subject of the Fall of Mecca, most candidates did quite well, giving the details and also the significance. Some of the expected points were: the Prophet's magnanimity, an indication that Islam was a peaceful faith, the theme of forgiveness being central to Islam, and the fact that the incident strengthened the hands of the Prophet.

Section B

Question 4

Even though many candidates attempted this question, many answers were not of sufficient quality. They were often basic explanations of the *Surah* without paying much attention to the thrust of the question. Exactly why this *Surah* is supposed to be a third of the Qur'an was not explained sufficiently well. It was expected that there would be some basic cross-referencing with other parts of the Qur'an to emphasise the themes of the *Surah* and how they reflect the core of the Qur'an. With the concept of *Tawhid* being the central theme and this being the bedrock of the message of the Qur'an, candidates were expected to reflect on this.

Question 5

This was one of the most popular questions, and many candidates who answered it wrote at length in sufficient detail. The question was straightforward, but it was expected that at this level candidates would reflect more on how the process has an impact on the authenticity of the Qur'an. Furthermore, there was a timeframe for the question. It specifically restricted the candidate to the period between the death of the Prophet and the end of the Caliphate of 'Uthman. Some candidates, however, covered an earlier starting

point. It could be argued that this was to provide some context, but a contextual discussion should be brief so that one does not lose sight of the main focus of the question. Some candidates spent much time on irrelevant issues outside the period and hence lost valuable time. The Examiners were looking for accuracy of detail and precision in the accounts of the specified period. For many candidates, this was problematic.

Question 6

This question was not very popular, even though it appeared to be straightforward. Those who attempted it were not able to discuss the issues with sufficient depth. Candidates were supposed to reflect on the significance of the Qur'an in the beliefs and practices of the Muslim community today. What does the Final Word of God mean to the Muslim community? How do Muslims see the Qur'an as the ultimate book of guidance? What internal evidence is there to justify this belief? On the latter issue, very little discussion was raised by candidates.

Section C

Question 7

The question on the five pillars of Islam was fairly popular, but many of the answers were basic and did not give sufficient explanation as to the part played by these institutions in the promotion of communal solidarity. Many of the responses were merely descriptive and rarely touched on the impact. Some of the main issues expected to be raised were: *Shahadah* reflects equality of all believers before One Creator, God, and believing in His message and in His Messenger. For *Salah*, standing shoulder to shoulder five times a day and going through the same motions under one leader [*Imam*] trains Muslims to see themselves as one community with all social distinctions removed. In *Saum*, again, social and class distinctions are bridged with all Muslims rich and poor going through the pangs of hunger and denial of certain 'normal' comforts for the whole month of Ramadan. In *Zakah*, Muslims are made to feel for others and help in the redistribution of wealth. Muslims see this institution as a way of minimising the suffering of the poor and the needy and eventually eliminating it all together. *Hajj* has the obvious advantage of bringing Muslims from all over the world together in one place with the same intention and going through the same rituals. With the simple apparel of *Ihram* removing all distinctions, again, Muslims see themselves as belonging to one faith and with one destiny.

Question 8

This proved to be one of the most popular questions, perhaps due to the fact that it was mainly descriptive. Most of the candidates who attempted it gave satisfactory answers, especially to part (a).

- (a) Since this part of the question was asking for a mere description of the performance of the five daily prayers, there were few problems, with candidates giving very good answers. Many candidates went into considerable detail.
- (b) In this part, candidates were expected to identify specific features that make Friday [*Jum'ah*] prayers different from the normal five daily prayers. Many candidates found it difficult to state more than two distinguishing features. These could have included: once weekly; only on Fridays; encouragement for people to put on their finery; it is held only in congregation; the number of *rakaat*; two calls of *adhan*; and the *Khutbah*.

Question 9

Even though this question was attempted by a large number of candidates, the performance was generally below expectation. Many candidates wrote very short notes without much detail. Many answers were sketchy, and there was not always sufficient attempt to bring in references from the Qur'an and Hadith to support answers. Answers to such questions would always certainly benefit from scriptural references.

- (a) It was expected here that a brief discussion of the belief in 'angels' would include looking at their nature, their role in divine guidance, their general behaviour and differences between them and other creatures. Examples of named angels and their responsibilities would have enhanced the answers. Even though many candidates did well, many responses were not detailed enough and references were lacking.

- (b) 'Enjoining good and prohibiting evil' proved a difficult concept for most candidates, even though this is core to the whole issue of Muslim social interaction. Humans were created essentially to serve [worship] God, and our day-to-day life is governed by this principle. Most candidates read 'enjoining' as 'enjoying' what is *halal* and forbidding what is *haram* and hence spent a lot of time discussing the wonderful things that are *halal* and how to avoid the *haram* things. Even though by some stretch of the imagination one could see some bearing on the question, there was a deviation here. The question was expecting a discussion on the principle explained especially in Qur'an 3: 104 and 3:110. It related more to the responsibility of *da'wah*. The thrust of the question was, therefore, the individual and the collective responsibility in carrying out this duty.
- (c) The responses to the theme of *jihad* were often interesting but generally poorly answered. Many candidates could not define it properly – *jihad* just meant 'war' without a clarification of what type of 'war' it was. Does *jihad* only refer to armed insurrection? What does the Qur'an itself say? Which Hadith make references to it, and how did the Prophet himself explain it on different occasions? How do we see it in contemporary times? These are some of the questions candidates were expected to ask themselves when dealing with a question of this kind.
- (d) This concept – God's predestination of all events – was not given adequate treatment. Many of the answers were even at odds with what Islam itself teaches. Some gave the impression that Islam totally rules out human responsibility, focusing only on the idea that whatever happens to one comes from Allah. Teachers are requested to give proper attention to the concept of predestination because it has serious ramifications for the general understanding of Islam and human behaviour. Islam certainly teaches about God's power to predetermine, but humankind also has responsibility for its actions. That is why the whole issue of reward and punishment, and heaven and hell, are pertinent. Emphasis must be placed on the place of human freewill and responsibility and accountability in the whole discussion.

Section D

Question 10

This was also a popular question but only a few of the candidates who attempted it did well. The point of the question was to determine how 'Islamic' the wedding ceremony tends to be in a particular country. Most candidates spent a lot of time discussing the formalities of marriage instead of focusing on the question of how the wedding ceremony conforms to the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. It was, however, interesting to see a few candidates being very critical of what they deem to be 'Un-Islamic' elements in modern-day weddings in Muslim communities. Some of these were: the show of opulence; waste; unacceptable level of mixing of men and women; and music and dance.

Question 11

Even though this question has been asked before in different forms, it does not seem to be very popular. Indeed, it was the least popular of all the questions. The question takes the position that Islamic teachings are capable of meeting new challenges, and candidates were expected to discuss how this could be done. The basis of this is to be found in the traditional belief in the timelessness of the message of the Qur'an. Hence, even though the Qur'an was revealed in the seventh century, the central teachings are still relevant to the present time and to the future. Answers were expected to refer to the traditional methods of interpreting the Qur'an with the help of the *Sunnah / Hadith* and applying *Ijma* and *Qiyas*. Excellent candidates could have referred to current situations in particular countries and the challenges faced in the introduction of Islam into public life. The attention of teachers should be drawn to the crucial importance of questions of this nature, as candidates are likely to be confronted with the relevance of Islam in real-life situations in modern life.

Question 12

This was also not a very popular question, and the few candidates who attempted it gave poor answers, often merely describing the four bases of the *Shari'ah* without discussing the relationship between them. It was expected that candidates would give a good account of how the four bases are related, together with some examples. This could then have led to a discussion on the importance of each of these bases of the *Shari'ah*, identifying how they formed the basis of Muslim thinking. It was also expected that good candidates would refer to contemporary debates on the need for fresh approaches to legal thought in Islam, including applications of *Ijma* and *Qiyas*. Some candidates might wrongly assume that certain topics are 'difficult' and

therefore they do not attempt them. Every effort must be made to dispel this notion whilst teaching, and students must be prepared for the whole of the syllabus and not just parts of it. This is the only way to build a rounded person in the education process.