

ISLAMIC STUDIES

Paper 8053/01

Paper 1

General comments

The general performance as compared to that of November 2007 has not been remarkably different. As for the level of difficulty, this year compares reasonably well with last year. There were some questions that the candidates found harder than others but there were also questions that candidates were able to do very well.

The issue of reading the question properly is still a problem and attention is again being drawn to this so that the skill of reading questions properly can be reinforced before putting pen on paper. Some candidates seem to latch onto particular key words. Even though focusing on key words is very important, candidates have to read the whole question so that they get a comprehensive idea about what the question is asking.

There has been some improvement in the citing of relevant Qur'anic and *ahadith* references to support discussions. A large majority of candidates still do not do this. Candidates should have the ability to cite examples from the Qur'an and Hadith at this stage of their education since they are the primary sources for Islamic thought and values.

There were occasions when questions in two parts were answered as one instead of attempting both parts separately. This leaves the Examiner in a very difficult situation because he/she has to spend quite some time looking for possible starting points for part one/(a) and the beginning of the next part. Linked to this is the practice where candidates answer the questions and number them consecutively instead of giving the actual number of the question attempted. This could confuse the Examiner and create many problems.

Again, some of the answers were just too short to make any meaningful inroads into answering the question.

Candidates are expected to conclude their discussions. This is especially important in questions where candidates are asked to take a position and offer reasons for the position they have taken. In questions demanding agreement/disagreement, 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 not found.

Further, the problem of lack of sufficient preparation, and poor time management still exist. It is important that these problems are addressed in order that candidates will be able to answer questions as expected of them.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was very popular and candidates generally scored very well. Candidates wrote a lot on **part (a)** and gave some interesting details.

The **part (b)** was often a repetition of the issues raised in the previous part without adequate conclusion. This is supposed to be an evaluation of **part (a)** reaching a particular decision as to the justification in using the term. In many cases, the conclusion was abrupt and did not reflect the main line of the question.

Many candidates offered only one-sided arguments condemning the pre-Islamic Arabs. This, on its own, is not a problem. The critical issue is if this attitude is defensible. An attempt to be objective is called for in instances like this. At least there were some values, both human and religious, in that society that one cannot completely ignore.

Question 2

This was not a very popular question. Many of the candidates who attempted this question did not seem to have a proper grasp of its main details. The question was looking for a linkage between the revelations in Mecca and how the situation in Medina enabled the Prophet to implement these teachings. Many of the answers spent too much time on the Meccan context without the emphasis on the Medinan situation which was the main thrust of the question. Not much of the discussion was devoted to the actual situation in Medina that made the implementation possible.

Question 3

This was a historical question asking candidates on the expansion of the Islamic Empire during the period of the Khulafaa al-Rashidun. Even though many mentioned some military exploits, the answers did not seem to gel properly.

- (a) In this part, candidates were expected to give details of the victories and the geographical spread of Islam during the reign of the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs. Many gave some basic information which was right in general but there was a lack of proper accounts of these.
- (b) This part looks for a discussion of the reasons why such expansion took place. Many of the answers lacked detailed reasons. Internal and external reasons and the general enthusiasm of the believers were some of the lines expected to be followed but in many of the papers this did not happen. The internal dynamics within the ummah and also the nations that fell to Islam formed a substantial part of the reasons why the expansion was that rapid apart from the general belief that 'God was on the side of the believers'.

Section B

Question 4

This question was attempted by many candidates. However, most of the answers were commentaries on the *Surah*. If the candidates were familiar with the *Surah*, as stated in the syllabus they should have been able answer this question. There was an expectation for candidates to identify and discuss the main ways in which this *Surah* is used in Muslim communities. Unfortunately this did not happen. It has not much to do with commentary on the *Surah* or translating it. The popularity of the *Surah* in Muslim piety is such that this should not have created problems. Its spiritual, medical and general social usage is something that a candidate of Islamic Studies should be able to discuss.

Question 5

This question was open requesting candidates to refer to any *Surahs they have studied* that reflect on the Qur'anic teaching about God. The syllabus has enough of such passages for candidates to have a good discussion. Generally those who attempted it did well. In fact, *Surah al-Fatihah* and *al-Ikhlās* alone should have provided enough details. Many referred to both but the discussions were not that good. Some read the question as 'The teachings of the Qur'an' missing the specific reference to '...about God.' Others also just provided general ideas about God in the Qur'an without reference to any *Surah*.

Question 6

This question was poorly answered. There is no lack of passages in the Qur'an on this, often making references to the scriptures of the People of the Book to be specific.

- (a) In this section, candidates were able to name the main revealed books mentioned in the Qur'an but that was all most of them could do. Even in this, some got them mixed up attributing revealed books to wrong persons. Generally, the information given was scanty and not much discussion of the contents could be given.

Very little was written in terms of what the Qur'an says about these Books and yet this was the focus of the question. The few who gave some information were often condemnatory. However, since the Qur'an sees itself as a 'Confirmation' of these Books, (Surah 3:3) one's outlook on them could not be always negative. The Qur'an refers to both the Torah and the Injil and explains that in them "... was guidance and Light" (See Surah 5: 44, 46).

- (b)** In part **b**, the discussions were very general. Some candidates misread the question and hence only wrote on the revelation of the Qur'an. Others read it as the different modes in which the Prophet received the revelation. Even though some were able to give reasons for the revelation taking such a long time, these were often very general and without any examples. The candidates were expected to identify and discuss issues including: ease of memorisation; understanding and human application of the teachings; occasion of revelation.

Section C

Question 7

This was one of the least popular questions in the whole paper. The few candidates who attempted it did well. Many were able to give basic information about *Zakat* and *Sadaqah*.

In **part (a)**, the details about *Zakat* were satisfactory and some were able to identify basic percentages to be paid on wealth, especially monetary income. Many could not go beyond that. Identifying two or more items would have made answers more comprehensive.

In **part (b)** the answers were short and did not gel properly. The question was asking for a sort of comparison in this part and candidates were expected to make a distinction between *Zakat* and *Sadaqah*. Points like the threshold (*nisab*) before *Zakat* becomes obligatory; the frequency; and even the timing could have formed a good focus for discussion.

Question 8

This question was popular and candidates performed reasonably well in both parts. What was not adequately dealt with was citing enough references from the Qur'an and Hadith to make comprehensive discussion.

- (a)** The question was asking for a full account of the fast in Ramadan, those on whom it is obligatory, those excused and what they are to do for expiation, including the celebration at the end of it. Generally, many candidates were able to provide enough information to obtain good marks.
- (b)** In **(b)**, there were some interesting comments about the significance of this institution to the individual and the community as a whole. Some comments include the revelation of the Qur'an in the month of Ramadan and hence fasting in that month celebrates God's guidance to humankind. However, not much was said about *Salat-ul-Tarawih* and *'Id-al-Fitr* and their social benefits.

Question 9

This question was also very popular and many of the candidates who attempted it did well.

Some interesting and relevant details came out in some of the answers. However, some candidates wrote on general Muslim belief without indicating its effects on the believer. This again calls into question the proper reading of questions. The general focus of the question was actually not on the belief *per se* but the effects. So if a candidate writes on the belief without the effects, that candidate would not have adequately answered the question. The question also has much to reinforce the idea that in Islam, belief must always issue out in action. The Qur'an consistently makes this clear in many passages.

Section D

Question 10

Overall this was not a popular question and the few candidates who attempted it did not do very well.

- (a)** Many candidates were able to identify the main traditional methods: Qur'an, *Sunnah*, *Ijma'* and *Qiyas*. Even though some struggled to explain what they are, in general, many got it right. There was not much discussion.
- (b)** Here candidates struggled to give examples. It was expected that candidates would give examples from contemporary practices in order to reinforce the point that these so-called 'traditional methods' are still operative today in modern society. Since the message of the Scripture cuts across time

and space, candidates need contemporary examples so that they would know the relevance of such methods in modern society.

Question 11

This was very popular and it was generally well-answered with a good number of relevant Qur'an and Hadith references. Many candidates were able to give a good definition of Sunnah with specific examples. However, to a few of them, the claim cannot be accurate. The understanding of the question was the main problem here. Maybe it was thought that the statement would demean the integrity of the revelation and hence some tried to challenge the tone of the question which implies that the claim is true.

Question 12

This question was relatively popular but many candidates wrote on *Shari'ah* without due regard to the direction of the question, its relevance to the modern world. Many outlined the meaning of Qur'an, Sunnah, Ijma' and Qiyas.

The question expected candidates to begin the discussion with a definition of Shari'ah before moving on to discuss the four main sources. However, the main direction was to see how it is relevant in the modern world. Examples were expected to be given as to why it is relevant in the face of various challenges in many parts of the world.