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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

ISLAMIC STUDIES

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

<p>Paper 8053/01</p>

<p>Paper 1</p>

General comments

On the whole, the performance of the candidates was satisfactory and comparable to that of previous years. **Questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10** were perhaps the most popular and some of the answers here were quite good.

However, there is still general concern about the quality of the answers and also the paucity of Qur'anic references to support discussions. This is an issue that Centres need to tackle seriously because even in questions where this was obviously demanded as a matter of fact, there was not much evidence that the average candidate was familiar with relevant scriptural passages. At this stage of their education, where the next move is to a university or another higher educational institution, showing familiarity with relevant Qur'anic and Hadith passages is of utmost importance. The syllabus has enough material to prepare candidates.

Again, there was an obvious lack of criticality that one would expect at this level. Querying 'received opinions' should not be seen as rejecting the authenticity of those opinions as such, but should be welcomed as a further measure to substantiate a view and even reaffirm that 'received opinion' if it merits or needs affirmation. Islamic scholarship has never shied away from criticality and a measure of that at this level is very helpful. Questions could possibly even be challenged by looking at the opinion/issue from a different angle and arriving at a different conclusion. If the reasoning is sound and is in accordance with the basic tenets of Islam, candidates should have no worries. Examiners would credit such answers if they are in line with the general ambit of the mark scheme.

There were also quite a number of candidates who did not properly distinguish between various parts of a question. This often causes considerable problems to the Examiners because they have to guess which statements belong to which parts.

Further, sometimes points were made without much detailed discussion. In fact, there were cases where candidates just put down the answers in point form only without much explanation. While Examiners could be sympathetic in cases where the candidate is obviously pressed for time, if it is the general style of answering questions, then one cannot expect to get good grades.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Most candidates answered this question quite well, making adequate reference to the events of the Prophet's persecution. It was perhaps the most popular question. Even though the question clearly gives chronological boundaries (between 610 and 622), some candidates described events after the Hijrah. This is indicative of candidates not reading the questions properly.

The question was looking for comments and illustrations on the prophet's tenacity in the face of all the problems he and his followers had to encounter. Candidates were expected to make references to the periods of suffering, persecution, the grave dangers he faced personally, the attempts to 'buy him off' with material gains, etc. Candidates were expected to make references to relevant scriptural passages that support the discussion.

Question 2

This was generally not a popular question and the few who answered it did not do well. Few gave details about the situation of the Jews in Medinah and many candidates did not differentiate between parts **(a)** and **(b)**. There were some cases of stereotyping of Jews. This has to be discouraged at all cost because apart from the fact that it is not acceptable in academic writing, stereotyping often makes one lose sight of the main demand of the question and one strays from the focal point.

- (a)** This part demanded a discussion on the major incidents in the Prophet's relationship with the Jews. These include: his inclusion of them in the Charter of Medinah; their hostility to his prophetic claims; the expulsion of the three main tribes and the reasons connected with it.
- (b)** In part **(b)**, the Examiners were looking for references to the religious and socio-political reasons underpinning the deterioration of the relationship. These would include: the open disagreement with the prophet's mission; the mockery and taunts; and alliance with the opponents of the Muslims. Candidates were expected to explain how these contributed to the worsening of the relationship.

Question 3

This was another popular question, the answers being of mixed quality.

- (a)** Many candidates gave adequate accounts on Abu Bakr, even though some described his life prior to his becoming a Khalifah. Some started with his birth and early life, hence wasting valuable time as the main focus of the question is on his period as a Khalifah. It is quite valid to argue that the substantial help he gave to the Prophet, including the instance where he actually saved his life, indicates that he was a saviour of Islam. However, generally, the term is used to specifically describe the Khilifah period. Hence, candidates were expected to mention in their discussion: his reaction to the apostate tribes, the false prophets, factions within the community, the reluctance not to deviate from the policies of the Prophet and carrying out the 'unfinished business' of the Prophet. Good answers were expected to point out how these led to the unity of the community and hence made Islam stable.
- (b)** The focus of this part of the question was on the split at Siffin, the reasons why the Kharijites disagreed with Ali and why he was forced to confront them. Better answers would have explained the basic doctrinal attitudes of the Kharijites which made them intolerant to others with different views and that Ali's rather more pragmatic approach was not acceptable.

Question 4

This question was also popular but the answers were again mixed. Many candidates gave adequate answers but very good answers were rare.

- (a)** Many merely discussed the structure of the Qur'an whereas Examiners were looking for specific themes that can encapsulate the contents of the Qur'an, with basic passages as examples. Candidates were expected to have raised and discussed main themes such as: the being of God; God-human relationship; human response in worship; and conduct.
- (b)** This part of the question demanded the mention of issues including: the Qur'an as the origin of understanding about the world and how one conducts oneself in it; how it is the source of all guidance and regulations about life in general; its centrality to the Shari'ah and relation to other sources of law.

Question 5

Surprisingly, this was not one of the most popular questions and those who attempted it did not seem to have done that well. Many of those that answered tended to refer to Surahs that they had studied rather than those that were relevant to the question. Hence the answers were generally weak. Examiners were looking for relevant passages from those Surahs set in the syllabus, especially: Surah **1**, **102** and **109**.

Discussion about the creaturely status of human beings, God's concern for them and guidance for them, his judgement of them, and their duties towards him and towards other creatures were some of the main issues candidates were expected to touch on.

Question 6

This question on revelation was generally well answered. Those who attempted it were able to give a better account in part **(a)** than in part **(b)**.

- (a)** Here, the question was asking for general descriptions of the Prophet's experiences of *wahy*, including the occasion of the first revelation, the signs of revelation such as ringing of bells, change of temperature, his heaviness etc. It was expected that candidates would make references to relevant Qur'anic passages, including those that explicitly state that the revelations came entirely according to God's own decree rather than the prophet trying to induce them.
- (b)** Examiners were looking for a discussion of the term *kalam Allah* as a specific reference to the eternity of the Qur'anic revelation and its being the word of God, its relation to earlier revelations and its authority in the history of revelation, its acceptance by Muslims without question and its being used as the primary source of personal and communal thinking and action. It was expected that some of the ethical and practical implications of the statement would be alluded to.

Question 7

This question on Ramadan was popular, but the answers were very mixed. Some candidates gave very detailed answers whereas others generalised. Many, across Centres, stated that fasting commenced at sunrise rather than at dawn.

- (a)** Candidates were expected to provide a full and detailed account of the daily fast, those who are excused, the rules for expiation, the various individual and communal practices throughout the month and the celebrations at the end of the month. The Qur'anic reference forming the basis of this Pillar was expected to be referred to. Unfortunately, only a few could do that.
- (b)** Most of the candidates did well in providing the main points in their answers. It was expected that references would be made to the influence on individual piety, health and general social behaviour as well as the communal benefits including unity within the community and enhancement of relations with others. The effect of Ramadan as a form of spiritual and social training was to be at the basis of the discussion.

Question 8

Even though quite a number of candidates attempted this question and gave detailed answers, this was not one of the most popular questions. The basic problem was that most candidates failed to point out the specific characteristics of the ceremonies that make them distinctively Islamic. This is what the thrust of the question was about. It was not about a general description of marriages and funerals, but it was expected that candidates would identify the specific Islamic elements that set them apart from celebrations in other communities. This would include specific prayers relating to the Qur'an, rituals and other prohibitions that make them very different. Because the question specifically referred to 'your country', the answers seemed mostly experiential.

Question 9

Generally, this question was reasonably answered with most candidates making the connections between the three elements; Angels, Books and Prophets. This was not expected to be a difficult question and therefore clarity and accuracy in answering was important. The three elements of the question forming part of the belief system of Muslims were expected to be connected in the sense of explaining the Islamic understanding of revelation. A detailed discussion on each of the articles was expected and references to relevant basic Qur'anic passages would have added quality to the answers. Unfortunately, many of the answers were very basic without much reference to scriptural passages.

Question 10

This was one of the most popular questions, and candidates on the whole did well, providing some interesting and original discussions, with a few giving some scriptural details.

The question could be answered in a number of ways, but the main answer was expected to look at: the definition of Sunnah, its relationship with Hadith, its relationship with the Qur'an, Sunnah as a model for life and as a means of interpreting the Qur'an. The Examiners were also looking for discussion on how the Sunnah actually influences Muslim life and whether it has the capacity to provide a full framework.

The statement could also be seen in a more negative sense questioning the whole rationale on which it is based. One could raise a question looking at the relative importance of the two primary sources of law (Qur'an and Sunnah) and go on to inquire whether the Qur'an alone is enough.

Question 11

This question was not popular. Those who attempted it gave reasonably satisfactory answers but often with weak examples.

- (a) Candidates were expected to identify the Sunnah, *Ijma'* (consensus) and *Qiyas* (analogy) as tools for interpreting the detailed meaning of the Qur'an and extending the fundamental inspiration it provides. The function of each was to be clearly explained and the relationship between them traced. It could have been pointed out, among other things, that by doing so Muslim scholars were emphasising the eternal message of the Qur'an and that it provides the wisdom to tackle all problems for all times.
- (b) The examples given by candidates were rarely relevant to the discussion. Here, Examiners were looking for specific examples as to how these principles operate on the ground. These could include dealing with issues of new developments in medical science, contemporary moral problems, economic and socio-political debates.

Question 12

There were very mixed answers to this question, with some good examples but also some very weak answers which did not seem to be able to differentiate between private and public activities.

The question demanded detailed discussion of the Shariah in both aspects of life, including examples that are both given and discussed. Examiners were looking for discussions on prescriptive aspects of the Law, what it lays down for individual and communal life, descriptive aspects and how it is employed as a framework for religious life. On the whole, the examples given by many candidates were either too basic or had no specific relationship with the Shariah as such.