

ISLAMIC STUDIES

Paper 9013/01

Paper 1

General comments

This year, quite a few candidates were able to give some very relevant and in-depth answers. Also, pleasingly, there was not much evidence of candidates presenting answers in bullet point format as in previous years. However, the issue of lack of detailed discussion is still a problem. In many cases, some of the answers were very short and, in some cases, most of the answers were just half a page for each question. At this level, this is inadequate. The points raised are meant to be discussed and worked out into essay type responses.

There was also evidence of candidates not reading the question properly. There were still cases of some candidates looking for key 'topics' or 'themes' and not addressing the actual wording of the questions. It is important that candidates, in their reading of the questions, are able to form a comprehensive view of what is demanded. Paying attention to the scope and limitations of the question is crucial to a real understanding of what the question is all about. Many candidates were not able to keep within the limits of particular questions and hence spent valuable time discussing issues which were irrelevant. It is also important that candidates are able to conclude their answers properly in order to wrap up the discussion adequately, otherwise the Examiner might not be able to make sense of the argument.

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

Examiners would like to reiterate the points made in previous reports that 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 found wanting.

Even though there was a marked improvement in the use of relevant Qur'anic and Ahadith quotations in support of discussions, there is still a lot of room for improvement. Again, the problem of basic level of critical thinking exists. Islamic scholarship has always demanded critical thinking and this is the level at which candidates should try and start making use of this principle.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This was a very popular question, even though many candidates found it challenging and were not able to deal with all of the facets adequately. Most answers offered a litany of the ills of the society at the time, very often not showing how anything was retained or even sanctified. It seems that candidates were not able to appreciate the institutions and values that were retained and refined by Islam. Examples like the practice of *tawaf* during *hajj* and its other rituals, as well as some social values such as valour and generosity, were either completely ignored or not adequately explained. The question was asking for a comprehensive discussion on how far the traditional beliefs and practices of the people were rejected by Islam. This involved looking at those that were rejected and those that were retained, explaining how this happened.

Question 2

This was a relatively popular question asking candidates to examine the reaction of the Prophet to the main events in the early Meccan phase of Islam, explaining how this proved that he was the messenger of God. The question has a specific limitation. Anything beyond the early Meccan period would not be relevant to the

discussion. However, even though the question clearly stated this, many candidates were referring to incidents even in Madina which are quite outside the remit of the question. As pointed out in the general comments, it is important that candidates respect the scope and limitation of each question.

Question 3

This question on the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs was also popular and was attempted fairly satisfactorily, with many candidates giving relevant details. Both parts were adequately dealt with, although more details were expected, especially in part (b). In questions like this, it is always important that the discussion refers back to the thrust of the question. This means that the candidate should always link the examples to the question showing a continuation of the policies in the case of part (a) and expansion of the policies in the case of part (b).

- (a) In this part, candidates were expected to give a detailed discussion of how the Prophet's policies were continued by the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs. Specific examples from each of them were important. Most of the candidates were able to give relevant points and hence obtained maximum marks.
- (b) This part looked for an update on the previous section, concentrating on the way the activities of the caliphs showed expansion of the policies of the Prophet. Again, specific examples from each of the four caliphs were needed. Answers were generally satisfactory and many candidates obtained good marks.

Section B

Question 4

This was perhaps the least popular of all the questions and it proved to be difficult to the few candidates who attempted it. The question tested the candidates' familiarity with the main themes of the *Surah*. If the candidates were familiar with the *Surah*, as stated in the syllabus, they should have found this an accessible question. There was an expectation for excellent candidates to try and challenge the whole premise of the question, perhaps arguing that the Qur'an cannot be part of anyone's biography not even that of the Prophet.

Question 5

This was one of the most popular questions in the whole paper and many candidates who answered did relatively well.

- (a) This part expected candidates to look at the main reasons why the collection of the Qur'an in a written form took place. Many candidates gave the battle of Yamamah as the only reason. Not much thought was given to the other pressing needs on the minds of the Sahabah. For example, other issues that could have been raised included the passing of the Prophet and the realisation that revelation had ended, as well as the need for a documented reference for the future development of the community.
- (b) This part demanded a detailed description of the process of the collection of the Qur'an. Even though many candidates wrote elaborately, their main focus was the personalities involved, often ignoring the particular methods employed to ensure authenticity of the text. This approach was central to the question, the key word in the question being 'how'. Some critical analysis examining these methods was expected from excellent candidates but this was lacking.

Question 6

This question was not very popular and the few candidates who attempted it were not able to go into details as was expected.

- (a) Here, the question was specifically asking for the different ways in which the Prophet received revelation. Many candidates only described the event in the cave of Hira. It was expected that candidates would mention points such as the ringing of bells, the change of temperature and his heaviness that have been well documented.
- (b) In part (b), the discussion was relatively better. Many candidates were able to explain the term *Kalam Allah* and relate it to the meaning of the Qur'an. Many were also able to point out that primarily because of this meaning Muslims regard the Qur'an as a book of total guidance. However, it was expected that candidates would be able to identify some of the ethical and practical implications of this statement. Unfortunately, this was lacking.

Section C

Question 7

This was perhaps the most popular question in the whole paper and candidates were able to write extensively. However, identifying the three main strands of the question proved a little problematic for some. It was expected that there would be clearly identifiable sections focusing on the historical, social and religious significance of the festival. Many candidates just jumbled them all up and the Examiner had to sift through identifying each point and relating them to the relevant strand.

Perhaps it is apt to point out here that when a question has such clearly identifiable strands, candidates should make every effort to address each strand adequately and clearly.

Question 8

This question was not as popular as expected. Candidates were expected to answer (a) and any two of (b), (c) or (d).

- (a) This question on *jihad* was not satisfactorily answered by many candidates. Either they looked at *jihad* solely as warfare or gave such a sanitised view of *jihad* that the concept of warfare was totally absent. It is important to point out here that a balanced view is always needed.
- (b) In this part, the concept of 'enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil' was still hazy in the minds of many candidates. The discussions here were generally poor. It was expected that candidates would link this discussion to the institution of *Da'wah*.
- (c) This part was specifically on fasting outside Ramadan and yet many candidates wrote on the fasting during Ramadan. Some also saw this as referring to fasting to repay those missed during Ramadan and hence the same strictures of Ramadan fasting applied. Others merely mentioned the recommended days for fasting without mentioning the regulations governing this voluntary fasting vis a vis fasting during the Ramadan period.
- (d) This part was generally well answered, even though some of the discussions were too short. Examiners expected a discussion on the effect of this belief on people's behaviour on earth in order to reinforce the importance Muslims attach to such institutions.

Question 9

Even though this question was attempted by a number of candidates, the performance was below expectation. The question proved challenging, with many candidates not able to understand the issue of God communicating his knowledge and awareness of himself to humankind. Most of the answers referred to prophets, books and angels, hence mainly making only one point – that is, revelation. It was expected that candidates would go beyond specific revelation and examine other ways through which human beings are able to know God and His signs. Points like the natural world, reason and mystical experience were expected.

Section D

Question 10

This was also a popular question and many of the candidates who attempted it did well. However, as a straightforward question, one would have expected specific passages from the Qur'an to clarify points raised. This was very rare. Answers were very general, mentioning issues without any reference to what the Qur'an actually says about itself and its efficacy to guide.

Question 11

This 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, the second part of the question was not given sufficient attention, probably because candidates either did not finish reading the question or they were not prepared adequately to look at differences between the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Question 12

This was one of the least popular questions. The question asked the candidates to examine *Ijma* and *Qiyas* and discuss how they are used in Islamic legal thinking. It was expected that there would be definitions of the concepts, giving examples of situations in which they have been used in history but more importantly looking at the contemporary context. The few candidates who attempted it were not able to do enough justice to the question.

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Paper 9013/02

Paper 2

General comments

The difficulty of the paper on the whole was comparable to that of previous years. The most popular questions were **10** and **11** and many of the answers were very satisfactory, providing some interesting and relevant details. **Questions 4, 8 and 12** proved to be the most challenging.

Many of the general comments for Paper 1 also apply here. There were still a number of cases where it did not appear that candidates had read the questions properly or had not prepared certain topics adequately. Often candidates would attempt a part of the question and either completely ignore the other parts or give inadequate attention to them. However, there was evidence of many candidates planning their answers before writing. This was indicative of the preparedness of the candidates and enabled them to structure their answers well.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was relatively popular and many candidates who attempted it did well by tracing the events during the period of Ali and Mu'awiyah. However, the second part of the question looking at how the Umayyad dynasty suppressed resistance to its rule was generally inadequately dealt with. The question specifically asked for this to be done and hence by neglecting this part candidates often obtained low marks. This again raises the issue of candidates not having a comprehensive understanding of the question and hence leaving parts of the question unanswered.

Question 2

- (a) Candidates who answered this question wrote extensively on how the Abbasids seized power from the Umayyads but most answers were not well structured and often repetitive. The question specifically emphasised the main stages and hence the expectation was for candidates to look at the main events marking the history of this change of power.
- (b) This part of the question looked for three major reasons why the change occurred. This is clearly different from the main events or the main stages of the seizure of power. To many, the difference was blurred and therefore the answers were not clear enough to merit good marks.

Question 3

The question on the 'Abbasid dynasty was not that popular and the few candidates who attempted it did not do particularly well. It was expected that some candidates would question the basis of the claim of the question itself. This is exactly why it allowed room for candidates to agree or disagree with it. As indicated elsewhere, answers to questions of this nature will have to state clearly the position of the candidate and evidence provided to support that position.

Section B

Question 4

This was perhaps one of the most challenging questions and the few candidates who attempted it gave basic and sketchy answers. Even though many were able to identify the linkage with the Mu'tazilah and al-Ash'ari's attempts at synthesis, the discussions were so basic that there were not enough points made for good marks. It was expected that candidates would discuss this attempt of synthesis in detail and the use of reasoning to uphold revealed truths.

Question 5

This question was relatively popular and yet many answers were not able to deal adequately with the details of the question.

- (a) In this part, there were some interesting attempts because the question was very direct asking for candidates to give reasons why the Mu'tazilah were known as the people of divine justice. Some of the answers were satisfactory but repetitive. There was the need to identify who the Mu'tazilah were, but some spent so much time on this that the discussion on the rest of this part of the question was generally poor.
- (b) In this part, the question was looking for the main reasons why people disagreed with the Mu'tazilah on their teachings about God and His justice. Many answers could not go beyond mere elementary statements. Some showed understanding but the ability to go beyond the basic points was lacking and hence the marks here were generally not as high as expected.

Question 6

This question asked for brief accounts of the life and thoughts of the four Sunni Imams after whom legal schools were named. It was expected that the biographical information would take only a small part of the discussion allowing room for a greater discussion of their main ideas and especially the distinctive features of these ideas. Many candidates wrote a lot more about their biographies and spent less time on the rather more essential aspects. This chronic issue of detailed biographical information, when the question does not warrant it, needs urgent attention in the teaching and learning process.

Section C

Question 7

This question was straightforward and also popular with candidates. The question asked for a detailed discussion of the reasons why the Shi'ites attach great importance to the succession of the Imams. Answers therefore were to include the identification of the Imams, the place of Ali in Shi'ite spirituality, and the belief in the infallibility of the Imams as the basis for the way the Imams are regarded.

Unfortunately, many of the answers were very general and sounded 'anti-Shi'a' showing a lack of proper awareness of Shi'a beliefs. It is important that the learning and teaching process enables candidates to have a fair and balanced appreciation of any phenomenon or group, whether 'Islamic' or not. It is quite disturbing to read such material from candidates at this level of their education.

Question 8

This question was not popular at all and only a handful of candidates attempted it.

It is becoming clear that questions on philosophy are often ignored. The syllabus has the objective of providing a rounded education in this field and therefore all the themes/topics should be seen as relevant for that central objective. Every effort must be made to help the candidates expand their horizons instead of avoiding particular areas.

Question 9

The question had two parts even though the two could be linked. It was not as popular as expected but the candidates who attempted it did relatively well.

- (a) In this part, candidates were expected to make a direct description of the relationship between Sufism and Islam. There were many who made a good definition of Sufism and made a positive appreciation of its teachings and related this to Islam. However, there were others who also saw Sufism as a complete aberration of Islamic beliefs or even an alien importation into Islam. The candidates in the second category, however, found it difficult to provide tangible reasons for their position.
- (b) This part dealt with al-Ghazali and the extent to which he was able to reform Sufi beliefs. Many of the answers merely talked about al-Ghazali in general without giving adequate attention to specific contributions to the reform of Sufism. It was expected that references could be made, for example, to al-Ghazali's criticism of how some Sufi sheikhs carried themselves and how some followers also saw them beyond their humanity.

Section D

Question 10

This was one of the most popular and accessible questions. Most of the candidates who answered this did quite well, except that there were obvious biases in some answers, especially when certain countries were mentioned.

- (a) In this part, candidates were expected to look at the problems Muslims as a minority in a named country face. Even though many candidates did quite well here, in a few cases, especially when western countries were described, there seemed to be a wrong perception of the life of Muslims in such places. Some of the issues raised were pure fabrications. A lot of references were made to the contemporary situation of war and terror and the general 'post-9/11' world. Even though some of the points were valid, it should have been emphasized that these were not the norm. It is important that candidates are provided with a balanced view of the life of Muslims, especially in the west.
- (b) Here, candidates were expected to reflect on the opportunities that Muslim minorities have in the countries they live in. There were some very interesting discussions with very positive appreciation of the opportunities these nations offered minority Muslims.

Question 11

This was also a popular and straightforward question. Candidates were able to discuss extensively the teachings of Islam about the place of women and how these are applied in various places around the world. The difficulty, as in previous years, was that the question demanded a specific country to be named and also a discussion on how these teaching either agree or depart from the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Even though the question was popular, many candidates were not able to bring these two points out clearly.

Question 12

This was not a popular question and the few who attempted it were not able to look at both parts adequately. This is similar to the question on philosophy and it often gets ignored. Islamic movements form a substantial part of any Islamic Studies syllabus. Therefore, efforts must be made to develop interest among candidates in this area as well.

The few candidates who attempted it gave sketchy information on the early historical development of the brotherhood as required in part (a). Part (b) on the contemporary significance of its main ideas also produced some weak responses. Awareness of such movements, their teachings and their relevance to the contemporary situation should be something that would be useful to candidates of this age and at this stage of their education.