ISLAMIC STUDIES

Paper 8053/12
Paper 1

General comments

A full range of responses were exhibited. Stronger responses started with clear introductions, defining any key terms. In these responses essays were written in paragraphs which included a clear, main point, explained in a couple of sentences then backed up with a couple of examples or evidence. Where questions referred to the possibility of different points of view; the best responses included different lines, evaluated them by stating why they were strong or weak perspectives and gave a personal view to agree or disagree.

Answers do not need large numbers of quotations but the best responses did included two or three, usually from the Qur'an and Hadith and sometimes from a scholar or book. Quotations of one to two lines long, where relevant, helped to illustrate answers.

Section A

Question 1

Candidates were well versed with the details of Pre-Islamic Arabia, and gave accounts of many of the aspects of life before the Prophet (pbuh) began his mission. General accounts described social and cultural aspects, the burial of daughters and the trade fairs. Focused answers recognised that the tribal and clan system was intended to be the main focus and explained the role of the Sheikh, loyalty to one's clan and tribe, and the inter-relatedness of this with the pilgrimage and trade fairs in which people bought and sold idols, contributing to the wealth of the Quraysh.

For part **(b)** some responses argued that the tribal system worked against Muhammad (pbuh). On the other hand, some candidates made the case that Muhammad (pbuh) received Abu Talib's protection and this helped his preaching since others were fearful to attack him because of the tribal protection Abu Talib offered.

Question 2

Most candidates wrote in great detail about the life of Muhammad (pbuh), whereas the strongest responses addressed the terms of the question to define stages. Commonly those who did manage to establish stages identified an initial period of peaceful preaching in Mecca, followed by stages of increased hostility of the Meccans, interspersed by the two groups of Muslims who claimed asylum in Abyssinia and the period of exile of the Prophet (pbuh) and his followers in the valley. The best answers identified stages in clear paragraphs and gave an outline of details in each paragraph.

The term 'success' was largely accepted by candidates, many of whom who argued that the Prophet (pbuh) was persistent and successful. The strongest responses questioned the meaning of the term 'success' which is often referred to in materialistic terms.

Question 3

Responses identified problems such as competing versions of the Qur'an, disunity between different groups of Muslims, the difficulties of maintaining the expanded Empire; the threat from external forces such as Persians and Romans (Byzantines), the controversy of 'Uthman's relatives who he appointed to positions of power to help enforce his authority and 'Uthman's character which some considered weak. Candidates generally understood the internal divisions within the Caliphate quite well. Weaker responses focused on the life of 'Uthman during the time of the Prophet (pbuh) before the start of his Caliphate.

Section B

Question 4

Stronger responses defined *tawhid* and *risalah* and gave quotations from the Qur'an to explain the meanings of these core beliefs. Weaker responses described the beliefs in general and did not specifically pick out references from the Qur'an about them. Many responses only briefly referred to the question of which was more fundamental, but this was in fact the focus of the question and should have been referred to throughout. Most candidates claimed that the two beliefs were intertwined; that the oneness of God pervaded everything but without prophetic messengers this could not have been established, so both were as important as each other.

Question 5

Weaker responses struggled to refer to the surahs set for special study. Stronger responses gave two or three quotations to help tell the story of Moses and Jesus. The strongest responses pinpointed what the surahs told and what details are not found in the Qur'an but have become accepted as part of the knowledge passed down to Muslims about the lives of these prophets.

The stronger responses explained specific references to aspects of Jesus' or Moses' lives which could be said to be similar to Prophet Muhammad's experiences. The strongest responses also challenged the premise of the question and argued every messenger had a message for their own time and no two could therefore be the same.

Question 6

The topic could be approached from many different angles, such as taking references from the Qur'an about the importance of revelation and accepting its message, as well as the instruction to observe 'signs' in the creation which support observation and rationalism. Most concluded that there was a place for both reason and revelation but that human reasoning could never overtake the revelation of the Qur'an but merely support it. Some approached this question from the point of view of arriving at *fiqh* rulings through reasoning and agreement of scholars; this was another acceptable angle to take.

Section C

Question 7

This was a very popular question with many strong responses. Most answers accurately identified three pillars and addressed how they helped to strengthen a sense of community, which was the required focus. Many chose prayer and explained how *Jamaat*, praying together in congregation, rich and poor, those of different ethnic backgrounds, all stood together in line as brothers. Some went on to explain the importance of *Jumah* and how the sermon and the social aspect of meeting others helped to strengthen community bonds.

Zakat was another popular choice. Good responses explained how *Zakat* helps redistribute wealth and give support to those in need, creating a bond of fellowship across communities. Others chose *Hajj* in which the worldwide community of Muslims is visibly connected in union by performing the pilgrimage rites together, all dressed in simple *Ihram* clothing.

Question 8

Many candidates who chose this question answered from a cultural perspective, and described social functions, wedding dresses, and traditional wedding foods, some even giving recipes for Biryani wedding rice. This was only partly relevant to the extent that Islam allows some cultural diversity according to local habit, although wedding traditions can be debated with some criticising lavish celebrations claiming they are excessive and non-Islamic in origin. Descriptions of the Nikah contract, the terms of dowry payment and any future arrangement for security in case of divorce; the importance of free will in the choice, the presence of witnesses, the role of a religious official and the importance of hospitality of guests in the party afterwards were all features which some candidates identified.

Part **(b)** gave candidates an opportunity to evaluate the Muslim and other cultural traditions which often merge in wedding celebrations, and offer a viewpoint as part of a good explanation. Some argued that the du'a and contract are distinctively Muslim and that the freedom of the woman to say no upheld a

fundamental woman's right introduced by the Prophet (pbuh). Others argued that often Muslim weddings, including henna, large week-long parties to which those of similar social standing attend; mirror the centuries long caste traditions of India and are not exclusively Islamic at all.

Question 9

For angels, responses identified roles in revelation, such as Jibril bringing the Qur'an; the role of angels actively helping prophets in their missions, not just as transmitters of the Qur'an, such as in helping the Muslims at Badr. Other roles identified were to watch over individual Muslims' daily actions and report on them at Judgement. Specific roles such as that of Mikael as Archangel and bringer of rain; and Israfil to blow the trumpet heralding the last days, were referred to in stronger responses.

The function of books to admonish each community which had strayed from monotheism and taken on immoral practices was well described. Some only referred to the Qur'an whereas stronger responses elaborated upon the earlier holy books and their importance to specific communities.

Section D

Question 10

Weaker responses described using the Qur'an together with the Sunnah and other sources of Shariah to provide answers for issues such as how to perform daily prayers. Stronger responses focused on issues relating to the lives of Muslims in the modern world, rather than general Shariah queries.

The strongest responses looked at modern situations such as how to address technology, genetic engineering, abortion and other medical issues which did not exist in the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and are not clearly guided by instructions in the Qur'an. A common line of argument was that the Qur'an included the skeleton of answers for all modern issues, but that the details often needed to be firmed up through logical deduction, reasoned agreement of scholars, or possibly through *ijtihad* (individual endeavour).

Question 11

The strongest responses focused on two or more examples and gave detailed quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith to back up claims made. Weaker responses only vaguely referred to the Qur'an and Hadith and struggled to explain the guidance they gave with any precision. Details about how to pray was a common example, with the Qur'an making general reference to standing and prostrating, and praying in the morning and the evening; whereas the Sunnah gives Muslims the exact pattern of a *rakat* prayer unit which remains unchanged today.

Question 12

Weaker responses were sometimes unclear on the concept. The focus of this question was to explain why some scholars frown on *ijtihad*, or even reject it. Some view it as verging on changing the fundamental, unchanging message of the Qur'an which they regard as in no need of further interpretation. Others accept *ijtihad* but do not necessarily welcome it; they see it as a last resort after exhausting all the traditional primary and secondary sources of Shariah. Some see *ijtihad* as perfectly legitimate and to be welcomed as a valid concept, supported in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and essential to find answers for today's problems. Some reference to this alternative point of view was another valid approach to the question.