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Principal Examiner Feedback

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In Religious Studies (9RS0)
Paper 4D

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Introduction

It was lovely to see some really excellent responses in this paper from candidates. Candidates did really well in all areas of the paper, with some incredibly well-thought-out answers. There are still some areas that centres need to address. These include ensuring that candidates spend appropriate time on each question. This is so that they do not lose out on marks. Guidance has been provided, which supports the number of minutes a candidate should spend on each question. This can be found on the teaching resources on the qualification. It is also important that centres encourage and remind candidates to stick closely the wording of the questions and ensure that relevant material is used throughout the paper. There were times when candidates drifted from answering the question and instead introduced material that was not relevant to the answer.

There were many examples where candidates had spent far too long on question 2 and on question 3a. As a consequence of this, they lost marks in question 3b and 4. It is also important for centres to remind candidates between the differences of assessment objectives found within the qualification.

However, it is pleasing to see that candidates generally performed better in assessment objective 2 (AO2) than they have in the past. On answering anthology questions, candidates should be reminded to select the appropriate material very carefully from the text in order to be able to elaborate on it with the detail required for achieving the higher marks. Candidates are encouraged to use the anthology text as a springboard to introduce ideas which are relevant to the text. For 3b, candidates are required to analyse the ideas. This means there needs to be discussions around the implications and what they could possibly mean. This should include varying debates and interpretations relevant to the study. It is important that when students are answering 3a, they are not simply regurgitating or paraphrasing what is found within the extract.

Question 4 had some incredibly high standards with excellent responses from candidates. However, candidates should be reminded that Q4 requires a synoptic link to either philosophy or ethics. Candidates can sharpen AO2 skills within Q4 in order to ensure that they can reach the highest marks. It is also important for centres to remind candidates that question 4 should not be descriptive, otherwise candidates cannot gain the required marks available to them. It is important that candidates provide their well-reasoned judgments and utilise various points of view to demonstrate their arguments. The best performing candidates were very focused on the assessment objective criteria and were very clearly evaluating many of their statements, which included potential strengths and weaknesses of the arguments that they provided. Overall, candidates did a very good job on this paper.

Question 1

This was generally very well answered and candidates drew across various ideas found within Sufism, which included specific practices found in various schools of Sufism such as fana, tariqa and purification. However, centres need to ensure that material which is covered is accurate. There were some instances where content was provided by candidates, which seemed very orientalist and inaccurate. This included ideas around and howling and drunkenness.

Candidates need to ensure that the terms used are accurately applied and with the correct translations. It is also important that candidates do not confuse ideas found within Sufism with ideas found in other groups such as Shi'a Islam. On the whole, candidates were able to maximise scores for this answer by drawing on a range of scholarship and varying ideas found in topic area.

Question 2

This question received a range of responses from the marks available. The highest scoring candidates understood the assessment objective criteria very well and were linking aspects of the question very closely to their responses. In particular, the idea of identity was embedded throughout their answer. This was very important to demonstrate as a focus of the question was clearly on how important the 5 pillars are for Muslim identity.

Amongst many candidates, the practices of the 5 pillars were compared between various Muslim groups. This was perfectly acceptable and was done very well. For example, there were comparisons made between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims and their practices of prayer and Zakat. Good candidates could demonstrate that the similarities were still important for identity of the wider Muslim community.

Lower scoring candidates were rather descriptive in their statements. For example, some candidates merely described some features of each individual pillar without any focus on their importance or linking it to identity. Centres should remind candidates that in question 2 if a candidate does not demonstrate AO2, they cannot exceed the marks for assessment objective one, which in this case is four marks.

Question 3a

For this question, there were some very good answers from the candidates. However, it should be noted that to score highly within this question candidates should not merely restate or paraphrase what is found within the extract. Centres should stress to

candidates that 'clarify' means that candidates must elaborate on the ideas that are found within the extract. Candidates are expected to use the extract as a springboard to develop ideas that are informing what is found within the text. Higher scoring candidates did this very well by highlighting aspects of jihad and philosophies found within the text, for example, highlighting greater jihad was very important and explaining it as a means of self development for each individual Muslim.

Candidates who scored well were able to highlight the complexities of Islamic spirituality through the lens of jihad. Candidates were also able to discuss the root meaning of the word Jihad, this was very pleasing to see. Unfortunately, lower scoring candidates did not satisfy the higher levels of the mark scheme because they focused their time on simply restating or rephrasing some of the extract. This is not appropriate and will not allow candidates to perform well.

Question 3b

There were some excellent answers found for this question by the candidates. Those who did incredibly well focused very clearly on the ideas of the importance of jihad and the struggle to live life in submission to Allah. Importantly, they understood the assessment objective criteria and were very good with their analysis. Much of the discussion evolved around focusing on the various interpretations of jihad and how they can be used in submission to Allah.

Many candidates highlighted the difference between the lesser and the greater jihad. The best scoring candidates had also incorporated ideas found within Islamic spirituality and Sufism and had linked it very closely to the notion of greater jihad. This included ideas of struggling against oneself for one's prayers and for one's own spiritual development.

Interestingly, even though the question did not specifically ask for a comparison between the views of Tariq Ramadan and Majid Khadduri, many candidates did so. This was acceptable, as there was a greater focus in Khadduri's text around the lesser jihad. Centres are reminded that if they require any assistance around supporting ideas, they should use the ask the expert facility that Pearson offers for this qualification, in particular to clarify some of the ideas which are found within Khadduri's text.

Lower scoring candidates did not adequately satisfy the assessment objective criteria for this question. In particular, the analysis aspect. Lower scoring candidates described features of jihad, and even though they were described accurately, they were not analysed appropriately in relation to the question. Candidates should be reminded to stick closely to the wording of the question.

Question 4

Again, there were some excellent answers provided by candidates for this question. Some particularly high level answers were found for this and candidates are to be commended for their learning and ability to answer questions with flair. Many of the highest performing candidates clearly linked the relationship between Islam and science to the modern world and evaluated the different ways that this relationship is understood.

There were some excellent answers that focused on how some literalist interpretations of Islam in the modern world have developed into a negative relationship between Islam and science and have created a conflict narrative. This was contrasted with the historical teachings of Islam where science and Islam were positively related to one another and were considered highly important. For example, the highest performing candidates used examples such as prophetic medicine to evidence the use of science at the time and analysis was provided for the Islamic golden age in the Abbasid times. There were some excellent synoptic links which were related to the study of philosophy of religion.

Unfortunately, there were candidates who did not achieve as well as they could because they did not satisfy the assessment objectives. There were candidates who were very descriptive in their writing and lacked the depth needed of evaluation. Centres should remind candidates of the importance of differentiating between the assessment objectives. It was also disappointing to see some candidates did not achieve full marks because they had omitted a synoptic link. The synoptic link in this question is a mandatory requirement. If it is not present, candidates cannot enter the highest part of the mark scheme. Centres should encourage and remind students to ensure that this is complete.

Overall, the candidates did very well on this question.

