

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in Islamiyat (4IS0)

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1. The Examination.

1.1. **Entry:** Almost eleven hundred candidates entered this examination, of which nearly two hundred were "home" or "new" centres, i.e., those based in the U.K., maintaining and increasing the gains of 2013/14. This year two British schools were particularly good but others less so, especially in their efforts to cope with Section 1. On the whole, however, the picture on all fronts is promising. The examination's growing popularity may yet attract Shi'ah students to Section 3(b), for their numbers are still very low.

1.2. **The Question Paper:** Following the pattern of recent years, the Question Paper gave what may well be considered to be a fair test of (a) knowledge, (b) understanding and (c) evaluation. Indeed, it might be argued that the 2015 paper tested the candidates more thoroughly than those before. That being the case, the grades achieved indicate a most commendable response from the candidates and their teachers.

1.3. Performance: There were a good number of fine scripts. Some questions (on Shari'ah Law, for example) left weaker candidates floundering, while even the brightest could not muster much material in their accounts of the Prophet's later life, nor of the Khalifers' achievements. On the other hand, there were also some excellent discussions of matters concerning the influence of family life, the Prophet's finest achievements and the lessons to be learned by modern leaders from the Prophet's immediate successors. It remains a feature of this paper that there are benefits to be derived from careful attention to the questions on the quotations given in Section One.

Presentation: Most of the centres had candidates with very legible handwriting and good spelling, making the task of the examiners easier for reading the text. As last year the majority displayed a welcome level of competence and excellence in this regard.

2. Report on candidates' responses – Section 1: The Qur'an and Hadith

In general most students found no difficulties with regard to the translations in Section One. A small minority, however, left them untouched.

2.1. Question 1 (a)(i) - An Nas: Confused by a few with Al-Falaq, the other cry for refuge.

2.2. Question 1 (a)(ii): Harmful thinking: Many students put thinking of an action they wanted to carry out like murder or adultery but some did have envy/jealousy, i.e. an **inner** fault: the Mark Scheme suggested "covetousness".

2.3. Question 1 (a)(iii): "King" implies a ruler with subjects – very few clarified this point. Even good candidates simply wrote that God is the Creator.

2.4. Question 1 (a)(iv): Most had the right answer ("trustworthiness" or "honesty") but a significant number wrote "truthfulness", a quality usually linked with Abu Bakr.

2.5. Question 1 (b)(iii): Many did not grasp the concept of avoiding selfishness and especially greed. They were mostly linking to material needs not lasting or using the phrase “the Prophet wouldn’t like it”!

2.6. Question 1 (b) (iv): There were mixed answers with the good students getting the correct answer – “faith in Allah” - which could be defined as prayer, fasting, etc.

2.7. Question 2 (a) (ii): Good candidates wrote of God’s justice not being biased: “flawless” or “equitable” were the key concepts here.

2.8. Question 2 (a)(iii): Many knew this but a few just wrote “they insulted him” – too_vague!

2.9. Question 2 (b)(iii): Less well done – often missed out – but some did have an acceptable answer, usually referring to forgiveness.

2.10. Question 2 (c)(ii): Some candidates identified the Ka’bah simply as “a house of Allah”; taken literally, this would imply that God required a house to live in. Good candidates correctly identified it as a Sacred Place or House towards which Muslims turn when praying.

2.11. Question 3 (a)(ii): There were, of course, a variety of suggestions possible, e.g., a mother is one who has cared for her children, nurtured Islamic values and has acted as an important role model for her children.

2.12. Question 3 (a)(iii): “The Mothers of the Faithful” – very few found the kind of point suggested in the Mark Scheme. Many simply wrote “they did not remarry after the Prophet died”.

2.13. Question 3 (c)(i): Some candidates had confused this ahadi with “the status of one who helps to recite the Qur’an.”

2.14. Question 3 (c)(iii): This was answered well in nearly all cases – a few commented “it is recited with respect”.

2.15. Question 3 (c)(iii): This was mainly answered well but some put “it is a complete code of life” (this could be said of the Bible and other Scriptures).

(If there are no comments on sayings or quotations in the above Section it means that there are no issues to criticize or debate.)

N.B. Becoming conversant with the Surahs, Ayats and Ahadis in Section One is, as has been mentioned before, a valuable exercise. The maximum mark available in this Section is 28, i.e., more than twenty-five per cent of the total. Therefore to score well may allow even candidates of limited ability to earn a commendable grand total and grade.

3. Report on candidates' responses – Section 2: The Life, Teaching and Achievements of the Prophet

3.1. Question 4 (a): A popular question answered reasonably well as far as the narrative is concerned, with a good many gaining the eight valid points on offer. A common error, nonetheless, put the Quranic words into the mouth of the angel Gabriel, when the whole point of the account was that the Prophet "suddenly knew the words..." and was able to recite them. Furthermore very few noted that, as he left the cave, the Prophet heard the angel's voice again, informing him that he was the messenger of Allah.

3.2. Question 4 (b): This was not answered well as some students repeated the call support (calming influence, Waraqa) rather than looking at **continued** support, e.g., first convert, implications of financial support and moral support. Again, not all candidates followed the request for **two** ways (only) in which Khadijah supported the Prophet. There were three possibilities suggested in the Mark Scheme: candidates were restricted to **two!**

3.3. Question 4 (c): The importance of the commemoration of the Night of Power for Muslims asked for three reasons, but even many good candidates struggled to get past the Prophet's Call and the passing down of the Qur'an. There were, of course, additional points listed in the Mark Scheme, some of which, e.g., "better than a thousand months" and the stress on forgiveness, candidates did note, but with more hesitation than expected.

3.4. Question 5 (a): Generally Question 5 was not answered at all well, yet in some ways it was the most straightforward of all the questions. In this “opener” (worth only three marks) many simply put “It is the Islamic Law” and left it at that.

3.5. Question 5 (b): There was quite a lot of muddling of Mandub and Mubah but most knew Makruh. Candidates who had confused themselves over the terminologies ended up with wrong examples as well. Some satisfied themselves by writing “it is not a sin but does not gain rewards” for all three. The examples in the Mark Scheme (hospitality, divorce, wearing trousers) were all suitable choices.

3.6. Question 5 (c): The key word was “protects”.

(i) A good many did know the required punishment for theft but others put interest/usury/bribery as forbidden practices. Such suggestions deserved some credit. Others went into Zakat purifying wealth, but some of these answers suffered from vagueness.

(ii) Halal and haram were used as guides to protecting health; some wrote that murder was punished, presumably thinking that to stay alive was a matter of good health!

(iii) A few did write accurately about the punishments for unchaste behaviour but on the whole many answers to “a person’s honour” tended to be vague.

3.7. Question 6 (a): Answers to this question were surprisingly vague and positively inaccurate. Some told the Prophet's whole life story from the call, while others described the conquest of Makkah, generally mentioned the pilgrimage and finally recorded his death in the lap of Aishah. Some gained a further mark for the reference to Abu Bakr leading the prayers. Answers often needed reading two or three times to make sure that anything relevant was found! The best candidates mentioned Tabuk, tribes accepting Islam and the shelving of the Syrian expedition but these points were scarce.

3.8. Question 6 (b): **Two** topics from the Final Sermon were required, **not all three** (in which case the best two were credited). Others did not use the Final Sermon, just quoting belief in Allah as the most important matter and using general teaching about brotherhood. On the other hand, racial prejudice teaching was usually well- presented.

3.9. Question 6 (c): Some good answers but a majority chose the battles as the Prophet's greatest achievements. Is this fair comment? (A minority even gave three aspects of the Fall of Makkah!) The Mark Scheme shows that there were many important alternatives, such as his personal example and the passing-down of the Qur'an.

4. Report on candidates' responses – Section 3 (A) (for Sunni students)

4.1. Question 7 (ai): A popular question, not least because its subject matter made no great demands on candidates, even though some just spoke about “being nice” to your children. Most knew the duties of parents included teaching the faith (66.6) and providing the children with food and clothing (4.11).

7 (aii): “Forbidden foods” presented no obvious difficulties. Among the possibilities were pork (5.3), blood (5.3) and meat without ritual blessing (6.119).

4.2. Question 7 (b): “Religious reasons” did present difficulties for the average student: the Mark Scheme suggests a long list to choose from, the most obvious being obedience to Allah. Most candidates concentrated on bringing children up as Muslims – some added to gain rewards for the parents.

4.3. Question 7 (c): Often simply expressed but most had at least the point that it is at home that children learn to pray and to read the Qur’an. According to some, the Prophet invited his near ones to Islam to show that faith begins at home. Some brighter students did not stop at supportive arguments but introduced contrasting views, arguing that the faith was learned at the mosque and masjid: if parents were not good practising Muslims the children’s faith at home might be wrong. Interesting views of this nature earned credit.

4.4. Question 8 (a): Only four points from the Qur'an's description of Judgement Day were needed, yet a significant number appeared to struggle to get that far. Some wrote only of the judgement – rewards and punishment –but others at least included the idea of confusion: heavens split, mountains turned to dust, like carded wool, etc. Any valid teaching about the event was given credit.

4.5. Question 8 (b): Perhaps this question would have been clearer had it been laid out as a simple description of Heaven or Hell followed by “show how these descriptions lead Muslims to live good lives”. Nevertheless, the Question as it stands is hardly obscure, yet some candidates made it appear so. Fortunately, some students gave very precise descriptions of **either** Heaven **or** Hell as reward or punishment for leading good lives, but more detailed examples of “good lives” would have earned more marks.

4.6. Question 8 (c): This question was tackled well by most with different pillars chosen, supported by sensible reasons. For the most part Shahadah or Salah was chosen. A few wrote that all the pillars are important and they explained why.

4.7. Question 9 (a): Despite the revision of the Mark Scheme so that up to nine qualities were available, many scripts failed to identify any four of these. It appears that candidates could not cope with the word **qualities**. Even so, they should not have linked their answers to specific Khalifahs in part (a).

4.8. Question 9 (b): Here was the opportunity for candidates to show their knowledge of the four Rightly-Guided Khalifahs, choosing two out of the four and recording their **achievements**. This simple task seemed too much for many! Many scripts were vague, resulting in low marks. Of the many who managed better only the Qur'an was referred to Abu Bakr's and Uthman's achievements. Others produced good answers for Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, but limited accounts of Ali.

4.9. Question 9(c): Unlike some recent question papers there were only two references to "today" on this paper and this was one. Some lively discussions followed, in which candidates urged their present leaders to follow the examples of the Rightly-Guided Khalifahs. Most had something relevant to say even if they only praised the Khalifahs and did not mention modern leaders at all, while others spoke strongly against modern leaders for being corrupt, greedy and not helping brothers in distress in other countries. They concluded by saying that they should follow the Khalifahs and what they were like. (Only a few students specifically covered character and behaviour.)

5. Report on candidates' responses – Section 3 (B) (for Shi'ah students)

5.1. No answers to Question 10 were seen. Scripts from different centres included Question 11, concerning Karbala, the death of Husayn and the return of the Mahdi.

Answers to Question 12 – again – made reference to the sufferings of the poor and encouragement through fasting to earn the respect of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

6. General Remarks

6.1. Reading the Question

Before leaving this latest Islamiyat paper, one feels it would be a dereliction of duty not to comment again on this important topic. Mistakes arising from a failure to read the Question carefully are not confined to "average" candidates, although such candidates are more likely to commit this type of error. So, for example, let us consider briefly four examples:-

Question 4 (b) asked for **two** (printed boldly) ways in which Khadijah **continued** (a key word) to support the Prophet.

Question 6(b) required **two** topics (of lasting importance) of the Prophet's teachings.

Question 8(b) requested an **either/or** answer.

Question 9 (a) asked for an outline of **qualities** of the Khalifas (implies a sharing of such qualities) and then the distinctive **achievements** of any **TWO**.

By the way they were printed, all these items were emphasized on the paper but ignored by many.

To this observation may be added another: the questions are very carefully set; it pays rich dividends (in terms of marks) if candidates take great care in reading the question – and then hitting on the particular aspect required.

6.2. Thinking about answers

Reading the words of a question may be the first task: thinking about one's answer (after it is written) is one of the last. The phrase "harmful thinking" appears in Question One but by the answers suggested by many indicated a failure to think one's answer through. Examples may be found in 1(a)(iv), 1(b)(iv), 2 (c) (ii), etc., etc., and the complete muddle some candidates made of Question Five. In particular this comment applies to 5(b), where the mis-use of terminology led to a similar mis-use of examples. More thought needed to be applied to Question 6(a), for some candidates thoughtlessly told the Prophet's whole life story from his call onwards (see 3.7 above). **In many cases, careful, thoughtful checking of the content required might have produced a very different answer.**

There was an important difference in Question 9 between the **qualities** of the Khalifahs and their **achievements**, which careful thought could (and in some cases did) differentiate. In 9 part (c) there were some good discussions and most had something relevant to say, but some did not

mention modern leaders at all. Only a few students gave the question careful thought, comparing the character **and** behaviour of early leaders with those of today.

6.3. "Today"

The evaluative responses arose again from well-ordered scripts. Thus candidates taking care over the wording of questions realized the importance of the word "protects" in **Question 5(c)** and answered accordingly. In the recent past a number of (c) questions have provoked answers relating to present-day Muslim behaviour. On the 2015 paper it appeared that there were only two questions concerned with the present day – **Questions 4(c)** and **9(c)**. There were, however, others which **implied** the present day. **Question 7(c)**, for example, emphasized present day home life without using the word "today"; indeed, thoughtful students praised religious practices in the home, but went on to discuss the advantages of using ("today") the madrasses and masjids as alternatives to the home. Even this kind of up-to-date thinking occasionally appeared elsewhere: **Question 6(b)**, for example, asked candidates to explain the **lasting** importance of the Prophet's teachings and in **8(b)** the consequences of leading good lives.

Candidates may conclude from this discussion that the Islamiyat paper continues to surprise and challenge students and teachers to write confidently and talk knowledgeably about their faith. Long may it remain so.

Grade Boundaries

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