

Examiners' Report

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in Islamiyat (4IS0) Paper 01

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Summer 2016

Publications Code 4IS0_01_1606_ER

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Introductory comments

There was a small decrease in the number of students sitting for this examination and, once again, very few students appeared to come from the Shi'ah tradition. The students overall demonstrated a wide range of ability, with more students than ever scoring in excess of 90% of the marks. At the other end of the range, there are still some students entered who are less well-equipped to deal with the demands of the paper, particularly in their inability to evaluate Muslim beliefs or relate them to the modern world.

Section 1 The Qur'an and Hadith

Most students were able to translate the various texts accurately, though occasionally the translations were incomplete and unable to gain full marks. The subsequent questions allowed some of the weaker students to build their marks, and so it is worthwhile considering in a little detail where marks could be gained.

One of the important aspects of answers to these short questions is the need to be specific. For example, when students were asked when the Night of Power is celebrated, it was not sufficient just to say, during Ramadan, but rather to specify, for example, the odd nights during the final days of Ramadan. Similarly, when asked to describe one way in which the event is celebrated, it is not sufficient to say 'by praying' because prayer, clearly, is a daily activity.

The second aspect that comes from this year's exam is the need to read the context of the question. Therefore, when asked how a Muslim can show respect for non-Muslims, it is not enough to say 'by being kind' as that can apply to anyone. An answer that would gain the mark would be, for example, by cooperating with non-Muslims in the work for peace, or respecting their places of worship. When asked about an action that can cause harm to others, it is not enough to name a bad attitude, such as envy, because this does not necessarily harm others, but an action such as stealing which does.

Section 2 The Life, Teaching and Achievements of the Prophet

There were many good answers to questions in this section, though some areas of the specification were clearly less well known and understood. For example, Question 4(a) asked about the events of the Hijrah of the Prophet, and students often demonstrated that they knew the detail of the event well. By contrast, Question 5(a) asked about the Battle of Khyber, and quite a number of students were unable to distinguish the detail of this battle from other key battles fought by the Prophet.

Another key area of weakness, for some students, was an inability to meet fully the demands of the (c) questions. In each part (c) question in this section, the question asked students to draw lessons from the actions of the Prophet for Muslims **today**. Only the best students met that requirement fully, by addressing modern day issues. Many others offered general

answers about the Prophet's example that could have applied to every generation. That limited the number of marks they could achieve. It may be helpful to comment briefly on each of the questions in his section in turn.

4(a) Good answers focussed on the details of the Hijrah of the Prophet, and not the events leading up to it, or regarding the general movement of his followers. So mention could have been made, for example, of the plot to kill the Prophet, of the way he evaded his would-be assassins, of the journey and the events at the cave of Thawr.

4(b) The best answers spoke of the various ways in which mosques supported the growing Muslim community in Madinah: as a centre for teaching the faith, for uniting the community, for developing instruments of government. Weaker students tended to focus only on the opportunity for prayer.

4(c) In the face of persecution the Prophet showed courage, faith in Allah, and forgiveness of his enemies. Most students were able to mention one of more of these responses. However, for full marks it was necessary to say something about modern life or events, perhaps with reference to occasions when Muslims face mistrust and persecution in the modern world.

5(a) There were fewer good answers to this question, as already indicated. Those who could distinguish this battle mentioned, for example, the alliances that were forming against the Muslim community, that the battle involved laying siege to fortresses, of Ali's victory at al-Qamus, and the terms of the post-battle settlement.

5(b) The context of this battle was also not very well understood, though some of the better students were aware of such factors as the threat to the security of Madinah, and the significance of the peace treaty with the Quraysh that removed the need to defend that flank.

5(c) The strengths and weakness of answers to this question were similar to 4(c). The Prophet sought peace, respected the faith of his enemies and treated them with fairness and generosity. Relating those actions to modern day conflict was necessary to gain full marks.

6(a) This was quite well answered. Students were able to focus on the details of the early relationship between Khadija and the Prophet, and also the length of their marriage and their children. They also mentioned the personal and financial support provided by Khadija during the difficult times, as well as her belief in the revelations.

6(b) There were some excellent answers to this question about the way the Prophet improved the lives of women. There was focus on the end to female infanticide, greater access to education, and women gaining control of their own finances. The historical situation and the prophet's actions were often well explained.

6(c) Many answers to this question were too general, saying the Prophet was very kind to his wives, and that they cared for each other. These are important simple ideas, but to gain full marks students had to be specific about the hardships they faced together, for example, and the significance of the age gap in the marriage to Khadija.

Section 3a (for Sunni students)

The vast majority of students tackle this part of Section 3, though it is important to stress that any student can choose to answer from either Section 3a or section 3b, provided they do not answer one from each section. Generally the questions were well answered, though it is important that students pause for a moment to read the question carefully. Some students lost marks by failing to distinguish the relevant teachings about the attributes of Allah 7(a) and by failing to read the specific question about the Prophet's dealings with children 9(a). Also, as in other sections, the (c) question will often ask students to relate their answers to the modern world, and some fail to respond to that.

7(a) This question proved to be a challenge to many students. The question was quite specific, asking what is said in the Qur'an about Allah as creator. However, many students failed to focus on the specifics of the question, and quoted the Qur'an about the oneness of Allah and many other qualities.

7(b) The importance of the belief in Allah as creator also produced a mixed quality of answers. Some students continued to discuss the various attributes of Allah, but those who did respond to the question were able to demonstrate a good understanding. They mentioned that it indicates the power of Allah, for example, and can increase a Muslim's respect and obedience.

7(c) This question did focus on the importance of the oneness of Allah, and this was a better answered question. Particular reference was made to Allah being unique in his power, and that the teaching is central to the message of the Qur'an and the Hadith.

8(a) Too many students only really knew that Hadith are a collection of the Prophet's teachings and actions. Some understanding of the compiling of Hadith, for example, was necessary for full marks.

8(b) Most students chose to speak of Hadith that elucidated specific teachings of the Qur'an, such as the form of prayer and the level of Zakat. This was a legitimate approach and was rewarded accordingly. However, in order to gain full marks it was necessary to provide a good level of development, or to add some more theoretical understanding, too, such as the way Hadith add detail to the ethical principles of the Qur'an. Many sound, thoughtful and relevant answers were given.

8(c) Although many students were able to refer to illuminating Hadith, many failed to demonstrate their relevance to the modern world, and were unable to gain full marks. Some who did make this link mentioned the disunity that is sometimes seen in the modern world, which contradicts the Hadith about the brotherhood of all Muslims.

9(a) This was a well answered question with many students offering relevant information about the Prophet's children. A few students concentrated just on Fatima, and that made it difficult for them to gain more than a few marks.

9(b) There were some excellent answers, but some students misread the question and focused on the Prophet's dealings with his own children, rather than children in general. They were still able to gain marks for such answers, but to a limited extent. Consequent to that, other students focused on the child/parent relationship, which was the subject of 9c) and their answers were therefore repetitive.

9(c) Weaker answers tended to focus on the Prophet as a father, but were unable to draw out implications for parents today. But there were also some very good answers that highlighted the challenges to families in the modern world.

Section 3b (for Shi'ah Muslims)

Very few students attempted these questions, but those who did so usually answered very well and gained high marks. The question that students seemed to find most challenging in this section was question 10, and so I will also comment on these answers.

10(a) The importance of the three sites was well known, and good marks were scored on this question. The least well known site seemed to be that of Fatimah's grave at al-Baqi'.

10(b) The rituals of the pilgrimage were well explained, with reference to the equality of all pilgrims, remembrance of the revelation of the Qur'an and the importance of seeking the mercy of Allah.

10(c) This question asked about how pilgrimage might be seen as the duty of all Muslims, and some students were able to evaluate this very effectively, about how it is one of the Five Pillars on the one hand, but also how it is not an obligation on those who cannot afford it.

Advice on how to improve performance

This report has tried to provide specific guidance on all but a few of the questions that were answered by students. From those observations it is possible to draw out some items of general advice:

- In the translations in Section 1, always provide a full translation of the text.
- In Section 1 questions, always provide examples that are specific rather than general, and which are mindful of the context of the question.
- In sections 2, 3 and 4 the a) questions will require the candidate to display detailed knowledge of events or teachings in order to gain full marks.
- In section 2, 3 and 4 answers to the b) questions will need to demonstrate an ability to develop reasons, drawing out their significance. A series of short simple reasons would not be able to gain full marks.
- In sections 2, 3 and 4 the c) questions will often require that the candidate evaluate an issue in respect of the modern world, and a failure to do so will lose marks.

