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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

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IGCSE ISLAMİYAT (4ISO)

PRINCIPAL EXAMINER'S REPORT ON THE 2017 EXAMINATION.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

There was another small increase in the number of candidates sitting for this examination. Once again, very few candidates appeared to come from the Shi'ah tradition, though it should be remembered that both Shi'ah and Sunni candidates can choose to answer two questions either from Section 3a or 3b, provided both answers are from the same section. The candidates overall demonstrated a wide range of ability, with many candidates scoring high marks in all sections of the paper. At the other end of the range, there are still some candidates entered who are ill-equipped to deal with the demands of the paper. The main weaknesses are that they fail to evaluate Muslim beliefs, often stating them rather than discussing them, and they do not relate their answer to the modern world, even when that is a requirement of the question.

Section 1 The Qur'an and Hadith

Translation of the various texts was generally accurately, though occasionally the translations were incomplete or they were translation of other passages.

The subsequent questions also allowed some of the less able candidates to build up their marks. In reviewing these answers, one factor above all stands out. The answers need to avoid being over general. For example, when candidates were asked to name an occasion when the prophet kept a promise, it was not sufficient to say 'when he promised to spread Islam', but must refer to a specific occasion such as 'when he returned the valuables of the people of Makkah'. Similarly, when asked how Muslims may avoid certain kinds of wrong behaviour, they should try not to fall back on a general answer such as 'by praying'. This answer could be a response to many questions and therefore does not meet the specific demands of each question. For example, 'they can avoid envy by being thankful to Allah for the good things they have' makes the link between being envious and being aware of their good fortune.

Section 2 The Life, Teaching and Achievements of the Prophet

There were many good answers to questions in this section. It is clear, though, that some aspects of the specification need to be looked at in more detail by some centres. Candidates who answered 4a) for example, about the Battle of the Trench, and 7a) about the duties of Hajj, tended to score well. But it was apparent that far fewer candidates knew sufficient about the relationship between the Prophet and the Jewish and Christian groups, save for some rather general sense that he treated them well. Similarly the role of the Ansar, in the early days of the formation of the Muslim community, was known in detail by few candidates.

Perhaps the key area of weakness, for some candidates, was in respect of the part c) questions. There was a tendency among some to re-state teachings rather than discuss them, or relate them to modern life. A good example would be 8c) which asked candidates to discuss the idea that Muslims **today** should respect other religions. Weaker candidates tended just to repeat the teachings and actions of the Prophet, without discussing why following those teachings could be particularly important in the modern world.

It would be helpful to comment briefly on each of the questions in this section in turn.

Question 4

4a) Good answers focussed on the details of the battle, which many students knew well. Weaker answers tended to remember only a few general details, and some could not distinguish between different battles.

4b) The best answers spoke of the Prophet's instructions following the Battle of Uhud, for example, and the decision to allow some tribes to emigrate. Also, there was mention of the general amnesty after the Battle of Makkah. Often candidates were able to explain further how these could be examples of mercy and tolerance. But some candidates could only repeat the idea that the Prophet was kind, without specific mention of actions or teachings.

4c) The concepts of freedom and justice were a challenge for some candidates, even though they form a key part of the teaching of the Prophet. Mention could have been made of the Prophet's views on slavery, or of his commitment to appointing just rather than corrupt judges.

Question 5

5a) There were a number of good answers that knew what the Prophet taught about idol worship, such as his commitment to monotheism, and that idols led to a belief in magic and to shirk. It was necessary for full marks to focus on the teaching, but weaker candidates were able to pick up some marks for saying what the Prophet did.

5b) Many candidates know the story of Ta'if and told it well, but some candidates neglected the second part of the question which asked why the people of Ta'if opposed the Prophet. Good answers focused on their worship of idols and their fear of change.

5c) This was often a challenge for candidates, with some describing the actions of the Prophet but without focusing on the way Muslims today can show the peaceful nature of Islam. However, some candidates were able to draw lessons from the Muslim belief in a theory of just war, on how they greet others with words of peace, and on the importance of the inner peace that comes from submission to Allah.

Question 6

6a) This was not well answered, overall. Only the strongest candidates were able to focus on the detail of the relationships. Too many relied on simple declarations that the Prophet was generous or fair. Good candidates mentioned such things as the Prophet's respect for the common lineage of many religions, and his respect for a shared belief in the role of prophets.

6b) Many candidates were able to gain the initial marks for this question, generally knowing what the Prophet taught. For full marks, however, they needed to develop their answers, by pointing to such ideas as how attendance at prayers at the mosque encouraged unity, and how lasting family relationships strengthened the community.

6c) Simple answers tended to say that the rules of Islam are important because they are in the Qur'an, or they show obedience to Allah. Some stronger candidates were able to develop their answers by referring to the ways in which a moral code can sustain a society, or how the teachings can inform behaviour in all aspects of life, social, political and economic. Few candidates spoke against the value of the observance of rules, but those who did were able to suggest that too many rules can turn people away from religion, and to the value of the spirit of the law over the letter.

Section 3a (Sunni perspective)

The vast majority of candidates tackled this part of Section 3, though it worth repeating that any student can choose to answer from either Section 3a or section 3b, provided they do not answer one from each section.

Question 7

7a) This question was well-answered. Many candidates knew the duties of Hajj. Better candidates avoided giving just a list and were able to identify the key features, and to describe them with full sentences.

7b) This was also well-answered, though it highlights the importance of developing answers. For example, the offering of sacrifice re-enacts Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. For development, they need to add, perhaps, that this symbolises the sacrifices that all Muslims are called to make to follow the teachings of Allah.

7c) This question is a very good example of the requirement to talk about the importance **today**, in this case of going on Hajj. Some candidates just repeated the meaning of some of the events. The best candidates were able to speak about how Hajj can help Muslims to cope with the hardships they can experience in life, or to develop the spiritual strength to cope with the temptations of the modern world.

Question 8

8a) This was a well-answered question, with most candidates able to recount aspects of the life of such prophets as Musa and Isa. It could have been answered either by focusing on one or two prophets and developing the answers, or by reference to the lives of a number of prophets.

8b) Most candidates were able to explain the importance of the title 'Seal of the Prophets' but weaker candidates wrote briefly of just one or two reasons, such as that the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad (pbuh) or that he was the last of the Prophets. Better answers developed these reasons, such as by explaining the significance of the idea that the Qur'an was presented for all time and all peoples.

c) Most candidates were anxious to say that Muslims ought to respect other religions, pointing to the example of the Prophet and the teaching of the Qur'an. Fewer were able to argue further, though some spoke effectively about the relationship between respect for the beliefs of others and maintaining peace, and of the facts that religions share common beliefs. Those who took an alternative view wrote, for example, about the condemnation of shirk, which may be associated with some religions.

Question 9

9a) There was a clear division between those who were fully aware of the details of the contribution of the Ansar to the development of Islam, and those who were only able to speak of generalities. This serves as a reminder that centres need to try to cover all aspects of the specification.

9b) This was not well answered by most candidates. Better candidates took the time to think carefully about the question and were then able to offer relevant explanations, such as that mutual reliance helped develop a sense of unity, or that the Prophet was a human being and needed encouragement and support like all others.

9c) This is a good example of an evaluation question, requiring candidates to offer arguments and discussion. Some candidates were better equipped than others to answer such questions. Whilst that is inevitable, it is possible for centres to practise how to respond to questions of this kind. The best answers spoke of how everyone brings their individual gifts, given to them by Allah, and that all people are responsible for helping to promote Islam and establish its reputation.

Section 3b (Shi'ah perspective)

Very few candidates attempted these questions, but those who did so often answered well and showed a good understanding of the issues raised by the topics. Candidates usually answered questions 10 and 12 (which mirrored question 7 in Section 3a, comments above).

Question 10

10a) The events of the Holy War were well known, and most candidates were able to answer this question in detail.

10b) As is common in many 'how and why' questions, candidates tended to be clearer about how Shi'ah Muslims honour Hussain. Better answers were also able to explain how his martyrdom can represent the struggle for justice, or how his determination and courage are an inspiration.

10c) This was a challenging question, but many candidates were able to look at more than one point of view, an approach which can gain particular reward in c) questions. They pointed to the final sermon of the Prophet about the unity of all Muslims, and how unity brings strength to any community. On the other hand, it was possible to argue that Muslims need to be faithful to their beliefs even if that can cause division, or that other acts, such as practical examples of kindness, are the most important part of Muslim behaviour.

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 candidates. From those observations it is possible to draw out some items of general advice:

- In the translations in Section 1, full marks are only available if the translation is accurate and near complete, although accurate paraphrases are accepted.
- In Section 1 questions it is also important to provide specific rather than general answers.
- In sections 2 and 3 the a) questions will require the candidate to display detailed knowledge of events or teachings in order to gain full marks, and simple lists should be avoided.
- The section 2 and 3 b) questions will often call for the development of answers. It is rare that the significance of some teaching or event can be explained with a series of simple ideas, as something of the complexity of the ideas needs to be pointed out in order to gain full marks.
- In the c) questions it is usually necessary to relate a teaching to the modern world, and sometimes to consider more than one point of view.

