



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In Religious Studies (4RS1)

Paper 2D: Islam

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Principal Examiner's Report for Paper 4RS1_2D Islam

General Introduction

Once again this year there has been a large entry of candidates for 4RS1_2D Islam.

Here are a few initial general observations about this year's Paper, some of which will be exemplified further later in the Report.

- Candidates are required to answer all questions on this Paper, and this seemed to be generally well understood.
- Once again this year, a significant number of candidates used extra paper for their answers, though, depending on handwriting of course, it is possible to provide a full answer in the space available on the exam paper itself.
- The different question types have different demands. For example, a) questions test Assessment Objective 1 whereas the c) questions are much more directed towards testing AO2.
- The majority of this year's candidate cohort appeared well prepared for the examination in terms of their knowledge, understanding, and willingness to engage with the questions. There were some candidates who displayed less complete understanding on certain aspects of the Specification.
- There was little evidence of candidates being unable to complete the paper in the allocated time. When this did seem likely, it may have been because they spent too much time on questions, such as a) questions, which can usually be answered with just a few sentences.

Teachers and Centres may well find it helpful to look at the Principal Examiner's Report for each of the other religions, as there may be points made there about a specific question that will have more general application.

Comments on specific question types

a) Questions

These questions are worth up to 4 marks, 2 each for two developed responses. The command word is always 'Outline', though it is important to look for the further indicator of what is being requested. This could therefore be 'Outline two **ways**', 'two **features**', 'two **reasons**', or a number of other similar terms. If, for example, the question asks about a feature, no marks can be awarded unless a feature is identified, regardless of the quality of the answer.

The other key requirement for gaining full marks is development. In each case the response must be developed in a way that furthers the understanding of the response given, and which responds to the question. This development does not need to be extensive. For example, if a

feature of a place of worship is identified, a sentence that goes on to explain the purpose of that feature can often gain the development mark.

b) Questions

These questions are worth up to 6 marks, and the marks are awarded in accordance with two Levels: Level 1 being worth up to 3 marks, and Level 2 from 4 to 6 marks. The requirements for these levels can be found in the current Mark Scheme, and they do not change from one series to the next. It is important for candidates to be aware of these requirements. In order to gain marks in the higher Level 2, candidates must demonstrate the ability to develop their responses (for 4 marks) and, furthermore, to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the topic (for 5 or 6 marks). For these higher marks, depth of understanding is more important than breadth.

c) Questions

These questions are worth up to 10 marks, and the marks are awarded in accordance with four Levels: Level 1 being worth up to 3 marks, and Level 2 from 4 to 6 marks, Level 3 allocates 7 or 8 marks, and Level 4 allocates 9 or 10 marks. The requirements for these levels can be found in the current Mark Scheme, and they do not change from one series to the next. In order to gain marks in the higher Levels 3 and 4, candidates must demonstrate the ability to develop their responses, demonstrate a deeper understanding of the topic, and also the ability to evaluate two points of view to arrive at a justified conclusion.

Currently the rubrics for c) questions allow candidates to refer to other religions. It is important for candidates to be aware that such references can only be rewarded when there is a clear attempt to explain why the experience of another religion might be significant for, and help in the understanding of, the religion being examined.

General issues per question type that may restrict candidates' marks.

On a) questions, the most usual weakness in candidate responses is the lack of development, where only simple responses are given. Such responses cannot earn more than 2 marks in total, regardless of the number of such responses. Another occasional weakness is when candidates give features, for example, when they are asked for reasons. It is important to pay attention to that changeable key word. Also, if candidates are asked about **one** festival or **one** ritual, for example, both responses must relate to it, and marks cannot be awarded for reference to any further festival or ritual.

On b) questions, many candidates develop their answers and achieve Level 2, 4 marks. However, there can then be a tendency for these simply developed responses to be multiplied, rather than explained in greater depth, thereby candidates limiting themselves to 4 marks. Although there has been some improvement in this, following previous PE Reports, it is still a common feature in answering b) questions.

On c) questions, again many candidates develop their responses. However, an answer that says that some believers would propose arguments a, b and c, but other believers would argue x, y and z – without any attempt to demonstrate a deeper understanding or to evaluate the different points of view – is unlikely to go beyond the top of Level 2. Also, answers that do not at least consider more than one point of view cannot go beyond the top of Level 2.

It is rarely the case, in examples seen by the Principal Examiner, that references to other religions prove very productive, and so often waste valuable time. The most common way this is used by candidates is to say ‘and this is very similar in religion x’ along with some description to back that up. That tells us very little about the religion being examined.

Strengths and Weaknesses of approaches to specific questions.

Section 1 focuses on Origins and their impact on the community

1a Outline two teachings of one significant Muslim other than Muhammad.

There was a mixed response to this question. It looked for teachings rather than a biography (save when a teaching could be drawn from that). Some candidates were able to refer to a significant Muslim, which could have included all of the prophets aside from Muhammad, the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the companions of the Prophet, as well as prominent modern day Muslims such as Malala Yousafzai. The definition of significant is that they would be known beyond the immediate circle of the candidate. Some struggled with this, but many candidates were able to refer to teachings and develop them.

1b Explain what it means to say that Muhammad is ‘the seal of the prophets’.

Almost all candidates had an understanding of this question, and provided a range of relevant answers. The main distinction was between those who were or were not then able to develop a simple understanding into something fuller and more comprehensive.

1c Discuss the suggestion that ‘The sunnah of the Prophet is needed to fully understand the Qur’an’.

This was well done. First of all candidates were able to explain the authority of the Qur’an, and some added that the nature of that authority meant that it must be able to stand alone. Others made a good case for why the sunnah might be needed to draw out practical implications from general teachings. Further, some candidates were able to explain why the principles of ijma and qiyas could have a role in the discussion, which might therefore not be quite so binary. There were some very good answers.

Section 2 focuses on Celebration and Pilgrimage.

2a Outline two ways Makkah is an important place for Muslims.

This was a well answered question, citing Makkah as the birthplace of Muhammad, the site of the first revelations of the Qur’an, the destination of Hajj and so on. Just one or two candidates confused Makkah with Madinah, but that was rare.

2b Explain why it may be important for Muslims to celebrate festivals.

Most answers focused specifically on Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha, and developed answers based on the specific importance of these two festivals. This was a legitimate approach, as was that of speaking more about why festivals in general are important within the Muslim community – for worship, as a celebration of community, in gratitude and so forth. It was generally well answered, but some fell into the approach of giving too many answers, with limited development.

2c Discuss the suggestion that ‘It is not important if a Muslim is unable to go on pilgrimage’.

Most answers to this question compared the obligations and benefits of Hajj with the exemptions and exceptions that are outlined in the Qur’an and in the teachings of Muhammad. Some candidates were able to take the matter onto a different level, and consider the very purpose of pilgrimage as a religious act, and to compare it with other religious acts within Islam that might be seen as equally spiritually beneficial, perhaps even more, because they form part of everyday life. This latter approach often led to a much fuller and deeper discussion.

Section 3 focuses on Worship and Practice.

3a Outline two external features of a mosque.

This was well answered, except that a small number of candidates misread the question and answered by referring to internal features. Some feature could be both, such as washing

facilities, but it is important in this specification for candidates to distinguish external and internal features.

3b Explain why birth ceremonies are important for many Muslims.

This was also a well answered question in that almost all candidates were aware of various rituals and ceremonies associated with the birth of a child in Islam and could give a simple explanation of the importance of each one. What fewer candidates were able to do was examine the notion of birth ceremonies generally, to offer some kind of synthesis or overview of their role and importance within the religion. Those that could often provided some very insightful responses.

3c Discuss the suggestion that 'It does not matter where a Muslim prays'.

Many candidates responded to this question by seeking to clarify what is essential to prayer and what is not, generally within religion and specifically within Islam. They often also contrasted prayer within the mosque and prayer performed elsewhere. This led to some fruitful discussion, with many focusing on the importance of Niyah, on the intention of the prayer, as being more important than location, without forgetting that some unclean places might show a lack of respect for Allah. Good insight was shown, and some responses were very well developed.

Summary and Recommendations to Centres to improve candidate performance

- Development is very important. On Paper 2 candidates will always add value to their response if they further describe, illustrate or explain their answer. In b) and c) questions such development is essential to gain access to the higher Levels.
- On b) questions, any number of simply developed responses can gain only a maximum of 4 marks, and a demonstration of depth of understanding is required to gain the higher marks in Level 2.
- On b) questions, candidates should not provide an alternative point of view. A question about why pilgrimage may be important to some, for example, is not usually helped by explaining why, for others, it is not.
- In b) and c) questions, some description can help to develop a response, such as description of pilgrimage sites or aspects of worship. However, in 'explain' and 'discuss' questions, only development of reasons and points of view can take answers into the higher marks.
- Candidates should only spend time explaining the point of view of another religion if they are confident they can show how that helps to provide a better understanding of the religion being examined. Otherwise, the time could be better used.

