

**A LEVEL**

**Examiners' report**

# **RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

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**H573**

For first teaching in 2016

**H573/04 Summer 2024 series**

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## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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## Paper 4 series overview

As with last year, it seems that there has again been a slight improvement in the overall quality of candidate responses. There were a few more candidates pushing some parts of their essay into the top level of response (Level 6) and fewer being awarded the lower bands. All of this makes for a pleasing trend.

In terms of overall coverage, all questions were answered. However, Question 1 was probably the least popular. Most candidates were able to sustain lengthy discussions on the topics, although there were marked differences in terms of the relevance of material selected. Question 4 was probably the response that candidates seemed to have the greatest trouble answering. For this question there was a much larger proportion of responses discussing the general topic rather than focusing on the specific question.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>wrote full and clear definitions for terms included in the questions, such as 'secularism' in Question 1</li> <li>questioned and engaged with key words in the statement</li> <li>demonstrated a good level of breadth or depth of knowledge pertinent to the question, and were also able to demonstrate an appreciation of the topics that extended beyond the usual classroom discussions</li> <li>demonstrated well developed analytical/evaluation skills of the topics covered, showing a good appreciation of the complexity of the issues discussed</li> <li>included a good range of scholarly views on the issues</li> <li>had a level of knowledge, across all three topic areas, that was of a consistently high level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>did not include clear definitions for terms included in the questions, either leaving understanding implied or having the wrong understanding</li> <li>lacked a sharp focus for the overall essay, having a tendency to waffle or include too much unnecessary narrative</li> <li>were not successful with paragraph structure: paragraphs should have a clear point or focus to them, best stated in the first line, then supported by evidence or examples. Gaps should also be left between paragraphs</li> <li>poor handwriting was also a real issue for some students, in extreme cases affecting the examiner's ability to fully read responses. Centres would be advised to check for laptop provision in these cases</li> <li>demonstrated basic evaluation/analysis skills.</li> </ul>

## Question 1

**1\*** To what extent is it true to say that the Muslim world has reacted to secularism in the same way? **[40]**

**AO1:** There was clearly a lot of knowledge of examples of the differing reactions to secularism evident from the responses. More successful candidates also showed a good appreciation of the diversity of the 'Muslim world'. For example, a discussion of the difference between Islamic states, Muslim-majority states and individuals living in non-Muslim states. A significant proportion of candidates made accurate use of examples to clearly illustrate these differences – referencing, for example, Turkey and Iran to illustrate possible state reactions. Successful responses had either a real depth of knowledge in the cases discussed, or a good breadth of knowledge. The most adept responses incorporated both state and individual responses, demonstrating a really comprehensive knowledge. Less successful responses generally lacked accurate knowledge of what secularism was, affecting the material selected, or did not address what was meant by the 'Muslim world'.

**AO2:** There were some excellent responses that discussed the contrast between the approach of modernisers, taking on board secular concerns such as women's rights and/or environmental issues and positively addressing these within an Islamic framework, and traditional approaches. A grounding in traditional Islamic interpretation reflecting pre-modern Muslim societies helped to set the scene for a Muslim world which was far distant from notions of secularism and had no common, prepared, response for it. The question was asking about how the Muslim world has reacted to secularism and not how it should react; some candidates evaluated how it should react, or whether Islam is compatible with secularism. Those candidates were not as successful.

### Misconception

Quite a few candidates had an incorrect understanding of the term 'secularism'. Some took it to mean 'westernisation' without a full appreciation that the two terms are not interchangeable. Others interpreted it more as referring to the pluralistic/multi-faith nature of countries like the UK and USA. An accurate definition, explaining the idea of secularism being state separation of religion from politics and civil policy, was essential in order to be successful with this question.

## Exemplar 1

1	<p>Secularism is the separation of politics (and in some cases public life) from religion. I would argue that the Muslim world has not reacted to secularism in the same way there are many contrasting views on how linked politics and religion should be. This can be seen in the different <del>uses</del> uses of sharia and ideas on pluralism within Muslim majority countries.</p> <p>Some Muslims may feel there is little need for politics <del>and</del> to be dictated by religion. Muhammad set an example of living in a pluralist state in creating the Constitution of Medina, allowing people of different religion to have rights and protection <del>and</del> within the early Islamic state. Some may interpret this as the <del>only</del> evidence that Muslims can live in a state that <del>is</del> does not enforce religious laws. Muhammad also encouraged migration and many Muslims have been <del>in</del> inspired by the Hijra to migrate to non-Muslim countries. This suggests that some Muslims do not see living under <del>an</del> Islamic governance as necessary for being a practicing Muslim. This</p>
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Shows, to me, that some Muslims have a more accepting view of ~~secularism~~ Secularism.

However, some Muslims would view Secularism negatively because in separating politics and religion ~~the~~ ~~importance~~ ~~is~~ Islam is devalued. Not using Sharia as the basis of law suggests that the country is not willing to use the guidance Allah has provided, which would be seen as wrong by many Muslims. Evidence that this is the view of some of the Muslim world is that Saudi Arabia still uses a legal code based on Sharia and has strict religious laws, for example about clothing. This is evidence that some of the Muslim world is opposed to Secularism.

On the other hand, some Muslims may embrace Secularisation as they feel it creates social progress. Some may interpret Sharia outdated to some extent due to its roots in culture in early Islam. ~~So~~ For example, some may view capital punishment as wrong in today's society and therefore look to a more secular code of law to guide them. Turkey is a secular

		country with a Muslim majority
		and can be seen as highly progressive
		in its social policies. It allows for
		freedom of <del>ref</del> religion as well as
		acceptance of behaviours that would
		<del>do</del> <del>be</del> not be allowed under strict
		Sharia. For example, the <del>does</del> legalisation
		of homosexuality. Turkey decriminalised
		homosexuality before the UK did
		suggesting that for some Muslims
		social progress and equality is central
		and secularism is accepted as a way
		to do this.

This response gives a clear definition of secularism and sets out the candidate's view from the start. There is a full appreciation of the diversity of the 'Muslim world' demonstrated with reference to Islamic countries, Muslim-majority states and also individual Muslims (living in Western countries). This candidate achieved full marks in this essay, having demonstrated an accomplished selection of material and critical analysis skills that were really well developed.

## Question 2\*

- 2\*** Critically assess the view that Muslim treatment of non-Muslims should always be one of complete tolerance.

[40]

**AO1:** Most candidates gave some kind of definition for what complete tolerance might mean, although there were some that did not do so. The stronger responses were those that discussed the full range of what the term non-Muslim might encompass, referencing the 'people of the book' (Ahl al-kitāb) in contrast to other religions such as Buddhism and Zoroastrianism as well as those of no faith (atheists). Some candidates referred exclusively to the former. In many cases students used a variety of sources to help illustrate possible views on tolerance, such as The Charter of Madinah or the 2016 Marrakesh Declaration. Some of the weaker responses focused more on non-Muslim treatment of Muslims and in doing so selected material that was relevant only to a discussion of the general topic area.

**AO2:** Some candidates did not consider why some aspects of Muslim treatment might be considered intolerant, assuming that it always was. These responses were not able to score highly in the AO2 levels, for this reason. The question is asking about whether treatment 'should' be one of tolerance and this wasn't always fully answered in responses – a number of candidates didn't appreciate that the focus is more on the theory than the practice. The more successful responses were those where the students were able to point out the difference between guidance for peaceful interaction and what might constitute 'complete tolerance'. For example, the jizya tax on non-Muslims in the early Caliphate period might be considered non-violent and therefore tolerant, or might be considered unequal and therefore intolerant.

## Exemplar 2

		Secondly Muslim treatment
		of non 'Muslims should always
		be of complete tolerance
		because of the fact that the
		Qur'an describes Christians and
		Jews as 'People of the book
		Having that description of people
		of the Book, means that <del>that</del>
		they are also <del>the</del> one of the
		other Abrahamic faiths. prophet
		Ibrahim was so important, especially
		in Islam because of his message
		of sacrificing everything for the
		sake of Allah. This means that
		Muslim treatments of non
		Muslims should be of tolerance
		because of the fact that <del>the</del> one
		common prophet - Ibrahim, who
		was extremely important in all
		three religions of the book

This extract shows the candidate referencing Christians and Jews as 'people of the book'. However, as with quite a few students this was the only example of non-Muslims that was discussed in the essay. This clearly impacted on the number of marks that could be given both for AO1 and AO2.

### Question 3\*

- 3\* 'Diversity in the Muslim practice of the Shari'a should be accepted because human interpretation of it will always be different.' Discuss. [40]

**AO1:** A significant proportion of students gave some level of explanation as to what the Shari'a is, however, there were some who assumed this was not necessary. Those responses would have been improved with a clear explanation at the start. Some candidates mentioned that the Shari'a provided revealed truth, in the minds of Muslims, about a few matters but many in modern life required human interpretation and were not covered by the primary sources. This helped root the discussion and point students to appropriate material that could be included. For example, many used the example of tobacco smoking to help illustrate the point. Candidates achieving higher levels for their AO1 generally demonstrated a really good knowledge of the differing law schools and sources used in the formation of the Shari'a.

**AO2:** Some candidates did not grasp the implication that 'human interpretation' inevitably might include diversity of opinion, and so did not address this part of the statement. Every word is there for a reason, so candidates should practice addressing statements in their entirety. Inherent diversity might be traced to the inevitable differences in context which defined the issues Muslims face, such as the diverse communities in the West many reside in as minorities. The issue of usury was mentioned by a few candidates in relation to this. A small minority of students seemed to be evaluating whether or not the Shari'a itself should be followed by Muslims and as a result were less successful for the AO2 marks.

### Question 4\*

- 4\* 'The differing Sunni and Shi'a views on succession had little impact on the formation of the early Muslim community.' Discuss. [40]

**AO1:** The majority of candidates had some level of knowledge of how Sunni and Shi'a views of succession actually differed, explaining that Shi'a Muslims viewed the 'rightly guided' caliphs as illegitimate usurpers and Ali as the legitimate successor to Muhammad pbuh. Good responses were not only able to do this but had a clear understanding of the formative years in the creation of an Islamic community from the Prophet's time in Medina to his companions and the Caliphate period. The stronger responses came from those students who selected material illustrating the link between differing practices (both spiritual and political) of the two sects and their respective views on succession.

**AO2:** A number of candidates focused more generally on whether the differences between Sunni and Shi'a communities were significant or not, without addressing it in the context of views regarding succession. For example, some candidates wrote about Shi'a devotional practices such as some differences in prayer but did not suggest the origin of the differences and whether they were due to succession or other reasons. This had a negative impact of their ability to critically evaluate this issue. There were other divisions in the early Muslim period, such as Umayyad and Abbasid; Mu'tazilah and Ash'ari and the different Madhabs. Understanding of the range of divisions might help to judge better how significant each was and there were a small number of candidates who had the ability to do this and who, therefore, scored highly in the AO2 component.

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