

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/07 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 responses 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 7 series overview

Overall, the standard was higher than last year. Teachers have prepared students well and candidates responded by demonstrating increased knowledge and more mature understanding than has been shown in recent series. This might be in part due to normalisation of studies after the pandemic disruption.

The number of entries remained roughly the same. Responses showed the full range of ability, from those gaining just a few marks at the lower end to a small number of outstanding responses which gained over 100 marks out of a maximum possible of 126.

It was particularly pleasing to see that candidates had attempted to grapple with challenging topics such as first cause, and very few missed the question out entirely. Even where knowledge and understanding were not altogether clear, candidates tried their best.

That said, there are still common areas to be worked on, with candidate difficulties commonly seen in gaps in knowledge for some key terms. Reference to sources of wisdom and authority, while good, was missing in some questions where it was required. It might be worth centres going through sources with their candidates, as these may include Imams and scholars as well as tradition and conscience, and the primary sources of Islamic law, the Qur'an and Hadith.

In terms of the sections covered, candidates attempted them all but some wrote less on the last section, perhaps because of time constraint or lack of familiarity with the material, especially 4 (b) Christian traditions.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> referred to more than one position where ways, views, opinions or differing perspectives were required (note the words in plural) attempted all questions, gaining one or two marks even where a response was less successful, which could make a crucial difference to the total overall included reference to sources of wisdom and authority, be it text, person or inner conscience knew the meaning of terms and were able to accurately make definitions and apply them in writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> were unclear on key terminology such as Fitrah, pacifism, religious exclusivism and first cause gave simple responses and stated essentially that all Muslims believed the same thing, missing alternative positions missed referring to sources of wisdom and authority, especially in the last section when referring to Muslims and life in modern Britain for part (d) questions, gave agree and disagree points but no judgement overall, or a very brief and unsubstantiated one.

Question 1 (a)

1 Relationships and families

(a) Give **three** purposes of a Muslim wedding.

- 1
- 2
- 3

[3]

Three simple, short statements were sufficient to gain three marks for this question; explanations were not required. To have children was accepted, as was to fulfil half of faith (referred to as 'deen' by some candidates), to legalise the relationship according to the Nikah (contract). There were also some who gave responses more appropriate for Christianity such as being joined in the presence of God. The question was focused on the wedding itself, rather than the concept of marriage as a whole.

Misconception



Some candidates thought the purpose of the wedding was to unite the ummah or unite families but these appear to be more cultural traditions than purposes of a Muslim wedding. Indeed, some weddings take place without family guests and are very small, and some Muslims regard these as according to the example of Muhammad and so just as valid, showing the celebration itself is not the purpose.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Outline Muslim attitudes towards the roles of men and women in family relationships.

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Many responses mentioned traditional roles; that men are breadwinners, working outside the home, and women are carers. Quite a few then stated that alternative views were that men could assist in the household chores, as Muhammad did, and women could work or have businesses, as Muhammad's wife Khadijah showed. The question asked for attitudes (plural) so mentioning these different perspectives significantly improved the level a response might gain. A few mentioned contexts and the different roles played by Muslim men and women in families living in different communities in different parts of the world, according to tradition and culture.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Explain how Muslim beliefs affect the ethics of divorce.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer.

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Many candidates wrote about how to get a divorce in Islam and described some sort of process. Some added comments about whether that was good or recommended or not, most saying it was not and should be avoided, but was permitted in some circumstances. Better responses explored those circumstances to draw in ethics: welfare of children; responding to situations of abuse; rights of the woman to a fair financial settlement according to the Islamic Nikah contract, and so on. Many successfully included sources of wisdom and authority by mentioning Qur'anic quotes about divorce being hated but permitted.

Question 1 (d)

(d) 'Celibacy is never the best option for Muslims.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam
- Explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. **[15]**

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar **[3]**

Every word in statements are given for a reason. 'Never' and 'best' are there to help candidates argue and focus their reasoning. So, an average response might agree and say about celibacy that Islam promotes marriage to have children and continue the faith. To fine tune the argument further requires delving into the words and exploring different circumstances. Some candidates did so, considering before marriage, people who are naturally inclined to be LGBTQ, or those choosing to lead a life of piety as an ascetic Sufi. Another way of approaching the statement was to argue that celibacy is an option which is permitted but not promoted. Many candidates conflated the concept of marriage and not being celibate and used the terms interchangeably, which was not accurate. Better responses defined celibacy at the start of their answer, demonstrating clear understanding.

Assessment for learning



Each word in statements is there for a reason and can be used by candidates to focus their discussion. 'Never' and 'best' are two words which can be debated here. Teachers might use several words and ask students to line them up according to how open or closed they are. This could be started simply: line up satisfactory, good and best for example, then use that as a way of getting students to consider what the statement is actually saying and argue about it.

Question 2 (a)

2 The existence of God

(a) Describe what is meant by Fitrah.

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Misconception



Candidates confused three very different concepts. Fitrah is an Arabic word referring to a person's innate nature or conscience. Fitna is disorder or division or a time when Muslims are tempted to follow conduct disruptive to Islam. Fitrana is a payment of charity made during the Eid ul-Fitr prayers.

This is a technical term and candidates needed to know the meaning to gain marks here. Many confused it with other terms which had different meanings, and so gained no marks. Some made a general point about knowing right from wrong or looking for religion which sometimes amounted to a relevant point. Some did have a reasonable understanding of the term as natural state, innate nature, or the way Allah created a person as they are born, before knowing or having opportunity to turn away.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Outline how Allah's actions show the meaning of goodness.

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Candidates did very well on this question, mentioning Allah's creation as a sign of goodness, and Allah's compassion and mercy as showing that Allah can be there to comfort those in need or suffering. Traditions of times from the life of Muhammad and previous prophets were mentioned by some, to illustrate how Allah could help those in need, providing goodness to Allah's people. This included the miracle of the escape of Moses (Musa) from Egypt. Some mentioned that all the things we take for granted in daily life were sent by the creator, and a sign of Allah's goodness.

Question 2 (c)

(c) Explain why Muslims might have different views about the creation of the world by a first cause.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer.

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This was a challenging area of the specification where candidates performed well, having improved the knowledge demonstrated compared to when questions on this topic have been touched on in previous series. Some wrote about creation without addressing 'first cause', but many did know what first cause meant and explained that this was essential for many Muslims to believe in, as opposed to spontaneous generation of the world in a Big Bang. One mentioned the works of Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Arabi who argued that Allah is timeless so could not be in time as a cause. Some candidates took polarised views, on the assumption that Muslim and scientific positions were diametrically opposed, whereas others made the point that Allah could create the Big Bang as a first cause, combining the positions.

Exemplar 1

~~Some~~^{Many} Muslims may believe in Allah creating the world. As the cosmological argument states that it is too intricate for ~~anyone~~ to it to just exist. Many Muslims believe that there is a cause behind the world, as well as a creator, that creator is Allah. "He is not begotten, nor begetting," meaning He is alone, ~~He~~ has no children or parents. Others believe in the "Big Bang Theory," this could also be true, that the world started small and had expanded, however Muslims must remember that Allah is almighty and he has created the world for us to live on, be tested on and it is where we will be resurrected, on the Day of Judgement. The Muslims believe they will enter heaven or hell on this world. Some Humanists, may believe in science more than religion as they do not believe in God. As well as Atheists. They [6] believe that 'evolution' and the 'Big Bang Theory' took place.

Many candidates struggled with 2 (c) but this response shows how it was possible to gain full marks, using clear explanation and referring to sources of wisdom and authority.

The candidate refers to cosmological argument as well as the Big Bang Theory, showing clear understanding and confident handling of these challenging concepts.

The candidate refers to sources of wisdom and authority with a relevant quotation from the Qur'an, which helps to explain Allah's role as creator.

The theories are then linked to the context and limits set by Islamic teaching, about the world being created by God as a test for Muslims who are judged in the afterlife.

The last sentence acknowledges different views which, although not detailed further, are held by some Muslims. The qualifying word 'some' has not been used but the candidate is not marked down for this; the question asked for views and a range has been given.

This response is particularly strong in that it isolated the word 'cause' and explains that the world is 'too intricate to just exist', showing clear explanation. The response gains Level 3.

Question 2 (d)

(d) 'The best way to know Allah is through a Muslim's conscience.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam
- Explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. [15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

Candidates made a good effort in putting forward different views about knowing Allah. Many argued that it was best to use established sources, especially the Qur'an and Hadith, as these provided authentic knowledge. The Qur'an is considered unchanged, words of Allah, and therefore beyond question. Individual thoughts might be open to day-to-day influences, or someone's individual ideas, which might lead a Muslim astray. Some candidates explored different ways in which a Muslim might connect to Allah, conscience being one of them. The focus on 'best' way was picked up by many candidates and this helped them form an argument effectively.

Assessment for learning



It might be worth exploring what is meant by conscience and how Muslims might know Allah through this. Sufism refers to spiritual practices, including the remembrance of Allah, which might help a Muslim to think deeply about what is right and wrong by connecting with God through meditations. Personal du'a prayers might bring to mind thoughts of God and requests for forgiveness in the privacy of unspoken personal requests, during which Muslims believe God is close to the heart.

Question 3 (a)

3 Religion, peace and conflict

(a) Give **three** examples of ways Muslims might work for peace with non-violent action.

- 1
- 2
- 3

[3]

This was a well answered question. There was no need for candidates to focus on specifically Muslim examples and many did not. Peaceful protest, speeches, writing letters to MPs, charitable campaigns and so on were all valid responses. Some wrote about reasons why Muslims might take non-violent action but there were no marks for this. Working for peace might include religious activities for those who believe in the power of prayer, so prayer vigils was accepted.

Question 3 (b)

(b) Outline Muslim beliefs about pacifism.

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- **[6]**

Muslim beliefs are mostly gathered around conditional pacifism, and good responses used this term and were able to accurately define it in varying degrees of detail. Some mentioned the conditions for lesser Jihad as a way of explaining conditional pacifism, for defence and as a last resort. Other views included different interpretations of what the conditions could be; absolute pacifism which one or two individuals might agree with, especially when considering weapons of mass destruction, and other views depending on local context. This was a gap in the knowledge of some candidates as there were a few who attempted to answer but did not have an idea about the meaning of pacifism.

Misconception



One misconception is that there is only one Muslim position on pacifism. Candidates might explore different opinions held by individual Muslims and schools of thought, some subtly different, and different aspects of one position. Within conditional pacifism, for instance, there are also different perspectives of the conditions required.

Exemplar 2

pacifism is the belief that ~~all~~ violence is wrong and should not happen. Muslims are believed to ~~be~~ ^{follow} conditional pacifism - as this means they are against war and violence unless it is the last resort. This belief also supports the rules of ^{war} Jihad as ~~it is~~ war should only be done as a "last resort". Muslims ~~are also~~ ^{should also} avoid violence and encourage peace through ~~other~~ ^{ways} acts eg: charity, protesting or boycotting. ~~It and~~ ^{and} ~~non-violence~~ which is also known as active pacifism.

Candidates generally did well on this question but many could improve their mark. This is an example of one which achieved Level 2 so helps to point out features to improve it to gain Level 3.

The response gives a clear and fairly simple outline of a Muslim belief about pacifism. It begins by stating that violence is wrong, then defines Muslims as conditional pacifists. This is defined as taking a position against war and violence except as a last resort. The term is used correctly.

This is an accurate outline of one Muslim belief. It could be further improved by being more precise and, in the definition of pacifism and conditional pacifism, giving more details about this Muslim position.

The rules of Jihad are then mentioned but 'last resort' is repeated, so it does not add anything to the response. Active pacifism is mentioned at the end.

The question asks for Muslim beliefs (plural), so to improve the response could mention that there are several positions held by different individual Muslims. Another perspective is that conditional pacifism might mean different things and be interpreted according to different interpretations of criteria. This would help raise the response to Level 3.

Question 3 (c)

(c) Explain different Muslim attitudes towards forgiveness.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer.

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This was very well answered. Mention was made that Allah is forgiving so Muslims should do likewise, and that Muhammad forgave enemies despite circumstances of persecution. Another view was that Muslims might not forgive without repentance, compensation or not at all if they felt the crime was too great, such as murder. References to Islamic law (Shariah) as a source of authority were relevant here. It was necessary to give more than one attitude (note 'different attitudes' in the question), and most candidates achieved this with varying degrees of success.

Question 3 (d)

(d)* 'Muslims should oppose all forms of warfare in the 21st century.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam
- Explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. **[15]**

Many candidates discussed warfare but did not refer to anything which might link warfare to the 21st century. General perspectives had some relevance but better responses included mention of modern warfare such as nuclear weapons and the implications that warfare might be apocalyptic. This might differentiate Islamic teachings from other forms of warfare because the methods would inevitably hit the innocent, women and children through the nature of the weapons. There was an opportunity here to refer to sources of wisdom specifying conditions, which many candidates missed. On the other hand, warfare might include defence in a limited context using conventional means, or be it another form altogether, such as a propaganda war using cyber technology.

Question 4 (a)

4 Dialogue between religious and non-religious beliefs and attitudes

(a) Describe what is meant by exclusivism.

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..... [3]

Misconception



Candidates sometimes confused exclusivism with pluralism or inclusivism. Some defined exclusivism in terms of a non-religious group rather than a specific religious term. The best responses mentioned that it meant one religion is the only way to heaven in the afterlife, and so it was a duty to spread the word of this to others to follow what exclusivists regard as the right way.

Many candidates were confused about this question and made definitions incorrectly or unrelated to the term. Some did manage to note that exclusivism meant that one religion was the only way. This needed to be developed to gain three marks, and ways of developing it included stating that this meant Muslims should apply preaching to convert others, so that they could achieve paradise in the afterlife, because this was exclusively reserved for Muslims, according to exclusivists.

Question 4 (b)

(b) Outline challenges for Christian religious traditions in Britain today.

In your response you must consider that religious traditions in Great Britain are diverse, but mainly Christian.

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A few candidates mentioned that challenges included not everyone celebrating Christmas or Easter, and the challenge of living alongside those of other faiths. The Christian focus of this question was challenging for candidates in this Islam paper. A common misunderstanding of the question was that it was asking what challenges Britain, being a Christian country, creates for Muslims. Most attempted a response and gained Level 1. A few got into Level 2 by going into detail and mentioning the problem of declining church attendance and weakening of traditions proving a challenge for Christians to address.

Question 4 (c)

- (c) Explain different reasons Muslims might have for sending their children to faith schools.

You should refer to sources of wisdom and authority in your answer.

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Several factors were mentioned but most candidates only came up with one. Reasons included maintaining the strength of their faith tradition in various ways, to be able to attend religious assemblies and prayers, and to avoid feeling isolated in a mixed context. It was a requirement to refer to sources of wisdom and authority in this question, which few did, but it could be satisfied by stating to learn about Islamic traditions in religious education such as stories of the prophets from the Qur'an. Another way of including sources here would be to mention teachers considered practising Muslims and able to advise on Islamic teachings due to their training for a faith school.

Question 4 (d)

(d)* 'There is no difficulty in being both British and Muslim.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam
- Explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. **[15]**

In the previous series many did not reach or simply missed out question 4 (d), but most attempted it this year. Candidates found this question interesting and generally did well with the AO2 discussion mark. The AO1 marks were often limited by the lack of reference to sources of wisdom and authority. Topical issues such as prayer, clothing, time to celebrate festivals, bullying and discrimination were all mentioned. Equality laws were included by a few, giving varied perspectives. One aspect missed was the Prophet's preaching in a hostile context considered much more difficult than the present day. Some saw a challenge as a good thing because it might lead to strengthening of faith and reward for extra effort in the afterlife.

Assessment for learning



Candidates might practise referring to sources of wisdom and authority, especially in this section. Textual sources, especially the Qur'an and Hadith, are relevant to discuss how far they can be applied in life in modern Britain, and examples might be given. Sources also include Imams and scholars, so they might be referred to in the context of gaining guidance for Muslims living in Britain today.

Exemplar 3

Being both British and Muslim is a muslim person living in Britain. The muslims would still act upon their religion as Britain has laws to protect them from oppression against religions. Britain has become alot more diverse and has had an increase in muslims overtime.

Some muslims would agree with this statement as there has been alot more diversity into the country, wheather it's religions or races. The amount of diversity in Britain may make people more comfortable for being a muslims as everyone is and looks different hence why some muslim girls wear their hijab as they feel comfortable to be different. ALSO, there has been an increase in muslims in the UK so there would be more muslims who are wearing the hijab, making others more comfortable to wear it. Another reason, is that there are ^{laws} ~~rights~~ in Britains that give muslims the right and free will to practice their religion which allows them to be protected against oppression or islamophobia. Also, Allah says

that there is no oppression in being religious or muslim so maybe being a muslim in Britain is easy as they ~~ea~~ have the free will to do whatever they like.

However, some may disagree as although there are laws to protect muslims from oppression, they may still experience islamophobia, however Allah says 'verily with hardship comes ease' telling us to have patience and we shall be rewarded. Another reason is the clashes in law that muslims may experience, for example same-sex marriage is not permitted in Islam as Allah says in the Quran 'you chase after men instead of women' and calls it an outrage whereas there is a law in Britain allowing same-sex couples which could influence muslims.

To conclude, I disagree with the statement as although there are laws to protect muslims, it doesn't completely eradicate the islamophobia that muslims may experience and the clashes in laws could make it difficult for a muslim to practice their religion or it even may influence them to go against it.

END OF QUESTION PAPER

Many candidates struggled to refer to any sources of wisdom and authority when addressing AO1 for this question. These could include texts, such as the Qur'an and Hadith, applied to modern issues, or other sources such as Imams giving guidance about life in modern Britain.

On the second page of this response, two quotes from the Qur'an are given and applied to issues Muslims might encounter during life in modern Britain, fully addressing AO1 together with the rest of the knowledge shown in this response.

For AO2, the response is well structured and coherent. It begins with a paragraph which sets the scene, then considers agree points followed by disagree perspectives. Terms, such as hijab and Islamophobia, are used accurately to support points made. At the end, a clear conclusion rounds off the discussion and makes a judgement. This is fine-tuned with the qualifying word 'although', and the nuanced position 'doesn't completely', showing the candidate has fully grasped the significance of the issues raised.

For AO1, the response gains Level 3.

For AO2, the response gains Level 4.

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