

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/02 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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Paper 2 series overview

GCSE Religious Studies Paper 2, Islam: Beliefs and teachings & Practices, assesses knowledge and understanding of key elements of Islam as it is practised in the contemporary world. The ability to discuss and evaluate the impact of Islamic belief and practice on different groups of Muslims is also assessed.

All questions and sections of questions are compulsory. Most questions were attempted by most candidates, which suggests an increased confidence with Islam-specific terminology.

Candidates who performed well on this paper demonstrated strong examination skills, including effective use of their examination time, careful reading of exam questions and the application of their material to the specific question that had been asked. Their responses also demonstrated recognition of the explicit requirements of the (e) part questions to include both reference to sources of wisdom and authority and to divergent views within Islam.

Candidates who did less well had attempted all questions but without necessarily understanding what the demands of that question were. Recognition of a key term led some candidates to write a general account of their knowledge relating to that term rather than selecting from that knowledge in the context of the question. These candidates were also often those who were more restricted in their discursive responses to part (e) questions. Candidates achieving marks in the lower levels often had relevant knowledge which was organised into broadly opposing views, but the explicit identification and justification of arguments was less clear.

It should be noted that the (e) part questions do not demand opposite views, but rather different ones. Identifying distinct sets of views is an important part of responding to these questions but it does not automatically lead to a discursive engagement sufficient for higher level marks. Knowledge deployed in ways that allows for justification, critique, counterargument and/or the relationship of different views to one another were better able to demonstrate the skills of evaluation and analysis necessary for the highest-level marks.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrated a focus on the questions asked with the selection and application of knowledge to the specific question asked showed an ability to discuss different perspectives by relating them to one another, comparing and/or critiquing them to arrive at a judgement on the issue raised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> showed difficulty in selecting from a pool of knowledge of Islam and/or in applying selected knowledge to the specific question asked gave descriptive responses where discursive ones were required by the question.

Question 1 (a)

1

(a) Give **three** duties of a Muslim during Sawm.

1

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2

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3

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[3]

This kind of points-marked question asks for three discrete points, with one mark given for each. There are no marks available for description or development because the question specifies 'three duties'. Most candidates understood the demands of this question, giving two or three specific requirements for Sawm. Most commonly referenced were refraining from eating and/or drinking between sunrise and sunset and not engaging in sexual activity. Other given marks responses included following sunnah with regard to how to break the fast and the extra requirements for prayer during this time.

Question 1 (b)

(b) State **three** rules of Ihram for Muslims.

1

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2

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3

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[3]

This question, as with Question 1 (a), requires three discrete points to be made. However, this question proved more challenging to candidates. Most did attempt it, although it was sometimes left blank. However, of those who did, there were clearly some who did not recognise the term 'Ihram', giving a selection of Islamic terms, examples from lists such as the Pillars or Articles of Faith and/or repeating their responses from Question 1 (a).

Things that are always rules for Muslims were not given marks here, as Ihram is a state that is very definitely set apart from everyday life, but rules relating to entering or leaving that state were given marks, as were the rules to be observed while in it.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Outline what Shi'a Muslims believe about Imams (Al Imamah).

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..... [3]

This kind of points-marked question gives marks for discrete points of correct, relevant knowledge as well as for points of development of that knowledge and/or relevant exemplification. Candidates were able to gain a mark for correctly defining the term and identifying it as one of the Roots of Usul ad-Din and most responses did this.

Many candidates demonstrated clear knowledge of Twelver beliefs and a smaller number of Sevener views; both were given marks as was less specific material. Description of Imams as divinely chosen or divinely inspired, as infallible and as being able to properly interpret the Qur'an were all acceptable points. One common error was to suggest that Imams are Prophets, Messengers or semi-divine beings.

Question 1 (d)

(d) Describe Muslim belief in Allah as the one and only God.

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..... [6]

This question is marked according to the levels of response given in the mark scheme, considering the responses as a whole. These levels require reference to different views within Islam for the highest levels. This requirement must always be interpreted in relation to the demands of the question asked, and, with this question, explicit recognition that this belief is at the centre of all Islamic traditions was considered sufficient to meet this demand, enabling access to the higher levels if the rest of the material used justified this.

Most candidates recognised that this was a question about tawhid and were able to link this to the Articles of Faith, the Roots of Usul as-Din and the Five Pillars. Most responses included reference to the Shahadah, some in the context of it being the first and last words heard by a Muslim and some in relation to it as the declaration which makes a person a Muslim. Many responses also addressed the sin of shirk and the destruction of the idols in the Ka'ba.

However, this question also elicited responses which misunderstood the demand of the question. Some of these focused on sources which support tawhid and these usually had some relevant material in them. Others answered a question about the importance of this belief in Islam or gave general descriptions of the attributes and qualities of Allah rather than focusing on the specific issue of oneness. All these approaches limited the available marks.

Exemplar 1

Muslims believe in the oneness of Allah and only him being their God. They follow rules Allah set in the Qur'an and expand to please him. Muslims believe Allah created the world so they worship and only praise him. Muslims attempt to communicate with Allah through Salah to bring in a close relationship and understand the Al-Qadr Allah has set for them. They sacrifice things like Ibrahim to bring them closer and portray things like Wudu out of respect and worship. They dedicate their lives for Akhirah to in the end be with Allah.

Exemplar 1 is an example of a response that has not grasped the focus of the question. It opens by identifying oneness as a core Muslim belief and Allah being the only God recognised in Islam. This is expressed in very vague terms but is sufficiently distinct from the phrasing of the question to be considered more than just a repetition of it. However, the rest of the response describes how Muslims try to relate to Allah or to please Allah in the way they live which is not relevant to the question asked.

Question 1 (e)

(e) 'Muslims need more than Muhammad's guidance to follow Islam.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Islam.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

The (e) part questions are marked using two sets of levels; one addresses the three marks available for AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) and the other the twelve marks available for AO2 (Evaluation). Addressing these questions requires a discussion of the issue given in the stimulus and the higher levels require that a judgement be made on that issue.

Most candidates displayed a good level of knowledge relevant to this question, giving an account of the role and importance of Muhammad in Islam along with the creation of the Qur'an and Hadith. Also many showed knowledge of the existence of other prophets. However, there was a common confusion about the level of detail the Qur'an itself contains about the requirements of practice, with many candidates suggesting that all aspects of how to pray salah or perform Hajj are explicitly described in the Qur'an. Some responses focused entirely on the importance of Muhammad as a role model, which limited the marks available for discussing the issue.

It is important to note that, while a discussion begins with identifying and justifying differing views on an issue, the level descriptors against which these responses are marked require more than this for the higher levels. Responses often sorted their knowledge into 'for' and 'against' with the different positions on the issue presented descriptively rather than as ideas in dialogue with one another.

Some responses were structured around a clear framework of making a point, giving some support or justification for it, usually in the form of describing some knowledge and then concluding the paragraph with a statement beginning 'this is a strong/weak argument because...'. This does make the response more than pure description, but the reasons given were often underdeveloped or consisted of repetition of the material previously offered as justifying the argument. Higher level evaluative responses compared different views, identified how one view emerges from gaps or weaknesses in another or gave a reflective conclusion considering the different ways one view might be chosen as preferable to another.

Question 2 (a)

2

(a) Give the names of **three** types of charity in Islam.

1

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2

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3

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[3]

Most responses named zakah and some did not even attempt to name the other two forms of charity identified in the specification. Most were also able to identify either khums or sadaqah but very few gave all three. Some described the form the charity might take instead of naming it but, as the question asks for three things, description and exemplification could not be given marks.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Outline the importance of the Prophet Dawud for Muslims.

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Many responses opened by identifying Dawud as a prophet, which could not be given marks since it is included in the question. However, candidates who were then able to expand on what being a prophet means in a Muslim context were able to gain marks.

Many responses identified him as a messenger who received a book from Allah and this was given marks, even if the specific book was not named; correctly naming the book as the Zabur constituted development of this point and gained an extra mark.

One common error was to describe Dawud as receiving the Tawrat and some responses very clearly confused Dawud with Musa, describing him being rescued from the Nile as a baby and leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

The most common response was to identify him as the person who killed Goliath. Some of these gave quite detailed accounts of the story but did not offer any reason why that would make him important to Muslims, which prevented their gaining all the available marks as they had not answered the question asked.

Question 2 (c)

(c) Outline **one** reason why Muslims might attend Salah in congregation.

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..... [3]

This question construction awards marks for discrete points of knowledge, for development of those points and for exemplification. However, unlike the more general 'outline' questions (such as 1 (c) and 2 (b)) this question specifies 'one reason'. Where the question specifies one thing examiners are only able to credit the first one identified, along with any development or exemplification relating to that point.

While most candidates were familiar with the term 'salah' general responses about the importance of prayer were not considered to answer the question. The most common response was to connect praying communally with strengthening or belonging to the ummah.

Exemplar 2

- Salah in congregation is a sunnah from the Prophet Muhammad
- This also ~~is~~ is because Muslims have a strong sense of Ummah and community within a mosque.
- This community of praying together gives everyone in the mosque more good deeds and a sense of closeness with each other and Allah. [3]

Exemplar 2 demonstrates this as it gives three different reasons why Muslims might attend salah in congregation. The first (that it is sunnah) is correct and relevant and so gains a mark. Both of the other points would also have been given marks had they been the first point made. The final point also includes what would be given marks for development but the marking principle, which is given on page three of the mark scheme (Short Answer Questions requiring a more developed response) specifies that given marks material begins with the first response made and stops when the development of that response ends.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Describe different Muslim beliefs about predestination (al-Qad'r).

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..... **[6]**

The question does give the basic definition of al-Qadr as predestination, but most responses were able to go beyond this, showing clear understanding of the relationship between this idea and human life. Most responses linked the concept to free will and considered the different ways a belief in predestination and a belief in free will might interact. Knowledge of a wide range of Islamic schools of thought on this issue were shown.

It is worth noting that where responses gave a correct account of the two different views but confused which was the Sunni and which was the Shi'a view, this did not devalue the response as a whole and credit was given for the correct description.

Some lower-level responses gave general descriptions about the afterlife and/or the role of angels.

Assessment for learning



The command word for these (d) part questions is 'describe'; this means to select and apply knowledge to answer the precise question. This question asks for a description of different Muslim beliefs relating to predestination but this does not imply comparison, analysis or evaluation of those different views. Those skills are assessed in the (e) part questions (AO2).

To gain the higher levels of marks with these questions it is necessary to develop the knowledge being presented in ways which show understanding of the question asked, rather than giving everything known about the general topic area.

Question 2 (e)*

(e)* 'Eid-ul-Adha is the most important festival of the year for Muslims.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Islam.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

Responses to this question displayed a high level of knowledge of a range of different festivals; many responses described Eid-ul-Adha, Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Ghadeer and Ashura in some detail, describing their origins and practices associated with them. There was some confusion between Eid-ul-Adha and Eid-ul-Fitr and the suggestion that Eid-ul-Adha marks the end of Ramadan was quite common.

The discussion usually took the form of pointing out that since these other festivals existed it was impossible to judge relative importance. Some responses argued that either Eid-ul-Ghadeer or Ashura would be most important to Shi'a Muslims because of the history and political context of the events marked by those festivals, and others argued that since there are fewer Shi'a than Sunni Muslims those festivals can't be considered more important than festivals shared by all Muslims. As with Question 1 (e) evaluative discussion was often limited, although the existence of festivals specific to a single group of Muslims seemed to encourage some candidates to more explicit comparison of views than was present in 1 (e) responses.

Exemplar 3

Eid-ul-Adha is the festival of sacrifice. This is a time when Muslims remember Prophet Ibrahim and his sacrifices. Ibrahim had to sacrifice his wife and son and leave them in a deserted place and run. They were left to have to find water. He also had to sacrifice his sons life to show complete obedience to Allah. Allah allowed Ibrahim to kill a goat instead. The killing of a goat or a sheep and eating the meat is still a big part of Eid-ul-Adha. Muslims argue it's the most important festival as it allows them to show complete devotion and utter obedience to Allah.

However, other Muslims may argue Eid-ul-Fitr is the most important festival. This is a 3 day celebration which marks the end of Ramadan. Muslims believe this is most important as it's a celebration of the holy month ending.

Exemplar 3 is a response which demonstrates a good level of knowledge that has been organised into two separate positions, but which does not then go on to develop a discussion. It opens by correctly identifying Eid-ul-Adha as the festival of sacrifice, but the expansion of this is a mixture of relevant and irrelevant material and lacks depth. This paragraph concludes with a position on the stimulus but this position is only implicitly connected with the material that precedes it. A second position is stated regarding Eid-ul-Fitr being the most important and this again is supported implicitly by the material which follows describing what happens during Ramadan. There is also a reference to bringing the community together that could imply an additional argument, albeit one that would be relevant to any festival, but this is not explicit or developed any further. Each of these sections does amount to a stated position with some supporting evidence but it does not amount to the 'reasoned argument' required by the descriptors for Level 3 and up.

None of the views is related to any other, nor is there any critique of the evidence offered in support. The conclusion repeats the opening point, without adding extra analysis, critique or evaluation. The response gained two marks for AO1, showing some correct knowledge of two Muslim festivals. For AO2 it was placed in Level 2; it meets all the requirements of that level, stating different views with limited development, analysis and/or evaluation, so it gains six marks, but it cannot move above Level 2 because there is no clear discursive engagement with the issue.

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