

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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**OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in  
Religious Studies**

**H573**

For first teaching in 2016

**H573/04 Summer 2025 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 4 series overview

As with the previous couple of years, only a small number of candidates received the lowest response levels. This suggests that centres continue to work hard on ensuring candidates have, at least, the basic knowledge and skills required to pass the qualification. There are still a relatively small number reaching the highest Levels (6), this suggests there is still some work that could be done to develop candidate knowledge further.

In terms of overall coverage, all questions were answered. However, Question 1 was by far the most popular question and Question 4 was the least popular. Most candidates were able to write quite extensively on at least two of the three questions. However, there is still a marked difference amongst candidates when it comes to their ability to select relevant material and engage in critical analysis of the issues discussed. Question 4 was probably the response candidates struggled the most with, which may indicate it is an area of the specification that they felt less confident discussing.

| Candidates who did well on this paper generally:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accurately defined key words in the question from the start, such as 'maslaha' in Question 4</li> <li>• identified key words in the question such as 'no Islam' and 'ideal'. Some candidates referred to them in every paragraph of their response – allowing them to maintain focus throughout</li> <li>• demonstrated a good level of breadth or depth of knowledge pertinent to the question. In doing so they showed evidence of understanding that suggested a level of independent study and research</li> <li>• made good reference to scholars/scholarly views and regularly incorporated technical terms</li> <li>• showed a good appreciation of the complexity of the issues discussed. This was evident through some confident and insightful critical analysis, allowing them to reach a fully justified conclusion</li> <li>• exhibited a level of knowledge, across all three areas, that was of a consistently high level.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lacked clear definitions for terms used in the questions. Understanding was either left implied or clearly inaccurate</li> <li>• structured responses around factual content and made these the subject reference points of paragraphs, with the odd comment to evaluate or discuss added on</li> <li>• tended to include too much unnecessary narrative. This led to a lack of focus in the essay as a whole</li> <li>• demonstrated a basic level of evaluation and lacked any real depth of analysis when discussing evaluation points</li> <li>• appeared to have content for a slightly different question that they wanted to include in their responses, not quite appreciating the lack of relevance to the question being asked</li> <li>• poor handwriting was also a real issue for some students, in extreme cases affecting the examiners' ability to fully read responses. Centres would be well advised to check for word-processor provision in these cases.</li> </ul> |

## Question 1\*

1\* To what extent is it true to say that there would be no Islam without the prophet Muhammad? [40]

**AO1:** This was probably the most popular question with many engaging well with the topic. A significant number of candidates referred to earlier prophets who delivered teachings through their preaching and deliverance of books, such as Isa and the Injeel, and this was considered the same message of Islam. Some of the stronger responses gave detailed evidence about devotional practice and legal schools of thought in Islam, naming schools and one or two scholars, and showing how they relied on sayings and actions from Muhammad as a core authority. Less successful responses were those that engaged in a large amount of unnecessary narrative detail, retelling the story of the revelation on Mount Hira for example.

**AO2:** There were some excellent responses that showed confident critical analysis of the issue. Most candidates were able to put forward at least basic arguments agreeing with the statement. These tended to link to the nature of Muhammad as a perfect role model/vessel for the revelation, with less successful responses going no further than this. Commonly-made responses argued that Muhammad was important in Islam, but the question was more than that and suggested no Islam at all without Muhammad. Many candidates made the distinction between 'no Islam' meaning either 'not existing at all' and/or 'being totally unrecognisable' – with the more adept responses addressing both. There were more nuanced responses that referred to his actions and sayings to illustrate how these made him indispensable for Islam, in the way that it has become formalised and developed over the centuries. Some tried to make an argument referring to Qur'anists and the Hadith. These arguments sometimes were confused and could be clarified: Qur'anists reject the Hadith as inaccurate. The Hadith are the recorded sayings of Muhammad. That does not quite mean Qur'anists take the view that there would be Islam without Muhammad but could be used to argue there would be Islam without the record of Muhammad's sayings because the Qur'an provides sufficient guidance.

## Exemplar 1

|  |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  | It could be argued that there would be no Islam without the Prophet Muhammad because most of the practices that are used in daily Islamic worship were introduced by the Prophet Muhammad. For example, Prophet Muhammad made it obligatory to pray five times a day, which is one of the five pillars of Islam, which is significant in Islamic belief. This is very important because praying is mandatory in Islam, and Muslims believe that it is one of the defining factors on whether you go to heaven or hell in the afterlife, which all Muslims are working towards going to heaven after they die so they can obtain rewards. This is a convincing argument because it is stated in many scriptures such as the Quran and the Hadith that prayer is absolutely essential regarding Islamic faith, so there is evidence of its significance in Islam. However, this argument is flawed because Islam would not |
|--|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Exemplar 1 shows the candidate referring to the devotional practice of prayer, using it to illustrate how it is both an essential aspect of daily Islamic practice and inextricably linked to Muhammad- making this evidence that there would be no Islam, in its recognisable form, without Muhammad.

## Question 2\*

2\* Critically assess the view that the Shari'a is just an ideal.

[40]

**AO1:** A few candidates addressed this well, however overall the responses to this question demonstrated an inconsistent understanding of what is meant by describing something as 'an ideal'. The success of these essays was obviously linked to the candidates' understanding of the term. While some candidates were able to offer a detailed explanation of the Shari'a, some assumed Shari'a meant punishments, and missed a wider coverage of it – impacting on the level of evaluation they could go on to engage in. The stronger responses discussed the Shari'a as guidance, opinions and covering a range of religious and social matters varying according to law school interpretation and application in different countries and at different period.

**AO2:** A significant proportion of candidates used examples of countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, where Shari'a law is implemented as a way of arguing that it is more than just 'an ideal'. However, less successful responses lacked specific knowledge of laws that could be used to engage in more insightful analysis. One or two challenged the word 'just' and suggested having an ideal was a helpful focus and even if it could not be achieved it provided Muslims with a broad range of guidance which affected all aspects of their lives and was a helpful and all-encompassing collection of legal material to go on. Others referred to the belief that Muhammad's example was considered best so law based on his example could be considered ideal. They then contrasted this with the reality that no society could match up to that which he created, and many dreamt of returning to the days of the early Muslim communities as an escape from current problems: an ideal far off.

### Misconception



Many assumed 'ideal' meant important, missing finer distinctions. Others understood it as meaning something that is aimed at but impractical, but not necessarily positive. For example, quite a few candidates highlighted ways in which the Shari'a was flawed and suggested that due to these flaws it shouldn't be implemented – making it 'just an ideal'. An understanding of the Shari'a as 'an ideal' needs to include both the idea of it as perfect and impractical.

## Exemplar 2

|  |  |                                                                |
|--|--|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  | However, some people may say that Shariah Law is not           |
|  |  | ideal, due to the different Madhabs. As they differ a lot      |
|  |  | in opinion, it can confuse Muslims on what is actually right   |
|  |  | As example, the Hanbali madhab, believe that the niqab         |
|  |  | is fardh upon women, whereas the other three madhabs           |
|  |  | believe it is optional. This causes confusion amongst Muslims. |

Exemplar 2 is exemplifying the differences between law schools (madhabs) when it comes to addressing the issue of awrah and the niqab. This is used to illustrate how these differences could be used to argue that the Shari'a is not an ideal.

## Question 3\*

3\* To what extent has 9/11 made it difficult for Muslims to integrate in Europe?

[40]

**AO1:** A large proportion of candidates didn't explain what 9/11 was, with understanding left implicit. Others were unclear about what integration might mean and did not offer any definition; this created a greater issue for some. Most candidates were able to exemplify, to some extent, difficulties Muslims might face while trying to integrate in Europe. Some wrote generally about issues of halal food and wearing the hijab, without exploring issues in more depth. Stronger responses referred to reports, and named scholars and interpretations about the difficulties of integration tracing them to before and after 9/11 – exploring a range of alternative issues that may affect integration, such as voluntary segregation within Muslim communities. Some responses also skilfully selected evidence to illustrate the ease with which some Muslims have been able to integrate into Europe, however overall this could have been done in greater depth. A few also discussed the experiences of Muslims living in America, or other parts of the world, which was not relevant to the question.

**AO2:** Several candidates chose only to offer arguments that illustrated the difficulties in integration, which clearly impacted the marks given for this aspect of the question. Some candidates restricted the evaluation further, by talking purely about the impact of 9/11 leading to a rise in Islamophobia and connected incidents. A few made perceptive comments about the difficulty of integration including attitudes from some in Muslim communities opposed to the concept of integration, fearful of losing identity and culture, and that this was more noticeable due to fear of prejudice faced after 9/11 by some. Some gave simplistic answers referring to Europe as a single entity, without recognising the different experiences for Muslims in different parts of Europe. For example, the different laws in France regarding the hijab, which might affect a Muslim's experience of integration. Potentially candidates might consider if these had any link to 9/11 or were more a facet of French secular society and an approach to integration based on this.



## Question 4\*

4\* 'Public interest (maslaha) is more important than individual rights in Islamic law.' Discuss. [40]

**AO1:** This was the least popular question, with subject knowledge on this part of the specification appearing less successful than the other areas. Some candidates gave shorter responses that were more generalised. A significant proportion of candidates did not address the term public interest (maslaha) specifically. Stronger responses showed a clear understanding of public interest, defining it as the attempt to 'prevent harm' to or to 'benefit' individuals and the society. A few responses had advanced knowledge of Islamic schools of jurisprudence, could correctly use terminology relating to Islamic law and sources of authority, and referred to two or three scholars and the way they might use public interest (maslaha) in giving guidance to their people.

**AO2:** This appeared to be the area that seemed slightly lacking, especially regarding subject knowledge. The evaluation and analysis for this question was done less effectively. However, there were still strong responses. They were able to convey a sense of how Islamic law considered various factors but was bound by adherence to direct revelation of the Qur'an, considered indisputable word of God, and that public interest (maslaha) was bound by this and not democratic or human rights defined as such. Less successful responses put forward a much more simplistic, generalised account. They tended to focus on the idea of Islam as a community-based religion making it more likely to favour public interest and/or on teachings surrounding the Day of Judgement suggesting the individual may be of greater importance.

### Assessment for learning



Some responses focused on description of public interest (maslaha) rather than comparison of its importance with individual rights. Candidates might practise focusing their responses on making an argument and planning paragraphs with that in mind, then adding details to support that argument. This would be a more effective approach than writing factual detail first, then trying to add on evaluative comments as an afterthought.

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