

Examiners' report

GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in
Religious Studies**

J625

For first teaching in 2016

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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 [Teach Cambridge](#).

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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 are compulsory. Many candidates attempted most questions, but Question 2 (c) saw more candidates leaving it out. There were also questions which appeared to confuse candidates so that the full range of marks was not seen on them.

Candidates who were more successful on this question paper generally 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. Clear understanding of technical terms used in the questions was demonstrated by many candidates, both through their understanding of the questions and in the material deployed in responding them.

Candidates who were less successful generally attempted all questions but without necessarily understanding what the demands of the 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. There were also instances of key terms being wholly misunderstood, with Question 2 (e) being a common example of this. Less successful candidates were often 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.

The part (e) 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 enabled candidates 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:
- demonstrated understanding of the specific question by selecting and applying knowledge to that question - showed an ability to critically discuss different perspectives by relating them to one another, comparing and/or critiquing them to arrive at a judgement on the issue raised.	- showed knowledge of religious concepts without applying these to the specific questions asked - gave descriptive or formulaic responses where discursive and reflective ones were required.

Question 1 (a)

1

(a) Give **three** ways in which Muslims believe Allah is benevolent.

- 1
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- 2
-
- 3
-
- [3]

This kind of points-marked question asks for three discrete points, with 1 mark given for each. There are no marks available for description or development because the question specifies 'three ways'. Most candidates understood the key term 'benevolent' and were able to give examples of Allah acting in a benevolent way. Common responses included 'forgiving sins', 'being merciful' and 'making heaven a possibility for humanity'.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Describe the meaning of the term **du'a**.

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- [3]

In this kind of points-marked question marks are given for discrete points of correct, relevant knowledge as well as for points of development of that knowledge and/or relevant exemplification.

Most candidates had good knowledge of relevant material. A common error was to confuse du'a with wudu and describe that process. However, candidates who recognised the term were able to gain a mark for correctly defining du'a, either as personal/private prayer or more explicitly as supplication and this is how many responses began. Creditable development included the ways in which du'a is distinct from salah, description of the kinds of things that might be included or asked for in du'a prayers and reasons why Muslims might engage in it.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Describe how books (Kutub) became distorted.

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..... [3]

As with Question 1 (b) this is a points-marked question and marks are given for discrete pieces of knowledge, for development of that knowledge and/or for exemplification.

This question proved challenging for many candidates. Most demonstrated understanding that they had been asked about the status or reliability of sacred texts in Islam but most candidates addressed this issue wholly from the perspective of the infallibility of the Qur'an and how that has **not** been distorted. This does not constitute a valid response to the question.

More successful responses referred to human fallibility and imperfect oral transmission of remembered content, to deliberate changes made by people with an agenda and to the passage of time leading to loss and confusion. These responses were often very brief or contained a lot of descriptive material about the history of text but in both cases the relevant material lacked the development for full marks.

Exemplar 1

In the past, ~~so~~ many prophets all received messages from Allah through Angels, and they are recorded in the holy books. However, over time these books ^{misinterpreted} may have been misread, damaged, or ~~text has~~ no longer apply. So in the end Allah sent his last message to Muhammad and ^{Allah's} last words are recorded in the Quran which is the only untouched and uncorrupted version of Allah's words. [3]

This exemplar includes a lot of material but most of it is description about where the books came from; this could have been made more relevant by expanding on the need for the people to whom the angels spoke to remember and then share their words but this has not been done.

The middle sentence (beginning 'however...') is an attempt to address the question by offering a list of things which might happen to books. However, not all of these are correct or relevant: while books can be misread or misunderstood this does not distort the text itself – again, extra development is needed to make this apply to the question. Similarly damage to a copy does not distort all other copies and there is no expansion to relate this to the transmission of the knowledge. The suggestion that they 'no longer apply' suggests a misunderstanding of the status of Kutub and the decision of Allah to send the Qur'an, which remains uncorrupted is not relevant to the question asked. Therefore, the only creditable point remaining is that of misinterpretation.

Question 1 (d)

(d) Describe the Muslim attitude towards wealth.

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..... [6]

This question is marked according to the levels of response given in the mark scheme, considering the response as whole and determining a best-fit based on the level descriptors. These levels require reference to different views within Islam for the highest levels and this requirement is interpreted in relation to the demands of the question asked. The demands of this question could be met by examining different teachings that relate to wealth, such as those around charity, earnings and greed, or by considering the differing interpretations or applications of different Muslim traditions on one such teaching. It is also worth noting that the question asks about attitudes to wealth and, while a belief in charity is a part of such attitudes, responses that focused wholly on Muslim rules or requirements around charitable giving did not fully address the question. Exemplar 2 is an example of a response that did not fully address the focus of the question.

The most common approach to the question was to focus on charity with many responses expanding on the differences between Zakat and Khums. These responses became more than generalised responses when they included material about charity being a means of sharing wealth and withholding it being analogous to stealing from the poor. The more successful responses expanded beyond charity to explore ideas about greed, wise use of wealth as a gift from Allah and/or the idea that too much concern with money could amount to idolatry and therefore to shirk.

Exemplar 2

- All Muslims believe that too much wealth is ~~is~~ ^{pay taxes} bad and that everyone should give to charity and ~~give~~ ^{is in the Five} to help the poor. This is because Zakah ~~and Sadaqah~~ ^{Pillars} which means they all should pay 2.5% of their annual salary as tax in order to help the poor. ~~This is obligatory~~ ^{that should have} and ~~the~~ ^{the} money that is kept ~~instead of~~ ^{being} given as zakah is considered haram because it is seen as stolen money for Allah that should have been given to the poor. The Sadaqah ^{are} being in the Five Pillars also means Muslims ~~are~~ ^{are} taught to not keep too much wealth and give to charity when they can. The Qur'an also ~~says~~ ^{teaches} the Muslims to 'keep from the fires of Jahannah' by giving to charity which shows that they believe being greedy and keeping wealth will lead them to go to hell.

- Shia Muslims believe that it's ~~even~~ ^{even} more important to [6] not be greedy and give away wealth because they also have to pay khums (20% of money not used on expenses) ~~because they~~ so that they can help the poor and be obedient to Allah.

This exemplar starts by distinguishing material wealth from spiritual wealth; this is a relevant point that is then developed in relation to giving to charity. This implication is that doing so will maximise spiritual wealth and minimise undue attachment to/greed for material wealth, but this is only referred to explicitly at the end of the response and remains undeveloped. All the detail which follows this opening is concerned with the requirements and practicalities of charitable giving. This is not wholly irrelevant but, as used in this response, it does take the focus of the response away from attitudes to wealth.

Question 1 (e)

(e) 'Muslims have different attitudes towards the importance of angels.'

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 part (e) questions are marked using two sets of levels; one addresses the 3 marks available for AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) and the other set addresses the 12 marks available for AO2 (Analysis and 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. Sources of wisdom and authority must be referenced to move into the higher levels for AO1 and different viewpoints must be offered to move out of Level 1 for AO2.

Most candidates had a good level of knowledge about different angels in Islam and what their roles are perceived to be and so were able to achieve success for AO1. A few candidates also explicitly identified the inclusion of angels in the Articles of Faith and their absence from the Roots of Usul ad-Din and those that did so were generally more successful in their discussion of the question asked than those that did not. The most successful of these responses were also able to offer reflection on the fact that both Shi'a and Sunni Muslims believe in the truth of the Qur'an, which mentions angels, and so the apparent difference in their positions might not translate into a meaningful one in reality.

Although the knowledge level was good, less successful responses did not directly address the issue in the stimulus. Those responses that did not distinguish between Sunni and Shi'a tended to focus on the relative importance of the work/roles of different angels, while the question is about whether Muslims have different attitudes to their overall importance.

Question 2 (a)

2

(a) State **three** times each day when Muslims perform prayers.

- 1
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- 2
-
- 3
-

[3]

This points-marked question asks for three discrete points, with 1 mark given for each. There are no marks available for description or development because the question specifies 'three times'. Marks were given for either the English or Arabic names for prayer times and most candidates were able to identify three of these. However, some candidates did not recognise they were being asked about salah prayers, and they gave general responses such as 'before meals' and 'before going to bed' that could not be given marks.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Describe the role of the prophet Isa in Islam.

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- [3]

As with Question 1 (b) and Question 1 (c) this is a points-marked question for which marks can be given for discrete pieces of knowledge, for development of that knowledge and/or for exemplification. Most candidates who recognised the correct prophet did not focus their response on the role but rather gave a brief biography of Isa which usually included some creditable material, such as his manifesting miracles from Allah, receiving scriptures and spreading knowledge of Tawhid.

Less successful responses confused Isa with Dawud and Isa with the Twelfth Imam. There was substantial conflation of the role and person of Isa in Islam with that of the role and person of Jesus in Christianity; this was seen both about his life and work during it and in terms of his association with the Last Day.

Misconception



Knowing that Isa in Islam and Jesus in Christianity are the same person was not relevant to responding to Question 2 (b). Candidates should understand his role and importance in an Islamic context, in which he is not the son of Allah or a divine being, he did not die and so he was not resurrected but was instead taken to heaven while still alive. Nor is he the person who will judge everyone on the Last Day, although Muslims believe he will be present; judgement is carried out by Allah.

Question 2 (c)

(c) Describe what is meant by the term **Munkar**.

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..... [3]

This is another points-marked question for which marks can be given for discrete pieces of knowledge, for development of that knowledge and/or for exemplification. This question was frequently not attempted. Where it was attempted, less successful responses gave the meaning of Nahi Anil Munkar (avoiding what is evil) when it is actually asking about the meaning of Munkar itself (evil); these responses were then developed in relation to goodness and virtue when the question required the opposite concept.

A few responses identified Munkar as the name of one of the angels associated with the questioning of the dead in the grave and this could be a successful approach.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Describe the Islamic concept of stewardship.

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..... [6]

This question is marked according to the levels of response given in the mark scheme, considering the response as whole and determining a best-fit based on the level descriptors. This question appeared to confuse some; although most candidates attempted it there were many brief and very general responses about being a good Muslim and pleasing Allah. These were creditable, because of the breadth of the Islamic concept of stewardship, but they tended only to reach Level 1 because they were so generic.

Other responses did recognise the term 'stewardship' but had a limited, and often Christian focused, understanding of it. The best responses were able to connect stewardship with the idea of khalifa and consider some of the things that concept encompasses: taking care of Allah's creation, both planet and people; Imams teaching people about Allah and/or guiding Muslims in the way of Allah; the tasks given to Adam and/or Dawud by Allah. Only a small number of responses made explicit reference to the afterlife, which is the section of the specification which the term appears in.

Different approaches to the concept were accepted as fulfilling the requirement in the level descriptors to refer to different viewpoints within Islam but this was another factor that limited the available marks for some responses.

Exemplar 3

Some would believe that Allah created earth
 in order for us to look after it and pray to ~~and~~
 him. ~~The~~ The Quran says that Allah created earth
~~for~~ mankind to 'worship me'. This shows how
 Allah expects Muslims to take care of the
 world that he created and to make sure
 your thank him for it.

Another concept of stewardship is the helping
 of one another in order to get to heaven.
~~The Quran says~~ The Muslims pay a tax ~~called~~
 called Zakat that distributes wealth in order to
 help people who need it. Muslims are required
 by Allah as stated in the Quran to care for ~~each other~~ [6]

This example illustrates a typical response to this question, connecting stewardship with the idea of taking care of both the planet and of other people. The former is explicitly linked to humanity being given a purpose by Allah, which gives some depth to the response. The latter point is supported with reference to charity, which is neither wrong nor irrelevant, but which needs extra development to be securely tied in to the concept of stewardship.

Question 2 (e)*

(e)* 'Sawm benefits individual Muslims more than the Ummah.'

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 had more explicit discussion than Question 1 (e). The wording of the stimulus meant examiners were instructed to accept any reasonable interpretation of the phrase; the most common approaches were to compare the importance for an individual Muslim of the concepts of sawm and of Ummah or to compare the overall importance of sawm for both the Ummah and the individual. There was no significant difference in the performance of these approaches judged against the level descriptors.

The most significant issue seen with this question, regardless of how it was interpreted, was that many candidates appeared unfamiliar with the term 'Ummah'. The most common error was to identify it as prayer and compare sawm and Salah. Other less successful responses avoided referring to Ummah at all and simply considered why sawm might or might not be of benefit. Both approaches were able to gain some marks but could not move beyond the lower levels as there was clear misunderstanding of the question and/or inaccurate use of knowledge. Where Ummah was understood it was generally explored in relation to Hajj and the coming together of the global Ummah.

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