

ISLAMIC STUDIES

Paper 8053/12
Paper 1

Key messages

- Strengths of the best answers included a crisp opening clearly showing understanding of the requirements of the question.
- Where facts are given, brief quotations or references helped to demonstrate expertise and strength of knowledge, followed by explanation as to why they were relevant.
- A range of different opinions were seen, argued from candidates who cited their experiences of Islam from different parts of the world and in different ways.

General comments

The standard of this year's entry for Paper 1 was good and many candidates showed evidence of being well prepared and making an effort to reflect evaluation in their responses. **Question 1**, the practices of pagan Meccans, and **Question 4**, the compilation of the Qur'an, were very popular and very well answered. All of the questions were chosen by differing numbers of candidates, with some being more popular than others. There were examples of strong and weaker responses for all questions, showing good differentiation.

Strengths of the best answers included a crisp opening clearly showing understanding of the requirements of the question. One way to do this was to define the topic; another to outline the different range of views before going on to explain them. Good essays included appropriate paragraphs each linked back to the question. Where facts are given, brief quotations or references helped to demonstrate expertise and strength of knowledge, followed by explanation as to why they were relevant. Selectivity was a strength in the best answers, which did not need to be the longest to get the most marks. A range of different opinions were seen, argued from candidates who cited their experiences of Islam from different parts of the world and in different ways. It was possible to access the full range of marks from various different standpoints, the crucial factor being how well evaluation was argued and supported.

Weaker responses wrote about topics in general, sometimes at length but without honing in on the main focus required. Some missed the main focus of the question or addressed it without selecting the main parts required, therefore spent additional time writing about parts not relevant. Almost all candidates followed the rubric but the occasional candidate only answered 4 questions rather than the required 5.

Section A

Question 1

By referring to the beliefs and customs of the pagan Meccans, explain why the new teachings delivered by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) caused them to reject him so violently.

(20)

This was a very popular question and answered well by many candidates. Excellent responses took the teachings of Muhammad (pbuh), such as the rejection of idolatry and why they provoked a violent response.

Well-structured essays referred back to this violent reaction after each cause identified and kept the response focused throughout. Those achieving a band C level of response tended to focus on the details of pagan religion and customs, sometimes in depth, but could have improved further by making the link in terms of causation for the violent response. Examples of good evaluation included identification of a most important factor as against other factors in provoking a response.

Question 2

- (a) **Outline the ways in which the Muslim community interacted with the ‘Hypocrites’ (Munafiqun) and Jews in Medina.** (12)

Good responses mentioned the arrival into Medina of the Muslims as an initial occasion of peaceful contact, and developed the theme of mutual engagement and protection by discussing the Charter of Medina. The best answers were precise about this, sometimes quoting relevant verses from the Qur’an or from Hadith, or episodes from the life of Muhammad (pbuh) to illustrate points made. Some mentioned how the Prophet (pbuh) showed compassion even to those who had abused him or other Muslims and asked about the well being of Jews and Hypocrites (*Munafiqun*) even after some had abused him.

- (b) **Explain why the Prophet (pbuh) changed in his attitudes towards either the ‘Hypocrites’ or the Jews.** (8)

The emphasis of this question was missed by some candidates. It was important to explain the word ‘changed’ and to do so in the context of events in Medina, as outlined in **part (a)**. Some candidates wrote in general about the Prophet’s attitudes; others wrote about the initial revelations in Mecca and why this caused relations to break down. But the best responses pinpointed the tribal relations which broke down in Medina and caused the Prophet (pbuh) to change his dealings with them and ask disloyal tribes and all their members to leave. Good answers gave details about this and explained the situation in terms of tribal alliances at the time.

Question 3

- (a) **What aspects of ‘Umar’s caliphate caused him to be remembered by many as a strict and severe ruler?** (12)

The best answers focused on both the character and policies of Caliph ‘Umar and selected examples to show how, as asked in the question, some regarded him as strict and severe. Good points mentioned were his strictness in demanding payment of revenue and good use of the money, guarding against corruption. Another example mentioned was his strictness in his demands of those who served in the army so that they were agents of his rule as firm and fair soldiers, particularly in new provinces. Some mentioned Caliph ‘Umar’s provision of religious facilities in that he encouraged adherence to the Five Pillars of Islam and provided mosques and pilgrimage facilities for the people.

- (b) **Was this judgement fair? Give reasons to support your answer.** (8)

Good answers sometimes agreed and sometimes disagreed; it was possible to achieve the full range of marks by evaluating from either perspective or a mixture of the two. The best answers discussed what the words ‘strict’ and ‘severe’ meant and whether they were appropriate during ‘Umar’s time. Some argued that he was strict but that it was necessary and good to rule in this way, to stamp out corruption and encourage people to adhere to Islam. Also, some noted that although ‘Umar was strict he was also humble and pious: he was not being strict for self-advantage. Others argued that ‘Umar was putting in place fairness and following the Sunnah of Muhammad (pbuh) so it is unfair to call him severe; indeed he showed mercy to some and was known as a ‘rightly guided’ Caliph so strict and severe might not be the best descriptors for his rule.

Section B

Question 4

- (a) **Outline the process through which the Qur'an came to be a written book from the time of the Prophet (pbuh) to the time of the Caliph 'Uthman.** (12)

This was a popular question and very well answered by many candidates. Most identified several stages in the process, beginning with the oral memorisation of the Qur'an by those who heard it directly from the Prophet (pbuh) at the time of revelation. Almost all responses mentioned Abu Bakr's reluctance but then acceptance of the need to record a written Qur'an at the time of the death of many huffaz in battle. Good and excellent responses mentioned the strict verification process and particularly the role of 'Umar and Zaid ibn Thabit in this, and the creation of a volume which became known as the Mushaf Hafsa. Nearly all mentioned Caliph 'Uthman's completion of this and destruction of unauthorised versions in order to establish the written book in standard format. The best answers were accurate and precise in their relating of the process, and covered the whole process from the time of the Prophet (pbuh) to the time of Caliph 'Uthman.

- (b) **Explain in detail how the first Muslims ensured the written text of the Qur'an corresponded to the recitations delivered by the Prophet (pbuh).** (8)

This question was also well answered. Many detailed the verification meticulously carried out by 'Umar and Zaid, and the importance of checking with the huffaz. Some gave anecdotes about Zaid and 'Umar sitting at the door of the Prophet's mosque and meticulously collecting any evidence they could, which added detail to the response and provided evidence of in-depth learning. Some mentioned different scholarly opinions about the process of collection which provided evidence of wider reading, another factor contributing towards a higher level of response answer.

Question 5

- There are many stories about prophets in the Qur'an, not only about the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). With particular reference to the passages set for special study, explain the purpose these stories serve.** (20)

Few candidates chose to answer this question. Of the few who did, some told the stories giving references from the Qur'an and quotations. Better answers developed this by explaining the purpose of those stories, as prompted by the question. Some identified teaching Islamic beliefs, with the role of prophets as people sent to warn populations away from shirk or idolatry again and again through history. They concluded that this helped people at the time of the Prophet (pbuh) as well as today to heed the warning and not to slip back into the worship of idols. Others argued that the stories brought Muslims hope because they could look back at examples of prophets who faced hardship but had trust in God and patience that things were part of a wider plan, so when facing hardships today Muslims could find inspiration in those stories. The best answers gave detailed and precise references and quotations from the set passages to back up their arguments.

Question 6

- The Qur'an contains a number of major themes. Identify the most important, and explain your choice.** (20)

Those who chose this question were few, but many of those who did respond well and produced good answers. Some chose a single theme and some two or more. The most popular and well supported choices were the main beliefs of *tawhid* (Oneness of God), *risalah* (Prophethood) and *akhirah* (belief in the Day of Judgement and the Afterlife). Some mentioned that there were many themes in the Qur'an and these predominated in surahs thought to be revealed in Mecca, whereas other themes, particularly to guide Muslims as they faced life alongside others, were revealed in Medina. One or two made a strong argument for identifying compassion and mercy as a major theme in the Qur'an. The best responses were able to quote portions of text, some stating how frequently words or references to themes such as *tawhid* are found, giving examples of their prominence as evidence to support their argument that this should be regarded as a major theme.

Section C

Question 7

Explain the relationship between the Articles of Faith and the Pillars of Islam.

(20)

The best responses to this popular question made links between the Articles and the Pillars. For example, the belief in *tawhid* and the statement of the *Shahadah*. Those who chose to structure their essays analytically, making links throughout, achieved on the whole excellent levels of response to this question. Some candidates wrote lengthy answers detailing all of the Articles and then detailing the Pillars but without necessarily pointing out the relationship between the two. In those cases, even though the answer might be considerably longer, the mark given was generally lower. Better responses were evaluative and clearly linked aspects of following the Pillars to the Articles of Faith.

Question 8

(a) By referring to at least three examples from the Prophet Muhammad's life, show how the Prophet (pbuh) reflected the teachings of the Qur'an.

(12)

The best responses here chose examples which clearly reflected teachings, rather than writing about the life of Muhammad (pbuh) in general. Good responses quoted short verses or parts from the Qur'an then explained occasions in which Muhammad (pbuh) had exemplified this, again giving details. Many candidates wrote very good answers to this and prayer was the most popular choice of example: details being given in the Qur'an telling Muslims to pray and the Prophet (pbuh) exemplifying this with the precise actions which Muslims follow today. Many other examples were chosen, particularly about interpersonal relations and treating others equally.

(b) 'It would not be possible to put the Qur'an into practice without the example of the Prophet (pbuh) before us.' Give reasons why you agree or disagree with this statement.

(8)

There were again many good answers to this question with most respondents arguing that the examples of the Prophet (pbuh) were essential to form the detail of Muslims' practice without which it would not be possible to uphold the Qur'an, giving examples such as prayer. Some argued that the Qur'an could still be put into practice in outline or main beliefs. The more detail the discussion, with evidence and explanation to back up points made, the better the response.

Question 9

In what ways do the main elements of a marriage ceremony reflect the teachings of the Qur'an about relations between human beings?

(20)

Not many candidates chose this question and those who did struggled to differentiate between marriage ceremony and marriage in general; as well as between teachings of the Qur'an and teachings in general from tradition and general beliefs and practices. The best responses were specific. Some good points made were the consent necessary within the ceremony by both parties, reflecting the Qur'anic teaching about 'no compulsion'. Some identified the duties in Islam, the marriage forming a family as the basis for bringing up children. Some expanded on this theme and noted that it was important to reflect the Qur'an's teaching on treating people equally and all being humble before God, and so not make others jealous through lavish displays.

Section D

Question 10

In a twenty-first century society, how practical would it be to follow the teachings of the Qur'an in every detail?

(20)

This was a reasonably popular question but many missed the point and gave a response with a different focus. Some argued that the Qur'an provided general themes to which the Hadith collections added details. The focus of these answers was in the formation of Shariah in the early centuries of Islam. Whilst it was partly relevant to argue that the Hadith are needed to make sense of details in the Qur'an and apply the teachings today, part of the focus of the question was missed.

Better answers explained aspects of the Qur'an and how they might be made sense of today. One response mentioned details in the Qur'an made sense according to the occasion of revelation (*asbab an nuzul*) of the surah, some given as specific directions to the Prophet (pbuh) to participate in battle and so on. The response went on to argue how general points from these details might be taken in the light of scholarship, using the *ijma* of scholars and *qiyas* analogy where necessary. One looked at *ijtihad*, to discuss whether details of the Qur'an needed special interpretation in the light of modern circumstances.

Good answers focused on the practicalities of modern life, and recognised that some Muslims see it as important to return to the details of life following all aspects of the Qur'an as literally as possible, whereas others might focus on the main aspects as far as practical. Differentiation of which aspects are considered compulsory (*fard*) and optional helped in this discussion, as did everyday examples of life in a Muslim country. Candidates answered best where detail and specific answers were given.

Question 11

'The Sunnah is for all times and all places.' How can Muslims follow the Prophet's example in present-day society?

(20)

This was a popular question. Many candidates selected examples of modern-day issues, then referred to aspects of the Sunnah which related to these issues and therefore helped Muslims to address them. Commonly the process of working out aspects of Shariah was also referred to, particularly where Muslims faced new issues such as those involved with medical ethics, and how scholars might address these working back from the Sunnah to produce new guidelines.

Many identified issues living in modern societies around those of other faiths and discussed issues of prayer and fasting, and the difficulties of following the Sunnah at times. Good discussions considered how Muslims might choose their environment, such as their employment, carefully so that they may follow the Sunnah, or looked at other issues. The best responses gave thoughtful and measured evaluations of these issues and chose relevant examples of actions of Muhammad (pbuh) as evidence for the Sunnah.

Question 12

(a) Describe how *ijtihad* (individual intellectual endeavour) is used in a legal context.

(12)

Not many candidates chose this question but those who did wrote reasonable responses. Best answers here gave detail and were clear on both a definition of *ijtihad* (individual intellectual endeavour) and how it related to the formation of rulings with regards to traditional processes of Shariah. Weaker responses were unclear on the definition or missed some aspects of the formation of opinion in legal context.

(b) Why do some Muslim legal experts reject the use of *ijtihad*?

(8)

Good answers here discussed legal opinions, such as those who argued that *ijtihad* was only valid in the early days of Islam by the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) who were closest to him and knew what he might have ruled. Some mentioned various opinions about when the 'gates of *ijtihad*' might have closed. General discussions raised the risk that individuals might emphasise their own

reasoning in preference to Qur'anic revelations and veer away from God's message as a result. Good answers noted a variety of different opinions about this topic and referred to wider reading in their answers.