ISLAMIC STUDIES

| Paper 9013/01 |
| Paper 1 |

General comments

The overall performance of candidates was similar to previous years. There has been a clear improvement on the quality of answers. Some of the questions enabled excellent candidates to shine through with some very competent answers. **Questions 5, 9** and **11** fall into that category.

There is the need for candidates to take time to read the questions properly, some candidates seem to latch onto particular key words. Even though focussing on key words or particular 'registers' is very important, candidates have to read the whole of the question so that they can get a comprehensive idea about what is being asked rather than what the question might be asking.

There has been further improvement in using references from the Qur'an and Hadith to support discussions especially in questions where they are specifically required for examples. These are the primary sources for Islamic thought and values and hence such references are crucial to the quality of the answers.

Candidates should ensure that answers are not too short and simplistic, comments need to be meaningful. Candidates should consider the importance of concluding their discussions properly. This is especially important in questions where candidates are asked to take a position and offer reasons for that position. Candidates must also weigh up how much of the background is needed.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a)   **Explain the significance of the Ka'ba in pre-Islamic Arabian beliefs.**
(b)   **Why, according to traditional Muslim accounts, did the Prophet Muhammad seek to 'cleanse' the Ka'ba?**

This question was very popular and many candidates answered well. Part **(a)** of the question focuses on the relevance of the Ka'ba in pre-Islamic beliefs and hence the candidates were expected to dwell mainly on this not the general behaviour of the pre-Islamic Arabs. The best answers did specifically refer to the Ka'ba demonstrating its importance to the people of Mecca at the time.

Part **(b)** expected candidates to make reference to the historical importance of the building and its place in Islam, leading to the need for its cleansing due to the way the Meccans had used it. The best answers made reference to the revelation that came to support the cleansing as seen in Surah 17:81.

Question 2

(a)   **Write brief accounts of the following:**
        (i)   the Prophet Muhammad's first experience of revelation
        (ii)   the first migration to Abyssinia
        (iii)   the Charter of Medina.
(b)   **Explain the significance of any <u>two</u> of these for Muslim reflection about relations with other faiths.**

In part **(a)(i)**, candidates wrote about the Prophet's experience in the cave of Hira mentioning his surprise and then linking that with the fact that revelations were not stage-managed and that everything was in the hands of God.

In part **(a)(ii)** many candidates answered very well and provided some interesting details even though the question was only looking for 'brief accounts'.

In part **(a)(iii)** it was important not to confuse the Charter with the Hudaybiyya Treaty and many candidates provided some very interesting insights.

The answer to part **(b)** depended upon the way part **(a)** was answered and this was reflected in the scripts. The two themes chosen should have been correctly identified so that candidates could give explanations of the significance. For all the three themes, there are definite points of relevance for Islam and other religious communities (for example, after the first experience in the Cave, the Prophet sought advice from Waraqah Ibn Naufal, a Christian and al-Najashi, a Christian, had a role during the migration to Abyssinia).

Question 3

Explain why the Caliph 'Ali was compelled to fight against
(a) **Talha and Zubayr**
(b) **Mu'awiya.**

This question was relatively popular and many candidates did well. In each section, candidates were expected to cite specific reasons why the conflicts with 'Ali occurred. In both cases the main issue was on the challenging problem of 'Uthman's assassination and many made some very interesting comments. Candidates needed to use arguments to support their points.

In part **(a)**, the point that the conflict brought to the fore the rivalries and disagreements in the first community was very important. Again, candidates needed to see the conflict as pointing to the fact that no matter how committed and pious the early Muslims were, they were 'normal' human beings whose judgement was sometimes mistaken.

In part **(b)**, the possibility of the self-interest of the various parties involved in the conflict needed to be raised for high marks. However, the effect on the core principles of the faith were either nil or very minimal.

Question 4

(a) **Describe the part played by Zayd ibn Thabit in the process of compiling the Qur'an.**
(b) **Explain the differences between the revelations delivered in Mecca and Medina.**

Part **(a)** of this question was very popular even though part **(b)** proved to be a challenge. It was important to show evidence of good background understanding as to the historical development of the Qur'an.

For part **(a)** most candidates wrote extensively. For higher marks the question of the consequences if Zayd had not been methodical in his work needed to be addressed.

In part **(b)** focus on the structure and themes of the passages was needed. Specific references to the text of the Qur'an were needed for the highest marks. Some candidates pointed out the fact that there could be passages revealed in Mecca in the later period of the revelation but classified as Medinan, therefore, it is better to describe the Meccan and Medinan revelations as pre-Hijrah and post-Hijrah respectively.

Some candidates read the question as meaning the way revelations were received in Medina as compared to Mecca. They focused on the status of the Prophet in Mecca and Medina often adding that while in the former, he was scared, afraid and worked in secret, in the latter, he was bold, open and free to speak.

Question 5

How do the experiences of the prophet Moses as they are recounted in Surat al-qasas (ch 28 of the Qur'an) relate to the experiences of the Prophet Muhammad?

This question needed a close familiarity with the relevant surah (Surah 28). Good detail led to the comparison. That is perhaps why the question was not popular. The question demands reference to the biographical details of the two prophets, their religious experiences, the way they settled among peoples outside their native homes, the revelations they received and the protection God gave them.

Question 6

Why do many Muslims attach as much importance to memorising the Qur'an as to studying its meaning?

Most of the candidates who attempted this question did very well providing some interesting details. Candidates needed to explain the central place of the meaning of the Qur'an in the lives of Muslims. However, memorization is also significant for every Muslim since parts of it are needed in daily prayers and rituals. Some candidates add that even for those who do not understand the meaning, the attempt to memorize a few surahs for their own use was important. In this case, the Qur'an becomes 'personalised' as if God is speaking to the individual Muslim and then the Qur'an is not alien to them. There are also traditional teachings about the rewards one receives when one memorizes the Qur'an.

Question 7

In what ways do the observances of prayer (*salat*), almsgiving (*zakat*) and fasting (*sawm*) strengthen ties within the Muslim community?

This was a very popular question and those who attempted it did well. Many candidates provided excellent details.

Some candidates were able to describe how these rituals enable Muslims to see themselves as one and in solidarity with each other. The format of *salat* the way people stand, the meaning and significance of *zakat* and how it shows a form of 'redistribution of financial resources' to help the poor and the needy in society were some of the points made. With fasting (*sawm*), there is evidence of unity and solidarity in the way everyone, both rich and poor keep the fast, the behaviour during *Tarawih*, *I'tikaf* and the payment of *Zakat al-Fitr* confirm the thrust of the question. The candidates were expected to point out the 'perception' on both sides of the argument.

Question 8

How do the various ceremonies carried out each year in the Islamic world remind Muslims of the life and example of the prophet Abraham?

This question was attempted by many candidates looking from various perspectives. The question demands focus on the annual Hajj and the *Id al-Adha* ceremony. This was not a question about the celebration of *Id al-Fitr* and *Id al-Adha*, to gain high marks there had to be proper links with Abraham.

The question does not ask for the biography of Abraham. Mention should be made of the historical link between Abraham and his son Ismail and the Ka'ba. The ritual of running between Safa and Marwa and the link to Hagar, the *Maqam al-Ibrahim,* the Zamzam and the 'stoning of Satan' could all have been mentioned. The *Id al-Adha* (and the link with the story of the attempted sacrifice of Ismail) completes the picture.

Question 9

In the Qur'an the Prophet Muhammad is given the title 'seal of the prophets'. Explain the meaning and the significance of this title.

A good answer depended upon a proper understanding of the title 'seal of the prophets'. Answers needed to make comments on God's communication with humankind from the beginning of history, the corruption of the messages by earlier people and how the Prophet Muhammad came to provide the ultimate message which then becomes the final.

An explanation of the nature of a seal was needed for high marks. Further, even though the expression itself is taken from Surat al-Ahzab (33:40), other passages like those found in 33:21 and 21:107 would have improved answers.

Question 10

In what main ways have Muslim legal experts made use of the Prophet Muhammad's Sunnah in order to interpret the Qur'an?

This question was also popular and many of the candidates who attempted it did well. Many candidates defined Sunnah and explained its relationship to the Qur'an. They then went on to give examples from the general day to day life of a Muslim. Excellent answers were expected to explain how the Sunnah came to be recognised as a source of authority in addition to the Qur'an. Such answers would include Qur'anic references on the status of the Prophet as an Exemplar (33:21), a Guiding Lamp (33:45-46) and the One to explain the Qur'an (3:164).

Question 11

Why was it thought necessary to make use of consensus (*ijma'*) and analogy (*qiyas*) by early Muslim legal experts?

This question was not very popular. The question is not asking for a descriptive answer but an explanatory one. This will include first, identification of the two sources, their role in the legal structures of Islam and the reasons why their usage was considered necessary.

The best answers explained that their usage shows the universality and flexibility of Islamic Law. Specific examples of situations in which the two are employed then completed the discussion.

Question 12

In a rapidly changing world, can the Qur'an continue to form the basis of belief and action in the Muslim community?

Many candidates attempted this question. Candidates are always encouraged to consider the wider implication of such questions. Hence, this question calls for a discussion on the relevance of the Qur'an in contemporary times. The question is not about how the Qur'an could be made relevant to changing circumstances and hence practical examples in the use of *qiyas* and *ijma'* are of little or no significance here.

Better answers could include references to the attitudes of particular movements or groups within Muslim societies and point out the inherent problems in these societies, within the contemporary world, where Muslims have to practice their faith within communities that might not be Islamic.

ISLAMIC STUDIES

| Paper 9013/02 |
| Paper 2 |

General comments

The standard of questions was similar to previous years. Candidates found **Questions 2** and **3** somewhat more difficult, as well as **Question 6**. Few candidates attempted **Questions 9** and **10**. Those candidates who did choose to answer them made reasonable attempts. **Questions 11** and **12**, addressing modern day issues, once again proved to be the most popular on the paper.

The overall performance of candidates this year was good. Answers were generally well constructed and conclusions given. Candidates need to evaluate material and address the particular question set, rather than repeating facts about a topic.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a)   Trace the main events through which Mu'awiya obtained and secured his position as caliph of the Islamic state.
(b)   Explain how his position as caliph differed from that of his predecessors.

This was a popular question that was well answered. Most candidates had accurately learned the details of Mu'awiya's rise to the Caliphate and could expand on them in their essays. Candidates are reminded of the need to discuss the terms of reference of the question to achieve the highest marks, particularly in part **(b)**. For example, candidates might discuss how far Mu'awiya could claim closeness to the Prophet and religious authority.

Question 2

How did the early 'Abbasid caliphs justify in religious terms their overthrow of the Umayyads?

Few attempted this question and those who did found it challenging. This question invited a comparison of the early 'Abbasid's to the later Umayyads. The very best responses might challenge the question.

Question 3

Harun al-Rashid is often regarded as the greatest of the 'Abbasid caliphs. Give reasons to agree or disagree with this view.

Very few candidates attempted this question, those who did wrote good answers. The best answers contain comparison between Harun al-Rashid and his rivals for this title, with clear reasoning.

Question 4

What are the main differences in the methods employed by the founders of the four Sunni schools of law?

This proved a popular question and was very well answered. Many candidates were able to draw similarities between the madhhabs as well as draw important distinctions in depth.

Question 5

(a) **Write an account of the methods used by al-Bukhari to ensure the Hadiths he collected were authentic.**

(b) **Why was it thought important to ensure the Hadiths were authentic?**

For a good answer, both historical details about the collecting of the Hadiths as well as a comprehensive evaluation of methods of collection were required.

Question 6

(a) **Write an account of the Mu'tazili principle of divine justice (*'adl*).**

(b) **Explain how it conflicted with earlier views which stressed that God was all-powerful.**

It should be noted that the focus of the question was Mu'tazila teaching about judgement, not Mu'tazila teachings in general. The best answers were able to demonstrate sufficient understanding of this specific aspect of Mu'tazila theology to expand and explain it as well as how it differed from mainstream beliefs.

Question 7

Why was the position of Imam so powerful for early Shi'i Muslims?

Many answers showed an improved understanding of this topic from previous years. It should be noted that the focus of the question was on Imams and the best answers compared and contrasted the role of both Sunni and Shi'i Imams.

Question 8

(a) **What are the main teachings of al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* ('Revival of the Religious Sciences')?**

(b) **How would you defend or reject the view that this book is one of the most important Islamic religious texts ever written?**

Of those who answered, some gave reasonable responses evidenced with details from the text referred to, the *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* ('Revival of the Religious Sciences'). It was expected that candidates should have some knowledge of this specific work so should be able to respond in sufficient depth.

Question 9

How far can Islamic philosophy be accepted by Muslims as a means of explaining the truth about God and the world?

The few candidates who chose this question made reasonable attempts at answering it. The confusion between Sufism and philosophy seems to have virtually disappeared. Note that the question addressed specifically this aspect of Islamic 'philosophy', not just philosophy in general, and the best answers were rooted specifically in an historical context and defined exactly what philosophy meant to Muslims at the time as opposed to others (such as Classical Greek philosophers).

Question 10

Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Iqbal were both of Indian origin, but their Islamic thought contains major differences. Examine these differences.

Few candidates answered this question but those who did made some very strong responses, with good comparisons between the two leaders. These answers were well referenced in historical detail.

Question 11

(a) **Outline the main teachings of the Qur'an about women.**
(b) **How far can these teachings be reconciled with the position of women in present day societies?**

For part (a) it should be noted that the question asked for details about the position of women in the Qur'an – so specific references were required. Some candidates wrote about the position of women in Islam in general, but the better responses included quotations from the Qur'an and explanations about what they mean in relation to the question. Part **(b)** was well answered. It should be noted that many candidates chose to debate several different lines of argument and followed up evidence for each one, before reaching their own conclusion, and this was exactly what is required of a good answer at this level.

Question 12

What are the main challenges that face Muslims who live as minority communities in wider societies? (Focus your answer on one or two countries that you know.)

This was generally very well answered and many candidates responded with balanced arguments about challenges as well as benefits that Muslims encountered. Basic responses tended to include general perceptions, but more sophisticated arguments were developed where candidates referred accurately to a wide range of specific examples, and took care to ensure their statements were factually correct.