

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in Islamiyat (4IS0/01)

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The Examination.

1.1. Entry: Approximately a thousand students entered this examination, nearly two hundred of which were “home” or “new” centres, i.e., those based in the U.K., maintaining and increasing the gains of 2013. The present picture is therefore satisfactory; it seems that this is an appropriate time to build on that progress by finding ways in which the future potential could be exploited further. One such way might be to investigate why Shi’ah students constantly fail to enter this examination.

1.2. The Question Paper: The specification sets out the assessment objectives and weightings. The Question Paper is designed to test the level of the knowledge and understanding of the candidates, together with their competence in evaluating the material in the context of Islam. The 2014 Question Paper appears to fulfil that intention.

1.3. Performance: For the second successive year UK candidates were less confident in their handling of Section One than overseas candidates. Some were unable to write out the Surahs, let alone answer the questions. Generally overseas candidates pick up very useful marks here, thus subsidizing the somewhat weaker level of response (where it exists) to the essay questions.

1.4. The 2014 cohort demonstrated similar ability to their counterparts in 2013. In simple terms this means that the performance of some reached a high level of competence and excellence. Examples will be seen at various points in the body of this report.

Note, however, the *caveat* at the report’s conclusion.

1.5. Presentation: Although a few candidates seemed to think that the blank pages of the Question Paper were there to be written on and the addition of supplementary sheets left examiners thoroughly confused, on the whole the majority wrote neatly, clearly and with accurate spelling. In other words, a longstanding tradition of this paper was maintained. Students deserve praise for their efforts.

2. Report on candidates' responses – Section 1: The Qur'an and Hadith

The translations presented no serious problems, although they were not attempted by some weaker or "new" candidates.

2.1. Question 1 (a)(ii) Example of kindness: Interesting examples included smiling at someone, picking up a stone from someone's pathway and helping an elderly person to cross a road. Vague examples like zakah, sadaqah or just helping were not accepted.

2.2. Question 1 (a)(iii): Hypocrisy: Most linked to the concept of kaffir and limiting their answer to Muslims, instead of stating the general mantra "saying one thing and then doing another".

2.3. Question 1 (a)(iv): Some correctly identified Allah's merciful character; a minority gave vague alternatives.

2.4. Question 1 (b)(i): Most had the "knots" version but gave generally good translations.

2.5. Question 1 (b)(ii): Many stopped at "protection" instead of defining the passage as "a surah requesting protection from external factors".

2.6. Question 1 (b) (iii): A significant number wrote vaguely "because it is forbidden in Islam" but there were some good answers as well.

2.7. Question 1 (b) (iv): Not well done by many with just a reference to light and darkness without any interpretation or link with the Guide to Goodness.

2.8. Question 2 (a)(ii): Some had the “go to war” version of Jihad rather than the continuing battle against inner evil.

2.9. Question 2 (a)(iii): This was not well done – “last resort” did not appear, whereas “defence of Islam”, “fighting enemies” or “dying as a martyr” did. “Fighting as a last resort” is an important teaching point (see 6.2.)

2.10. Question 2 (b)(ii): Surprisingly few identified the Qur’an as “the cable of Allah”.

2.11. Question 2 (b)(iii): Some vague answers included “practice religion together”, but a good number did suggest “staying strong”, “brotherhood” and “the reputation of Islam”.

2.12. Question 2 (c)(ii): Another surprising unknown – “a jinn” or “a being made of fire” were suggested but inaccurate alternatives.

2.13. Question 2 (c)(iii): Not all got “lack of faith in Allah” (or Shirk) but many did.

2.14. Question 3 (a)(ii): Reference to rivers (of honey, milk, etc.) was popular.

2.15. Question 3 (a)(iii): Many (correctly) linked with prayer, fasting and generally doing good.

2.16. Question 3 (b)(ii): Most candidates gave an incomplete answer, leaving out the reference to “future testimony unaccepted”.

2.17 Question 3 (b)(iii): Not well-answered; some limited response to a woman's reputation, others to the outcome of "burning in hell fire". What was required was a reference to trust.

2.18 Question 3 (c)(ii): Instead of "the names" a few produced the apple incident but a significant number answered accurately.

2.19 Question 3 (c)(iii): Some correctly noted the links with equality of educational opportunity, the right to be educated and sexual equality, but a few mentioned woman as the homemaker, needing to "know" how to bring up her children in the faith: such answers gained no marks.

The point is again worth making that candidates of moderate ability may "subsidise" their total mark by answering these one-sentence answers accurately. Some "new" centres need to learn this lesson. A total of 20+ for Section One will see a candidate well on the way to a respectable grade. See 6.1.

3. Report on candidates' responses – Section 2: The Life, Teaching and Achievements of the Prophet

3.1. Question 4 (a): An extremely popular question with a good many gaining full marks on this part. Weakest answers concerned Bahira, who was variously described as Waraqah, “she” (a servant) and the Prophet’s wife. Those making this kind of mistake lost marks on part (b) as well, as they could not then explain correctly the influence on the Prophet of these people. On the other hand, if accurate (a) material appeared in (b), a measure of cross-marking and the obtaining of transferred marks was allowed.

3.2. Question 4 (b): The question of how the Prophet’s early years influenced his later years led to a succession of vague answers. Generally the best suggestions related to Abu Talib, the Prophet’s uncle. Suggestions about the influence of Halima sometimes were restricted to “a mother’s love”, while Bahira’s influence was limited to the material concerning him in (a). It is worth pointing out here that 4(a) and 4(b) are good examples of the value of reading the question carefully. Here we have a connection between the Prophet’s early years and his later years. Candidates who spotted this connection gained the best marks. See 6.1.

3.3. Question 4 (c): This part of the Question was not tackled well by the majority. Often only minor illustrations, such as “doing the household chores”, examples of correct items of dress or the right way to brush one’s teeth were given. Nor were there any sound links with “today”, a key word in this section. Care of the poor, women’s rights and (the pride of present-day Muslims) just behaviour, were totally overlooked by many.

Question 5 (a): Another popular question, many writing full and accurate accounts of the assistance provided by Abu Bakr. Some wrote in detail about Ali's return of the Prophet's belongings, traditionally correct but not relevant here. See the Question!

3.5. Question 5 (b): Some candidates struggled with the "breaking of ties" concept: they concentrated on the start of the Muslim calendar and then went on to detailed descriptions of life in Madinah. Only a minority commented on the contrast between the persecuted messenger of Allah and the respected ruler of a new state: those that did were able to provide colourful descriptions and earn good marks.

3.6. Question 5 (c): Many answers to this part were disappointingly limited in scope. Unity and brotherhood, the Five Pillars (especially prayer and pilgrimage) were given due emphasis, but the wider, more sophisticated features of the Ummah, were disregarded. A broad picture, based upon key concepts, such as the Ummah's extension across nations and class, earned the highest marks.

3.7. Question 6 (a): Here much was made of the events surrounding Abu Sufyan's caravan; from that description, many accounts moved on to a very brief rendering of the battle of Badr itself – for example, the contrasting numbers of the participants and the outcome – a victory for the Muslims were all that many could muster. Details such as the lack of protective armour, the wells, the rainy conditions, the single combat, the flight of the Quraysh, the numbers of dead and those taken prisoner, were all ignored! In addition, very few attempted to explain why Badr was called "the first battle in the Jihad". (See the Mark Scheme)

3.8. Question 6 (b): Here, some used other battles – e.g., Uhud, the Fosse and the conquest of Makkah – but Badr, of course, was meant. Those who mentioned the presence of a thousand angels lost the important point of a small, faithful force defeating a large army; what the text meant was an illustration of the Prophet’s call to arms, viz., “Don’t be afraid; Allah’s power is with us; we are fighting for righteousness and justice; a thousand of Allah’s angels (metaphorically speaking, not literally) are on our side.” However, the majority answered part (b) well, quite a number scoring full marks.

3.9. Question 6 (c): Some good answers successfully linked the past with the present by highlighting how events such as Badr can evoke pride in one’s history, encourage one to overcome persecution by following the Prophet’s example and to find strength to face the future through faith in Allah. It is worth noting that even good students performed better on parts (b) and (c) than on (a) – an unusual phenomenon! As a result they were able to pull up their marks on this question to a total of nine or ten – fairly respectable.

4. Report on candidates' responses – Section 3 (A) (for Sunni students)

4.1. Question 7 (a): Another popular question; some knew the Qur'anic references well and were able to produce most of the relevant ones for both the power and the mercy of Allah; others stayed simply with creation and forgiveness but achieved at least half-marks.

4.2. Question 7 (b): Unsurprisingly the vast majority were able to state some clear points, such as reference to the First Pillar of Islam and the resulting influence on a Muslim's behavior. The majority also made reference to Shirk.

4.3. Question 7 (c): Instead of the sympathetic stance which one might have expected (and indeed what was intended by the word "help"), many understood this question as a rallying-cry in support of Islam. These candidates advocated not mixing with non-Muslims unless it was to convert them, which was not what the question meant. The more appreciative candidates stated that Allah has declared that "there is no compulsion in religion". A majority of Muslims tolerate what others believe and try to find common ground. Thoughtful candidates developed these concepts well.

4.4. Question 8 (a): This initial question required a simple definition covering the key points that zakah is paid by the rich (and) annually. Most scored at least one of the two marks on offer but a few just wrote of the nisab rule or 2.5%.

4.5. Question 8 (b): This question was often well-answered with reference to mosque collections, boxes and government levies through bank accounts.

4.6. Question 8 (c): Most did well on this question but not as much in some cases on how the poor benefited, apart from having their basic needs met. The point about zakah uniting rich and poor could apply to either or both. The best candidates included references to selfishness and sacrifice, two concepts closely linked within this subject.

4.7. Question 8 (d): There were some excellent answers to this question; others misunderstood the quotation and so wrote a page of irrelevance; yet again others did not understand (or notice) the word “challenge”, which implied disagreement with the statement. Thus the correct line was to reason that true giving is obligatory as it is a duty to Allah, expressing obedience to His commands. Another point worth mentioning might be that leaving the matter to conscience may result in contributions to poor relief diminishing in value, as selfishness may be encouraged. Sensitivity to the needs of the poor may be lost in the wish to satisfy one’s own desires. An examining of such ideas, with appropriate development, need not be feared, even by candidates of relatively modest ability.

Question 9 (a)(i): Ijma – most knew this and gave an accurate definition, supported by examples from the Prophet’s time, e.g., the appointment of the First Khalifah or the extra prayer.

4.8. Question 9 (a)(ii) : Qiyas – some good answers with relevant examples – often more than one example given in detail, yet without earning the full three marks for the definition. Some used a whole page writing on two definitions.

4.9. Question 9 (b): Some repetitive writing here without any reference to Allah or the Prophet but equally there were some very good responses linking in with Paradise and an overall commitment to belief. The caring society, in many shapes and forms, frequently came across.

4.9.Question 9(c): Most answers concentrated on the reasons why public justice should be favoured and mainly the deterrent argument was used. There were some detailed descriptions of the punishments and the need to suffer for crimes committed. In this day and age, however, the argument concerning private justice might be more relevant, for (as the Mark Scheme notes) secret justice allows the possibility of inhumane treatment and torture. So some very good discussions concerning justice being seen to be done ensued.

5. Report on candidates' responses – Section 3 (B) (for Shi'ah students)

5.1. Three or four candidates from one centre attempted these questions, but as they were additional to responses to questions 7-9, the better of these two sections was taken.

Very limited answers to (it would seem) very interesting questions!

6. General Remarks

6.1. Reading the Question

It is with a degree of reluctance that one returns to this topic. A year ago its importance was stressed by placing it first in this section. Either some pupils were never informed or the matter was overlooked – or a third reason may apply - but the fact remains that in many cases it appears that reading the question occasionally occurred casually or hastily (at least without due care and attention), so that the main point was missed or irrelevant material worth no marks followed. Let us refer to some examples mentioned in the body of this report. First, Question 4. Part (a) specifically refers to “the Prophet’s early years”, while in 4(b) the question (again specifically) refers to “the Prophet in his later years”. When this question was set the words just quoted were carefully chosen. Yet many ignored the link. The Mark Scheme reinforces the point, e.g., “His infant years were blessed with a healthy climate (i.e. early years)/ gave him the physical strength to face up to his sufferings (i.e. later years).” The Mark Scheme suggests two further examples. In the majority of answers, the connection was not made. In 5(a) candidates ignored the words “the Prophet’s escape from Makkah”, persisting in writing about the return of his belongings – IRRELEVANT! In Question 7(c) the key word was “help”, which should have led to some interesting discussion of the possible friendship between Muslim and non-Muslim. The word was ignored, with the consequential lack of sympathy for one’s non-Muslim neighbour. There were some excellent responses to Question 8(d), but only because the candidates were alert to the words of the quotation and question. The key word of the question was “challenge”, at once pointing out to the careful

reader that Muslims would be bound to disagree with the quotation – and why. Some apparently did not read the question carefully enough, resulting in a page (or two) of irrelevant writing.

So the message to teachers is to renew their efforts to train their students to develop good examination habits and to encourage them to use their time sparingly and meticulously.

6.2. Teaching Points:

While on the subject of teachers, the last thing one would wish to do would be to criticize the fine work they do. The appearance of many new candidates from various “home” centres, however, introduces a different kind of response from those one is used to receiving from overseas. It may be helpful to teachers to be made aware of some weaknesses in the work of the new entrant which need to be addressed. One important example refers to Section One, which, when done well, significantly contributes to the total score of the script. It seems that many British students are less confident with Section One, missing all or most of the translations.

Teachers should be aware of this simple fact, so that they can take action to “mind the gap”. Furthermore, the subject of Jihad needs clarifying – the difference between the lesser and greater Jihad and the important reminder that Muslims might be prepared in certain circumstances to go to war but only as a last resort (this in contrast to those who adopted a more aggressive stance). To reason through an argument or statement is a skill which students new to this paper will need guidance from their teachers. Question 5(c), for example, concerning the Ummah, is a case in point. Here is an all-embracing subject about which a concise list of reasons will

produce good marks. But the approach to such subjects requires certain skills, the understanding of which depends on learned members of their profession. No doubt Islamiyat candidates will be pleased to know and learn from them.

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