ISLAMIC STUDIES

Paper 8053/01
Paper 1

General comments

Overall, this year's performance was in-line with that of previous years. The issue of answers being in bullet points seems to have been addressed. However, there is still evidence that some candidates do not take either time to read the questions properly or are not able to manage their time efficiently to be able to cover all aspects of every question adequately. This is an essential part of the examination process and needs to be addressed.

In many papers the conclusions to the answers did not reflect the tone of the question. It is important that candidates are able to conclude their answers properly in order to wrap up the discussion adequately. This, of course, depends upon candidates' reading of the question. The conclusion needs to reflect the thrust of the question for the answer to attain top levels.

In some cases, some parts of questions were left without responses. Even though the numbers involved are not statistically significant to be a cause for concern, attention has to be drawn to it.

There has been a remarkable improvement on the subject of citing passages from the Hadith and Qur'an to support discussions. Many candidates showed a good insight into relevant references especially from the Qur'an.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This was one of the most popular questions and many candidates achieved the higher levels. The question needed precise answers for each of the sections with detailed information. A number of candidates were able to tackle parts **(a)** and **(b)**, but **(c)** and **(d)** proved challenging.

(a) Most of the candidates were able to give very capable answers, showing they had studied the texts and understood what was expected.

(b) This section was also well answered. Most candidates were able to give very informative answers with names of the main deities identified.

(c) For this question it was important that the Hanifs were identified correctly. Some answers said they were 'idol worshippers', and this confusion affected the levels given.

(d) It is important to read the questions carefully. This question is an example of where candidates had different understandings of what 'the wider world' referred to. Some candidates interpreted 'the wider world' to mean 'leading a worldly life' and went on to describe how wayward and frivolous the pre-Islamic Arabs were. Others understood the expression to mean 'the hereafter' and went on to discuss their disbelief in the next world. Yet others read it as 'our contemporary world' and compared the situation then and now. Candidates needed to write about the links the pre-Islamic Arabs had with other societies.

Question 2

(a)   Many candidates recalled the battles very well and hence were able to provide some good answers with the relevant dates and names of people involved.

(b)   The question is asking for a discussion of how the results of these battles helped raise the profile of the Prophet and the Muslims and how this led to improvements in their relationship with the Quraysh and the other tribes. Further, it was expecting candidates to reflect on how this also led to the heightening of Muslim belief in God and His Prophet and their adherence to Islam. This part of the question was not answered as well as the **(a)** part.

Question 3

(a)   This question was also very popular and attracted some very interesting answers. Many candidates were able to give details of Abu Bakr's reign and the activities that led to him being called 'The Saviour of Islam'. Many were able to mention points like: his eulogy at the death of the Prophet; wars against the false prophets; the apostasy wars; sending young 'Usama into battle to fulfil the wishes of the Prophet, and the collection of the Qur'an. Most of the answers addressed the salient features of the question with relevant names and activities.

(b)   The main issues for this question included: the traditional rivalry between the 'Umayyads and the Hashimites which was rekindled and, fanned by interest groups; the alleged nepotism; and the activities of Ibn Sabah who was alleged to have become a Muslim merely to cause trouble from within. As with **question 2 (b)**, this part of the question was less well done.

Section B

Question 4

For this question it was important to focus on the 'ways' the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet. The context of revelation has a place but is not the focus. Hence, the way the experience of revelation 'affected' the Prophet's mood, personality and his general body conditions should have received greater attention. Most of those who attempted it did very well and in addition, were able to describe the latter point giving examples and statements from the Hadith as support. There were some excellent answers giving very good details.

Question 5

This question looks for a discussion on the whole concept of prophethood/messengerhood in the Qur'an, providing examples. It also demands a clear demonstration as to how the earlier prophets sent by God were all meant to lead the way to the final one, Muhammad. Candidates were expected to explain how the earlier messages were all part of the divine design and the same messages were reiterated by the Prophet Muhammad. This is why the Qur'an keeps referring to itself as a 'Reminder', and the same expression is used for the Prophet Muhammad. Prophets such as Musa, Ibrahim, Da'ud, and Isa were expected to be identified and the essence of their message explained and linked to the Prophet Muhammad. Many candidates just referred to Muhammad.

Question 6

The question demands that candidates show how the Qur'an could be 'divided' into three with *Surah al-Ikhlas* covering one of them, not just a commentary on the surah. A few candidates were able to give some very interesting answers and achieved the higher levels. Some were able to divide the Qur'an into three covering: *Tawhid, Risalah* and *Akhirah.* They then drew out the main theme of the surah being Tawhid and explained the link. The core Hadith of the Prophet on the subject was also mentioned and worked into the discussion of some answers. Another group of candidates made the division as: *Tawhid, Risalah* and *Mua'malat* and hence used this to explain how the surah could be considered as a third of the Qur'an.

Section C

Question 7

This, again, was among the very popular questions and many candidates who attempted it did very well. The question asks for a discussion of each of the Five Pillars of Islam explaining how they enable a believer to have a closer relationship with God. The key is to look at the issue of obedience and how this enables the observance of each of the pillars to lead to the pleasure of God and hence a more positive relationship. Many answers did not touch on the issue of obedience adequately. Some merely described the Five Pillars without linking their discussion to how one is brought close to God. For *Salat*, candidates could have pointed out the effect of s*ujjud* on one's relationship with God and saying the *talbiyyah* during *Hajj*.

Question 8

(a) This question asks for a description of how the *Jum'ah* prayers and *'Id al-Adha* are celebrated. The description is expected to be precise and accurate. Many candidates gave basic information about both without going into details. Many candidates pointed out that women were prohibited from the *Jum'ah* prayers and the prayers of *'Id al- Adha* as well. It seems because in many Muslim cultures women do not routinely pray in the mosque, this was reflected in many answers. Very often, the descriptions were simplistic without much detail. Candidates could have included: the rationale behind the two *rakaat* for *Jum'ah* prayers instead of the normal four for *Dhuhr;* the essence of the *Khutbah;* the timing for the *Khutbah* and so on.

(b) Here, answers could have included the origins of the celebration, its connection to Ibrahim and his son Isma'il and also with *Hajj*. Comments on, for example, the celebration showing obedience to the command of God, the universality of the Islamic message, the show of unity, and joy for the poor and the needy, with references from the Qur'an in support, were expected.

Question 9

This was one of the least popular questions.

(a) Many interpreted 'earlier revelations' to mean revelations to the Prophet Muhammad in Makkah as against those revealed in Madinah. This understanding, in some cases, had an effect on **part (b)**. The question is asking candidates to identify the main revelations given before the Qur'an and explain how they functioned as signs for the eventual advent of the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an. Candidates could mention Ibrahim's *Suhuf,* Da'ud's *Zabur*, Musa's *Torah* and Isa's *Injil.* Reference to the way the Qur'an calls itself to agree with this understanding was expected for the higher levels. Expressions such as 'Reminder' (*Dhikr*) and confirmation of what has already been given (*Musaddiqa lima bayna yadayhi*) fit into this description.

(b) In this part, the effect of the wrong reading of part **(a)** was very clear. For many therefore they were describing the Qur'an and what it means to Muslims. It was expected that candidates would describe the character, specific traits and functions of these earlier revelations within their communities leading on to the finality of the Prophet and the Qur'an. For the highest levels it was expected that answers might suggest that since all these revelations came from the same source, God, they attested to the same divine truth.

Section D

Question 10

This question was not very popular.

(a) The question asks for a descriptive account of what *ijtihad* is and how it works in practice giving examples to support the answer. The answer could then have moved on to comment about the essential qualifications of a *mujtahid,* the main sources of his/her deliberations and the circumstances within which he/she exercises this role in the legal context. Candidates could also have written about situations in which *ijtihad* becomes necessary and the limitations in exercising it. Excellent answers could have included the call for *ijtihad* in various parts of the Muslim world and how appropriate these calls are.

(b)   This part demands an evaluation of the whole institution of *ijtihad* and explaining why some people question its efficacy in Muslim legal matters. Candidates could have written about possible subjectivity, partiality, influence by the environment and inconsistencies with the revealed texts, leading to disunity in the Muslim world. Excellent candidates could raise the issue of the applicability of the Qur'an and Sunnah in new situations and the danger of unqualified people seeing themselves as experts and distorting the message of Islam.

Question 11

Many candidates found it difficult to give an adequate description of what the Sunnah is and how it is used in establishing legal teachings. The question expects candidates to give a good account of the role of the Sunnah in legal practice as a means of interpreting the teachings of the Qur'an. Many of those who attempted this question gave basic examples on day to day practicalities of Islam especially with regard to how the Sunnah enables a Muslim to understand fully how these are to be carried out. However, the question expects candidates to go beyond these simple examples and look at real legal issues such as inheritance, marriage and divorce, relationships with other people/faiths, financial transactions, and war and peace. To reach the higher levels candidates needed to write a comprehensive discussion on the Sunnah as the model for Muslims to follow with Qur'anic passages in support.

Question 12

This question allowed candidates to be 'creative'. It is the level of 'creativity' and not necessarily the real historical experiences that enabled candidates to reach the higher levels. Candidates were thus expected to stick to the line of the question and raise four examples and discuss them fully. Many candidates gave very general answers without specifying to whom they refer as the question demands.