

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/07 Summer 2023 series

Contents

Introduction	3
Paper 7 series overview	4
Question 1 (a)	5
Question 1 (b)	5
Question 1 (c)	6
Question 1 (d)	7
Question 2 (a)	7
Question 2 (b)	8
Question 2 (c)	8
Question 2 (d)	10
Question 3 (a)	10
Question 3 (b)	11
Question 3 (c)	12
Question 3 (d)*	13
Question 4 (a)	17
Question 4 (b)	18
Question 4 (c)	18
Question 4 (d)*	19

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 answers 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.

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Paper 7 series overview

Candidates studied four main areas and were assessed by a compulsory question on each area, each following the same four-part structure.

Overall, the standard was comparable to 2022. There was an increased entry from a greater number of centres this year.

Candidates overall tried hard and there appeared to be a greater number who answered all questions and completed the paper; this had been an issue last year.

There was evidence that candidates had been well taught and had a good background in the topics under consideration. This was not always translated into higher marks for particular questions, because some candidates did not respond according to the Assessment Objective (AO) or directly answer the question set. Understanding the requirements of the question is frequently an area which candidates could improve on, and this year was no exception.

This year's topics included a wide range, from civil partnerships, men and women's roles, visions as a form of religious experience, the duty of Khalifah, reconciliation and forgiveness, views about what Allah is like, different attitudes towards violence to achieve peace and the basis of Muslim values.

It was evident that candidates knew something about every topic so they had been comprehensively taught, of which centres should be complemented. The priority for many will be to understand and address the demands of specific questions set.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • made an attempt to answer all questions: there was a notable improvement on last year, and most candidates wrote something for every question on the paper • showed good understanding and use of the specialist vocabulary, and there were very few candidates who could not access questions due to lack of understanding of key words from the specification • referred to sources of wisdom and authority, such as the Qur'an, Hadith, Muhammad's sayings and actions, teachings from Imams and scholars, and Islamic traditions commonly seen as an authority by communities • attempted to refer to different points of view in part (d) questions: even if the effectiveness of arguments made varied, most candidates tried hard to distinguish different perspectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responded to part (c) questions with explanations suitable for AO2 questions; many gave descriptions more relevant to AO1 part (b) type questions • responded with a single view in part (c) questions when the question specifically asked for different views • made a judgement or personal conclusion in part (d) responses: this often came at the end when made although it did not have to, but in many responses there was no evaluative judgement and instead just a recognition that different views existed which commonly held responses at Level 2 • did not understand some key concepts or topics such as values, visions or the role of Christianity in Britain today, as required by particular questions.

Question 1 (a)

1 Relationships and families

(a) Describe **one** Muslim teaching about contraception.

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..... [3]

This question was very well answered. Many wrote that contraception was permitted provided that it was not permanent and was carried out within marriage for reasons such as to avoid ill health of the mother or to avoid poverty by having a large family. This question was about one teaching which could be made by any Muslim or Muslim group, it did not have to be a universally agreed on teaching, so those which some Muslims might agree with were given marks.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Describe different Muslim attitudes towards civil partnerships.

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..... [6]

Most candidates mistook civil partnership for gay marriage. While they are often considered together, they are two different things, and there are people who may have civil partnerships for other legal reasons. It was still valid for candidates to include Muslim attitudes which suggested that marriage should be prioritised, and referred to the tradition that marriage is 'half of faith', according to a Hadith tradition. Some candidates noted that there were Muslims who took the attitude that as civil partnerships were permitted and agreed on under the law of the land, they should also be welcomed by Muslims and culturally accepted.

Exemplar 1

There are many different views about what Allah is like as some Muslims take the word of Allah and hadiths literal whereas others interpret it like a metaphor. An example of this is when it is said Allah created Adam from his own hands. Many Muslims look at this and they believe it is meant that Allah has hands and he created Adam with it however others believe that it is a metaphor ~~and~~ and we shouldn't take it too literal.

This question did not ask for description, but for explanation of why there are differences between different Muslim views about what Allah is like. This response is placed in Level 2 because it offers a clear explanation: because some Muslims take the Qur'an and hadiths literally and others metaphorically. This also refers to sources of wisdom and authority by mentioning the texts, and this is further added to with reference to the 'hands' of God. This might be taken further and differences between schools of thought mentioned. A few candidates noted that some rejected literal descriptions of Allah, such as the Mu'tazilah, because they believed Allah has to be totally separate from anything which could be seen to have human form. Further elaboration might help this move into Level 3, or perhaps taking a different approach such as those Muslims who might focus on different characteristics of God, ranging from immanent to transcendent. Importantly, the candidate could point out the focus or experience in their worship, not just to describe Allah, as marks here are for explanation.

Assessment for learning



Part (c) questions are marked according to AO2, and the command word given is 'explain'. This means that descriptions of knowledge do not gain marks here. Many candidates wrote lengthy descriptions of what Allah is like, but could have achieved more marks by focusing on the explanations of reasons why there are different views about what Allah is like.

Question 2 (d)

(d) 'The most important duty for Muslims today is to act as Khalifah (custodians/stewards) of the world.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam.
- Explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. **[15]**

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar **[3]**

This question was very well answered. Most candidates wrote about the importance of looking after Allah's world since the days when Prophet Adam was sent into the world as a test, and that all humanity follows in his footsteps. This was contrasted against other Islamic duties, especially commands to fulfil the Five Pillars and five daily prayers, which could be seen as a command important to gain entry into heaven in the afterlife and therefore an important duty. This question refers, as in the specification, to the duty to be custodians or stewards. Some candidates mistook this and thought it referred exclusively to the early Caliphs and did not refer to the custodians or stewardship.

Question 3 (a)

3 Religion, peace and conflict

(a) Give **three** ways in which Muslims might work for social justice.

1

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2

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3

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[3]

This question was well answered. Many identified protests for social justice, charity work or donation which aided social justice, or any other relevant activity, so were generally given marks. Note that if the candidate identified two very similar ways, one would be given a mark, for example, protest and demonstration gained a total of 1 mark; or give to charity and give to good causes got a total of 1 mark, but they would not be given 2 separate marks.

Question 3 (d)*

(d)* 'Reconciliation is for Muslims but forgiveness is only from Allah.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam.
- Explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. **[15]**

This question was one of the best part (d) questions answered and candidates responded well. Many made the point, backed by traditions from the Qur'an and Hadith, that Muslims would be rewarded for showing forgiveness to others, and that this was liked by Allah. Some mentioned that it was important to reconcile with others before going on the Hajj pilgrimage. Another view was that Allah's forgiveness was far more important because it determined whether a Muslim might achieve an afterlife in heaven. As with other part (d) responses, those who gave a conclusion or evaluative judgement were able to achieve a higher level than those who recognised different views without completing this step.

Exemplar 2

Reconciliation is the act of making up with someone after arguments. Forgiveness is given after you repent to someone. The statement suggests that reconciliation is for Muslims but forgiveness is only ~~from~~ from Allah.

Some may agree that reconciliation is for Muslims because maintaining good relations with people is encouraged by the prophet. The prophet said "do you know what is better than fasting and praying? It's keeping good relations". By reconciling with one another Muslims can ensure that they keep peace and they can gain more reward from Allah. Some may however disagree and say that Muslims can reconcile with Allah, for example if they have converted out of faith and they convert back in. If a Muslim sins a lot then they may think they need to reconcile with God, but as God has grace for mankind and is "al-ghaffar" (the great forgiver), the Muslims need to repent and they can reconcile with God.

Some Muslims may agree that forgiveness is only from Allah as when we sin, we are expected to

repent and ask God to forgive us for our actions. Only Allah has the power to forgive us as he is "al-Ghaffar" (the great forgiver). However, some may disagree and say that forgiveness can also be from other people. The Quran states "the best of you are those who can forgive in the heat of the moment", implying forgiving each other is also crucial for Muslims. It's also believed that when you sin against someone Allah doesn't forgive you till the person forgives you, further stressing that forgiveness should also come from people, not just from Allah, as people need to forgive you before Allah can. It's also believed in Islam that if you don't forgive someone Allah will bring you both forward on the day of judgement in front of him to explain.

To conclude both peace and reconciliation can be achieved between both Muslims and Allah. Muslims should attempt to reconcile and forgive each other as much as possible, but the ultimate forgiveness for sin is from God, and it's what will help you reach heaven.

This is a successful response which is placed in Level 4 for AO2 and given full marks for AO1. A clear and precise definition in the introduction helps frame the argument from the start. The second paragraph then begins by agreeing with the statement. Reference is made to the prophet with a quotation, relevant to the response, and satisfying necessary referencing to sources of wisdom and authority for AO1.

The argument then turns to forgiveness from God and reference to a name of God to back up the point, 'al-ghaffar' the forgiver. This is used to support an alternative point of view, that forgiveness is from Allah and not from other Muslims.

The argument is clear, concise and well structured, building up from one paragraph to the next. A personal conclusion reaches a judgement, that ultimate forgiveness is from God, adding some fine-tuning to the discussion and showing awareness of the significance of the topic, by referring to 'ultimate' because it will help a Muslim 'reach heaven'.

The response might go on and explain that judgement occurs individually, and a Muslim could not call on others to support them when facing Allah's judgement, to further extend this last point and reach a higher mark within Level 4 for AO2.

Question 4 (a)

4 Dialogue between religious and non-religious beliefs and attitudes

(a) Describe **one** Muslim belief about pluralism.

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..... [3]

Most candidates understood that pluralism referred to interfaith relations and entry into paradise in the afterlife. Only one belief was required, so it did not matter if it was held by all or many Muslims or just a few, as there are different beliefs on this topic. As 3 marks were available, those who were able to fully describe or explain their response were able to gain all 3 marks.

Exemplar 3

Muslims believe that even non-Muslims have a chance to go to Al-Jannah if Allah wills so after judging what kind of life a person has led.

For this type of short answer question, marked according to AO1, marks were given for a statement supported by any combination of development and exemplification. Here, a clear statement is given, that Muslims recognise non-Muslims have a chance to go to Al-Jannah (heaven). This is then elaborated with the words 'if Allah wills after judging'. It could be further expanded for a third mark, such as depending on the person's actions and intentions, or perhaps whether they have heard and rejected the message of Islam or not.

Question 4 (d)*

(d)* 'The basis of Muslim values is completely different from that of agnostics.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs, teachings and practices within Islam.
- Explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Islam. **[15]**

This question was not well answered. Most candidates wrote that agnostics were unsure about God, and that Muslims believe in God and explained this. This was not what the question was asking about. The question required some explanation of values. Those who did address the question were able to find some common ground referring to fairness, equality, community support – support for the poor, action against discrimination and so on. The main difference was the basis of those values: with agnostics not accepting them due to religious revelation but rather on the basis of logic and human compassion, and Muslims taking them on the basis of revelation in the Qur'an.

Misconception



Values are not the same as beliefs. Values may be things like compassion for the poor and disadvantaged; respect for individuals and their right of expression; tolerance of those of different points of view and so on. The basis of values may indeed be belief derived, but there is a distinction to be made.

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