

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/02 Summer 2023 series

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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 2 series overview

GCSE Religious Studies Paper 2 is the Islam: Beliefs and teachings & Practices paper. It assesses candidates' knowledge and understanding of key elements of Islam as it is practised in the contemporary world, and their ability to discuss and evaluate the impact of Islamic belief and practice on different groups of Muslims.

All questions and sections of questions are compulsory. Most questions were attempted by most candidates, but Question 2 (c) was routinely left un-attempted by a significant number of candidates.

Candidates who performed well on this paper generally demonstrated strong examination skills, including effective use of their examination time, careful reading of exam questions and the application of their material to the specific question that had been asked. Their responses also demonstrated recognition of the explicit requirements of the part (e) questions, to include reference to sources of wisdom and authority and to divergent views within Islam.

Candidates who did less well had often missed out or not attempted some questions. They were also often those who were restricted in their discursive responses to part (e) questions. These questions showed a distinction between candidates who clearly understood and responded to the specific demands of the question and those who did not. The candidates achieving marks at the lower end often had relevant knowledge and were able to organise it broadly into opposing views. Where a diversity of perspectives was included, these were likely to be presented as extra knowledge, with all the evidence on each side being presented together in turn.

It should be noted that the part (e) questions do not demand opposite views, but rather different ones. However, the identification of distinct sets of views does not automatically amount to a discursive engagement sufficient for higher level marks. Candidates who deployed their knowledge in the form of arguments, offering justifications, counterarguments and/or critique of the justifications were better able to demonstrate the skills of evaluation and analysis necessary for the highest-level marks.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrated familiarity with important concepts in the study of Islam and understanding of how they related to specific questions • showed awareness of how religious belief and practice impacts on/relates to everyday living • showed recognition of diversity and difference within Islam. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showed difficulty in relating understanding of common and divergent views to the issue in the question • showed difficulty in applying knowledge of Islam teachings, beliefs and/or practices to the specific question asked • demonstrated confusion between technical, Islam-specific terms and/or confused Muslim understanding of a concept with a Christian understanding of it.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Give **three** features of heaven (al-Jannah) in Islam.

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2

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[3]

There were a wide range of possible responses for this question and both general associations with heaven and specific references from scripture were accepted. Most candidates gave three distinct points and gained all 3 marks. Some focused on physical features such as the gates, mansions of gold and gardens, while others included experiential features such as peace, joy and calmness. The most common incorrect response was to include material on how people get to heaven, who would get there or describing the Last Day.

Question 1 (d)

(d) Describe how self-denial in Ramadan is an act of devotion to Allah.

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[6]

Almost all candidates were familiar with the significance of Ramadan in Islam and were able to give some account of fasting and other associated restrictions. Some responses were able to relate this descriptive material to ideas of obedience, submission and taqwa, thus expanding on the concept of devotion specified in the question. Other responses followed the description of the fast with statements that simply repeated the wording of the question by saying these things showed devotion, lacking further development of that concept which limited the marks available for the response. Connecting fasting with the idea of self-denial given in the question was challenging for some and led to responses considering failure to fast or disobedience to Allah's commands.

Exemplar 1

Ramadan is a vital belief in both Sunni and Shi'a Islam, making up one of the five pillars. The self denial of water and ^{food} Muslims put themselves is the key part of Ramadan, as it shows submission towards Allah, proving their devotion. Denying themselves of this and other things they enjoy proves that their material possessions ~~will~~ ^{should} never take priority over Allah, and makes them think about others in less fortunate situations.

Exemplar 1 illustrates the approach taken to this question by many candidates. It demonstrates clear knowledge of the nature of the fast during Ramadan and its significance to both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, and explains that denial of one's physical needs demonstrates submission and that Allah has priority over everything else. All the material is relevant and correct. The response gives a clear answer to a general question about why Muslims fast during Ramadan, but since this was not the question asked the response does not get top level marks. It shows understanding of what self-denial is and the desirable virtues that practising it in this way demonstrates. The response needs to be more explicit about how or why being virtuous amounts to an act of devotion to Allah.

Question 1 (e)

(e) 'There is no point in Muslims considering what might be written in **their** book of life.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Islam.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

Many responses began with the idea of a book of deeds and recording angels. They explored different attitudes to this book through differing understandings of freewill and predestination, and reflections on whether good deeds should be done in the expectation of reward. Other responses interpreted the 'book of life' as a reference to the Qur'an and these tended to be somewhat one-sided responses because of the general agreement across different Muslim groups about the status of the text.

It is important to note that while a discussion begins with identifying and justifying differing views on an issue and most responses did this, the level descriptors against which these responses are marked require more than this for the higher levels. Responses often needed to expand beyond a descriptive account of a teaching or philosophical position as justifying a specific view, into a more critical analytic or evaluative reflection on that position.

Question 2 (a)

2 (a) Describe what Muslims mean when they call Adam the first Muslim.

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..... [3]

Most responses began by identifying Adam as the first man, for which a mark was given. Responses which identified him as a prophet, described how he believed in one God, or followed Allah's instructions were also common and some made all these points. Responses which developed the reference to being the first man by giving an account of the creation story as a whole did not clearly answer the question and few of them gained all 3 available marks.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Describe what some Muslims mean when they call Allah transcendent.

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..... **[3]**

Almost all candidates attempted to answer this question, and some were able to differentiate between their knowledge of the attributes ascribed to Allah to give a description of transcendence. These responses generally included being outside of both space and time and being beyond human comprehension. Other responses were more of a list of various divine attributes, implying either that transcendence is somehow a collective term for these, or explicitly stating that it is a synonym for omnipotence or omnipresence; these responses did not gain full marks.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Outline different beliefs held about justice by Shi'a and Sunni Muslims.

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..... [6]

Some responses demonstrated good understanding of the broad concept of justice as being to do with treating people fairly in relation to their actions. Most focused on this as a divine quality, describing Allah's role as a judge, others considered it as a social obligation and outlined how Muslims might work for it. Some responses addressed both. Concepts such as al-Adl, jihad (both lesser and greater), the Day of Judgement and akhirah were considered relevant and many responses used them effectively in their responses, clearly showing how they connect with justice and the wish to act justly.

There were also responses which did not address justice explicitly at all and so did not answer the question. Some of these wrote a general account of differences between Sunni and Shi'a Islam while others described the original schism which created these two groups.

Exemplar 2

~~Some shi'a muslims~~ Shi'a muslims hold a festival that ~~remember~~ remembers the death of their second Imam Hussayn. Hussayn was killed by Sunni forces. This led to the fall in the relationship between shi'a and Sunni Muslims. During this festival ~~Shi'a~~ Shi'a muslims will whip and cut themselves in order to feel and remember the pain Hussayn ~~was~~ went through ~~show~~ some shi'a muslims may also go on pilgrimage (Haji) to the place of Hussayn's death. This festival highlights the injustice shown to Muslim, because of this muslims are still working to this day to fight for justice.

Exemplar 2 illustrates one of more common ways in which this question was misunderstood. It gives quite a detailed account of the Shi'a Ashura festival, which commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and, in the final sentence, identifies this event as an historic injustice. If there was some extra explanation as to why this death might be considered unjust, then there would be some understanding of the concept of justice demonstrated. Without this kind of development, the only part of the response which clearly relates to the question asked is the final point, explaining that Muslims in the contemporary world see a need to strive for justice.

Question 2 (e)

(e)* 'It is more important to communicate with Allah than complete the rituals of a raka't.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Islam.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

This was a challenging question in relation to the requirement for divergent views within Islam; candidates who understood the term raka't and correctly connected it with salah were also aware that this is a pillar of Islam regarded as central by all major branches of the religion, making an oppositional discussion difficult. It is useful to note here that different views do not have to take opposing stances on the statement; divergent views on this question often focused on the distinction between formal and informal prayer, arguing that they are equally important for different reasons or that they have different kinds of importance.

There were responses which showed no clear understanding of what raka't means. Some confused it with wudu, while others used the word in general statements such as 'raka't is very important for Muslims because Allah likes it', without making any more explicit reference to what 'it' is.

Exemplar 3

Communications through Surah
ask God for forgiveness
personal connection.

8

(e)* 'It is more important to communicate with Allah than complete the rituals of a raka'at.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

Structural Prayer
(Prayer connected?)

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Islam.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

Muslims would agree with the statement as they see that the whole purpose of prayer is to communicate with Allah. When Muslims communicate with Allah they can give Allah for guidance, Ask Allah for help or just thank Allah give thanks to Allah.

They communicate with Allah is through reciting spiritual texts in the Quran (Surah). This helps Muslims to be able to establish a better relationship with Allah and helps them deepen their faith in Islam.

Some Muslims may argue that the personal communication is more important as not all can pray.

As Muslims are able to complete the raka'at due to disability and that as long as your praying, Allah would not be angry by ~~missing~~ ~~raka'at~~ ~~able to~~ ~~communicating~~ with Allah and Allah would understand.

Not completing the rituals of raka'at means

Raka'at is the structural prayer of Muslims

Raka'at is the structure of prayer for a Muslim

and some Muslims believe that not completing the Raka'at means your prayer is incomplete. Meaning that your prayer has not been recognised by Allah.

Some Muslims may say that the Raka't should be completed because ~~that~~ that is the way Muhammad taught Muslims. As Muslims ~~to~~ strive to follow in Muhammad's footsteps. ~~Other~~ Finally, some Muslims may see the act of prostrating and bowing your head down to Allah, shows that your submitting ~~you~~ yourself to Allah and see it as an act of devotion towards Allah.

Overall, ~~I~~ I think that if you are able to do the Raka't you should do all of it to show your devotion of faith to Allah and if you are not ~~at least~~ able, Allah's nature of being just and fair would not judge for not being able to do the full Raka't.

Exemplar 3 demonstrates one of the ways in which candidates successfully dealt with the requirement for divergent views in relation to this question.

It opens with a general observation about the universal importance of prayer, summarising the various things prayer might be considered to include. The response identifies reading the Qur'an as another means of communication with Allah and the argument is made that less formal forms of personal prayer could be considered more significant because of the potential for accessibility issues with the movements of raka't. The second section offers several reasons why completing raka't is really important, including the need to show submission to Allah and to follow the sunnah. The two views are revisited in the conclusion, where the candidate argues that although raka't is commanded, Allah's inherent nature means Muslims who cannot perform it will be forgiven.

Overall, this response demonstrates clear knowledge of what raka't are, the connection with salah prayer and the existence of other forms of prayer within Islam. Different views are dealt with by emphasising both the obligatory nature of salah and the recognition that some people are physically unable to meet those obligations.

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