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Introduction

Aims of the book

Since the reform of Religious Studies GCSE in 2015, GCSE courses now include the study of two religions. For some teachers, this is new and requires them to teach material with which they may not be very familiar. The aim of this book is to give some support to those who have chosen to offer Islam as one of the religions students study for GCSE, but who might need some support in their subject knowledge and some help with preparing activities for their classes.

The book should be useful for teachers whichever awarding body they have chosen for their assessments because it follows the content prescribed by the DfE and there is guidance to show how it applies to each specification. The book is written by a team of authors who have a wide range of teaching experience and expertise, some of whom are members of the Muslim faith community.

The first chapter offers a subject booster with information about the beliefs, teachings and practices of Islam, to help teachers answer questions the students might have and aid knowledge at a level a little deeper than the textbooks designed for the classroom. Chapter two offers insights into the ways in which Islam deals with philosophical and ethical questions, again following the content prescribed by the DfE. Both of these chapters consider common and divergent views within Islam and look at the ways in which Islamic sources of wisdom and authority are interpreted and put into practice in the daily lives of Muslims.

Chapter three looks at different teaching strategies which might be helpful when planning lessons. There is advice about useful books for enhancing subject knowledge as well as suggested websites for teachers and students. There are also sections about Islam in the media, and strategies for dealing with some sensitive issues that may arise in class or in conversation with parents.

In the final chapter there are some photocopiable worksheets, which can be used as they are, or can be used for inspiration for directing learning in other parts of the specification.

Where we quote from the Qur’an we indicate in brackets the surah (chapter) and ayah (verse), for example (2:117).

Where we quote from hadith, that is collections of the sayings and teachings of Muhammad, we have named the hadith in brackets, for example (Sahih al-Bukhari).

Introduction to Islam

At the heart of Islam is the belief in Allah – the all-powerful eternal God who created everything and upon which all depends. Muslims believe that when Allah created the world he did so in an orderly manner, giving each form of life a good purpose. However, humans have a choice over whether they wish to submit to the will of Allah and follow their natural good purpose (although if they do, it is believed that true inner peace will follow). ‘Islam’ is therefore the name given to the beliefs and practices Allah wishes humans to accept and which result in peace, whereas ‘a Muslim’ is the term used to describe someone who has voluntarily chosen to follow this lifestyle. Furthermore, it is said that a person who has made such a choice has reverted to this faith rather than being converted because they have simply returned to their natural created purpose.

Guidance on Islam is provided primarily through the revelations given to Muhammad contained in the Qur’an (the final message from Allah), along with various hadiths (sayings of the prophet Muhammad),
the Sunnah (the example of the ideal Muslim life as seen in the thoughts and actions of Muhammad) and, for some, reason and the Ahl al-Rayy (family of Muhammad). Although most Muslims agree on what is entailed in the core beliefs (iman) and practices (ibadah) of Islam, there are disagreements over who should have been the legitimate successor of Muhammad and what role this person should have within the community of Muslims (known as the umma). The two groups that emerged over these differences are known as Sunnis and Shi’as. Today, the majority of Muslims, including in the UK, belong to the Sunni tradition of Islam (around 85 to 90 per cent) with Shi’as comprising between 10 and 15 per cent (being found mainly in Iran, Iraq, with large majorities in the Gulf States and Pakistan). It is important to note that Sunni and Shi’a population percentages are only estimates and are much contested. Figures of up to 90 per cent belonging to the Sunni tradition are often quoted but research suggests that Shi’a numbers are underreported. The Shi’a tradition of Islam is comprised of more groups than the Sunni tradition of Islam, although the majority of Shi’as (around 90 per cent) belong to the Ithna ‘Ashari or Twelvers. In line with the requirements of the new GCSE, this book will only focus on the two main dominant branches of Islam, namely the Sunni tradition and, within the Shi’a tradition, the Ithna ‘Ashari or Twelvers. There are too many other smaller branches of Islam that have not been discussed as they are beyond the scope of this book.

Sunni tradition of Islam

Sunnis believe that Muhammad did not appoint a successor, but that this person was legitimately selected through consensus amongst the significant Muslims at the time. This successor was a spiritual and temporal leader chosen because he was pious, wise, and knowledgeable of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. The successors were always male and were given the title Caliph (God’s deputy on earth acting as spiritual and political leaders).

The first caliph was Abu Bakr, an early revert to Islam and one of Muhammad’s closest companions who accompanied him on the hijra, and also his father-in-law (through his daughter, Aisha). He held this position from 624 ce until his death two years later in 634. On his death bed, Abu Bakr appointed ‘Umar to be the next caliph. ‘Umar was the caliphate from 634 until 644. He is seen as an ideal caliph within the Sunni tradition of Islam because he was considered to be a wise, strong and capable leader. He made great military advances, helping to significantly enlarge the Muslim empire. After ‘Umar died, a council of six, known as the Khilafa, selected ‘Uthman who was caliph from 644 until 656. He was a member of the Umayyad family who were part of the aristocracy within Makkah. He continued the expansion of the Muslim empire and it is also traditionally believed that he standardised the Qur’an. He was assassinated in 656 by those who felt he was not behaving as a true caliph should, whereupon he was followed by Ali, Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law. Ali was the second revert to Islam, who acted as a decoy to save the life of Muhammad during the hijra. He was the caliph from 656 until his assassination in 661 by Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljim (a member of the Khawarij, a group that initially supported Ali but later turned against him). After these four caliphs, known as the ‘rightly guided’ as on the technicalities of prayer and wudu), on the whole they accept the same beliefs and practices. The four main schools are:

- Hanafi school: founded by Imam Abu Hanifa (died 767 ce). This school appeals to the Qur’an, the Sunnah and reason for formulate Muslim laws. It was very dominant during the Abbasid dynasty and the Ottoman Empire. Around a third of all Muslims belong to this school today and it is dominant in countries such as Syria, Jordan and Turkey.
- Maliki school: founded by Imam Malik ibn Anas al-Asbahi (died 795 ce). In addition to the Qur’an, Malik had access to many different hadiths collected from the companions of the prophet and other eminent people in Madinah. All of this information is drawn up to create laws, etc. It has been very popular within Egypt, North Africa and parts of West Africa.
- Shafi school: founded by Malik’s son, Imam Idris al-Shafi’i (died 820 ce). This school argues that the source of law should firstly be the Qur’an, followed by the Sunnah, consensus (ijma or community of believers) and analogical reasoning. Followers of this school are scattered throughout the Muslim world but particularly in East Africa, parts of Egypt and Southeast Asia.
- Hanbali school: founded by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (died 850 ce). This is the most conservative of the four schools. It argues that the main source of information should be the Qur’an (with the Sunnah after this). It is the official school of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and is also found in Iraq and Syria.

Shi’a tradition of Islam

‘Shi’a’ means the party or faction of Ali. Shi’as are so-called because they believed that Muhammad did appoint his successor and this was Ali, his cousin and son-in-law (they believe that this was ignored by those who appointed Abu Bakr). They named the successors of Muhammad ‘Imam’ rather than ‘Caliph’ (which has a different understanding to that found amongst Muslims in the Sunni tradition). In the Shi’a tradition of Islam, Imam refers to someone sent and selected by Allah to be the legitimate spiritual and political leader after Muhammad because Imams have perfect knowledge/inspiration from Allah (called ‘ilm), enabling them to understand and guide people to the true meaning of the revelation given to the prophets. The Imam is also free from sin/error (called ‘isma) and is a perfect example for Shi’as, offering correct guidance on the meaning of the Qur’an and Sunnah. Imams must come from the bloodline of Muhammad (that is, his successors through the offspring of Ali and his wife Fatimah), with the Ithna ‘Ashari, or Twelvers, taking their name from the fact that they recognise a line of twelve Imams. The first Imam was Ali, who was followed by his descendants, including his sons Hasan and Husayn. Since 874 ce, the twelfth Imam believed to have gone into occultation (a concealment from humans, created by Allah), from which he will not return until the end of time. This is why, since this occurrence, guidance should be obtained from the most learned ulama (clerical leaders which have different titles including Ayatollah). The ulama will normally belong to different schools of jurisprudence, the most prominent of which in the Shi’a tradition is the Ja’fari school created by the sixth Imam, with 80 per cent of Shi’as following it.

[pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/](pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/)
Chapter 1
Islam: beliefs, teachings and practices

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1.1.1 The fundamental beliefs of Islam

All Muslims should accept or have faith (iman) in certain foundational beliefs which form the essence of Islam, separating it from other religions. These fundamental beliefs are believed to have been given by Allah to all the prophets, providing guidance on how life should be understood and shaped. Although Muslims are free to accept iman, they are said to be accountable for this decision on the Day of Judgement. In addition, once iman is fully understood it should lead to pure thoughts and speech as well as the performance of acts of worship (ibadah), undertaken from the correct intention (niyyah) to love Allah. Thus, iman provides the rationale and motivation for ibadah and niyyah. Although there are many similarities in Sunni and Shi’a beliefs about iman, there are some differences in its composition and understanding. In the Sunni tradition iman is illustrated through the six articles of faith and within Shi’a it is in the five roots or ‘Usul ad-Din.

The six articles of faith in the Sunni tradition of Islam (arkan al-iman)
The six articles of faith are the fundamental beliefs accepted by all Sunnis. They are:

1. Belief in the divine unity of Allah (Tawhid)
2. Belief in angels (Malaikah)
The five roots of ‘Usul ad-Din in the Shi’a tradition of Islam

The five roots of ‘Usul ad-Din are the fundamental beliefs that should be accepted if one wishes to follow the Shi’a tradition. Although some of these overlap with the six articles, there are some differences in their contents and understanding. For example, Shi’as accept the belief in the Imams, and they have a different understanding of free will. In addition, Shi’a argue that all Muslims should individually investigate and rationally assent to iman rather than simply accepting its accuracy (which not all Sunnis agree with). The five roots are:

1. the belief in the oneness and divine unity of Allah (Al-Tawhid)
2. the belief in the divine Justice of Allah (Adalat)
3. the belief in Prophethood (Al-Nubuwah)
4. the belief in Imams or Imamah (Al-Imamah)
5. the belief in the Day of Resurrection (Al-Mad’ad or Yawm al-Qiyamah).

Similarities and differences between Sunni and Shi’a beliefs

The following table summarises the main differences between Sunni and Shi’a beliefs on iman.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundamental belief</th>
<th>Accepted by Sunni</th>
<th>Accepted by Shi’a</th>
<th>Summary of views and any differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tawhid of Allah</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Both agree that Allah is one, the God for all and that shirk (the worship of other gods) is wrong and a grave sin. Shi’as include four aspects of Tawhid and believe that some of Allah’s attributes only occurred once the world was created.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adalat of Allah</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Although both accept that Allah is just, Shi’as have a different understanding of how he is just. This is tied to their different view of free will, and is one of the main ways in which these two branches differ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Both believe angels perform the duties of Allah and that they have no free will. Especially important is Jibril who brings the revelation to the prophets. Shi’as add that he visited the members of the Ahl al-Bayt too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophets</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Both believe that Allah sent the same message of Islam to different prophets since the creation of the first human, Adam. They also accept the same prophets but there are different views over whether they were ever forgetful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revealed books</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Both accept the same list of revealed books and that only the Qur’an is the true unaltered words of Allah. There are differences over how the Qur’an should have been originally organised and whether the message was created in time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akhirah, Day of Resurrection, Day of Judgement and predestination</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Both believe in the Day of Resurrection and the Day of Judgement, and in heaven and hell. However, there are different views over whether humans are truly free or if their decisions are predestined (with Sunnis taking the latter view).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imams</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>This is the main difference between Sunnis and Shi’as. To Sunnis the Imam is a learned male who leads the prayers (especially Friday prayers). In the Shi’a tradition it is Muhammad’s successor who is infallible, has divine wisdom and comes from the Ahl al-Bayt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.1.2 The nature of Allah

AQA A 3.1.5.1; AQA B 3.2.1.1: “The Oneness of God (Tawhid), Qur’an Surah 112.” The nature of God: omnipotence, beneficence, mercy, fairness and justice (Adalat in Shi’a Islam), including different ideas about God’s relationship with the world: immanence and transcendence.

Edexcel A Areas of Study 1 and 2 – Islam 1.3; Edexcel B Areas of Study 1, 2 and 3 – Islam 1.3:

“The nature of Allah: how the characteristics of Allah are shown in the Qur’an and why they are important: Tawhid (oneness) including Surah 16:35–36, immanence; transcendence, omnipotence, beneficence, mercy, fairness and justice, Adalat in Shi’i Islam.”

OCR J265/02: “The importance for Muslims of the 99 names of Allah with specific knowledge and understanding of: Tawhid (oneness); Merciful; Omnipotent; Benevolent; Fair and Just; Transcendent; Immanent/ The meaning of Tawhid and its relationship to the concept of shirk/ The implications of Tawhid and shirk for polytheism and Christianity/ Issues related to the nature of Allah and how these attributes are shown: Allah’s role as creator and judge demonstrate his omnipotence; His concern for humankind and intervention as evidence of immanence; His guidance to humankind showing His merciful nature/ The Shi’a concept of the Imamate and its relationship to Shi’i belief in Tawhid/ Common and divergent attitudes of different groups of Muslims towards the nature of Allah/ Different interpretations and emphases given to sources of wisdom and authority by different Muslim groups/ Suggested sources of wisdom and authority: Surah 1 (al-Fatihah); Surah 2:117 (al-Baqarah); Surah 3:31; Surah 50:16 (Qaf); Surah 53:19–25 (an-Najm); Surah 112 (al-Ikhlas)”


At the heart of Islam is the belief in Allah, the one true God for all. However, problems arise in trying to comprehend Allah, who is believed to be ineffable, going beyond our limited understanding and language. As the Qur’an says: “No vision can take Him in, but He takes in all vision.” (6:103). Despite this, Muslims believe they should try to understand their God and one way in which they can do this is by looking at the descriptions of God found in the Qur’an. Some of these descriptions include: Tawhid; Adalat; mercy; eternal; fair; creator; omnipotence; beneficence; transcendent; and immanent. These are accepted by all Muslims and are often used in prayer and worship, especially when they appear within the different lists of the 99 beautiful names (descriptions of Allah recited by a Muslim in order to help remember – Dhikr – and contemplate his unknowable nature). Although not accepted by Sunnis, Shi’as believe these descriptions can be divided into two groups: those which describe God’s unchanging essence (one, all knowing and all powerful) and those which describe God’s actions (merciful, creator, just). The attributes that describe God’s essence are eternal whereas those that deal with God’s actions are only in evidence once Allah creates the world. Furthermore, they add that these descriptions must not be seen as being separate from Allah and worshipped as such, as this would be shirk.

Tawhid – the divine unity and oneness of Allah

Tawhid is a foundational belief for all Muslims. It is one of the six fundamental beliefs and one of the five roots. Thus, it is a universal principle forming the main part of iman.

Tawhid expresses the belief that God both exists and is only one (ahad). In Arabic the word Allah means the one and only God. Thus Tawhid encompasses the idea that Allah is indivisible; neither male nor female; has no partner or children; and is unique. As it says in the Qur’an, “He is the God the One, God the eternal. He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him.” (112:1–4, known as the Al-Ikhlas – meaning
Ashura means ‘tenth’ because it takes place on the 10th day of Muharram (the first month in the Muslim calendar). It is celebrated differently in the Shi’a and Sunni traditions because it remembers different events.

**Ashura in the Shi’a tradition**

For Shi’as Ashura remembers the martyrdom (shahadat) of the third Imam Husayn at the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE. This arose because Yazid (the next ruler of the Umayyad dynasty) did not trust Husayn after he refused to pledge his allegiance to him. It occurred seven days after Yazid’s army forced Husayn and his family to stop at Karbala on their way to Kufa without any food and water. They not only killed Husayn but also 72 members of his family and companions (on the spot marked by the Mashhad al-Husayn or tomb of Husayn).

In the Shi’a tradition Ashura not only remembers the martyrdom (shahadat) and unlawful killing of Husayn but it also symbolises the struggle of Muslims against injustice, tyranny and oppression. Thus it helps Shi’as to endure their own suffering, which may arise due to injustice, tyranny and oppression. For this purpose, many wear black which show that a Shi’a would be prepared to fight with Husayn if he asked them to fight. This occurs during the street procession, at re-enactments or while listening to the narrations. Some might donate blood instead.

- Women may organise/attend a special ceremony only for females called Sufra (which literally means table cloth). This involves a meal and a talk on Husayn and the other Imams led by a Mullah.
- Organising/attending narrations of the Karbala tragedy called Majlis. During these recitations, discussions occur around the lessons that could be learned from the tragedy and how they might be applied in people’s lives. In addition, people often cry and beat their chests during these events, calling out ‘Ya Husayn’. These can be held in mosques or in private.
- Organising/attending re-enactments of the martyrdom called Ta’ziyah or Shabih. All the actors are male and it may involve horses (especially Husayn’s horse, Dhul-Jannah). The audience participates by weeping, lamenting, calling out ‘Ya Husayn’ and by beating their chests at appropriate times.
- Watching/participating in a mourning procession. In some countries a replica sarcophagus or body will be carried (and in India this is placed in a copy of the Karbala tomb). The audience participates in the same ways as above.
- Although banned in most countries (such as Iran), a very small minority of Shi’as flagellate themselves with knives/chains on their head/backs to show that they would be willing to be martyred with Husayn.

Shi’as believe that through organising/participating in these activities the Imams will intercede on their behalf with Allah (providing this is done from niyah). Furthermore, some of these activities are held in mosques or in private. They may also offer free food for visitors on this day. If possible, Shi’as visit the Karbala tomb and other graves. In some countries, such as Iran, it is also a public holiday.

**Ashura in the Sunni tradition**

Some Sunnis do remember with sadness the martyrdom of Husayn and his family and some Sunni mosques may hold special talks to remember this event. But for Sunnis, Ashura is particularly marked by remembering when Musa (Moses) and the Hebrews were saved by Allah from the pharaoh, when he parted the sea. Sunnis may observe two optional fasts, on the 9th and 10th or the 10th and 11th of Muharram, to show gratitude to Allah. This day is also believed to remember when the flood ended during the lifetime of the prophet Nuh (Noah). In Turkey, it is traditional to eat a special pudding called Noah’s pudding.
2.1.1 Family

**AQA A 3.2.1.1:** “The nature of families, including: the role of parents and children; extended families and the nuclear family. The purpose of families, including: procreation; stability and the protection of children; educating children in a faith. Contemporary family issues including: same-sex parents; polygamy.”

**Edexcel A Area of Study 3 – Islam 2.3 and 2.4; Edexcel B Area of Study 1 – Islam 2.3 and 2.4:** “Muslim teaching about the purpose and importance of the family. Muslim teaching about the purpose of the families, including: marriage: Hadith Sahih Bukhari 9:89:252”

**OCR J625/07:** “Muslim attitudes towards the role and purpose of the Muslim family”

**WJEC Edagas A: Component 1, Theme 1 – Content from an Islamic Perspective: “Islamic beliefs, attitudes and teachings about the nature and purpose of relationships in the twenty first century: families, roles of women and men, marriage outside the religious tradition and cohabitation: Hadith Sahih Bukhari 9:89:252”

The role of the family and family life is central to all societies whether religious or secular. In Islam, the institution of the family is highly valued. It is where procreation takes place, where children are raised in the Muslim faith, and where all members, from the very young to the elderly, are safeguarded and cared for. Through the family, Islam is carried forward into the next generation.

Within Islam, the nuclear family consists of the husband, wife, their children and their parents. Traditionally they would all live together where possible and it is usually the husband’s parents who live with the family rather than the wife’s parents. This is because Islam teaches Muslims to care for their parents just as they were cared for when they were young. Since daughters move in with their in-laws when they get married, it is always the sons who look after their own parents. However, in many Muslim societies in the developed world, this is not always the case.

The extended family includes a number of relatives who may or may not be living together. Members have special rights and obligations towards each other. For example parents have the right to be honoured and cared for in their old age, and they are obliged to show love and kindness to their children and to bring them up with morals and ethical values. They are able to share wealth, property and other family resources and they also inherit from each other upon the death of a family member. Women are not required to cover up (hijab) in front of any relative with whom marriage is not permitted (called mahram, these relatives include parents, children, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, etc. – see 4:223). In practice some women might still cover their heads.

The strongest family relationship is said to be the relationship by blood: between father, mother, grandfather, grandmother (and upwards), son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter (and downwards), brother, sister, nephew, niece, paternal uncle and aunt and maternal uncle and aunt. The relationship between spouses is considered to be as strong as a blood relationship.

The second level of relationship is the relationship through marriage: father in-law, mother in-law, grandfather in-law, grandmother in-law, husband’s children (from another marriage), wife’s children (from another marriage), husband’s grandchildren (from children of another marriage), wife’s grandchildren (from children of another marriage), son in-law, daughter in-law, great son in-law, great daughter in-law, step-father and step-mother.

A third level is the relationship through foster nursing. Literally, this is when a woman physically suckles a child for another couple. For example Muhammad’s biological mother was Aminah but he also had a foster mother, Halimah, who nursed him and looked after him for a period of time as was customary in early Arabic culture (according to the historian Ibn Hisham). Today, this might also refer to an adopted child. Later in life, Muhammad himself adopted a son called Zayd. In Shari’ah – the Islamic religious law derived from the teachings of the Qur’an, traditional sayings of Muhammad, the consensus of scholars (ijma’), precedence and deductive analogy (qiyas) – the rights of this third level are the same as for the level two relatives (e.g. marriage is forbidden) with some exceptions, particularly in terms of inheritance. The second and third levels of relatives are regarded as the extended family.

Within the immediate family the husband/father is regarded as the head of the household. Within the extended family, traditionally it is the eldest member who is the head of the entire family, regardless of gender. They would manage conflict, and impart advice and guidance on matters. Shari’ah states that the man, as head of the family, is responsible for providing shelter, food, clothing and all the basic necessities for his family. Traditionally it is men who go to work while women run the home, taking care of the children and all other domestic duties. In Britain, increasing numbers of women are now also in employment, so most duties are shared. Growing numbers of women now contribute financially towards the needs of the family. In addition, many British Muslims financially support members of their extended families who live abroad. There are growing numbers of divorced Muslim women with children who are managing single parent families. After the divorce the father is required to provide child maintenance and the mother and father will share care of the children. Some women will remarry and start a new family with their new husband and his family. In blended families all children become mahram, brothers and sisters.

Any hierarchy within the family is not to be regarded as discriminatory against women as they can also enjoy a central position within extended families, especially when they are the eldest members. The man assumes the responsibility of being head because of the obligation Islam places upon him to protect and to provide financially for his family, whereas the wife is under no obligation to do so even if she is wealthy. The woman assumes the responsibility of safeguarding the household in her husband’s absence: “Husbands should take good care of their wives, with [the bounties] God has given to some more than others and what they spend out of their own money. Righteous wives are devout and guard what God would have them guard in their husbands’ absence.” (Qur’an 4:34).

Muhammad likened everyone who is in authority and has a responsibility of care to a shepherd. He said, “Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The leader of the people is a guardian and is responsible for his community. A man is a guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is a guardian of her husband’s home and his children and she is responsible for them. The servant of a man is the guardian of the property of his master and he is responsible for it. No doubt, every one of you is a shepherd, and is responsible for his flock.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim).

The most important role that a mother carries out is the nurturing of children, raising them to be good, decent and respectable human beings, and also good Muslims with a keen knowledge of the culture of the family as they grow up in a wider society. The teaching of manners, social etiquette, honesty, care and compassion, being generous and charitable, showing respect for all, and the importance of prayer is one of the very important duties that a woman carries out in her family. The work of raising children within the Muslim faith and passing down Muslim values is a way of strengthening the universal Muslim family, the ummah. There is a famous and popular saying in Muslim societies: “A mother’s lap is the first school!” The ummah offers support to families through shared worship, and shared celebration and commemoration of the major rites of passage in a Muslim’s life. For example, family and friends are invited to celebrate aqiqah, the ceremony marking the birth of a child which normally takes place seven days after the birth. When a person dies the ummah will offer prayers for the dead, and comfort for the family. Mosques will often
3.4 Difficult conversations with parents

Unfortunately, the first part of the twenty-first century has seen the rise of some extremist groups that identify themselves as Muslim. Terrorist attacks by such extremist groups have become more common, and when Islam has appeared in the news it has often been in the context of an atrocity committed or a perceived threat. Several of the UK’s national newspapers have taken a negative, often racist and fear-mongering stance on Islam (see 3.2, pages 107–9).

The Internet has given opportunities for groups such as ‘Britain First’ to publish inflammatory and very often inaccurate portrayals of Muslims, which do nothing to promote multicultural tolerance and respect. There are rumours falsely claiming that Muslims in Britain are trying to ban Remembrance Day, trying to prevent people from celebrating Christmas, or working to remove any reference to the Holocaust from the curriculum.

In this climate, it is unsurprising that some parents feel worried about Islam in Britain, seeing it as a negative influence and a threat to what they understand to be a British way of life.

Education ought to have an important role in setting the record straight by helping young people to understand what Islam really teaches, the importance of high standards of morality for Muslims, and the ways in which Muslims contribute to society. Studying Islam, as well as other faiths, ought to encourage young people to think about their own perspectives on issues of religion and belief, so that when they encounter beliefs that differ from their own, they have an opportunity to pause, evaluate and think rationally about their own choices. Religious Studies offers great opportunities for helping young people to understand the beliefs of others. As well as teaching them useful facts about different world religions, it can also help to foster a mindset in which young people can grow to be more willing to listen to others, more balanced in their judgements and more able to defend their own beliefs and values in a respectful way.

However, there are some parents who feel that withdrawing their children from religious education is the best way of protecting them from what they have been led to believe is a threat to their own values. Sometimes parents contact RE departments with requests or demands that their son or daughter should not take part in lessons which focus on Islam. Often, these issues arise in response to a piece of homework on Islam, at parents’ evenings or when a trip is planned to a mosque and parents are asked to give permission for their son or daughter to attend.

If GCSE Religious Studies is an option in your school, and you have chosen to offer Islam as one of the world faiths you will study together, then a simple solution for a student at GCSE stage whose parents are unwilling for him or her to study Islam would be to choose a subject other than Religious Studies. However, if GCSE Religious Studies is normally compulsory for all students then difficulties could arise.

What the law says

Most parents know that they have a right to withdraw their children from either or both religious education and sex education, on the understanding that they will be making alternative provision for their children themselves in accordance with their own faith and beliefs.

Every LEA, governing body and head teacher must ensure that religious education is provided in a school, as is made clear in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The Education Act 2002 reiterates that religious education must be provided. However, parents do have a right to withdraw their children from religious education, either wholly or partly, and they do not have to give their reasons. They do have the right to withdraw their child from lessons that are about Islam, and then opt back in once the class has moved on to a different topic. Although you as a teacher may have strong views on the importance of young people learning about different faiths and beliefs, the parents are not obliged to listen to you.

The student does not have the right to choose to withdraw from lessons without parental permission.

The DfE has stated that parents have a right to withdraw their children from religious education, and that schools must comply with their request. The school is still responsible for the supervision of the child, unless he or she is having alternative religious education off the premises. The DfE suggests that in order to avoid misunderstanding, a head teacher might want to clarify with the parents which particular religious issues they wish their child to be withdrawn from. The head teacher might clarify for the parents the practical implications of the request.

If parents wish to withdraw the child, then it is the parents’ responsibility to provide alternative religious education for the child. This can be done by taking the child out of school in order to be taught by, for example, the local rabbi or pastor, or the parents themselves, or by having the school supervise the child in a different room during Religious Studies lessons, with the child doing work provided by and assessed by the parents. The school has the right to say whether removing the child from the premises during the school day would be too disruptive for other subjects, so, for example, if the parents wanted the child to attend an off-site religious class every Thursday afternoon which involved missing subjects other than RS, the school could refuse permission and ask that the child is provided with alternative work to be done during RS lessons instead.

These options should be made clear to parents who are thinking about withdrawing their children from Religious Studies. If parents do not have a religious faith of their own which they want their child to learn about, an alternative might be for the student to study some age-appropriate philosophy. The parents are responsible for supplying the work, but there would be no harm in making some suggestions to help them, for example, showing them a textbook with exercises that they might want to buy for their child to work through.

It would be unwise to allow a student to study a different subject during Religious Studies time, for example to spend more time on science, because this could be seen to be giving that child an advantage in science and could lead to more parents requesting withdrawal from Religious Studies for their child in order to ‘concentrate on more important subjects’.

If the student is meant to be studying for a GCSE in Religious Studies but the parents insist that he or she only learns half of the course, then the parents and school will need to make a decision about whether entering for the exam is a good idea.

Strategies for coping with angry parents

Most parents are very polite and appreciative of their child’s teachers and will raise concerns in a non-threatening manner. However, a minority can be quite aggressive in their manner if they feel a school is in the wrong, and can sometimes be rather intimidating to deal with.

If a parent contacts you as a classroom teacher and is clearly angry about the fact that you are educating your class about Islam, this can be very upsetting and worrying for you. Some of the following advice could be useful in helping you to deal with such situations:

1. Make it clear, in advance, that the class will be studying Islam, so that parents can raise any concerns they might have. You have the chance to discuss your specification content and its value, and alternative provision can be made if necessary, in plenty of time.

2. If parents contact you to deal with them as soon as possible, partly as a sign of respect for their views and partly to avoid the issue hanging over you and increasing your stress levels.

3. Even if you are feeling upset or attacked by the parents’ tone, try to remain calm and professional throughout. Thank them for bringing their concerns to your attention and try to make it clear that you are there to help them and that you share their wish to provide their child with a high quality education. Let them know early on that you recognise they have a right to withdraw their child from Religious Studies and that you will help them to facilitate this if they are sure it is what they want.

4. If at all possible avoid dealing with angry parents on your own. Sometimes this is unavoidable, such as at times when you are seeing parents during consultation evenings in a room by yourself, or if parents corner you out of school if they happen
4.26 ‘Greater jihad is more important than lesser jihad’

Look at the arguments below, which could be used to evaluate the statement: ‘Greater jihad is more important than lesser jihad.’ Identify which could be used to support this statement and which would be used against it. Then decide how convincing you think the argument is. You can use words such as ‘strong’, ‘weak’, ‘persuasive’ and ‘unconvincing’.

You could then use this table to write an extended evaluation of the statement above. Try to:
- give reasoned arguments in support of the statement
- give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
- refer to religious arguments
- reach a justified conclusion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>For or against?</th>
<th>How convincing do you think this argument is?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unlike lesser jihad, greater jihad is something that will affect Muslims on a daily basis as every day they will need to strengthen their faith, and resist temptation because the devil and his jinn are always whispering temptations in their ear.</td>
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<tr>
<td>According to one hadith, Muhammad said greater jihad was more important than lesser jihad. Furthermore, Muhammad was constantly engaged in demonstrating greater jihad and only on a few occasions did he perform lesser jihad.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater jihad is central to what it means to be a Muslim. This is because it involves trying to put the will and wishes of Allah above one’s own selfish desires.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Qur’an says that Muslims should take up arms when it has been legitimately called for, and there are examples of when Muhammad himself fought this type of jihad (e.g. in the Battle of Badr).</td>
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<tr>
<td>The importance of greater jihad is timeless. However, many believe that the reasons why Muhammad would sometimes permit lesser jihad are no longer relevant today because Islam is now an established faith.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing the good may require performing lesser jihad, especially if a foreign aggressor has invaded a country and all other peaceful means of solving the dispute have failed. We do not live in an ideal peaceful world.</td>
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4.27 The Battle of Badr

The Battle of Badr took place after Muhammad and his early community of followers fled from Makkah to Madinah because they were being prevented from following the will of Allah, and also because their lives were in danger. Even when they had settled in Madinah, conflict and difficulties continued between themselves and the powerful Quraysh in Makkah. Not long before the Battle of Badr took place, it is believed that Muhammad received a revelation from Allah where he was told: “[Prophet] give good news to those who do good: God will defend the believers; [...] Those who have been attacked are permitted to take up arms because they have been wronged – God has the power to help them – those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying, ‘Our Lord is God.’ [...] God is sure to help those who help His cause – God is strong and mighty” (22:37–40). This was seen as permission from Allah to fight the Quraysh from Makkah, and the Battle of Badr is seen to be an example of such an encounter.

Badr is about 70 miles southwest of Madinah and was a popular resting point on the road between Syria and Makkah because it contained wells. Muhammad took an army of just over 300 men, comprised of both those who had left Makkah during the hijrah and also those who had reverted to the faith in Madinah. His army included Ali, Abu Bakr and ‘Umar. They fought a much larger Quraysh army from Makkah. The battle took place during March in 624 ce. Initially the fighting only involved three people from both armies, but after Muhammad’s men won this encounter, the Quraysh sent arrows over to Muhammad’s army, which resulted in the death of one soldier and the injury of another. Muhammad retaliated by calling his men to fight. The Qur’an says that his army were helped by Allah who reinforced them “with a thousand angels in succession” (8:9), telling the angels “I am with you: give the believers firmness; I shall put fear into the hearts of the disbelievers – strike above their necks and strike all their fingers” (8:12–13). Some hadiths say that the angels came on horseback, led by Jibril. The Qur’an also says that even before the battle Allah helped Muhammad and his men by sending the rain and enabling them to have a good night’s sleep. Due to the help of Allah, Muhammad and his men were victorious. After winning the battle, Muhammad ordered that the captives should be treated well and that any booty should be for Allah, his Prophet, the poor and Muhammad’s companions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Were the reasons for jihad legitimate?</th>
<th>Did the jihad observe legitimate behaviour?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In God’s cause?</td>
<td>• Making every attempt to not harm innocent people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In self-defence?</td>
<td>• Not using bad tactics, such as rape, poisonous weapons, the destruction of resources needed to survive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• As a last resort?</td>
<td>• Used minimum and necessary force?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To preserve Islam?</td>
<td>• Minimised damage done to property?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To protect the oppressed?</td>
<td>• Treated captured enemies with justice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Called by a legitimate leader?</td>
<td>• Ceased fighting as soon as this was possible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not to force people to revert to Islam?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not to conquer other nations or for economic gain?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Had peaceful means to settle disputes already been tried?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>