

Support for centres with AO2: some suggestions for teaching

NB the nature of this information is for developing AO2. What follows are NOT definitive answers – lines of argument are suggested in order to demonstrate the skills of AO2, but the WJEC strongly advises further development and for teachers and candidates to apply their own ideas and evaluation in response to the materials already provided.

For the skills of AO2 it is important to remember that what is being assessed are skills of evaluation and not simply knowledge and understanding of content. The six bullets for each Theme are listed beneath the AO1 content. They are NOT questions in themselves but rather indications of the areas of debate that may arise in a typical AO2 question statement. In addition, as AO1 material is studied the whole purpose of AO2 is to approach an understanding of the AO1 material in a critical and evaluative way that is very much a rigorous and academic discipline.

One of the most common features of a Principal Examiner's report is the regular comment that candidates just **present lists of views** in support of and/or challenging an argument often in response to a question expecting an evaluation. So, for instance, a typical mark scheme may list bullets of points to consider but to repeat them does not demonstrate AO2. How the points are **USED** and **DEVELOPED** by the teacher and candidate to form critical analysis and evaluation is crucial and transforms any suggested material into academic debate that mirrors the AO2 Band descriptors.

There is nothing wrong with preparing your considerations and reflections of a topic in response to the 'Issues for evaluation and analysis' section of the Specification; however, what is important is **making sure that there is some form of personal analysis or commentary throughout the answer** that can then be **used to form a reasonable conclusion**.

Evaluation and analysis skills present themselves as a constant dialogue between the voice of the evidence or the views that you are selecting, and that of your own voice, with the end result of you having the final word that states clearly your position [conclusion(s)].

Unit 3 : Islam

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Islam Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The first bullet point is to consider the divine nature of the shari'a

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Muslims make their intention to do all actions for Allah, and they believe they are following His will when they follow His commands in the shari'a. It is a system of law and guidance looked up to by many Muslims because it is beyond human corruption as a divine law made in heaven.
2. However, that does not mean shari'a as we know it is completely divine. There are in fact several schools of law and many different interpretations of shari'a, indicating that human interpreters have had a major role to play in the development of shari'a law.
3. The shari'a is based on the Qur'an first and foremost, and the examples of Muhammad, last and perfect messenger from God. Therefore, it can be said that the two primary sources of shari'a originate in divine nature.
4. However, the sources for Muhammad's examples are mostly the hadith, and there are questions about their authenticity as they were passed down by fallible human narrators.
5. Scholars use consensus (ijma), and analogy (qiyas), to provide answers to issues unclear in the known sources. On the one hand, they discuss primary sources in forming opinions. On the other, they provide human opinions about them.
6. Muslims have different opinions about the ways in which they may arrive at shari'a teachings. Some believe that shari'a should take literally commands from the Qur'an and sunna, to remain close to its divine origin. Others believe the general principles are timeless, but details of applying them should be re-interpreted by people who know best for the time they live in.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What are the differences between the Qur'an, regarded as the divinely revealed word of God, and the shari'a?
2. Does the fact that there are many different interpretations of shari'a affect interpretations about its divine nature?
3. To what extent can humans make shari'a rulings with confidence that these rulings are justified if shari'a is divine?
4. Does shari'a need to be unchanging for all time to be divine in origin? Or can shari'a be applied differently at different times according to God's plan for the world?
5. Some Muslims prefer secular systems for society today. Does this mean that shari'a is no longer needed and therefore cannot be divine?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The shari'a originates with Allah and is eternal and unchanging.
2. The shari'a is essentially a collection of human interpretations loosely based on the Qur'an and sunna.
3. A pure system of shari'a may exist with God but is only partly known to Muslims who use both divine commands as well as human interpretations.

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Islam Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The second bullet point is to consider the extent to which human interpretation may impair understanding of shari'a

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The Qur'an is God's direct revelation and the first source of shari'a. It is possible that any human interpretation could never be as good as the Qur'an for understanding God's divine plan and might mislead.
2. However, the second source of shari'a is the sunna, contained in the words of the fully human Prophet of Allah, Muhammad. He set a perfect example which exemplifies God's commands so that Muslims could understand. His human example helps Muslims follow the sharia.
3. Qur'anists reject human interpretations and follow the Qur'an alone as a source of authority. Qur'anists consider human interpretations as impairing understanding of God's law.
4. In the early days of Islam, Muslims of Madinah helped to set the commands in the shari'a schools. Their habits were followed because they knew the Prophet's ways well. The Madinans habits were a form of human understanding of divine law.
5. However, many different schools of thought grew up which can be confusing and may impair some Muslims understanding of shari'a.
6. Today, many issues do not find clear answers in the primary sources of shari'a, so Muslims turn to human interpreters and ask for consensus (ijma) and analogy (qiyas) to help them.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Why do Muslims find the need to make human interpretations when shari'a originates with God?
2. How can Muslims find solutions to modern day problems which are also compatible with divine shari'a law?
3. Does interpretation change and detract or enhance understanding of God's will? How do Muslims know the difference?
4. Can human interpretations be made by anyone or should a qualified Imam, Mujtahid or scholar be required to make judgements?
5. What is the difference between interpretations and re-interpretations (ijtihad) for current needs? Is one any more valid than the other?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Human interpretations are essential for Muslims to understand their faith in the age they live in and so help Muslims get a clearer idea of shari'a law.
2. Human interpretations bring change and innovation which detracts from the law and at worst are a form of shirk, association of something besides Allah.
3. Where clear, original sources should be used and no human interpretation added, but where shari'a does not answer modern problems, interpretations can help Muslims understand their faith.

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Islam Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The third bullet point is to consider the extent to which a description of shari'a as law is misleading

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Shari'a is widely referred to as a system of law and has developed forms of court, judges and rulings over the centuries.
2. However, 'law' is perhaps better referred to as a single system within a national state. Islamic shari'a provides very many different rulings made by scholars of different schools of thought; there is a great deal of variety.
3. Criminal laws have been implemented by some shari'a courts, but at most times in history separate state courts dealt with criminal misleading.
4. Originally, shari'a meant the 'straight path' and provided guidance in religious matters about which there was 'no compulsion'. This is different from a system of law.
5. Shari'a is based on revelations and events in early seventh century Arabia. To follow laws and commands from those times, to the letter, might be seen as an ideal for some and of concern for others.
6. Many see shari'a best used selectively and re-interpreted for today, rather than laws to be followed literally.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What subjects and areas of life does shari'a cover?
2. What are the key parts of a system of law, law making and enforcement? To what extent do Muslims practicing shari'a have aspects of these key parts in place?
3. Does it matter that there are so many different and individual interpretations of shari'a? Is this compatible with a legal system?
4. To what extent can beliefs and morals be legislated for as laws for both society as a whole and for individuals? What about plural societies where different religions live side by side?
5. Many new rulings are made for new situations. Is it misleading to refer to these as laws when they are not directly covered by the Qur'an?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Shari'a is mostly about religious traditions and family life, so the word 'law' is misleading.
2. Shari'a can be about all aspects of life according to God's command so forming a complete system of law is a logical conclusion.
3. Shari'a could be seen as family law, concerning matters such as marriage and divorce, but not criminal law, usually dealt with by separate state authorities throughout Muslim history.

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts

Islam Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fourth bullet point is to consider whether or not the doors to ijthad are closed.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Ijthad is personal opinion. Muslims believe in submission to God's will, so it could be argued there is no room for personal opinion to pick and choose what to do. Muslims should be obedient to the Qur'an.
2. The early Muslim communities knew the Prophet and heard his words. People who knew him well could make opinions on issues, but today we have lost their knowledge and there is a risk that opinions may be formed that the Prophet would not have agreed with. So Muslims should no longer make ijthad.
3. Great Muslim scholars from the past, particularly Al-Ghazali, taught that the days of Ijthad are over: the 'gates' are closed. Following him, Sunni Muslims traditionally ask a Mutjahid not to make ijthad but to practice Taqlid, to copy these earlier opinions as closely as possible without the flexibility of ijthad.
4. However, there are many new issues that Muslims need guidance on. Without making new opinions, by practicing ijthad, Muslims might find themselves lost and find it confusing to follow their faith.
5. Shia scholars continued to make opinions to guide their followers and some research suggests some Sunni Muslim scholars made ijthad opinions throughout history, so why not continue today?
6. Reformist Muslims believe some issues such as the unequal treatment of women are unacceptable and should be challenged. Ijthad is essential to reform Islam for the modern world.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What are the reasons a Muslim might have for seeking to carry out ijthad?
2. Can anyone carry out ijthad or should this practice be limited to certain people? If so, who and on what grounds?
3. Are there any limits to ijthad in terms of what can be decided?
4. To what extent are the teachings of Islam absolute and unchangeable and to what extent are they relative to different times and circumstances?
5. How can ijthad be defended against the charge of innovation (bid'ah), which is seen as unacceptable in Islam?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Ijthad should no longer be practiced because we cannot know as much about what the Prophet taught today, so we should rely on the opinions of those who knew him and not add anything else.
2. Ijthad is important today to make sense of new issues and situations not covered by the opinions of those in the early Muslim communities.
3. Ijthad could be practiced in limited circumstances: only by those qualified and to resolve unknown issues.

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Islam Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fifth bullet point is to consider the extent to which the term jihad is misunderstood

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The media often show jihad as violent terrorism, in which innocent people are murdered or harmed, often in war zones or sometimes even in western cities. Some who have carried out these crimes have claimed to do so as a jihad for Islam.
2. Many Muslim leaders have condemned these actions and Muslims have protested 'not in my name': meaning that extremists have the wrong understanding of jihad and what they do is to be condemned.
3. Islamist Muslims sometimes call for a jihad to establish Muslim government, either peacefully or with force. Others regard this as a misunderstanding of the original term jihad and the creation of a new Islamic system, not supported by the practice of the Prophet.
4. There are examples of Muslims who follow a personal jihad to practice their faith. This can include struggling to pray five times a day and fast without food in Ramadan whilst it is challenging to do so. They claim this is the greater or more important meaning of jihad.
5. There are conditions for lesser jihad: it should be a defensive conflict as a last resort, taking care not to involve women, children and various other conditions. Sometimes conflicts have occurred where these conditions have not been followed, misunderstanding the nature and bounds of jihad.
6. Some Muslims believe there should be a gender jihad to struggle for equal rights for women and reform the practice of the religion, whereas traditionalists reject this as a misunderstanding of the true teachings of the faith.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What is the difference between greater and lesser jihad? Can these be further sub-divided into different types with examples?
2. To what extent are the media responsible for showing a biased view of jihad, creating misunderstandings?
3. To what extent do Muslims speak coherently with regards to their views about jihad?
4. Are the conditions and applications for jihad understood as well as the general concept?
5. Is violence ever justified? Can Muslims be pacifists?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The term jihad has been totally misunderstood and now carries negative associations with extremism and terrorism.
2. Many Muslims practice the greater jihad to follow Islam despite difficulty, which is an inner struggle carried out throughout life.
3. Jihad means different things to different Muslims who do not necessarily agree. One person's misunderstanding is regarded by another as a genuine opinion.

Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 2)

Islam Theme 1 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The sixth bullet point is to consider the relevance today of the teachings about lesser jihad.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Lesser jihad in the time of the Prophet took the form of defensive battles against other tribal groupings, to ensure the survival of the early Muslim community. Today, Islam is a long established faith so it could be argued lesser jihad is no longer relevant.
2. However, as a struggle for what is morally right, or to defend a community from oppression, lesser jihad might be applied at any time throughout history including today.
3. Muslims in some countries feel frustration against corrupt rulers or policies they feel forced to follow but do not accept. They feel teachings about lesser jihad, to struggle for what is right, are relevant and inspire them to struggle for what is right.
4. The teachings about lesser jihad include rulings about how it should be defensive and not harm women, children and be as a last resort. In today's world some Muslims are not following these teachings so the teachings themselves could help restrain some from extremism and terrorism and make clear that Islam does not sanction such actions.
5. Some in the media and politics, Muslim and non-Muslim, see Islam and the West in a clash of civilisations, and jihad as part of this. The teachings about lesser jihad can help to dispel such a confrontation.
6. Teachings about lesser jihad may not cover modern interpretations, such as those of the Muslim Reform Movement who call for a jihad to reform Islam. They argue the teachings need updating for the present day.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What forms can lesser jihad take?
2. What are the conditions for lesser jihad?
3. What misconceptions do different people have about the meaning of jihad in modern times?
4. To what extent can Islamic teachings be transferred from one time period to another? What are the problems involved in doing so?
5. Why do some Muslims today demand a new and different focus on jihad as reform and why do other Muslims reject this?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Lesser jihad is not relevant today: the conditions for it are limited to tribal society in seventh century Arabia.
2. Lesser jihad in terms of struggling for what is right is just as relevant as ever, as there are lots of wrongs in the world which need to be challenged.
3. Lesser jihad may be relevant but with different conditions and circumstances today because times have changed so much.

Theme 2 : Significant historical developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The first bullet point is to consider the compatibility of Islam with democracy.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The Prophet consulted the people of Madinah when he set up the early Muslim community, setting a precedent which supports the compatibility of Islam with democracy.
2. Early Caliphs were appointed by consent of the people and held consultations called shura, which some argue naturally lead on to democracy. Therefore Islam may be said to be compatible.
3. In democracies, people vote for parties and they make new laws. People might vote for policies which are against the revealed teachings of the Qur'an. Therefore some Muslims see limits to democracy or even oppose it completely.
4. Some Muslims see the practice of their faith as a personal and family matter. Government is separate from this so it is quite possible to live in a secular and multi-faith context. Therefore they see Islam as compatible with democracy.
5. Others associate democracy with colonial rule and corruption. They aim to build an Islamic system based on shari'a and revealed teachings. Some Muslim countries only allow candidates to stand for election if they are conservative Muslims, thereby limiting people's choice.
6. In the UK, many Muslims support democracy and there are high profile Muslims who hold positions of power and have been democratically elected, such as Mayor of London Sadiq Khan. They encourage Muslims to vote and take part in elections.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What forms of government do different Muslims use around the world? To what extent are they democratic?
2. Is shura, consultation, the same thing as democracy?
3. To what extent are Muslims free to choose and make laws on the basis of their own choices?
4. What are the effects of Muslim views with regard to democracy when it comes to integration? Bear in mind that democracy is a key British value.
5. Are there any aspects of Islam and traditional Muslim teachings which might cause some problems in modern democratic systems based on human rights?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Democracy is a form of government which logically follows on from the consultations of the Prophet and Caliphs, so is compatible with Islam.
2. Democracy might allow people to vote out teachings from the Qur'an therefore it cannot go together with revealed truths.
3. Democratically elected leaders are fine for matters of government provided Muslims are free to practice their own faith and family matters according to Islam.

Theme 2 : Significant historical developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The second bullet point is to consider the extent to which shari'a is an adequate guide for all aspects of a society.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Islam is a complete way of life and its teaching cover morality, family life, religious requirements, and so on. If Islam involves complete submission to Allah and Allah's plan covers everything, then it follows that shari'a should be used as a guide for all aspects of society.
2. However, society covers many aspects including family relations as well as criminal matters. In practical terms most Muslim rulers organised criminal law through state systems, loosely based on Islamic teachings but not directly following shari'a law.
3. Some people today raise concerns that shari'a contains rulings such as cutting off hands for theft which are clearly not appropriate in the modern world. It is suggested that shari'a is best used when dealing with personal religious affairs and family matters, such as marriage and divorce.
4. Some Muslims believe that shari'a should not be used in these matters either, because it can mean women's rights being denied in separate shari'a courts.
5. Muslims in the UK today try to follow shari'a laws for many aspects of life, such as dress and when choosing food to eat, to ensure it is halal and in accordance with shari'a requirements. This suggests they follow shari'a in all aspects of life.
6. Some people have concerns about shari'a and its position about issues such as homosexuality, which traditionally Muslims disapprove of, so believe shari'a is not an adequate guide for such matters.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What areas of life does shari'a cover? Does it cover all areas equally?
2. How is shari'a able to offer guidance to societies which change over time? Specifically, how is shari'a, based on seventh century Arabia, able to relate to modern society? Why is it that some Muslims view shari'a as an idealistic solution to the problems they face in all areas of society?
3. Can shari'a guide society as a whole when different people in society have different versions or views of shari'a?
4. Where the primary sources of shari'a do not answer modern questions, how should Muslims find answers? Is it acceptable to develop new answers through shari'a or reform Muslim teachings to find new solutions?
5. How do shari'a teachings help to guide Muslims who live in pluralistic, multi-faith and secular environments? What issues might arise?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Shari'a is based on God's law which covers morality and teachings in all areas so is a guide for Muslims to use in all aspects of society.
2. Shari'a is not suitable for use today in society because individuals have different views and some aspects of shari'a are not suitable because society has changed.
3. Shari'a might be used for personal and family matters but not in other areas, and particularly where society is made up of many different religions, where one secular system for all might be more useful.

Theme 2 : Significant historical developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The third bullet point is to consider the effectiveness of Islamic responses to the challenges of scientific views about the origins of the universe.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Muslims believe that Allah made the universe and everything in it, including all the animals and plants, in the days of creation. There is no need for logic or evidence, it is revealed truth. Therefore, Islam dismisses Science.
2. However, many Muslims have tried to reconcile the two. Some suggest that the scientific theory of the Big Bang is compatible with verses in the Qur'an, and that the universe could have been created by God through a big bang.
3. There are many different scientific theories and Muslims may point out that these are just theories. Scientists cannot prove God did not create the world, so both science and Islam are dealing with matters that cannot be proved beyond doubt.
4. Some Muslims thought that evidence from the creation led to the logical conclusion that God made the universe. Their use of philosophy and reasoning could be seen as supportive of a scientific approach.
5. Other Muslims criticise this and particularly the scientific theory of evolution. Their response to evidence of evolution is to dismiss the scientific approach.
6. However, some have attempted to reconcile views by saying that God created our evolution. God could have worked through this process to create the fresh and beautiful world as we see it today.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What are the sources of evidence acceptable to Muslims for the creation? In what respect might these differ from those used by scientists?
2. How far can Muslims use reasoning and philosophy to support their understanding of creation?
3. Can belief in God as creator be reconciled with logical reasoning from science?
4. Is it possible to accept the theory of evolution as well as believe in the Islamic creation story?
5. What are the implications for beliefs about creation for the way we manage the environment today?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Muslim responses to science are dismissive and ineffective because revelation is used without regard to logical reasoning, despite scientific evidence which supports the Big Bang and evolution.
2. Many Muslims responses are effective because they try to reconcile both scientific theory and religious explanation, recognising that both are unable to be proved absolutely.
3. There are a variety of opinions about this and Muslims disagree with each other. One person's effective response is another's heresy.

Theme 2 : Significant historical developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fourth bullet point is to consider whether or not Islam is compatible with science

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The Qur'an contains revealed truth for Muslims. They accept this no matter what scientific experiment has to say. Therefore, Islam is not compatible with science.
2. However, the Qur'an in its deepest sense is a revelation of truth, revealed not just in book form but also visible through the Qur'an of nature. Observation of nature can lead to logical conclusions that support the same objective truth in the revealed Qur'an. Therefore science and Islam are compatible.
3. Science supports the theory of Big Bang and evolution. These can be explained logically without the need to believe in a creator God. This approach is different from Islam which starts with God as the essential first cause and prime mover.
4. Medieval Muslim scientists did much to preserve ancient knowledge of Science and began scientific method and experimentation according to some scientists, including Jim al-Khalili. They did not have any difficulty reconciling Islam and Science.
5. However, knowledge did not move further in the late medieval period. This was partly because Muslims frowned on rational thinking and religious belief put constraints on scientific enquiry.
6. There are many Muslim scientists today in all fields who do not have any difficulty holding both a personal faith and scientific careers.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. To what extent do Muslims accept and use logical reasoning in their understanding of truth, and to what extent do they reject this?
2. How could religious belief constrain what scientists do?
3. What is the nature of truth? Is there such a thing as objective truth? What would be the Islamic and scientific answers to this question?
4. How do beliefs about creation and evolution affect the debate about Islam and science? Are they irreconcilable?
5. What are the implications for this for modern scientific enquiry, such as genetic and embryo research?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Islam is not compatible with science. Muslims must accept and obey revealed truth in the Qur'an which cannot be questioned by science.
2. Islam is compatible with science since both are searching for objective truth. Scientific enquiry and revelation can both support knowledge.
3. Islam is compatible with science in so long as core beliefs are not questioned. Ultimately belief in God cannot be open to question by science.

Theme 2 : Significant historical developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fifth bullet point is to consider the extent to which the media influences Western perceptions of Islam

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. We live in an age of mass media, newspapers, internet and social media, as well as films and TV, so inevitably the media is a means of communication. This issue is about whether the media reflects the truth or influences people to think about Islam in a certain way.
2. Some research, such as that by Ziauddin Sardar, presents many occasions where the media portray Muslims with backward stereotypes and associate Islam with terrorism and extremism. This influences people negatively.
3. Others feel that the media has been too reticent to criticise aspects of Islam and the behavior of Muslims, in the treatment of women for example, which needs to be challenged.
4. There are examples of documentaries about the history of Islam and contribution to art and science which suggests some parts of the media are attempting to give a fair and balanced view.
5. Major terrorist atrocities have been reported in the media because they have a duty to report them. Some of the perpetrators claimed to be doing so for Islam, so the media may only be telling the truth.
6. The MCB and others complain that the media do not always sufficiently report their condemnations of terrorism or marches by peaceful Muslims against terrorism, giving an imbalanced impression of the views of Muslims.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Should the media report things even if they cause offense to Muslims?
2. Or do they have a duty to report regardless of offence?
3. What are western perceptions of Islam?
4. How do Muslims interact with the media and mainstream society which it reports to?
5. What are the implications of this for the way Muslims interact with the media and mainstream society?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The media only reflect the truth about Islam, including criticism where justified.
2. The media are biased and give an unduly negative impression of Islam and Muslims.
3. Whilst there is an imbalance, there are also cases where the media has presented good news stories and reasonable criticisms.

Theme 2 : Significant historical developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 2 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The sixth bullet point is to consider the whether or not Islam is accurately represented in Britain today

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Muslims in the UK hold many important positions, including being members of parliament and leadership positions in many different fields, so they are well represented.
2. However, some research shows the media have not represented Islam fairly or accurately and there is a bias towards Islamophobia.
3. There are Muslim organisations such as the MCB which represent the views of Muslims to government and in the media.
4. However, some Muslims criticise these groups as being unrepresentative and failing to air the views of Muslims who want to take a less conservative approach and reform Islam for the present day.
5. Many Muslims protest against terrorism but complain their views are not well represented in the media which seems to give more airtime to showing the actions of a few Muslims who carry out acts of extremism.
6. Nevertheless, factual and documentary programming and academic writing contains a wealth of objective research to portray Islam based on accurate information for people who wish to view or read it.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. In what ways are Muslims and Islam represented?
2. Can accurate representation also be critical?
3. Are individuals and groups which represent Muslims truly representative?
4. How can representation be made of diverse views and interests which sometimes conflict?
5. How is the internet and social media changing perceptions?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Islam is well represented in Britain today through MPs, organisations and people in many different roles.
2. Islam is not well represented and organisations which have a voice are not democratic.
3. That are some areas in which Islam is well represented and others in which it is not.

Theme 3 : Significant social developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The first bullet point is to consider the effectiveness of Islamic responses to pluralism

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Prophet Muhammad set up the Constitution of Madinah and its government in which those of other faiths and tribes worked together to protect each other. Some see this as effective pluralism.
2. There are other occasions when Muhammad rejected pluralism, probably due to the circumstances of tribalism and persecution at the time.
3. At times in Muslim history, especially during Muslim rule in Spain, Muslims treated others well and enabled them Christians and Jews to flourish.
4. More recently, some Muslims have encouraged the creation of Islamic governments exclusively for Muslims to lead lives in which every aspect is governed by their faith.
5. In the UK, some Muslims have integrated well and work effectively in a plural context in all aspects of life, such as in politics, the media, sport or joining others in joint social action.
6. Some Muslims fear losing their identity whilst living in a plural environment, or find it more difficult to carry out the rituals of prayers, fasting whilst others around are eating, or take time off to celebrate Id festivals.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What are the different understandings of the term pluralism?
2. Does it matter what beliefs Muslims hold about who can get to heaven when living in plural societies alongside people of other faiths?
3. How might issues such as Islamophobia effect Muslims responses to pluralism?
4. What ways could be used to measure the effectiveness of responses?
5. What are the implications of beliefs held about pluralism for communities living in the UK today?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Some Muslims are very effective at balancing their personal faith with integrating into mainstream, plural society.
2. Other Muslims have chosen a degree of separatism in response to aspects of living in plural societies they find difficult.
3. Muslims disagree about what is an effective response: integration, a degree of separation, joint social action or missionary preaching.

Theme 3 : Significant social developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The sixth bullet point is to consider whether or not there is a coherent approach to conversion in Islam

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Muhammad taught that Islam was the truth and preached to the idol worshippers to become Muslims. Muslims today invite others to accept Islam as the revealed truth. Since all Muslims follow Muhammad in this, the approach is coherent.
2. However, Muhammad also accepted other believers, such as Christians and Jews, and his efforts were sometimes complicated with tribal matters. Therefore it is not always clear what a coherent approach might be. Some Muslims marry Christians and Jews and do not require them to convert, following the practice at the time of Muhammad.
3. Most Muslims in the world live in South and South East Asia where Islam was introduced through travelling Sufis who told stories, acted dramas, sang songs and helped people with charity to inspire them to convert to Islam.
4. Many people in the UK who become Muslims are inspired by the growing Salafi movement which rejects Sufism and promotes a simple, text based literal practice, giving meaning and order to life.
5. In the UK today converts identify many different reasons. Some become Muslim for marriage, others for reasons of theology, or to join a Sufi group for spiritual experience.
6. Different views are held by Muslims about the extent to which they are free to choose their beliefs. Some strictly forbid leaving Islam (converting to another religion for example) whereas others see forced conversion as a sin and it permissible to allow someone to return to their original faith if they so wish.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Muslims refer to conversion, reversion and embracing Islam. To what extent could these terms refer to different approaches to conversion?
2. What effect does belief in God's All-Powerful plan for the world and every person in it have on Muslim understanding of conversion?
3. Do Muslims have freedom to choose their own beliefs?
4. What effect does the variety of different Islamic groups, practices and teachings have on the experience of different people when converting?
5. Apart from religious belief, what implications could the different experiences of conversion have on the way Muslims interact with others in society?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Conversion is coherent and simple: new Muslims declare the shahadah in front of witnesses.
2. No two paths to conversion are the same. There is no coherent approach. Some Muslims encourage seekers to experience the spiritual path; others preaching and persuasion.
3. Conversion is about an individual commitment following God's plan for a person's life, so it is not dependent on the coherence or otherwise of what Muslims do in terms of their actual conversion.

Theme 3 : Significant social developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The third bullet point is to consider the extent to which the Muslim family is central to the Islamic religion.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The Muslim family is the unit that teaches Islam to children and passes on the traditions of the faith. It is seen as central to Islamic faith and practice.
2. However, the Imam and the mosque are the sources of guidance through the sermon at Friday prayers and through Madrassah supplementary schools which teach children how to say their prayers and read the Qur'an.
3. It is a religious duty in Islam to look after parents and many Muslim families form extended family units in which everyone has a role to play in looking after each other. Families also help to arrange partners in marriage.
4. However, some Muslims point out that they have a right to refuse marriage partners and must agree willingly as it is their right in Islam, regardless of what their families say. Many younger Muslims now choose their own partner instead of asking their families.
5. To some Muslim women, traditional family roles can be a tie upon their careers. Some point out that Muhammad's wife Khadija was a successful businesswoman and his employer, so women should be free to focus on their careers like her.
6. The concept of the family in modern Britain is changing, with greater variety of family units: some are single parents, some are gay couples, many are mixed race or mixed religion partnerships. Some Muslims reject some of these developments whereas others say Muslims should now embrace more diversity in family life.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What are the different ways of defining the family make up, particularly in the modern western world? What are the differences between this and the traditional Muslim definitions of family?
2. Should children follow the religion of their parents or be free to grow up and choose any religion or none for themselves?
3. Are there any possible points of difference between cultural family background and Islam?
4. Why might changes in modern living effect the traditional role of the Muslim family?
5. How should Muslims respond to mixed race, mixed religion, same sex and other connotations of family accepted by society in general?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Traditionally Muslim family units are central to passing on faith and culture to the next generation and supporting the old and young.
2. However, some Muslims find family life restrictive on women's careers or on the type of family unit acceptable so for them the role of the family is changing.
3. The family is important but there are other sources such as Imams and guidance from friends and the internet which are nowadays increasingly important for Muslims.

Theme 3 : Significant social developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fourth bullet point is to consider whether or not women are equal to men in Islam

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Muhammad in his final sermon made clear that his message was to believing men and believing women: he made a point of stressing both equally had religious requirements and women rights. Therefore men and women are equal.
2. However, through much of Muslim history men were leaders and women had unequal roles. Shari'a law courts gave women lesser weight than men. Women had a role to look after children at home, which was different from the role of men as breadwinners, and women had to manage their own careers around their family duties.
3. There are traditions that in the early days of Islam women had important roles in education, medicine and even one as an Imam, suggesting women were equal to men.
4. There are examples of successful Muslim women who have even been Prime Ministers and leaders of countries, in equal roles of leadership to men.
5. There are also examples today of Muslim women who lead lives mostly at home and are denied the same level of education and career advancement as men. They are unequal because their role in the home and bringing up children is seen as more important than doing similar roles to men.
6. Some women see the hijab as a symbol that they are unequal to men since they are encouraged to cover their hair whereas men are freer in what they can wear. Others see the hijab as a symbol of status and wear it with pride.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What does it mean to be equal? Does equality require men and women to have the same roles or can they have different roles but still be equal?
2. In what ways might cultural practice and Islamic teaching about the treatment of women differ?
3. Why might some Muslim feminists have a slightly different concept of equality?
4. Why do some people believe it is essential to reform Islam to achieve equality?
5. What are the implications of this issue for Muslim women integrating in plural societies such as the UK today?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Men and women are equal in status in Islam and have the same religious requirements, if different roles.
2. Men and women are unequal in Islam because of their different roles and because of male dominated society through much of Muslim history.
3. Men and women are equal in some ways but not in others, according to Islamic traditions in different areas.

Theme 3 : Significant social developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fifth bullet point is to consider the possibility of assimilation into a secular society for Muslims in Britain

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Many Muslims have succeeded in balancing their faith with mainstream British society and entered successful careers in business, politics and other professions.
2. Other Muslims fear losing their identity through assimilating. They feel that to maintain the purity of their traditions, such as praying five times a day and fasting in Ramadan, they need to avoid socialising in environments where this might be difficult.
3. Some Muslims feel that wearing Islamic dress, such as the hijab, and practicing their faith in public, helps assimilation because others get to see Muslims and understand more about their religion.
4. Others fear prejudice, Islamophobia or even attack as they are abused for being different, by wearing a headscarf for instance.
5. The Constitution of Madinah, an original model of society for Muslims, is seen by some as a good model for secularism and encouraged Muslims to live alongside people of other backgrounds.
6. There are advantages for Muslims who attend secular schools and places of work in that this helps to guarantee they are treated equally. However, some Muslim parents prefer their children to be educated in religious schools, where they can preserve their faith and values.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What are the overlaps and what are the differences between assimilation and integration?
2. Why might some Muslims fear assimilation but others welcome it?
3. Are there any particular aspects of secular society which Muslims might find difficult?
4. To what extent is Islam a social religion?
5. What are the implications for this bearing in mind debate about multiculturalism and muscular liberalism?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Muslims can and should assimilate into mainstream society as this benefits them and the promotion of their faith.
2. A degree of separation is better as it is a means to preserve the purity of Muslim traditions.
3. Muslims should pick and choose which areas of life where they might feel comfortable about assimilating into mainstream society and which traditions they feel they need to keep distinct.

Theme 3 : Significant social developments in religious thought

Islam Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The sixth bullet point is to consider the effectiveness of the Muslim Council of Britain

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. The MCB aims to represent a diverse collection of Muslim groups in Britain who do not always agree with each other. It is the broadest based Muslim group in the UK and has succeeded in getting a large number of affiliates, making it an effective Muslim group in terms of the number of members.
2. The MCB has led campaigns such as Tell Mamma, the campaign to report Islamophobia, and joined together with other faith groups at national events, giving a voice and presence for Muslims, which is effective.
3. However, the MCB has been criticised for being too close to some groups whose views have been questioned. Its boycott for some years of Holocaust memorial, now overturned, was criticised and as a result, some were concerned by the MCB and less receptive to listen to its voice.
4. The MCB aims to improve conditions for Muslims in the UK, but during the Iraq War strayed into international politics and criticised the government. As a result, it was cold shouldered by politicians in domestic matters making its voice less effective.
5. The MCB has been criticised by some groups such as Quilliam for not joining the Prevent Anti-Extremism strategy.
6. However, the MCB has made clear condemnations of terrorism, representing Muslims who believe in peace but feel they cannot support government policy.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. In what ways can the effectiveness of the MCB be measured?
2. How can Muslim opinion be understood in the UK when there are so many different groups?
3. In what ways could an organisation ensure it is representative? Does the MCB?
4. Should government in secular countries listen to religious concerns?
5. In what ways has the MCB changed or varied its approach about different issues over time? Which has been most effective?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. The MCB has been effective, particularly at providing the largest Muslim representative voice.
2. The MCB has been ineffective at representing everyone and taking a stance on some issues which has alienated some including government.
3. The MCB has been effective at dealing with some issues more than others.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity (part 2)

Islam Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The first bullet point is to consider Islam as a divided or united religion

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Muslims follow the Qur'an and sunna and all believe in the same One God, therefore they are clearly identifiable as a united religious community.
2. Shia and Sunni Muslims disagree over the legitimacy of who should lead them dating back to the time of Caliph Ali. Even today they are divided by mosques following different leadership.
3. Some Shia scholars, such as Vali Nasr, see the splits as significant rather like protestant and catholic Christianity. Others, such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, disagree and see the differences as insignificant.
4. In the modern world there are new splits between traditional Sunni Islam and the ultra-conservative Salafi movement.
5. Some see the emergence of differences as to do with identity and belonging, but not important when it comes to the essence of faith and key beliefs. As evidence of this Muslims from very different backgrounds are able to unite for Hajj.
6. Others see the diversity of Islam as a good thing and that divisions should be recognised as natural for a religion with so many followers worldwide. Allah created people in different nations so they should accept this and learn from one another.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What makes any religion united and what causes division?
2. What are the differences between diversity and division?
3. Is it more important to be united in beliefs or practices?
4. What effect might belief in Allah as controller of the world and human destiny have on attitudes towards destiny?
5. Does it matter that there are differences between Muslims?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Islam is united around common beliefs and Muslims form one ummah or Islamic community.
2. There is a diversity of Islamic beliefs and practices and today many of these are hotly contested between different schools of thought and in different places, making the religion disunited.
3. Islam is united around certain key issues such as belief in One God but divided about others such as leadership.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity (part 2)

Islam Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The second bullet point is to consider the extent to which Shi'a is a unique form of Islam

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Shia Muslims are known for their practices at the time of Ashura in Muharram, when they commemorate the sorrow and suffering of Hassan and Hussein murdered at the hands of their Sunni rivals. This is marked with passion plays and with self-flagellation, something not found in Sunni Islam.
2. Shia Muslims are also unique in that they follow 10 guiding principles rather than the five pillars of Sunni Islam.
3. However, the essence of these pillars is very similar, so it could be said that Shia Muslims are not unique and they agree with the main Islamic beliefs of Tawhid, Risalah and Akhirah, making any differences quite small.
4. The leadership of Shia Muslims through Imams traceable to the Prophet's line and with the power to interpret the Qur'an without error is different from the leadership of Sunni Muslims.
5. However, in some ways this is not unique because some aspects are similar to the Sufi Shaykhs whose followers also regard their pronouncements to be followed without question and who retain records of authority traceable to the Prophet.
6. Some Muslims regard Shia practices as similar and are happy to share devotions with them in the same mosques. Others reject and avoid prayer in Shia places of worship.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What are the different ways in which uniqueness could be defined and expressed?
2. In what ways does the difference over authority of leadership affect Shia and Sunni practices today?
3. Why do Shia Muslims follow different practices at certain times in the year?
4. In what ways is Shia Islam similar to Sufi and similar to Sunni Islam?
5. What is the significance of differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims today for communities of Muslims around the world?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Shia are unique due to their distinct beliefs and practices, which distinguish them from Sunni Muslims.
2. Shia Islam is not unique because it shares most aspects with other sects in Islam and there are only small differences.
3. Some aspects are common but there are also some unique practices that Shia Muslims follow, such as those associated with Ashura.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity (part 2)

Islam Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The third bullet point is to consider the possibility of a personal mystical union with God in Islam

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Many Sufis aim to rise through the spiritual states using practices of remembrance (dhikr/ zikr) to reach union with God which they describe as a deeply emotional experience which is real to them.
2. The poetry of Rumi and other sages describes how mystical experiences can help a believer to get closer to God and realise their faith. This mystical union seems very real and fulfilling from their descriptions.
3. On the other hand, the Muslim Al-Hallaj was condemned as heretic from claiming a union with God so close that he said: 'I am God.' This possibility was discounted by orthodox Muslims of his time.
4. Union with God could be seen as pantheism and straying beyond the bounds of the strict monotheism which Islam teaches.
5. Union with God is seen as a way of purifying the heart of selfish thoughts and connecting with the creator. Therefore this personal connection can help develop good character and is advisable for Muslims.
6. However, mystical union could detract from awe and fear of Allah, which most Muslims consider necessary to keep in mind as Allah is the ultimate judge and decider of who goes to heaven and hell.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Should God be understood mystically or rationally?
2. What is a 'mystical union'?
3. If there is nothing that can be compared with Allah, then is a 'union' possible?
4. Are monotheism and pantheism incompatible?
5. Considering the 99 names of Allah, do these qualities make mystical union possible?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Sufi Muslims promote personal mystical union with God as a high form of experience and devotional activity, so it is definitely possible.
2. Some Muslims such as Salafis reject this approach as an innovation, a Bid'ah, which should be excluded from Muslim devotional activity.
3. Personal mystical union might be achieved by a few Sufis entering higher states of fana but the majority may not reach it or choose this path.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity (part 2)

Islam Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fourth bullet point is to consider consider the religious validity of Sufi devotional practices.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Muhammad used to go out into caves to meditate and Sufis see their devotional practices of remembrance of Allah as naturally following his example, so they are valid.
2. However, the Prophet also told Muslims not to innovate anything new in religion and some consider Sufi practices invalid because they are not specifically laid out in the sunna or Pillars of Islam, so might be innovations.
3. Mainstream Sunni Muslim authorities such as Al-Azhar University have backed Sufi devotional practices as valid and within the traditions of Islam. However, Salafi scholars such as Tabari have refuted Sufi practices and advised they should be prohibited.
4. Some see Sufi practices as similar to the meditations carried out by Buddhist and Christian monks. This could be seen as in tune with genuine spirituality or it could be criticised as un-Islamic.
5. Some particular Sufi practices such as visiting the tombs of Saints and giving oaths to Shaykhs are criticised because they are, in the view of others, only ordinary people and should not be elevated in status or idolised.
6. Others regard Shaykhs and visits to tombs as a means to spiritual development and they say they are only learning from the examples people left which inspires them to follow Islam.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Why do some Muslims choose the Sufi path?
2. Why do some consider Sufi devotional practices bid'ah (innovation)?
3. Why does it matter if Muslims introduce new practices in their religious devotions?
4. Why do some people feel the need to follow a spiritual guide?
5. What are the similarities and differences between Sunni, Shia and Sufi Islam?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Sufi practices are valid: they bring believers closer to God and lead to greater realisation of faith.
2. Sufi practices are invalid, because they are innovations which lead away from the religion as revealed to the Prophet.
3. Some Sufi practices are valid and others are invalid.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity (part 2)

Islam Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The fifth bullet point is to consider the effectiveness of Islamic ethical teachings as a guide for living for Muslims today.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Islamic ethical teachings are based on the sunna of the Prophet. He was the last and perfect Prophet whose examples are seen as relevant for all time and not to be changed. Therefore, Islamic ethical teachings are just as much a guide for today as they always were.
2. However, Islamic ethical teachings were formulated in a different, largely tribal age. Teachings criticising homosexuality and the position for women are generally considered unacceptable today, so they should not be used as a guide.
3. Some argue that Islamic ethical teachings improved conditions for people, including women, relative to the norm at the time they were introduced in Muhammad's Madinah. So today Islamic teachings can still be effective if they are reformed to further improvement.
4. Others argue Islamic ethical teachings cannot be modernised and should be used as a clear code to keep Muslims on the straight and narrow in the same style as early communities of Muslims interpreted them.
5. In secular society, some argue that everyone should live by the same ethical teachings and there is no place for parallel ethical codes for people of different religions.
6. Others argue that Muslim ethical teachings can go hand in hand with life in modern, secular states and help encourage Muslims to play a full part in society with moral backing.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. Should ethical teachings be seen as absolute or relative to what is considered acceptable given different times and circumstances?
2. How are Islamic ethical teachings derived?
3. To what extent should religions proclaim ethical teachings and to what extent are these matters of individual conscience?
4. Should different religions have different ethical guidelines within mixed, secular communities and countries?
5. Why do some Muslims want to reform Islamic ethical teachings for today?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Islamic ethical teachings are effective today and throughout all time as they are based on the final revelation to humankind.
2. Islamic ethical teachings are rooted in sixth century Arabia and no longer appropriate in modern, mixed societies.
3. Some aspects of Islamic ethical teachings, such as the general promotion of human rights, are effective whereas other aspects such as literal application of punishments are not.

Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity (part 2)

Islam Theme 4 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

The sixth bullet point is to consider the extent to which Islamic teachings on punishment can be applied today.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

1. Islamic punishments are commonly associated with corporal and capital punishments. In ancient times hands were cut off for stealing and such punishments are still carried out in some Islamic countries. Today, these are seen as against internationally agreed human rights so should no longer be applied.
2. However, some Muslims believe these punishments follow the sunna of Muhammad and so are still valid. They believe strict punishments help deter crimes such as drug dealing.
3. Many Islamic punishments were symbolic and not carried out literally. Islamic teachings about punishment included the possibility of forgiveness, reconciliation, compensation and compassion. These are still relevant today as much as ever.
4. On the other hand, punishments could be seen as for the practical purpose of creating order and goodness for the most number of people in society, so Islamic punishments should only be applied where they have practical utilitarian effect.
5. Some Muslims say the death penalty should be carried out as a deterrent to other criminals and because it is allowed and even called for in the Qur'an and sunna. Others say the death penalty and other shari'a punishments are dependent on so many factors that they cannot practically be applied at all.
6. It could be argued that in today's world secular authorities are the only legitimate ones to meet out punishments which should be equal for everyone regardless of faith.

Key questions that may arise could be:

1. What is the purpose of punishment?
2. Should religions be part of systems of punishment?
3. In what ways might Islamic punishments be misunderstood?
4. Should punishments be relative according to time, place and circumstances?
5. What are the implications of this issue for Muslims living in different parts of the world today?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

1. Islamic teachings on punishment should be applied today as they are a model for all time, based on divine authority.
2. Islamic punishments should not be applied today because they are inconsistent with human rights.
3. Islamic teachings on punishment may have been more varied and compassionate than is commonly thought. Some aspects might still be relevant today.