

Ramadan: Exams and Tests, 2018

Information for schools and colleges

This paper is relevant to leaders in primary, secondary and tertiary schools and colleges, together with those involved in administering public examinations including GCSE, GCE AS and A levels, and national curriculum tests (SATs). There are also safeguarding implications for students considering how to observe Ramadan, therefore this will affect all teaching staff, and all staff engaged in the delivery of exams and tests over the summer.

ASCL has worked with imams, Islamic scholars, experts, Muslim chaplains in the education sector and education leaders (see Section 7 for a list of endorsers) to produce this information for school and college leaders so they may initiate discussions with Muslim students on how best they can fulfil their Islamic obligations during Ramadan, including the obligation to perform well in their exams and tests.

The intention of this paper is to provide information and practical advice for schools and colleges; ASCL does not endorse any particular interpretation of Islamic law or practice. This paper may also be used as a positive opportunity to engage with students, enabling them to make decisions for themselves.

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1 Overview

There is a wide and diverse range of possible interpretations of Islamic law. Scholars differ in their opinions on what age Muslims become obliged to fast, how long they should fast for and the legitimate exemptions. In this paper we have tried to present various positions from which parents, carers, and young people can draw their practice, rather than one Islamic answer.

In 2018, Ramadan, exams and tests all fall within the same period. Ramadan is predicted to start around 17 May and will end around 14-15 June. This year, Eid al-Fitr festivities will be on either 15 or 16 June. External exams will start as usual in early May and continue until the end of June. Primary school SATs will, as usual, take place in May with KS2 SATs between 14-17 May. The situation where Ramadan coincides with exams

and tests is likely to continue until 2019/2020. Also, Eid in 2021 will fall in KS2 test week. This year, statutory tests in primary schools also coincide with Ramadan for the first time.

No child under the age of puberty is obliged or expected to fast. Younger children may do a partial fast, but this should be in consultation with and under the supervision of parents, carers, and schools.

The combination of long days, higher temperatures, and exams and tests will put extra pressure on young Muslims, however they decide to observe Ramadan.

Observing Ramadan may bring many benefits to individuals and communities, but also has the potential to cause the individual temporary hardship through hunger and lack of liquids during fasting hours which may impact on physical wellbeing and cognitive performance.

Young Muslims and families, particularly those sitting exams and tests this summer, will need to balance their obligations as Muslims with their studies and the importance of exams and tests for their future, noting that the pursuit of education is also a religious and moral duty for Muslims of both genders. This is also alongside any other relevant factors when deciding how to observe Ramadan this year.

There was agreement from the imams, Islamic scholars, experts, chaplains and leaders we consulted that it is essential schools and colleges help support dialogue with Muslim students and families. Muslim students, their families, and schools and colleges should be aware that there is a wide and diverse range of opinions on how to observe Ramadan and from what age.

Age at which fasting is obligated or recommended

Fasting is only obligatory under Islamic tradition when a child becomes an adult. However, jurists differ over when this is¹. It is recommended for children to practise shorter and partial fasts in order to train them for the full fasting when they become adults.

Parents and carers should be made aware of the following points of view to facilitate their decision-making:

- The 'biological maturity' view: children become adults when they reach physical or biological maturity, that is, puberty. According to this view, children are expected to fast at the age of 15, possibly earlier.
- The 'intellectual maturity' view: children become adults upon attaining intellectual maturity in addition to biological maturity. According to this view, the expectation to fast will occur at some point between the ages of 16-19. Fasting, including partial fasting, is only recommended before this.

Children in primary schools are therefore considered too young to observe the full fast. They may, however, wish to practise a partial fast which is best done under the supervision of their family or carers outside school hours. For more information, see Section 4.

Unless there are legitimate safeguarding concerns, schools and colleges should not dictate to children who are considered old enough, or their families, how they observe Ramadan as this is a personal decision. Children and families should be informed of the flexibility Islamic Law offers to delay or exempt themselves from fasting and late night prayers if they believe their performance in exams and tests could be affected.

Islam encourages critical reasoning and while individuals may seek advice from religious leaders, they have the right to make their own decision. It is intended that the information in this paper will be used as a positive opportunity for engagement with students to make these important decisions for themselves.

¹ Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *Al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuhu* [Islamic Jurisprudence and Its Evidential Bases]

2 Ramadan: exams and tests, 2018

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. It is a 29-30 day period of prayer, fasting, self-control, charity-giving and goodwill to others. Ramadan is a time of self-reflection, increased religious devotion and self-control over the need to eat and drink during daylight hours. Fasting during Ramadan (which includes drinking no water), is one of the Five Pillars (fundamental religious duties) of Islam. Those fasting are recommended to have one meal (*suhur*) just before sunrise and an evening meal (*iftar*) after sunset during Ramadan. Muslims are encouraged to think of cleansing the whole self, through prayer and reflection throughout the day which can have a positive impact on individuals, familial and wider social relations

Ramadan is observed by Muslims across the world. Observing Ramadan has the potential to offer individuals many benefits as well as the potential to cause temporary physical hardship during the day. Each person will be affected in different ways, to different degrees and at different times in their lives. Some of the possible benefits include:

- feeling closer to God
- learning to exercise greater self-control
- establishing a healthier lifestyle and better habits
- greater feelings of peace, tranquillity and self-satisfaction spiritually
- the opportunity to establish better relationships with self and others

Ramadan also offers an opportunity to strengthen family and community ties through congregational prayer and celebration. Alongside these possible benefits, observing the fast and late-night prayers may also create less desirable consequences for some people, such as tiredness, low energy, dehydration, reduced focus, memory or concentration. This is of particular concern in the next few years when Ramadan falls in the summer in the UK, and for Muslim students who are scheduled to sit exams and tests during Ramadan.

Ramadan, 2018

Ramadan has a 33-year cycle and shifts backwards by approximately 11 days every year as determined by the lunar cycle. In 2018, Ramadan is predicted to start around 17 May and to end around 15 June (see Appendix 2 for details).

In 2018, Ramadan coincides with the UK exam season and will have one of the longest average fasting hours in the northern hemisphere during the 33-year cycle (2016 being the longest). 2016, was the first time Ramadan had clashed with exams and tests in the UK since the 1980s, this is likely to continue until 2019/20.

Young Muslims and their families, particularly those sitting exams and tests this summer, will need to take into consideration the impact on their studies and the importance of exams and tests for their future, as well as any other relevant factors (such as health considerations), when deciding how they will observe Ramadan this year. There is no doubt that Ramadan falling during the exam season will put extra pressure on young Muslims, whatever decision they make, especially with the length of the fast over the next few years. They should be made aware that there is a wide and diverse range of opinions on how to observe Ramadan and from what age, which give the necessary allowances for them to perform to the best of their ability in exams and tests.

Eid al-Fitr 2018

Eid al-Fitr is the one of the most important festivals in the Islamic calendar and was started by the Prophet

Muhammad himself. It is also known as 'The Feast of Breaking the Fast' and is celebrated by Muslims to mark the end of Ramadan. In 2018, the Eid al-Fitr festivities are likely to be on Saturday 16 June. School and college leaders should be aware of the importance of this day and the fact that Muslim children and their families will be attending festivities.

Eid ul-Adha and GCSE results day 2018

Note also that in 2018, the four-day celebration of Eid ul-Adha, another important festival in the Muslim calendar, will include GCSE results day on Thursday 23 August. This means that many Muslim students will be at the Mosque for prayers on the morning of the 23rd. This day is also a time when they may visit family and friends. In the morning of GCSE results day schools may therefore want to consider either gaining consent to post results to students affected or to enable collection of results at school a little later in the day.

Safeguarding issues

If there are concerns about an individual child, schools have an overriding safeguarding duty and should apply judgement and common sense on a case-by-case basis. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined in the DfE's statutory guidance *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, as:

"...protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children's health or development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes."

If the school notices signs of dehydration or exhaustion then the child should be asked if they are fasting and advised to terminate the fast immediately by drinking some water. They can be reassured that in this situation, Islamic rulings allow them to break their fast and make it up later.

The imams, Islamic scholars, experts, chaplains and leaders we consulted said that while some children and young people want to fast, there are occasions when peers or others put pressure on them to do so. Further, some young people may feel guilty even though they feel that it is not in their best interests to fast, while others may want to fast because they do not want to miss out on the rewards of Ramadan.

Schools should be aware of these possibilities and apply judgement to determine where safeguarding or wellbeing issues arise.

External examinations 2018

In 2018, external GCSE, GCE AS, and A level exams will start, as usual, in early May and continue until the end of June. Primary school tests and public exams, such as the International Baccalaureate, iGCSE and vocational and technical qualification assessments, will also fall within this period.

The common timetabling of GCSE, GCE AS, and A level examinations is collectively coordinated by the awarding bodies through their representative body the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). Each year the exam timetable is finalised a year ahead after consultation with schools and colleges, exam boards and other stakeholders². The summer 2018 timetable was finalised in May 2017 following such consultation. The window in which GCSE and A level examinations are to be taken is at the same time in the academic calendar as it was in 2017. A range of issues are taken into account to ensure the timetable is fair to all pupils.

² Ofqual Equality Impact analysis report 2013 also considered the potential impact on fasting students at GCSE; https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/529391/2013-11-01_01-equality-analysis-report-on-reforms-to-gcsesfrom.pdf and at A level <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141031163546/http://ofqual.gov.uk/documents/equality-impactassessment-on-the-a-level-decisions/>

School and college leaders should look carefully at the advice and guidance about exam delivery from the individual exam boards and consider the suggestions raised in Section 5 to help ease the pressure on Muslim students who are fasting.

Examination boards have the discretion to consider each student's situation on an individual basis and may be able to give special consideration in some cases, such as illness³.

For primary age pupils, Key Stage 1 tests which are taken in Year 2 must be administered during May. Key Stage 2 tests taken in Year 6 are timetabled from Monday 14 May to Thursday 17 May, with timetable variations available until Thursday 24 May for pupils absent on scheduled test days.

Diversity within Islamic law and ethics (Shari'ah)

The Islamic scholars we consulted made it clear that a key feature of Islam is the diversity of possible interpretations of Islamic law. Islam, like most major religions, has a pluralist tradition and is composed of a wide range of interpretations. This plurality is considered a strength and Muslim traditions evolve and can respond to new issues that emerge. Reasoning is encouraged and this has allowed different schools of Islamic law to flourish. Islam encourages all Muslims to engage in critical reasoning and to turn to local imams and scholars for further guidance.

Achieving what is good and protecting from what is harmful is an ultimate underpinning philosophy of Islamic law. While there are key principles on which most Muslims agree, such as the importance of fasting (*sawm*) and prayers (*Salah*), details vary from one school of law to another.

This means that when there are competing views, an individual is at liberty to decide what is best for themselves and their family.

An example of diversity in interpretation can be found in the geographical distances that entitle the traveller to break their fast during Ramadan. Different Islamic schools base their interpretation on different evidence which may include words of the prophet Muhammad (*hadith*) or verses of the Qur'an (themselves open to interpretation as they may have more than one meaning in the Arabic language; meaning is also dependent on the context in which it is used). To decide which meaning is intended in the evidence, scholars use different methods to reach their own independent reasoning (*ijtihad*).

The importance of education in Islamic law

The pursuit of education is a religious and moral duty for all Muslim students of both genders. There are many references in the Qur'an and the *hadith* which urge believers to gain knowledge. For example, "Seeking knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim, man and woman." (*hadith*). A favourite supplication of the Prophet was, 'O Lord, increase me in knowledge.' (Qur'an 20:114)

Al-Bukhari attributes a tradition to the Prophet which says that the disappearance of knowledge and the absence of scholars from society would spell the demise of civilisation. For Muslims, the ultimate goal is to seek God through knowledge, including learning how to deal effectively and knowledgeably with this world. Muslim students, like all students, will want to do as well as they possibly can in their examinations.

Grades attained at GCSE and A level are critical to the further education and career prospects of young people. Due to the importance of these grades, young people sitting exams and tests will need to seriously and thoughtfully take their future and their studies into account, alongside their previous experiences of

³ See <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance> for more information

Ramadan when deciding how they will observe Ramadan this year. Young people should be made aware that Islam does not require them to put their futures in jeopardy.

3 Devotion, fasting and health during Ramadan

Devotion and prayers

Sleep deprivation may be a concern for children and young people during Ramadan, even for those under the age of puberty or who, for another reason, are not fasting because they may be celebrating with their families.

Muslims are encouraged to recite as much of the Qur'an as possible, especially during Ramadan. Many Muslims listen to the entire Qur'an being recited over the nights of Ramadan in special prayers known as tarawih which are held in mosques and finish late at night. Many families invite family and friends to share the evening meal to break the fast (*iftar*). It is important for schools to be aware of this social aspect of Ramadan which may also lead to late nights for children.

The last third of Ramadan is considered to be an especially holy period because this is when the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet. Some Muslims like to observe *I'tikaf* in the mosque during the last ten nights of Ramadan. *I'tikaf* is similar to a retreat in the mosque where the person leaves behind all worldly matters and devotes all their time to praying, studying and engaging in worship. A special night, *Laylat al-Qadr* (Night of Power), is believed to fall on the 27th night of Ramadan. Many try to stay up all night in worship and prayer. It is also possible that this night could be on any of the odd nights of the month.

Students who have important exams and tests should be advised not to spend all night praying to avoid tiredness. Students will not be able to perform the full *I'tikaf* due to attending school, but shorter *I'tikaf* is encouraged and may occur on a weekend so as not to interfere with school and exams and tests.

Children and their parents or carers should be informed that extra devotions in Ramadan are voluntary; whereas for a child or young person to perform well in exams and tests given their consequences, is obligatory. **Fasting and health**

Length of fast

According to the Qur'an, traditional Islamic fasting timing is dawn to sunset, which averages out at just under 14 hours all over the earth as Ramadan cycles through the entire year in a 33-year cycle (although a few authorities allow sunrise to sunset, averaging 12 hours all over the earth). Most mosques in the UK begin fasting one to two hours before sunrise since dawn cannot be ascertained easily. Problems may arise when Ramadan falls in summer in high latitudes areas such as the UK (defined by Shaykh Mustafa al-Zarqa as over 45 degrees latitude⁴), because in summer, dawn to sunset fasting reaches 18-21 hours⁵. Islamic jurists differ on timing of fasting hours; the majority say dawn to sunset but there is a minority of jurists who limit the fasting timings to a maximum of 12-16 hours, wherever one is in the world.

⁴ Includes Northern Europe and most of Western Europe. Major exceptions; Spain, Southern France, Italy, Greece.

⁵ Note: "Dawn" and its astronomical reverse, "white twilight," are calculated variously using 12, 15 or 18 degrees of the sun's depression below the horizons. During the summer, and depending on the latitude (how northerly you are) in the UK, the distinction between "white twilight" and "dawn" disappears, so that even beginning the fast at 2am or 1am (midnight BST) is a matter of jurisprudential judgment (ijtihad).

Possible solutions: Fixed-length fasting

The Al-Mahdi Institute (Birmingham, UK) hosted a scholarly workshop in 2013 entitled *The Practice of Fasting (Sawm) In the Modern World*. Scholars at the workshop agreed that Muslims residing at high latitudes of the world should fast a 'normal' day's length. As for what constitutes a 'normal' day, the opinions of the scholars ranged from 14 hours to 16.5 hours⁶.

Following the timings of Mecca/Makkah and Medina/Madinah

A number of classical jurists have argued that in extreme latitudes, people could follow the approximate timings of Mecca/Makkah or Medina/Madinah, where the dawn-to-sunset fasting hours vary between 12 and 16 hours over the year. This ruling has been revived since the 20th century and endorsed by various jurists.

The imams, Islamic scholars, experts, chaplains and leaders we consulted were agreed that there is a pressing need for UK-based religious authorities to collectively discuss this issue and recommend solutions for Muslim communities. In the absence of such guidance, ASCL has consulted as far as possible, putting the welfare and education of UK schoolchildren first.

The NHS says: "*Fasting during the month of Ramadan can be good for your health if it's done correctly... When the body is starved of food, it starts to burn fat so that it can make energy. This can lead to weight loss. However, if you fast for too long your body will eventually start breaking down muscle protein for energy, which is unhealthy.*"⁷

Muslim scholars agree that if there is danger to an individual's health, it is permitted for them to break their fast, and indeed they should do so immediately.

Schools and colleges also have a safeguarding responsibility to the children and young people in their care and will need to keep a close eye on students who may be fasting. If a student seems unwell or an adverse incident occurs, for example a student faints or collapses, the situation should be dealt with in the usual way through providing appropriate medical assistance, including the administering of medicines or giving water to drink.

Few scientific studies have addressed the general health implications of fasting (positive or negative), especially long-period fasts, in any systematic way. Limited studies are indicative of possible negative health effects of long-period fasting, especially for certain groups of people, including students taking long exams and tests^{8,9}.

The Department of Health has produced *Healthy Ramadan*, a guide to healthy fasting during Ramadan. The guidance warns about the need to drink enough water before fasting to avoid dehydration. Poor hydration can be made worse by weather conditions and everyday activities such as walking. It recommends a healthy diet from all food groups. The NHS guide says: "*If you produce very little or no urine, feel disoriented and confused, or faint due to dehydration, you must stop fasting and have a drink of water or other fluid. Islam doesn't require you to harm yourself in fulfilling the fast.*"

⁶ For more information, see <http://almahdi.edu/the-practice-of-fasting-sawm-in-the-modern-world>

⁷ <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Healthylramadan/Pages/fastingandhealth.aspx>

⁸ Karim Meziane and Nidhal Guessoum, *The Determination of Islamic Fasting and Prayer Times at High-Latitude Locations: Historical Review and New Astronomical Solutions*, *Archaeoastronomy*, University of Texas Press, XXII:94-109, 2009

⁹ See also Aadil (2004), Leiper and Molla (2003), Toda and Morimoto (2004) and Fazel (1998)

4 Ramadan and performance

Fasting and staying up late for prayers may affect memory, focus, concentration and academic performance. There is a lot of clear research about the effects of hydration, dehydration and nutrition on performance but a paucity of research specific to students observing Ramadan. A small pilot study in 2016 in Saudi Arabia¹⁰ seems to have mixed findings. While an older Dutch study found that students fasting during Ramadan may be disadvantaged in their exam performance¹¹ and another study found that students reported reduced activity, study desire and concentration ability when observing Ramadan¹².

Anecdotally, some Muslim pupils say that fasting enhances their performance, particularly if they have been used to it for some years. There is huge enthusiasm for fasting and some young people, who have made a positive decision to fast, say they feel energised during Ramadan.

Sleep deprivation should also be taken into account and may be the biggest factor affecting performance for children and young people including those who are both fasting and observing prayers at night, as well as those too young to fast but who are celebrating with their families.

'Hardship' exemptions

Students revising for and taking exams and tests may be exempt from fasting according to some scholars. However, they are unanimous on the exemption for:

- those who are ill or on long term medication
- those who are travelling long distances
- girls who are on their period
- those with mental disabilities
- the old or weak

- breastfeeding or pregnant women

Illness and travelling (that cause hardship) are explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an (2:184) as reasons to break the fast and make it up later. Hardship is an established principle allowing people to defer or skip fasting. Specific examples of people who fall into this category have been widely discussed in the *tafsir* and *fiqh* literature (Qur'an-exegesis and jurisprudence).

Verse 2:184 of the Qur'an says that those who are unable to fast can feed the poor instead. Muslims who cannot fast can use this exemption to still observe Ramadan in a legitimate way.

Do students taking GCSEs and A levels, fall into the category of 'hardship'?

Some Muslim jurists allow students who are experiencing hardship to break their fast during Ramadan (and make up the days later), if it affects their ability to revise and study for important exams and tests. The imams, Islamic scholars, experts, chaplains and leaders we consulted thought that sitting important examinations can be an exemption from fasting if a student fears that fasting will affect his or her performance adversely.

Should schools ask children if they are fasting?

¹⁰ Fasting in Ramadan Affects Cognitive and Physiological Function in Normal Subjects (Pilot Study) http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar_url?url=http%3A%2F%2Ffile.scirp.org%2Fpdf%2FNM_2016060214434259.

¹¹ Ramadan, fasting and educational outcomes Hessel Oosterbeek Bas van der and Klaauw. This Dutch study indicated that Muslim university students in a non-Muslim environment are disadvantaged in a way they probably would not be in a Muslim environment where teaching and exam schedules are adjusted to the holy days of Islam.

¹² Daily practices, study performance and health during the Ramadan fast. Afifi 1997 This study explored the effect of Ramadan fasting on the daily life and performance of 265 university students and found over 50% of students observing Ramadan reported reduced activity, study desire and concentration ability. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9375486>

Positive dialogue and relationships between staff and students are key here and the answer to this question will depend on the individual circumstances for each child, particularly their age, understanding and any concerns there are about their health and wellbeing.

Primary schools: no child under the age of puberty is obliged or should be expected to fast. The imams, Islamic scholars, experts, chaplains and leaders we consulted felt, however, that many young children may want to do a partial fast, which is best done under parental supervision after school hours. If primary children are fasting during school hours, teachers and staff do need to know so that they can safeguard against any risk to health.

Secondary schools and colleges: A sensitive approach is required and schools should be cautious about asking students whether they are fasting or not. Asking children may be counterproductive and could be embarrassing for female students who may be on their period. Schools should, however, know which of their pupils are fasting and to avoid any embarrassment we recommend that schools ask parents and carers to let them know if their child is fasting. If a child presents with a health problem, it is appropriate to ask them if they are fasting.

5 Practical advice for schools during fasting

- Inform pupils of the allowances Islam gives for them to break the fast and make it up later if they feel fasting will in any way jeopardise their performance.
- Fasting pupils will not be in the canteen and will have plenty of spare time to pass during the lunch hour. It would be desirable to provide them with a supervised, quiet space to rest. • Running revision lessons in cooler classrooms during hot weather will benefit all candidates. • Discuss with students whether they would prefer revision lessons to be in the morning or afternoon¹³.
- Those on free school meals are still entitled to a meal. Schools should consider putting a bag together for students to take home.
- Any students not fasting for the reasons stated in Section 4, particularly girls on their period, should be provided with a space or area to eat where they feel comfortable.
- Fasting students are able to take part in physical activities but may need to reduce their level of activity. Schools may wish to plan alternative, less strenuous activities during PE or grant exemptions for some fasting pupils and should apply judgement and common sense on a case-by-case basis. • Show sensitivity when arranging official celebrations for graduation or the end of exams and tests.
- School and college leaders will also want to consider the possible impact fasting and late night prayers during Ramadan may have on Muslim children when setting dates for other activities, such as sports days, trips and celebrations.

Exam rooms and halls

- Invigilators are advised to refrain from suggesting to students to have a 'tiny sip of water' for those fasting. This is not allowed unless there is concern that they may be suffering from dehydration.

¹³ As with examinations it is not clear whether morning or afternoon revision lessons are preferable. A later start may be preferable as it allows pupils to sleep longer after late night prayers and the morning meal.

- Good examination room management during hot weather will benefit all candidates; ensure that exam rooms are shaded, ensure fans and sufficient bottles of water are available. If possible, provide an outside shaded area and/or a cool, quiet room for students to use between exams and tests.
- If a student taking an exam is showing any signs that they may be dehydrated, such as a headache or drowsiness, they should be advised to terminate the fast immediately by drinking some water. They can be reassured that in this situation Islamic rulings allow them to break and make it up later.
- Invigilators do need to keep a close eye on all students to help avoid any disruption to other students not involved in this activity.
- Provide a room(s), where appropriate, for prayers near exam locations.

GCSE results day and Eid ul-Adha 2018

- In 2018, the celebration of Eid ul-Adha and GCSE results fall on Thursday 23 August. Schools should consider either gaining consent to post results to students affected or to enable collection of results at school a little later on this day so that Muslim students can attend Mosque in the morning.

6 Further information

DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education* www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2

NHS, *Healthy Ramadan*

www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthyramadan/Pages/healthyramadhanhome.aspx

7 List of endorsers

The imams, Islamic scholars, experts, Muslim chaplains in the education sector and leaders listed below agree that school and college leaders, teachers, Muslim children, young people and their parents or carers need the information contained in this information paper to enable them to make informed decisions about how to fulfil their Islamic obligations by observing Ramadan and doing as well as they possibly can in their public examinations.

It should be noted that there was diversity of opinion within the group, particularly in respect of the legitimacy of shorter fasting hours. Their endorsement here does not mean that they are aligned with every part of this paper.

Dr Shaykh Salah al-Ansari, Heythrop College

Imam Mohammad Asad, Association of Muslim Supplementary Schools

Kalsoom Bashir, Muslim Chaplain at Bristol University

Dr Hashim Bata, Research Fellow and Member of Al Mahdi Institute Education and Research Board

Abdul Chohan, Founder The Olive Tree School, UK

Ashfaque Chowdhury, Chair, The Association of Muslim Schools

Imam Irfan Chishti, MBE, Manchester Central Mosque, Co-founder Me&You Education

Maurice Irfan Coles, CEO, The CoED Foundation, former director of Islam and Citizenship Education Project

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Sajid Gulzar, Executive Headteacher and CEO, Prince Albert Community Trust (PACT)

Rabiha Hannan, Co-Founder of New Horizons in British Islam

Kamal Hanif OBE, Executive Principal, Waverley School, Birmingham

Andrew Harland, Chief Executive and Founder Member of the International Examinations Officers' Association (iEOA) Khola Hasan, Scholar Islamic Sharia Council and Imams Online

Sheikh Dr Usama Hasan, Imam and Astronomer, Quilliam Foundation

(Imam Sheikh) Mohammad Ismail, The Muslim Chaplain and Member of SIIBS, The University of Sheffield and Lead Imam of Birmingham Central Mosque and Senior Member of Board of British Muslim Scholars

Tehmina Kazi, Policy and Advocacy Officer, Cork Equal and Sustainable Communities Alliance

Shabnam Khan, Executive Director, Education and Support Services VIP Minds

Imam Muhammad Sarfraz Madni, Assistant Headteacher and Director of Islamic Ethos, Al-Hijrah School Birmingham

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, imam, University of Leicester World Faiths Advisory Group member, Assistant Secretary General of The Muslim Council of Britain

Dr Farid Panjwani, Director of the Institute of Education Centre for Research & Evaluation in Muslim Education

Asgar Halim Rajput, Association of Muslim Chaplains in Education (AMCed)

Dr Mohammad Shahid Raza OBE, Chair, Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) Head Imam, Leicester Central Mosque, Leicester

Nasreen Rehman, Chair, British Muslims for Secular Democracy

Mawlana Sayyid Ali Raza Rizvi, Head of Ahlul Bayt Islamic Centre, London

Sir Iqbal Sacranie, Al-Risalah Education Trust, former Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain

Mohammad Imran Sulaman Al-Azhari, Leicester

Dr Matthew L N Wilkinson, Senior Research Fellow in Contemporary Islam, SOAS, University of London; Principal Investigator, 'Understanding Conversion to Islam in Prison'

Rukhsana Yaqoob, President, of the Muslim Teachers' Association on behalf of the Muslim Teachers Association

Anna Cole, chair and author, ASCL Parliamentary and Inclusion Specialist

8 Appendices

Appendix 1

Some relevant key Islamic principles

The primacy of mercy, compassion, justice, goodness and public welfare

“The Law is all about wisdom and achieving people’s welfare in this life and the afterlife. It is all about justice, mercy, wisdom, and good. Thus, any ruling that replaces justice with injustice, mercy with its opposite, common good with mischief, or wisdom with nonsense, is a ruling that does not belong to the Law, even if it is claimed to be so according to some interpretation.” Imam Ibn al-Qayyim of Damascus, 14th century CE, in *I’lam al-Muwaqqi’in*.

The obligation of ease (taysir) in the presence of hardship (mashaqqa)

“God wishes ease for you, not hardship” (2:185), a Qur’anic verse in the context of concessions related to the Ramadan fast.

The prohibition of harm (darar), including anything that corrupts the health of people, mental or physical, and their financial, social and spiritual welfare

For example, the Al-Azhar Fatwa Council (2010) stated that fasting for more than 18 hours constitutes harm, and cannot be supported by Islamic law.

The ‘blocking of means’ (sadd al-dharai’): taking steps to prevent harm, whether individual or social

The ‘opening of means’ (fath al-dharai’): taking steps to facilitate goodness, whether individual or social

Promoting public welfare (jalb al-masalih) and preventing public harm (dar’ al-mafasid)

The assessment of harm and benefits according to their level: harms and benefits should be weighed against each other, these will always lie on a spectrum.

Appendix 2: ASTRONOMICAL DATA

Ramadan dates 2018-2025 (approximately)

Based on Crescent Moon Visibility data for London from HMNAO’s Websurf 2.0 website

(Moon Visibility is estimated on a scale of A-F. The following dates are based on the approximation that A-C represent a visible crescent moon; D-F represent an invisible moon.)

YEAR	Beginning of Ramadan	Eid al-Fitr
2018	17 May	16 June
2019	07 May	05 June
2020	25 April	25 May
2021	14 April	14 May
2022	03 April	02 May
2023	23 March (Spring equinox)	22 April
2024	12 March	10 April
2025	02 March	31 March

Examples of dawn/sunset timings for the UK (four UK capital cities), 2018

Dates used are: 17 May (1st Ramadan), 31 May (15th Ramadan) and 15 June (30th Ramadan)

Date	City	Dawn (18°)	Dawn (15°)	Dawn (12°)	Sunrise	Sunset	Fasting length (18°)	Fasting length (15°)	Fasting length (12°)
17 May	London	01:57	02:50	03:27	05:06	20:49	18:52	17:59	17:22
31 May		***	02:09	02:59	04:50	21:07	***	18:58	18:08
15 June		***	01:26	02:42	04:43	21:20	***	19:54	18:38
17 May	Edinburgh	***	***	02:47	04:57	21:23	***	***	18:36
31 May		***	***	01:35	04:36	21:46	***	***	20:11
15 June		***	***	***	04:26	22:01	***	***	***
17 May	Cardiff	02:10	03:02	03:39	05:18	21:01	18:51	17:59	17:22
31 May		***	02:21	03:11	05:02	21:19	***	18:58	18:08
15 June		***	01:38	02:54	04:55	21:32	***	19:54	18:38
17 May	Belfast	***	02:21	03:17	05:15	21:26	***	19:05	18:09
31 May		***	***	02:33	04:56	21:47	***	***	19:14
15 June		***	***	01:44	04:47	22:02	***	***	20:18

KEY:

18° refers to astronomical twilight, when begins or ends when the sun is 18 degrees below the horizon

15° refers to when the sun is 15 degrees below the horizon

12° refers to nautical twilight, when begins or ends when the sun is 12 degrees below the horizon

The astronomical definition of 'dawn' is disputed, with various Muslim religious authorities adopting one of the three possible definitions given above.

*** **in the above table** means that the timing is not available, because the sun does not reach that far below the horizon. This happens every year during the summer at high latitudes, such as the UK.

NOTES:

- 1 If we use **18° astronomical twilight (Sun's depression = 18 degrees)** as the start of dawn, this only occurs for some days during the first half of Ramadan 2018 in each of the four capital cities. For the rest of the month, including the entire second half, the fasting start time and fasting length would be undefined.
- 2 If we use **15° (Sun's depression = 15 degrees)** as the start of dawn, this does not occur at all during Ramadan 2018 in Edinburgh. Therefore, the fasting start time and fasting length would be undefined there. In Belfast, it only occurs for some days during the first half of Ramadan 2018; for most of the month, it does not occur. However, it does occur throughout the month in London and Cardiff, giving fasting lengths of 1820 hours during the month.
- 3 If we use **12° nautical twilight (Sun's depression = 12 degrees)** as the start of dawn, this results in fasting hours during Ramadan 2018 in London and Cardiff of 17-19 hours, and in Belfast of 18-20.5 hours. We get defined fasting hours for most of Ramadan for Edinburgh, of 18.5-20 hours; towards the end of the month, fasting times would be undefined for Edinburgh.

It might be useful for the schools to have the ability to look up these data for their own specific location, particularly in terms of twilight times. Our data portal has onward links to both *Websurf 2.0* and *Crescent Moon Watch*. Crescent Moon Watch provides graphical depictions of the new crescent moon visibility predictions and a more detailed explanation of the categories than have been provided in the letter.

Our data portal is: <http://astro.ukho.gov.uk/> please note that there is no 'www' prefixing this resource address.



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March

2018