

# Ramadan and Exams, 2016: information for schools and colleges

This paper is relevant to all school and college leaders, and those involved in administering GCSEs and A levels. 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 over the summer.

ASCL has worked with imams, Islamic scholars, experts, Muslim chaplains in the education sector and leaders to produce this information for school and college leaders to use to initiate discussions with Muslim students on how best they can fulfill their Islamic obligations during Ramadan, including the obligation to perform well in their exams.

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.

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# 1 Overview

Ramadan falls within the examination season in 2016 and will do so for the next few years. In 2016, the middle of Ramadan will also coincide with the summer solstice. The combination of long days and examinations will put extra pressure on young Muslims, however they decide to observe Ramadan.

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.

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 this summer, will need to balance their obligations as Muslims with their studies and the importance of examinations 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.

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.

There was agreement from the imams, Islamic scholars, experts, chaplains and leaders we consulted that it is essential that schools and colleges help support dialogue with students and families. Muslim students, 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. We recommend using this information paper as a positive opportunity for engagement with students to make decisions for themselves.

### **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 is.<sup>1</sup> 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.

Unless there are legitimate safeguarding concerns, schools and colleges should not dictate to children (or their families), who are considered old enough 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 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 very important decisions for themselves.

## **2 Ramadan and exams, 2016**

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

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



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 during Ramadan.

## **Ramadan, 2016**

Ramadan has a 33-year cycle and shifts backwards by approximately 11 days every year as determined by the lunar cycle. In 2016, Ramadan is predicted to start around 6-8 June and will end around 7 July.

This means that Ramadan will coincide with the UK exam season and the midsummer solstice. Ramadan 2016 will have the longest average fasting hours in the northern hemisphere during the 33-year cycle. This clash with exams has not occurred in the UK since the 1980s and is likely to last until 2021; Ramadan will fall within the revision period for considerably longer.

Young Muslims and their families, particularly those sitting exams this summer, will need to take into consideration the impact on their studies and the importance of examinations 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.

## **Safeguarding issues**

If there are concerns about an individual child, schools have an overriding safeguarding duty and should apply judgment 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* (link provided in Section 6 Further information), 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 judgment to determine where safeguarding or wellbeing issues arise.

## External examinations 2016

The Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ) has confirmed that it takes all major religious festivals and periods of religious observance into account when constructing the exam timetable. The JCQ consulted with faith groups, including Muslim leaders and a wide range of stakeholders, early in 2015 before setting the timetable for 2016 exams. In keeping with usual practice the exam dates for 2016 were set in the spring term of 2015. JCQ confirm that the 2016 exam timetables did take Ramadan into account, with the result that more large-entry exams will take place before half-term and more will be held in the morning.<sup>2 3</sup>

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 of this paper 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 illness.<sup>4</sup>

## 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*).

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2 Ofqual Equality Impact analysis report 2013 also considered the potential impact on fasting students; [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/277893/gcse\\_reform\\_from\\_2015\\_equality\\_analysis.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277893/gcse_reform_from_2015_equality_analysis.pdf)

3 Note it is not clear whether morning or afternoon exams are preferable. A later start has the benefit of allowing more sleep after late night prayers and the early morning meal.

4 See <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance/a-guide-to-the-special-consideration-process-2015-2016> for more information

## 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 will need to seriously and thoughtfully take their future and their studies into account, alongside their previous experiences of 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 young people during Ramadan. 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 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.

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, 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 1-2 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 latitude<sup>5</sup>), because in summer dawn to sunset fasting reaches 18-21 hours<sup>6</sup>. 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.

## 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 present at the workshop agreed that Muslims residing at high latitudes of the world should fast a 'normal' days length. As for what constitutes as a 'normal' day, the opinions of the scholars ranged from 14 hours to 16.5 hours.<sup>7</sup>

### 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."<sup>8</sup>

### **Muslim scholars agree that if there is danger to their health, it is permitted for someone 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 (positive or negative) of fasting, 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.<sup>9 10</sup>

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


6 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).

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

8 <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Healthyramadan/Pages/fastinandhealth.aspx>

9 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

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



The Department of Health has produced *Healthy Ramadan*, a guide to healthy fasting during Ramadan (link provided in Section 6 Further information). 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.”

## 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. One Dutch study found that students fasting during Ramadan may be disadvantaged in their exam performance<sup>11</sup> while another study found that students reported reduced activity, study desire and concentration ability when observing Ramadan.<sup>12</sup>

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 young people who are both fasting and observing prayers at night.

### ‘Hardship’ exemptions

Students revising for and taking exams 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.

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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. <http://www.tierweb.nl/assets/files/UvA/20110502-ramadan2011feb.pdf>

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>

## 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. 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/her performance adversely.

## Should schools ask children if they are fasting?

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. Fasting for primary age children is best done under parental supervision after school hours. Some UK schools have banned primary schoolchildren from fasting during the summer and this is legitimate. 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:** 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 afternoon.<sup>13</sup>
- 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.
- Consider granting exemptions from PE and sports to children who are fasting.
- Show sensitivity when arranging official celebrations for graduation or the end of exams.
- 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.

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<sup>13</sup>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.



## 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.
- 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.
- 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.

## 6 Further information

DfE, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

NHS, Healthy Ramadan

<http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthylamadan/Pages/healthylamadanhome.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 and Co-director Inspire

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

**Ashfaq Chowdhury**, Chair, The Association of Muslim Schools

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

**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 Examination Officers Association

**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**, Director of Media, Outreach and Lobbying, British Muslims for Secular Democracy

**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**, Research Fellow in Islam in Education and Law and Director of Curriculum for Cohesion, SOAS, University of London

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

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

**[www.ascl.org.uk](http://www.ascl.org.uk)**

## 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

### Ramadan dates 2016-2025 (approx)

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

Year	Beginning of Ramadan	Eid al-Fitr
2016	7 June	7 July
2017	27 May	26 June
2018	17 May	16 June
2019	7 May	5 June
2020	25 April	25 May
2021	14 April	14 May
2022	3 April	2 May
2023	23 March (beginning of Spring)	22 April
2024	12 March	10 April
2025	2 March	31 March

Examples of dawn/sunset timings for the UK (four UK capital cities), 2016

Date	City	Dawn (astro-twi)	Dawn (15 deg)	Dawn (naut-twi)	Sunrise	Sunset	Fasting length (astro)	Fasting length 15 deg	Fasting length (naut)
7 June	London	***	0147	0248	0445	2114	***	19:27	18:26
22 June (midsummer)		***	0117	0241	0443	2122	***	20:05	18:41
6 July		***	0156	0256	0452	2118	***	19:22	18:22
7 June	Edinburgh	***	***	***	0429	2154	***	***	***
22 June (midsummer)		***	***	***	0427	2203	***	***	***
6 July		***	***	***	0437	2158	***	***	***
7 June	Cardiff	***	0159	0300	0457	2126	***	19:27	18:26
22 June (midsummer)		***	0131	0254	0456	2134	***	20:03	18:40
6 July		***	0209	0308	0504	2130	***	19:21	18:22
7 June	Belfast	***	***	0209	0450	2156	***	***	19:47
22 June (midsummer)		***	***	***	0447	2204	***	***	***
6 July		***	***	0219	0457	2200	***	***	19:41

#### Key:

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

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

15 deg refers to when the sun is 15 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.

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