



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The overall view of candidate performance in 2010 was that both the standard of candidate and of their responses was poorer than the exceptional cohort of 2009. Whilst there were many excellent candidates, the overall impression was that they were not as numerous as in recent years. Over 75% of candidates presented had completed the Course without prior experience at Standard Grade, Intermediate 1 or Intermediate 2 level. Centres should bear this in mind when any review of performance takes place in their own establishment. In addition, around two thirds of candidates were drawn from S6.

In terms of options, Crime and Punishment is the most popular moral issue, with Buddhism being the most popular world religion. No centres opted for the new Global Issues topic.

There was a significant increase in candidates rising from around 2,600 to around 3,100. The number of presenting centres has risen from 167 in 2007 to 194 in 2010 which is very encouraging, and evidence of both high quality teaching and engaging content in S3/4 RMPS and beyond. Departments and faculties responsible for the delivery of Higher RMPS are to be commended for their efforts.

There was very little negative feedback on the paper. Mostly this referred to known clerical errors which have now been corrected. This year around 60 teachers from across the country took part in the central marking event and as a whole they expressed satisfaction with the breadth and fairness of both papers.

Markers comments included a number of positive remarks:

- ◆ The separation of Knowledge and Understanding (KU) and Analysis and Evaluation (AE) is a positive step.
- ◆ The AE questions in Paper 1 allowed candidates the freedom to demonstrate high level evaluative skills (Questions (e) and (g)).
- ◆ The level of demand in both question papers was appropriate.
- ◆ The questions gave good coverage of the Course.

Markers also raised a number of concerns:

- ◆ Some centres did not appear to be aware of the changes to the arrangements.
- ◆ Exam technique was poor at times with candidates unable to distinguish between KU and AE.
- ◆ Few candidates used sources in any section of the paper.
- ◆ The use of bullet points in extended responses disadvantaged some candidates because they did not expand on the points they had made.
- ◆ There was a mixed reaction to some questions which were felt to be vague or ambiguous, however for every suggestion of ambiguity there was a commendation for the open nature of the questions concerned because they allowed candidates to perform well and use their creativity in developing an answer. Both views have their merits.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

KU questions in the moral issues were, as a whole, done well with candidates demonstrating a very good awareness of key factual information. Answers were well judged in terms of length, and the depth was appropriate for the amount of marks available for the question. There was also evidence that centres were keeping resources up to date by the regular use of recent developments in the various moral issues. Questions (a)–(c) in Belief and Science were answered well in spite of some concerns about the use of the phrase ‘nature of reality’. This is particularly gratifying since it is an area that candidates have often struggled with in the past — there are signs of real progress here in candidate understanding and evaluation in this part of the Course.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Question (i) presented major difficulties for candidates with a very low number performing well in this question. Markers expressed concern that candidates did not appear to know how to answer this question. In the past candidates have managed to do this as part of their answer to questions on various moral responses to issues. The arrangements clearly state that there would be a specific question on the application of the moral theory to a relevant general moral issue. No evaluation was expected; simply the skill of analysing and applying the moral theory to the moral issue. The grade boundary was adjusted to take account of any misunderstandings relating to this change. However, this will not be repeated in future years.

In the War and Peace section, Question (e) proved problematic for some because they answered about war in general rather than specifically on the reasons for declaring war. Markers considered this to be the result of candidates not reading the question properly or twisting the question to suit the answer the candidate had in mind.

In the Crime and Punishment section, Question (e) created a few problems some of which were of the candidates’ own making through misinterpreting the question which was intentionally open ended.

In the Medical Ethics section, there was some evidence that candidates may have been given information relating to genetic engineering. Whilst it is possible to have some elements of previous Course content in the new Course it should be noted that the emphasis now is on the use of human embryos.

A feature of the answers to (d) and (e) in Belief and Science was that candidates regularly confused cosmological and teleological arguments for the existence of God, which for those who made the error was both a frustrating and costly one. In Question (g) a striking number of candidates wrote about the Big Bang Theory and whilst it is possible to make the case for it being the ultimate origin of human life, this case was not made by the vast majority. Markers found these errors very puzzling since the questions were considered both clear and straightforward.

Paper 2

There were no significant problems reported for Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism. Not surprisingly the bulk of the problems were associated with the two most popular religions, Buddhism and Christianity. The overall view of Paper 2 was that candidates did not perform especially well. There are two groups of concerns: general concerns and specific concerns about certain world religions.

The first general concern was that candidates did not have sufficient in depth knowledge of KU which would allow them to answer AE questions well.

A second concern was the amount of repetition in answers. This happened between KU and AE questions where candidates all too often repeated much of what they had written in the KU question preceding the AE question.

A third general concern was in question (b) across all religions where candidates frequently did not seem to be aware of the term 'human condition' and therefore had difficulty answering this question. Given that this is one of the organising principles there was some surprise about this.

A fourth concern was the inability to distinguish between KU and AE questions in spite of the questions being identified as such. There was a tendency for candidates in questions (a) and (b) to repeat in (b) what they had already stated in (a) thereby gaining very few marks if any at all. Markers were satisfied that the distinction was obvious enough in the exam and that the format of the questioning had been clearly established in the specimen question paper and the NABs.

A final general concern was the lack of relevance of answers by a considerable minority of candidates. It was noted that these candidates tended to state all they knew about a particular belief or practice with little or no reference to the question which had to result in lower marks.

Question (c) in Buddhism caused problems. Candidates understood the Sangha to be a place rather than a community. As a consequence of this both Questions (c) and (d) were not answered well, but it is recognised that in Question (d) the inclusion of the term 'monastic' sangha may have improved performance. However, candidates should know that the Sangha is the worldwide community of Buddhists and not simply a place.

Question (e) proved to be a bit of a struggle too with candidates often identifying the Five Precepts as the main moral principles simply by listing the precepts without any explanation. At Higher level it is expected that when candidates are asked for a description of concepts, beliefs or practices that there is a sentence of explanation and not simply a list.

Candidates appeared to know enough about Buddhism to pass but all too often they failed to apply this knowledge to the questions or having provided good KU information failed to appreciate what the AE questions were demanding of them and consequently they lost marks for simply repeating what they had already written.

In Christianity, Question (c) proved to be challenging. In this question, candidates concentrated on the trial and crucifixion of Jesus often making no reference to the

resurrection when they should really have been focussing on the events after his death leading up to the discovery of the empty tomb.

Questions (d) and (g) were thought to have the potential for some overlap. Overlap did occur when candidates took the line that Christian action was required to lead a Christian life. The overlap was such though that no advantage or disadvantage for candidates was identified by Markers.

In Islam, Question (d) caused some minor difficulties with a small number of candidates being uncertain as to whether the 'community' in the question referred to the Muslim community or the community as a whole. A strong case can be made for Zakat being for the benefit of the Muslim community alone but there are a few examples of both writing and practice which dissent from this view. To account for this, both views were given credit as were views which considered what benefits the principles of Zakat might bring to the community as a whole.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres should ensure that:

- ◆ They are using the latest version of the arrangements and specimen question paper. It is the responsibility of presenting centres to ensure that they do this. Any queries should be directed to SQA for early clarification.
- ◆ Candidates should have appropriate skills of English comprehension to be able to understand and interpret the language used in questions. It would be good practice to make candidates aware of the range of command words and cues used by SQA. These can be found in the Course assessment pack.
- ◆ Candidates are directed to write answers that are relevant to the questions, especially AE questions. Candidates should be encouraged to make reference to phrases and terms used in the question. This will help candidates focus on the question and reduce the chances of them going off at a tangent and losing marks.
- ◆ Candidates are discouraged from writing all that they know about a topic in the hope that it might be relevant. It is appreciated that candidates may do this when all else has failed but to give themselves some kind of chance of picking up marks they should use phrases or terms used in the question. It is very obvious to Markers when candidates are simply writing down all that they know and whilst it does not lose them marks it is very difficult to find marks if there has been no attempt to make the answer relevant to the question.
- ◆ Candidates are aware of how the questions are laid out. The questions are grouped together. Candidates should find the AE questions first and then look at the KU question(s) preceding the AE question. They should note that they will not get marks in the AE question for information they have already used in the KU questions.
- ◆ Candidates structure AE answers more effectively. For example, in Question (h) for Belief and Science the following approach is the kind of answer given by excellent candidates and is a good example of how to structure AE answers:

- **(i) explain what the statement means** eg This statement means that at the end of the day the most likely explanation for human beings here is that God, in some way, created humans.
- **(ii) make a statement about the quote** eg Most Christians believe that this statement is true but they disagree on how God began human life.
- **(iii) explain the point that has been made** eg Some Christians believe that God created human life in the way described in the Bible but other Christians are prepared to accept that evolution was God's chosen method of creating human life.
- **(iv) provide evidence/argument to support the statement that has been made** eg Ken Ham of 'Answers in Genesis' believes that God is the best explanation for human life. He believes that God made humans on the sixth day as described in the Bible because he believes the Bible is the Word of God and contains no errors. Ken Ham is in agreement with the statement because he believes that not only is God the best explanation, but God is the only explanation for human life. On the other hand there are other Christians who do not take the Bible literally and believe that God used evolution to create human beings. These Christians use Aquinas and Paley's design argument to show that God is the best explanation because evolution is a complex thing and like all complex things it needs a designer. God is the designer of evolution therefore God and not evolution on its own is the best explanation for human life.
- **(v) make another statement about the quote** eg Some Scientific Materialists or atheists like Richard Dawkins would disagree completely with the statement because they believe that evolution is the best explanation.
- **(vi) explain the point that has been made** eg Dawkins and people like him say that answers to questions about human origins can be found in nature itself.
- **(vii) provide evidence/arguments to support the point** eg Dawkins says that evolution started off as a very simple thing and as time has gone on it has become more and more complex. There is no need to bring in something like God because nature has the answer. Therefore, for him God is not the best explanation. He is the least likely explanation.
- **(viii) offer a conclusion** eg Christians agree that God is the best explanation and although they disagree about how God created human life they do agree that he made it somehow. Scientific Materialists like Dawkins reject the idea of God as an explanation of human life although not all scientists agree with him. Some say that some kind of intelligence behind the universe and human life was something that had to be seriously considered. Whatever the truth is there are flaws on both sides of the argument. Christians can really only claim that God created human life whilst Scientific Materialists have the problem of where the laws of evolution came from and if nature can be that lucky.
- Candidates are discouraged from writing simple lists for which there are no marks awarded. Candidates should explain the points/features they have identified. Once again some examples of the kind of answers given by candidates are listed below.

Belief and Science

2010 Question (a) — Describe how scientific method gives us knowledge about the nature of reality (4).

◆ Candidate 1 answer:

- Observation
- Hypothesis
- Experimentation
- Verification

Comment: no marks — this is a list. At Higher level we expect more.

◆ Candidate 2 answer:

Science uses observation, hypothesis, experimentation and verification to understand the nature of reality.

Comment: no marks — this is a list. At Higher level we expect more.

◆ Candidate 3 answer:

- Observation (you observe something in nature).
- Hypothesis (you make a statement about it).
- Experimentation (you do experiments to test your hypothesis).
- Verification (you get the results checked by your peers).

Comment: Four marks. The candidate has given a brief explanation of what each one means as a bullet pointed list.

◆ Candidate 4 answer:

Science uses observation hypothesis, experimentation and verification to understand the nature of reality. To begin with a scientist will look at something in nature and then after that he will make some kind of statement about how the thing in nature works. He will then devise an experiment to see if he is right in his statement or hypothesis and once he has done the experiment he will make his result available to other scientists who can check to see if the knowledge he has given is right.

Comment: Four marks. The candidate has given a brief explanation of what each one means as a short paragraph.

In all sections of the exam there are certain items of factual information which can be 'listed'. For example in World Religions, in Buddhism it could be the Three Jewels or the Five Precepts, in Sikhism the Five Ks, in Hinduism the four castes and in Islam the Five Pillars. In Belief and Science the scientific method is the obvious one but so too are the different types of revelation or the days of creation. The morality section has the same opportunities for listing, for example, the types of weapons of mass destruction, the methods of execution, the types of euthanasia, the types of persecution inflicted on women in the Developing World

and the causes of poverty. There are many more examples that have not been listed here. The point is that when candidates are asked to 'Describe' or asked 'What' something is, at Higher level they have to give more than a list. They have to expand on each part of the description to gain a mark. Simply listing without explanation is not answering the question. To be able to answer a question in this way the question would have to say 'List', 'State' or 'Name', and clearly 'Describe' or 'What is/are...' is looking for much more than that.

There is an issue regarding the bullet pointing of answers. Bullet pointing remains an acceptable way of answering questions, especially KU questions. However, Markers noted that bullet pointing in AE questions did not benefit pupils. Experience has shown that candidates write a bullet point for an AE point and more often than not, do not build upon the point they have made nor go into any depth on the point. It almost becomes an exercise in listing evaluative points. Candidates are not penalised for writing in this style but it does not appear to lend itself to quality evaluation.

Please note that in next year's exam, the NABs and the specimen question paper, the numbering of questions has been altered. Following suggestions from Markers it has been decided that it would be of more benefit to candidates if the questions were clearly grouped together. Next year in every section there will be 3–5 questions which will be divided into 2–4 parts and will be worth between 3–10 marks each. For example, in Belief and Science, the questions will not be listed (a)–(h) but instead 1(a)+(b), 2(a),(b)+(c) and so on in order that the questions are grouped together and candidates can be clearer on the marking policy of not giving marks for information that has already been used in a question.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	2573
Number of resulted entries in 2010	3152

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark — 120				
A	31.2%	31.2%	982	79
B	24.2%	55.4%	764	67
C	22.4%	77.8%	705	55
D	8.2%	85.9%	258	49
No award	14.1%	100.0%	443	—

General commentary on grade boundaries

While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Head of Service and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.

SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as Arrangements evolve and change.