



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies
Level	Intermediate 2

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

There was a slight increase in the number of candidates presented for Intermediate 2 with 66% of candidates achieving a grade A–C pass. Just under half of all candidates answered questions on Buddhism in Section 1, closely followed by Christianity. Medical Ethics, Crime and Punishment, and Gender remain the most popular choices in Section 2. Over half of all candidates answered questions on Section 3 — Existence of God.

Once again central marking proved to be a positive experience with all Markers expressing appreciation of the support available. The continuous quality assurance ensures standardisation of the marking process and ensures all candidates are marked fairly. If you are not already involved in exam procedures you are invited to apply to become a Marker as this is certainly one of the best, and most useful, professional development activities you can share in.

Some changes took place to the marking of Analysis and Evaluation (AE) questions two years ago. However, judging by evidence submitted for Absentee Candidates and Appeals, some centres have not adopted this practice. It was agreed to acknowledge AE as higher skills and award every AE point two marks. In addition to this, if a candidate made a Knowledge and Understanding (KU) point in an AE answer which is then developed into a relevant AE point, this is credited with one additional mark for KU.

During 2008/09 a minor review took place in RMPS Intermediate 2 with changes to the mandatory content of some Units. These changes were well publicised by SQA in both paper and electronic form with updates sent out to all centres. Yet, it is clear from some candidate responses that some centres are continuing to deliver Courses based on the previous arrangements. If centres do not take heed of these changes, candidates will be disadvantaged. Therefore it is important that local network groups ensure that all staff delivering RMPS Courses in each local authority are aware of the changes to RMPS. Please encourage your colleagues to read this report.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Overall Markers commented that the standard of responses was good with candidates producing very good answers to all sections of the paper. A significant number of candidates displayed good AE skills. Markers commented that many candidates appeared to be better equipped to answer questions than in previous years, suggesting that candidates are being entered for the correct level.

Areas which candidates found demanding

As with previous years, a small number of candidates seemed confused with the rubric of the exam paper, answering too many questions from the same section or answering both Sections 3 and 4.

A number of candidates failed to relate the length of their answer to the number of marks allocated to the question, often giving too long an answer for the number of marks available. Lengthy answers were often given for questions allocated only two marks thus using up a significant amount of the time available to the candidate in the exam.

Some candidates did not seem aware of all of the mandatory content in the Units they were attempting, with some stating this in writing on their answer booklet. Some candidates also stated that they did not recognise the term 'secular'.

Section 1

- ◆ Buddhism: Question (c) — many candidates simply listed the lower passions and failed to explain them.
- ◆ Question (f) — a number of candidates did not answer how a Buddhist practiced the Five Precepts but gave a description of them.
- ◆ Christianity: Question (f) — instead of writing about Christian beliefs related to the death of Jesus, eg atonement, a significant number of candidates described events related to the crucifixion or the resurrection of Jesus.
- ◆ Islam: Question (c) — only one or two candidates recognised the term 'Khaliphas' and answered this question correctly. Many candidates left his question unanswered.
- ◆ Question (d) — a number of candidates described Zakah rather than answering the question and explaining what is used for.
- ◆ Judaism: Question (b) — some candidates wrote about similarities rather than differences within Jewish beliefs.

Section 2

- ◆ Gender: Question (d) — very few candidates identified a specific secular viewpoint giving only generalised responses to the question.
- ◆ Medical Ethics: Question (d) — candidates tended to confuse genetic selection with genetic engineering.
- ◆ Question (e) — a significant number of candidates misunderstood 'non-voluntary' euthanasia as 'compulsory' euthanasia. Compulsory euthanasia is not part of the Medical Ethics mandatory content and involves taking a patient's life regardless of their wishes.

Section 3

- ◆ Question (c) — many candidates did not understand the Freewill Defence argument talking instead about freedom of choice.

Section 4

- ◆ Question (b) — some candidates seemed to find it difficult to identify strengths of revelation.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

In addition to some centres still delivering Courses based on outdated Arrangements, there seems to be some confusion about the meaning of Genetic Selection. Genetic Selection applies to procedures carried out in the womb (prenatal screening) or outside the womb

(pre-implantation genetic diagnosis or pre-implantation tissue typing). It involves selecting the most appropriate embryo for the purpose required and not changing the attributes of those embryos. It is not the creation of designer babies outwith the necessary selection of embryos to prevent or help cure a family illness. Therefore, it does not refer to any form of genetic engineering such as germline therapy (altering the genes of an embryo by adding/removing genes). This type of procedure is still illegal in the UK. Social sex selection and any other forms of feature selection are also illegal in the UK. Genetic selection must be prescribed for medical purposes and individual licences obtained from HFEA. Information about genetic selection in the UK can be obtained from www.hfea.gov.uk.

As some candidates are still confusing the rubric of the exam paper, it is important to take time to familiarise themselves with the sections they must answer when preparing them for the external exam. Some centres use past papers to reinforce this with candidates in class and others prepare a full paper for the prelim exam copying it onto green paper helping candidates to familiarise themselves with it under exam conditions. This is worth doing and may prevent candidates from penalising themselves by spending time answering unnecessary questions during the exam.

It is important that all mandatory content is taught as candidates can be examined on all aspects of the mandatory content in the final exam and will be disadvantaged if not properly prepared for the external assessment. Likewise, it is important that candidates are taught specific viewpoints and can write about the viewpoints they have studied such as Humanism, Utilitarianism, and Feminism. It will benefit candidates if they can accurately link individuals to their viewpoints eg Singer, Warnock, Hume, etc. Candidates giving generalised answers when a specific response is required will be penalised. The marking instructions published on the SQA website (www.sqa.org.uk) can help to direct centres to some recognised viewpoints. The UN Declaration of Human Rights was cited as a secular viewpoint by candidates from one centre. This was not accepted as a valid viewpoint but it is recognised as a source.

Although Markers continue to note an improvement in the quality of AE answers from candidates, centres would still benefit from spending time helping candidates to develop Analytical and Evaluative skills. This can be achieved by helping candidates compare/contrast arguments in an issue, recognise the difference between making a statement and presenting a viewpoint supported with valid reasons, and teaching them how to judge the value of an argument and present a valid conclusion. The latter is a skill candidates need to develop if they are to progress on to study the Higher Course.

It is worth pointing out again that some candidates also need to be reminded of the importance of noting the number of reasons asked for in a question and the number of marks allocated to each reason. Where there is no number of reasons specified candidates can choose to present several brief reasons or to give fewer extended reasons. Questions beginning 'Give, State, Identify' require a brief response, usually a short phrase or one word answer. Questions beginning 'Describe' require more information, eg identifying an item and then giving a fuller description. Centres should also remind candidates of the time restraints in the external exam and teach them how to allocate sufficient time to providing detailed answers to those questions worth more marks.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	949
Number of resulted entries in 2010	963

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark — 90				
A	29.3%	29.3%	282	63
B	17.0%	46.3%	164	54
C	18.8%	65.1%	181	45
D	7.4%	72.5%	71	40
No award	27.5%	100.0%	265	—

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.