

Research and Information Services

Monitoring Standards Report



**Comparison of Higher Religious Moral and
Philosophical Studies for 2002 (X072) and 2006
(X213)**

Information about Monitoring Standards

Since 1998 SQA has been monitoring a sample of qualifications annually to determine whether standards in the level of demand in the syllabus and question papers are being maintained year on year and whether any changes to marking instructions have had an impact on candidates' examination results.

NQ teams are asked to compare the Arrangements, Question papers and Marking Instructions for the years in question and consider whether there have been any changes to these which have resulted in any change to the level of demand or difficulty. Teams decide whether the breadth and depth of the syllabus has remained the same and if not, how these changes have altered the level of demand in the question papers in the years being compared. The clarity of instructions and allocation of marks in the marking instructions across the years is also considered. The candidate evidence is compared and the teams decide whether or not the evidence is demonstrating the same standard of performance across the years.

NQ Monitoring teams comprise a subject specialist from Higher Education or a Professional Organisation, who is the chair of the group, the Principal Assessor for the subject, who is the SQA expert in the group and a practicing classroom teacher who can be an SQA marker.

Summary of findings

The panel, which comprised a University lecturer (chair and report writer), the Principal Assessor for 2009 and a Depute Head/Principal Teacher of RMPS concludes the overall level of demand for Religious Moral and Philosophical Studies Higher is slightly higher for 2006, compared to 2002.

◆ Cohort of candidates

The cohort of candidates has remained similar in both years ie from S5 and S6 although the overall number of candidates increased from 1596 in 2002 to 1774 in 2006 (see Appendix 1).

◆ Level of demand of Arrangements/ syllabus

There is a greater quantitative demand as the emphasis has changed from greater depth in Arrangements for 2002 to greater breadth in 2006. Overall the level of demand is slightly greater in 2006 compared to 2002.

◆ Level of demand of Assessment instruments

The greater coverage of the breadth of the syllabus in 2006 compared to 2002 has resulted in the 2006 assessment tasks to be as demanding as 2002.

◆ Level of demand of Marking instructions

The level of the demand is similar in 2002 and in 2006, though the changes in the nature of the exam has made comparison slightly more difficult

◆ Grading of scripts

There was a high level of consistency overall in marking between 2002 and 2006 and the A Grade scripts were similar in 2002 and 2006. The 2006 exam was a bit more

demanding and challenging for the C Grade candidates. This was due to the greater range of questions in 2006 and the removal of the extended essay which had been advantageous to C grade candidates in 2002.

1 Introduction

In 2002, 1,596 candidates were entered for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X072). In 2006, 451 candidates were entered for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X072) and 1,323 entered for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X213). The overall total in 2006 equals 1,774. This is indicative of a staged increase of candidates from 2002 (1,596), through 2003 (1,597), 2004 (1,673), 2005 (1,685) to 2006 (1,774) (see Appendices 1 and 2).

General changes

In 2002 the course consisted of two mandatory units and one optional unit from a choice of two. The mandatory units were World Religions and Christian Ethics in a Secular Context. The optional units were Christianity: Critiques and Challenges and Language: Philosophy and Religion. In 2002, there was a maximum of 110 marks to be obtained: 35 by means of an extended essay and 75 in one exam paper (three questions worth 25 marks each from the two mandatory units and one of the optional units). In 2006 the course had changed to three mandatory units: World Religion; Morality in the Modern World and Christianity: Belief and Science. The exam in 2006 consisted of two papers. Paper one examined Morality in the Modern World (two questions worth 10 and 30 marks – the 10 mark question was mandatory) and Christianity: Belief and Science (one mandatory question worth 40 marks). Paper two examined World Religion (one question on the candidate's choice of world religions worth 25 marks). The biggest change was the removal of extended essay in the 2006 Higher to produce a more robust exam instrument that would provide a more accurate gauge of the candidate's ability.

Changes were introduced because of concerns from classroom teachers about certain aspects of course content. The SQA were concerned about the number of permutations of options, the subjective nature of essay assessment and the need to have more focussed questions to increase assessment reliability. The changes have made the exam more robust because the questions are more specific and this reduces the opportunity for candidates to lose focus in answers. The 2002 question paper was also more predictable in that candidates had a fairly wide choice of essay topics throughout the paper.

2 Level of demand of arrangements/syllabus

The team agreed that there is a greater coverage of the breadth of the syllabus in 2006 compared to 2002 and this made the 2006 syllabus more demanding.

2.1 Depth of syllabus

The level of demand has decreased from 2002 to 2006 as the emphasis is more on breadth of syllabus rather than depth.

2.2 Breadth of syllabus

There was a greater quantity of Knowledge to be acquired in 2006. It was noted that in Belief and Science (Christianity), while the level of demand between 2002 and 2006 was similar, the balance of Knowledge and Understanding (KU) and Enquiry in 2002 was approximately 40/60 and the balance in 2006 was 50/50. The team agreed that the 2006 arrangements required a greater breadth of knowledge and understanding from the candidates.

3 Level of demand of the examination questions

3.1 General approach in the assessment instruments

There is a marked difference between 2002 and 2006 in terms of breadth and depth. The 2002 questions demand a significant amount of depth of Knowledge and Understanding, whereas the 2006 questions demand a significant amount of breadth of Knowledge and Understanding.

3.2 Coverage of the syllabus

This greater breadth in the 2006 questions was evident, for example, in Buddhism. The members of the monitoring team agreed the questions in 2002 were more open that there was more scope for writing around the Knowledge and Understanding. In 2006, however, the team agreed that the questions were much more focussed and the candidate would have to know the Knowledge and Understanding. The short answer questions in 2006 demand more focussed answers and while the candidate does not need to know the topic in as much depth, a greater amount of Knowledge and Understanding is required for the examination. Another example was drawn from Christianity and Science. The team agreed that in 2002 it was possible to avoid writing about scientific method, whereas in 2006 this was no longer possible. The team agreed that in 2002, because of the focus on depth, a candidate could gamble on which topics would be examined, whereas in 2006, because of the focus on breadth in the short answer questions, the candidate would be unable to gamble.

The team decided that, although the 2002 and 2006 assessments are different, the coverage of questions from the syllabus in both years is equally demanding.

3.3 Structure of the total assessment task

In 2002, the candidates had to sit one paper. The candidates had to complete three questions: one from World Religions; one from Christian Ethics in a Secular Context and one from either Christianity: Critiques and Challenges or Language, Philosophy and Religion. Each of these questions was worth 25 marks and consisted of one question worth 25 marks or two smaller questions worth 10 and 15 marks. There was no indication on the exam paper of the ratio of Knowledge and Understanding to Analysis and Evaluation There was also an extended essay worth 35 marks that was externally assessed. In 2006, the candidate sat two papers. In paper 1 all candidates had to answer three questions. Two questions had to be answered in Morality and Belief: question one

was mandatory (worth 10 marks) and had three parts and another question (worth 30 marks) chosen by the candidate from 4 options that had four parts. The third question was another mandatory question (worth 40 marks) on Christianity: Belief and Science that had six parts. In Paper 2 the candidates were asked to complete one section that contained two questions (worth 25 and 15 marks) on a World Religion. In 2006, each part of a question was clearly allotted marks for KU, AE or both.

3.4 Demand of assessment tasks

The team considered the level of difficulty of the 2006 assessment tasks to be similar to 2002. The candidates in 2006 were being asked for similar information but through different means. In 2002 the candidates were asked to answer the questions by means of essays and in 2006 the candidates were asked to answer by means of short answers and extended responses.

The 2006 questions were very focussed and required the candidate to be very disciplined in answering the larger number of questions such that each question received sufficient attention and the exam overall was completed.

In 2006 sources were introduced in to each of the sections on World Religions. This was a change as there were no sources used in the 2002 paper. In the 2006 paper, sources did not always appear to be commensurate in terms of length and in terms of the quality of the stimulus provided by the source and valuable time may have been wasted in reading and evaluating the usefulness of the source as a stimulus for an answer.

4 Level of demand of examination marking

The marking was consistent in both years. The marking instructions in 2002 were more open because the essay responses to the questions allowed candidates scope to cover a wide range of areas in their answers. In 2006 the more focussed questions meant that the marking instructions had to be more focussed and more specific. In 2006, KU and AE were specified for different parts of the questions. The use of general headings in the marking instructions allowed the markers plenty of scope for professional judgements on the relevance of the content of the answer.

The format of Marking Instructions in 2006 was the same as that used in 2002. However, the marking method, whilst consistent, was rather severe given the new style of exam. The nature of the assessment and the less specific MIs in 2002 made it easier to get marks than in 2006 so in order that candidates would not be disadvantaged in 2006 by marking instructions, grade boundary marks were lowered accordingly.

5 Grading of candidates performance

5.1 Grade A and C scripts

The team agreed that there was a high level of consistency overall in marking between 2002 and 2006 but thought that the 2006 exam was more demanding and challenging for the C candidates (see Appendices 5, 6 and 7).

The team agreed that there was consistency in grading in the A scripts and that many of the points raised above were demonstrated in the scripts. The performance in A scripts in Gender in 2002, for example, demonstrated some vagueness, while in 2006, the answers were more focussed.

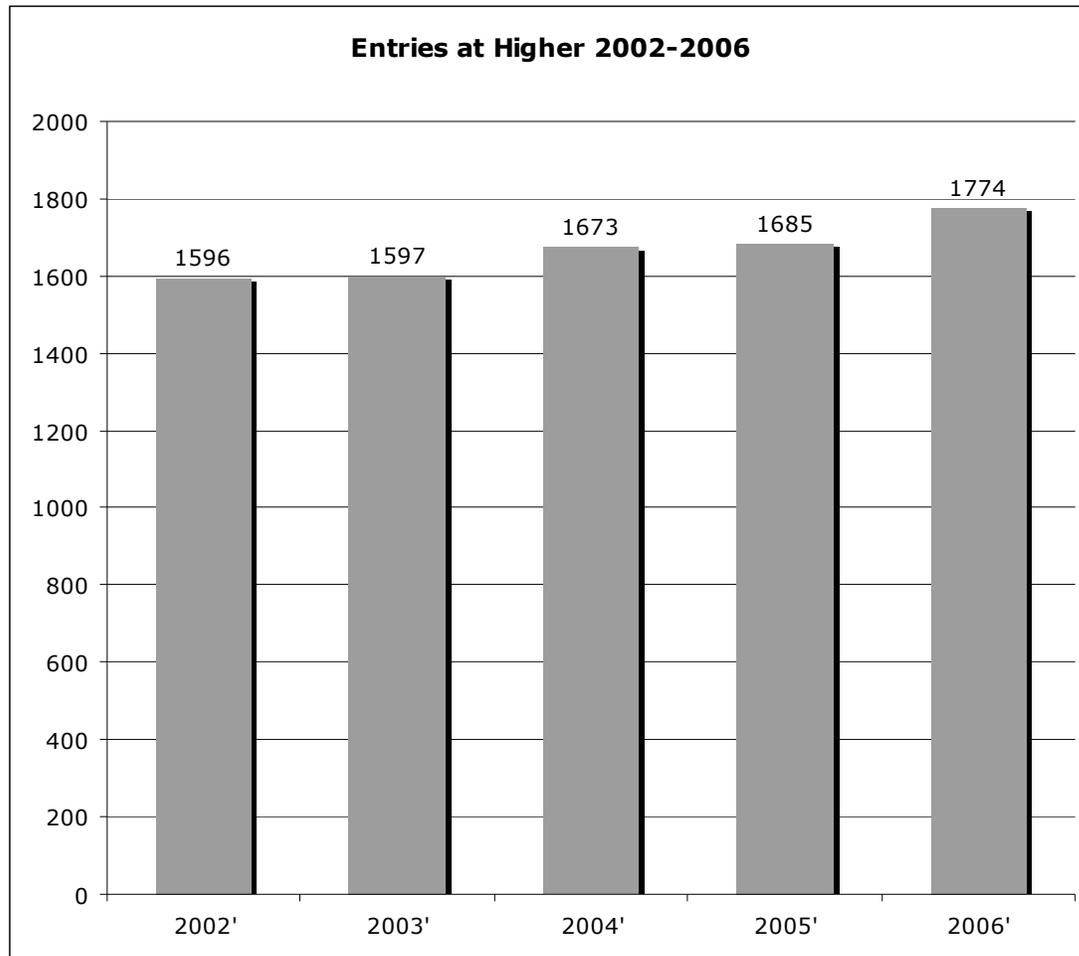
The team thought that the different demands in terms of breadth of the 2006 examination were most marked in the C scripts. The 2002 papers demonstrated a less sophisticated use of language (e.g. increased repetition of key terms) and, at times, an inability to develop a response in any depth or breadth. However, the team thought the candidates in 2002 had a chance to achieve more because the questions were less focussed and there were fewer questions than in 2006. The team agreed that the extended essay in 2002 was advantageous for the C Grade candidates and thought that a poor exam result could be partly masked by the extended essay mark. The 2006 papers demonstrated brevity and use of less sophisticated language. Some candidates at this level struggled with the sheer volume of the questions and had difficulty negotiating the range of grading accorded to questions (3 to 10) and gauging the appropriateness of the response. The team agreed that the C candidates struggled with the 10 mark essays in paper 1 and the 15 mark essay in Paper 2. The team thought that there were times when the candidates deserved a mark where the expression was clumsy (not awarded by examiners). Overall the team agreed that the 2006 exam was more demanding for the C Grade candidates. It was agreed that the smaller number of less focussed questions in 2002 allowed candidates an opportunity to 'stumble across marks', whereas in 2006 the candidates had no real room for error because of the focussed nature of the questions.

5.2 Specific weaknesses or strengths in scripts

As has been stated, the style of writing decreases in quality from the A candidates to the B and C candidates in both 2002 and 2006. The language becomes less sophisticated and the candidates become less sure of concepts, vocabulary and positions. However, the team agreed that one of the strengths for the C Grade candidates in 2002 was the extended essay and the opportunity to accrue marks.

The smaller number of questions in 2002 meant that some of the C answers became cyclical in the sense that the same points were raised in a number of places (allowing candidates to stumble over points). The larger number of questions in 2006 meant that the candidates had to know the answer. The team thought that this ensured a more comprehensive preparation for the exam and a more rigorous testing of the knowledge and understanding of the pupils.

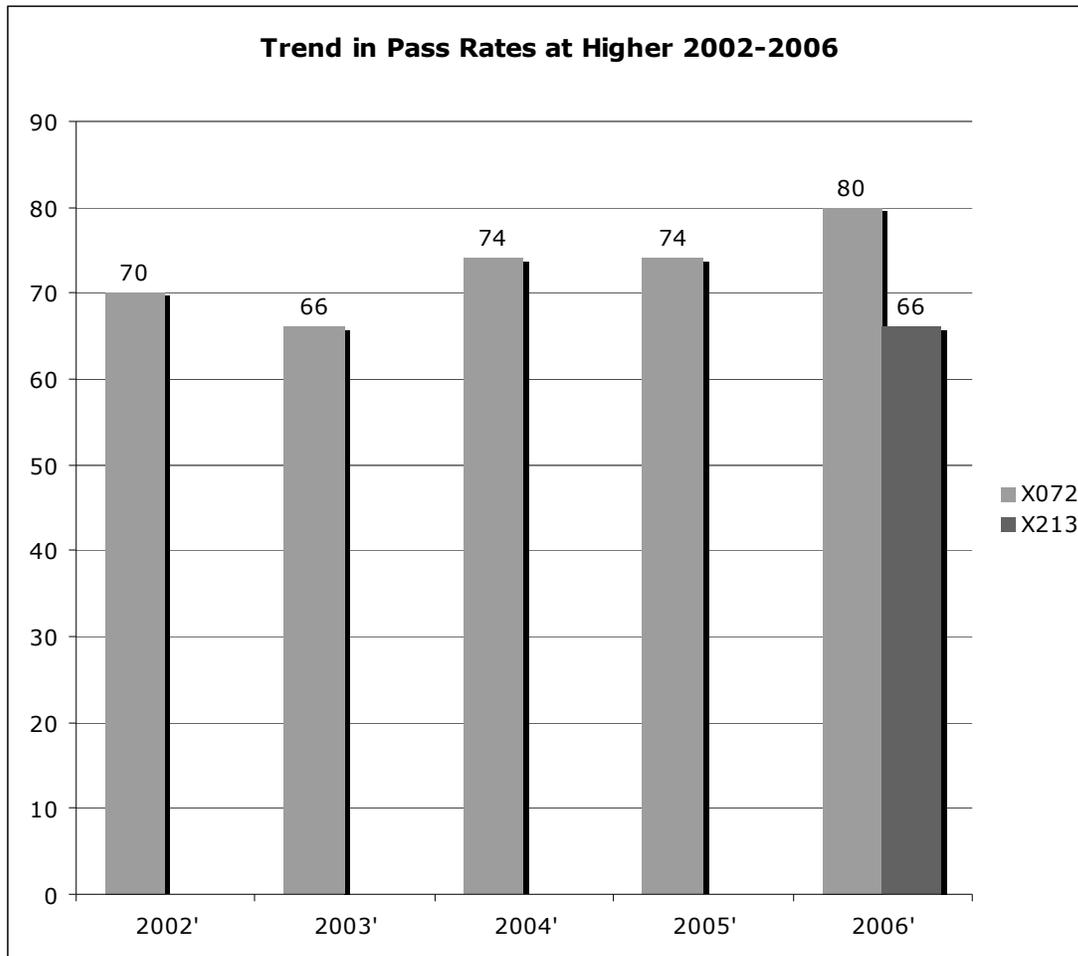
Appendix 1 Entries at Higher 2002-2006: Bar Chart 1



In 2002, 1,596 candidates were entered for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X072). In 2006, 451 candidates were entered for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X072) and 1,323 entered for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X213). The overall total in 2006 equals 1,774.

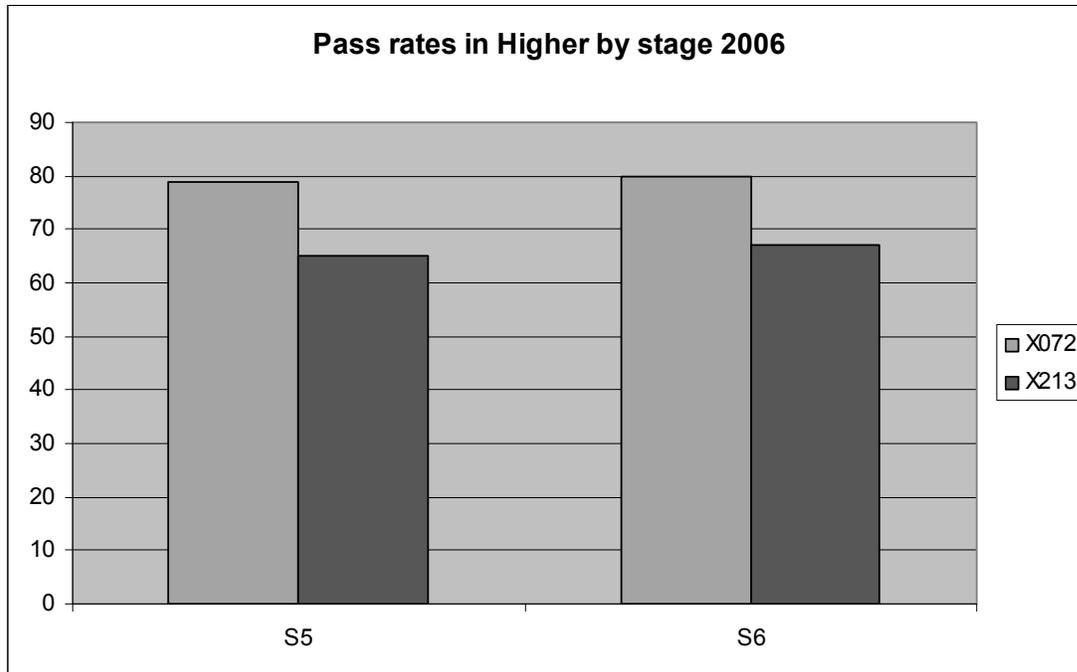
This is indicative of a staged increase of candidates from 2002 (1,596), through 2003 (1,597), 2004 (1,673), 2005 (1,685) to 2006 (1,774).

Appendix 2 Trend in Pass rates at Higher 2002-2006 Bar Chart 2



The percentage pass rate between 2002 and 2006 fluctuates: 2002 (70%); 2003 (66%); 2004 (74%); 2005 (74 %) and in 2006 (80% for X072 and 66% for X213). The drop of 8% from 74% (2005) to 66% (2006 X07) represents the largest drop in the pass rate between 2002 and 2006. The drop of 4% between 2002 and 2006 (X213) equals the difference between 2002 and 2003.

Appendix 3 Pass rates at Higher by stage: Bar chart 3

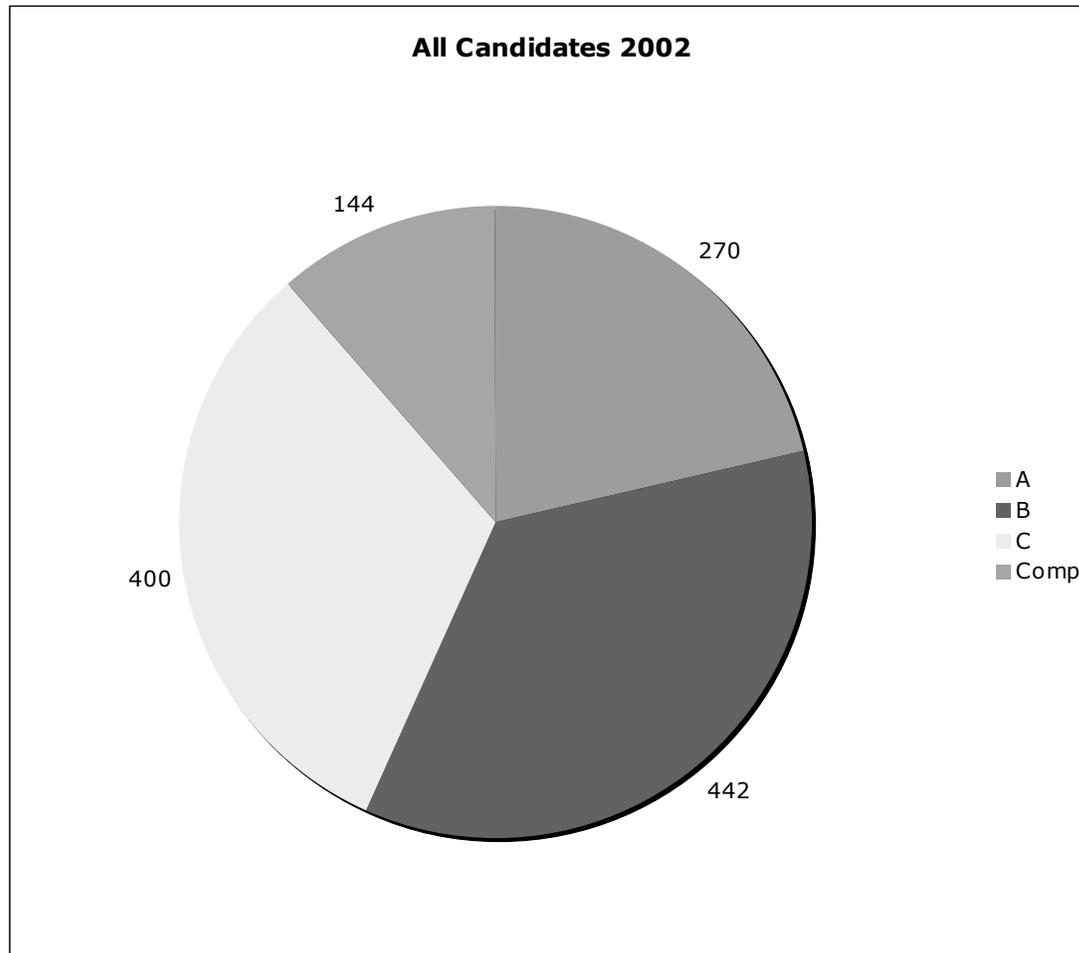


There is no record of pass rates for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X072) by stage in school for 2002, but for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X072) 2006 the pass rate for S5 candidates was 79% and for S6 was 80%, whereas, for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X213) 2006 the pass rate was 65% for S5 and 67% for S6.

Appendix 4 Achievement by Gender

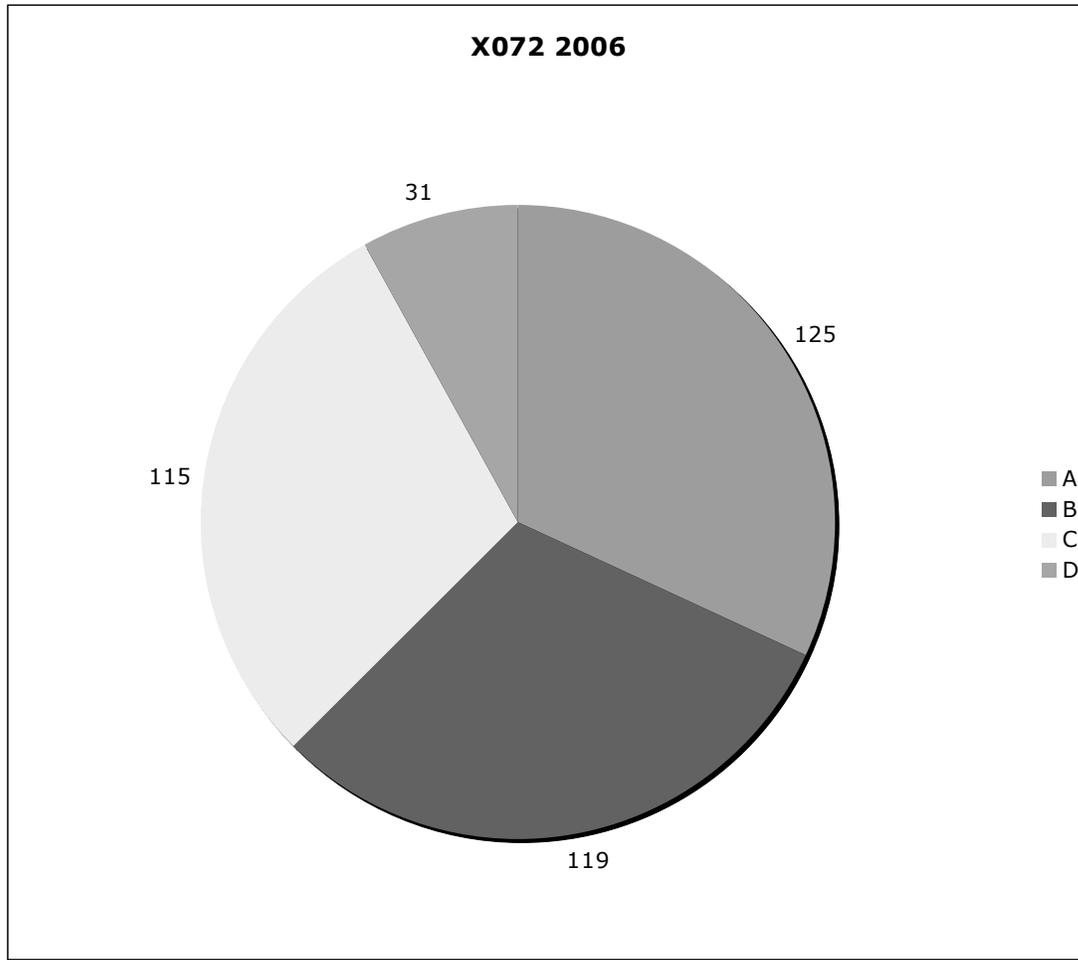
In terms of achievement of A grade according to gender, in 2002 14% of the male candidates achieved an A; 18% of the female candidates achieved an A. In 2006 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X072), 31% of the overall male candidates achieved an A; 27% of the female candidates achieved an A. In 2006 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X213) 15% of male candidates achieved an A; 20% of female candidates achieved an A grade. This demonstrates a large increase between 2002 and 2006 (X072): 13% rise for males and 9% rise for females, but a more steady rise between 2002 and 2006 (X213); 1% for males and 2% for females.

Appendix 5 Grades awarded in 2002: Pie Chart 1



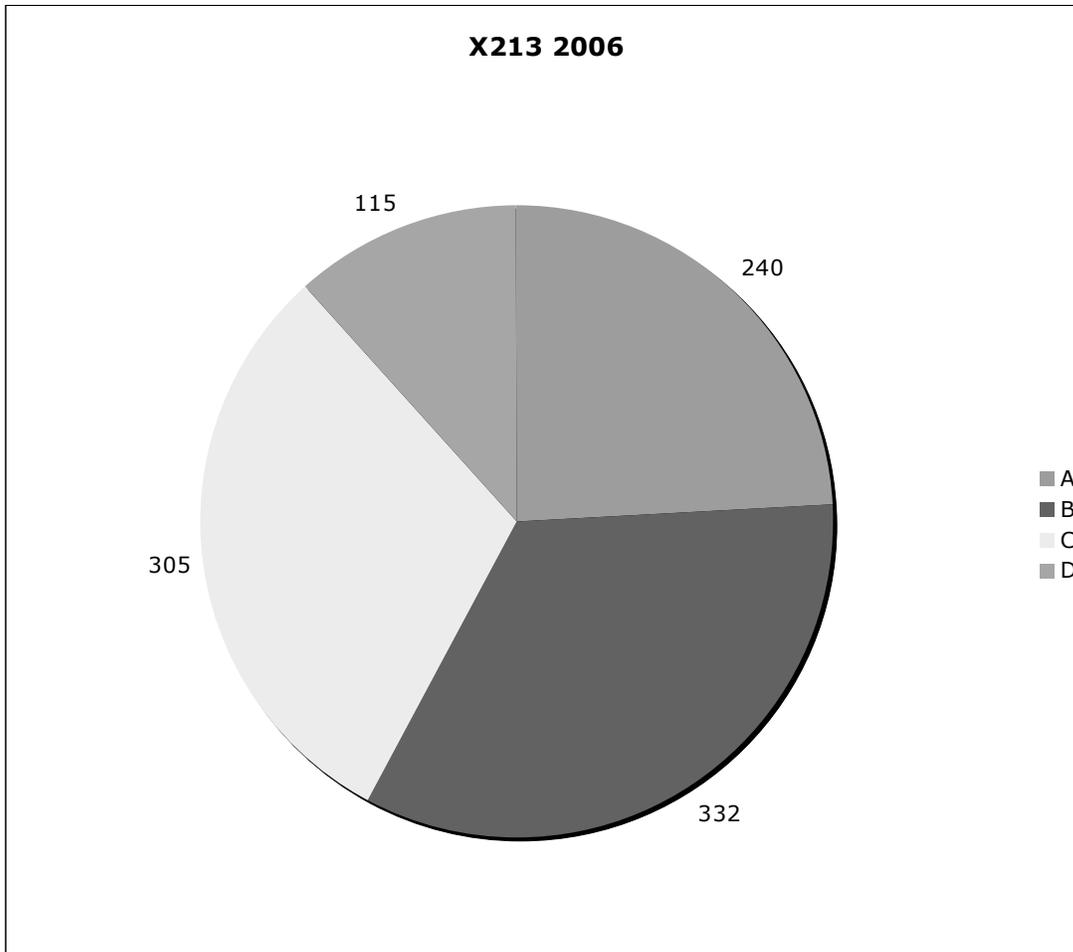
In 2002: 17% of candidates were awarded an A grade; 28% were awarded B and 28% were awarded C.

Appendix 6 X072 Grades awarded in 2006: Pie Chart 2



In 2006 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X072): 28% were awarded A; 26% were awarded B and 25% were awarded C.

Appendix 7 X213 Grades awarded in 2006: Pie Chart 3



In 2006 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X213): 18% were awarded A; 25% were awarded B and 23% were awarded C.

In comparing 2002 and 2006 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (X072), there is a marked increase in the A grades by 11% and decrease in the B (2%) and C (3%) grades. In comparing 2002 and Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies 2006 (X213), there is slight increase in the A grades (1%) but a decrease in the B grade (3%) and a more significant decrease in the C grades (5%).