

## Principal Assessor Report 2003

**Assessment Panel:**

RMPS

**Qualification area:**

**Subject(s) and Level(s)  
Included in this report**

RMPS Advanced Higher

---

## Statistical information: update

<b>Number of entries in 2002</b>	39
<b>Pre appeal</b>	

<b>Number of entries in 2003</b>	70
<b>Pre appeal</b>	

### General comments re entry numbers

There is a gradual upward trend in the number of candidates. This is heartening and indicates that centres are offering the course to candidates who have not necessarily sat the Higher examination.

## Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

Lower	A	70
	B	60
	C	50

### General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as syllabuses evolve and change

### Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

These are the same grade boundaries as for the previous two years.

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

The question paper was such that the best candidates could produce thoughtful, original work and yet there was scope for satisfactory answers from candidates who, for whatever reason, relied only on the support materials.

#### **Section B**

Religious Experience — is still the section which candidates find most difficult. There were more failed questions in this section than in the mandatory Section A.

#### **Section C**

Bioethical — produced generally good knowledge and understanding, but there was often little concept of the philosophy behind the issue.

The **Dissertation** indicated that the majority of candidates were well informed about the issue chosen and they attempted to express their own view. However, this very often produced baseless, unargued opinion. This was particularly so in the Bioethics issues as candidates who have no philosophical expertise can only set out opinions. A similar failure to argue arises where religious views on a topic are set out, but then the candidate cannot usefully effect an evaluative comparison. Either a crass secular utilitarianism is used without any defence of that stance or a subjective conclusion beginning ‘speaking as a Christian’ is used. Candidates do not seem to think of religions as making assessable competing claims to the truth. There is little awareness of the best pro-religion case being put forward by for example Swinburne.

There are still a few centres not completing the flyleaf declaration that this is the candidate’s own work.

### Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

The best answers were comprehensive, intelligent and organised expositions. They showed clear evidence of independent reading and were shrewdly assessed. They never lost sight of the central point of the question which was intelligently understood.

### Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

The most common characteristic of poor answers was that candidates did not answer the question set. This was indicated either by not engaging with the question at all or by appearing to answer a completely different question. They showed very little concept of the philosophy behind the issue and a heavy reliance on the support materials, often producing unconnected summaries of the viewpoints in the materials. The poor answers to the questions in the Bioethical section contained too many personal points of view.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

Candidates need to be encouraged to read more widely than the support materials.

Candidates need to show that they fully understand the implications for the question they are answering. They should refer to the question in their conclusion.

Candidates need to be acquainted with the philosophy in which the questions about religion and ethics are grounded.

Centres should ensure that the flyleaf declaration for the dissertation is signed by both teacher and pupil.

Centres should ensure that the topic for the dissertation is submitted to the SQA for approval before the end of October

.