

## Principal Assessor Report 2004

**Assessment Panel:**

**RMPS**

**Qualification area**

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

**Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies —  
Advanced Higher**

## Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003 (pre appeal)	72
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Number of entries in 2004 (pre appeal)	78
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## General comments re entry numbers

The gradual upward trend in the number of candidates has continued. Centres continue to offer the Course to candidates who have not sat the Higher examination. There is some evidence that pupils who have done the Philosophy Higher prefer to go on to the Advanced Higher RMPS Course as they can build on their study of the Philosophy of Religion.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards and grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	24.4	24.4	19	70
B	30.8	55.1	24	60
C	26.9	82.1	21	50
D	10.3	92.3	8	45
No award	7.7	100.0	6	

### Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

In such a small cohort of candidates the drop in the percentage of candidates gaining an upper A mark and the rise in the number gaining lower As and Bs is significant. The possible reason for these changes may be a cause for concern. See below.

### 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 arrangements evolve and change.

### Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

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

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

A common thread throughout the oral and written comments of the markers is that the candidates are being over-prepared by the teachers to the extent that the teacher's voice could be discovered in the answers produced by an entire class. The effect of this on examination, too often had understandable results:

- ◆ very little original thought
- ◆ an inability to answer the question set
- ◆ a tendency to add as an afterthought 'I feel ...', 'I believe ...' without backing up the statement with any specific knowledge or fact

The above may account for the drop in the number of upper band A candidates noted previously. Teachers are beginning to predict the questions set and teach in such a safe way that it makes it more difficult for the good candidates to emerge.

#### Section A

**Philosophy of Religion** — The best candidates did offer argument: too many report other arguments without engaging in it themselves and some few do not seem to grasp what argument there would be. Several batches from particular schools revealed a good deal about what had been taught at that centre.

#### Section B

**Religious Experience** — A few candidates engaged with the question and enjoyed responding to it by bringing original material to bear on it. However, far more were producing unconnected chunks of support materials. Many did not answer the question set.

#### Section C

**Bioethics** — There were no areas which were highly satisfactory. There is still not enough evidence that teachers are providing anything more than a support service for the support notes. There is an enormous amount of material in the media — all readily available.

#### Dissertation

Overall the candidates were better prepared than in previous years. However, unlike previous years, there was nothing of outstanding merit.

A real cause for concern is beginning to emerge. There is considerable un-cited use of the internet. Centres are not encouraging candidates to give a bibliography, refer directly to the text of their source in their own narrative, or use footnotes. At present there is nothing about this in the Arrangements documents although there is room for recognition that a candidate has done this in the marks awarded for headroom.

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

There were few 'best answers'. The few that were showed clear evidence of independent reading and never lost sight of the central point of the question.

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

Candidates invariably:

- ◆ did not answer the question set
- ◆ appeared to answer a completely different question
- ◆ relied heavily on the support materials
- ◆ produced unconnected summaries of the viewpoints in the materials
- ◆ showed very little concept of the philosophy behind the issue in the Bioethics section
- ◆ included too many unsubstantiated points of view in the Bioethics section.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

Candidates need to:

- ◆ be encouraged to think for themselves
- ◆ be able to back their own view with appropriate knowledge of the subject in hand
- ◆ show that they fully understand the implication of the question they are answering
- ◆ be acquainted with the philosophy in which questions about religion and ethics are grounded
- ◆ be encouraged to produce footnotes, bibliographies, and website references in their Dissertations.