

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies

Qualification area:

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

RMPS: Higher

Statistical information: update

	Pass Mark	Final
Number of entries in 2002	1,568	1,596
Pre appeal		

Number of entries in 2003	1,575	
Pre appeal		

General comments re entry numbers

I would have expected a more significant entry by this year considering the numbers for 2000 were 920 at Pass Mark stage and 1,354 Final, and the numbers for 2001 were 1,338 at Pass Mark stage and 1,407 Final.

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

Grade	Minimum Mark
A	76
B	64
C	53

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

The grade boundaries show no change from 2001 and 2002.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Candidates performed well in the Extended Essay (Paper 2). The mean mark for 2003 is 22.1 compared to 22.9 for 2002, and 21.2 in 2000.

There has however been a significant drop in candidate performance in Paper 1. The mean mark for 2003 is 34.9 compared to 35.8 in 2002 and 38.2 in 2000.

A significant number of markers commented that candidates showed weakness in the areas of analysis and evaluation. It was also observed that a large number of candidates did not address the question but tended to write all they knew on concepts, issues, challenges and responses with little reference to the question posed.

As in previous years candidates showed a generally poor performance in the World Religious Section of the paper.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Candidates performed well in the Extended Essay. They show good research techniques and that they have been given good advice concerning the various areas on which they are to be assessed.

There are still however a number of centres who allow candidates to present essays on topics which are clearly not conforming to the advice given by SQA that the topic chosen must be from a unit studied. Candidates who present essays which do not lie within the 'arrangements' are being seriously disadvantaged.

In Paper 1 candidates generally performed well in Gender Issues, Christianity and Science and War and Peace.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

There were few areas of difficulty re the Extended Essay (apart from my comments above about the relevance of Extended Essay titles).

In Paper 1 a large number of candidates find difficulty with the skills of analysis and evaluation, especially in the World Religious Section.

In Section A, Topic 2, Christianity, Question 1 there was a generally poor performance. Candidates had a satisfactory to good grasp of the problems of the human condition, but showed little understanding of the concept of wholeness and therefore could not explain/assess to what extent wholeness can address the problems of the human condition.

In Section A, Topic 1, Buddhism, Question 2 candidates showed some problems in understanding and evaluating the significance of the point of view expressed in the stimulus.

In Section A, Topic 4, Islam, Question 2 candidates showed a good grasp of the concept of resurrection (and of eternal life generally) but had difficulty discussing its significance as a goal of life.

Although the general performance by candidates in Gender Issues was satisfactory, some had difficulty with Question 1, with some very confusing answers and little understanding of the position of Christianity in relation to the statement.

A fair number of candidates still seriously disadvantage themselves by responding to a two part question with one single essay.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

1. Candidates should be given more training in the skill of how to structure a balanced response.
2. Emphasise the importance of the skills of analysis and evaluation and give candidates more practice to develop these skills. Although Knowledge and Understanding is an important component of a candidate's response it will only gain a maximum number of marks.
3. Carefully monitor candidates' choice of Extended Essay titles to ensure that they conform to **relevant** concepts, issues, responses and challenges in the topic studied.
4. Inform candidates that a two part question required a two part — (a) and (b) answer.
5. Candidates should be advised to read an examination question carefully and that their answer should relate directly to the question.