

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Religious Moral and Philosophical Studies

Qualification area

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

Religious Moral and Philosophical Studies Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003 (pre appeal)	1620
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Number of entries in 2004 (pre appeal)	1673
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General comments re entry numbers

There has been a slight increase in numbers of candidates this year and the subject still maintains a good number of presentations at this level. There is some evidence that centres are taking more care in presenting at the appropriate level and that Intermediate 2 is being considered as a more sensible option for some candidates. However, this is not always the case.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards and grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	16.3	16.3	272	76
B	23.7	40.0	396	64
C	28.6	68.6	479	53
D	11.4	80.0	191	48
No award	20.0	100.0	335	

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

There has been a significant increase in the number of candidates achieving grade A – 16.3% (c.f. 12.6% in 2003)

Also 23.7% achieved a B (c.f. 21.8% in 2003) and 28.6% achieved a C (c.f. 26.2% in 2003).

The number of No Awards (including D's for 2004) has dropped from 39.5% in 2003 to 31.4% in 2004.

There is comment from some markers that too many candidates are still being presented at the wrong level.

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

The grade boundaries show no change from 2001, 2002 and 2003 to 2004.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Candidate performance is significantly better in Paper 1 in 2004 than in 2003. The mean mark for Paper 1 was 37.1 out of 75 (c.f. – 34.9 in 2003). The mean mark for paper 2 was slightly increased from 22.1 out of 35 in 2003 to 22.3 in 2004. The Mean Mark for Papers 1 and 2 was 59.4 out of 110 (c.f. – 57.0 in 2003.)

There were more positive reports from markers this year especially in respect of Paper 1. Of the seventeen reports received, seven markers reported a Good/Excellent performance; eight reported a Satisfactory performance and only two reported a Poor performance by candidates. This is very encouraging and shows a clear improvement on last year's performance.

It is also worth noting that more markers reported positively on candidates' ability to analyse and evaluate. There were, however, a number of markers who commented that some candidates use a lot of irrelevant material in their answers. They appear to come to the examination with prepared answers to specific questions and if these questions do not appear they will use their material as planned, answering the question inappropriately.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

In Paper 1 – Candidates generally did well in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Gender Issues and Christianity and Science.

Question 2 on Christianity and Science was particularly well done. This was a popular question. Question 1 on Buddhism was answered by a large number of candidates and the standard of response was generally high. Questions 1 and 2 on Christianity also provided good answers. Question 2 on Islam was popular and provided some very good/excellent responses.

In Paper 2 – Candidates also performed well in the Extended Essay and a number of markers reported on some excellent essays showing high levels of research skills. This was particularly the case in respect of the Gender Issues; Christianity and Science; Buddhism and Christianity.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

A number of candidates had difficulty in adjusting their prepared material to the actual question in the examination. This resulted in a good deal of irrelevancy in answers. Candidates tended to write all they knew about a topic, concept or issue without paying due care and attention to what the question was specifically asking.

Whether this is due to misinterpretation of questions or to lack of sufficient preparation is not always clear. An example is Question 1 (b) in Gender Issues where a number of candidates wrote about the subordination of women and not ordination which the question was clearly about.

Also candidates answering Question 3 in Christianity and Science generally failed to identify that this was a question on methods. A number wrote very general essays on scientific theories/discoveries in Cosmology and/or Evolution but made no reference to discovery being dependant on the methods used by scientists to attain knowledge.

Some markers also commented that in Question 2 on War and Peace a significant number of candidates did not address the criteria of proportionality and discrimination, but wrote general essays on the Just War Theory. They were unable to show sufficient knowledge of, and ability to analyse and evaluate, the two criteria referred to in the Question.

In Christianity and Secular Humanism, Question 2 (b), candidates showed a very poor understanding of the significance of morality in relation to the existence of God.

Some candidates still answer a two part (a) and (b) question with a single essay answer. This can seriously disadvantage candidates.

In Paper 2 candidates had difficulty in that they sometimes chose topics for the extended essay which did not conform to SQA guidelines ie that the topic studied must be from a Unit studied.

There was also a significant number of candidates who penalised themselves by not conforming to the 250 word maximum for the essay plan. There were some cases where 800 word plans were submitted.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

1. Inform candidates that in a two part (a) and (b) question must be answered with a two part (a) and (b) response.
2. Ensure candidates choice of Extended Essay topic is relevant to an issue/concept studied in a Unit.
3. Ensure candidates conform to the 250 word maximum for their Extended Essay plan.
4. Candidates must be advised to address each question carefully and to avoid irrelevancy in their answers.
5. Give candidates more practice in essay writing skills especially in respect of the skills of analysis and evaluation.