

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Religious Studies

Qualification area

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

RMPS intermediate 1

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	
Pre appeal	333

Number of entries in 2003	
Pre appeal	524

General comments re entry numbers

Significant increase in entries this year. This has been the pattern since 2000. Increase is due to some presentations from centres that have not presented at this level previously. Also it is notable that some of these new centres are presenting candidates who have performed very well in the course.

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

C — 26
B — 31
A — 36

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

Grade boundaries remain the same as in previous years. Question Paper considered to be similar in demand to previous papers.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

There is a general improvement in candidate performance at this level. In both the assignment and the Question Paper the average mark achieved by candidates has increased from 2002. More candidates appeared to be better prepared for the exam with length of answers being more appropriate than previously. Many candidates are being presented in S4 and although this causes problems for some candidates, it seems that, on the whole, this age group copes well with the demands of Intermediate 1. Those candidates who do not perform well usually give too short answers or miss out large sections of the paper. There is also a high rate of absenteeism in some centres.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Candidates generally scored well in the Assignment and this helps to boost the overall achievement. The majority of Assignments were well structured with aims being clearly stated at the outset. Candidates demonstrated reasonable analysis and evaluation throughout. More candidates made better use of the planning pro-forma.

Within the exam candidates performed well in the Making Moral Decisions unit, particularly the Human Rights section. There is a significant improvement in candidate's ability to present a reasoned opinion in part (c) of each exam question. Candidates who chose to answer the Nature of Belief question on Existence of God generally performed well, demonstrating a sound grasp of the arguments for and against the existence of God.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Some candidates appear to have difficulties understanding the rubric of the Question Paper. This is reflected in the fact that some answer too many questions, thereby penalising themselves by trying to do too much in the allocated time. Other candidates appear to answer questions on units that they have not been taught. This may be due to the fact that many of the topics within the course are of a contemporary nature and candidates feel that they have something to say about these issues. However, without specific teaching and learning they are unlikely to answer appropriately.

A large number of candidates fail to answer the specific questions within the exam paper. Instead they present general answers presenting information and arguments which apply to the issue, but not the actual question being asked. This suggests that candidates may be learning generalised answers to practice questions but lack the skills of applying knowledge to different questions. There is also evidence that some candidates did not read questions carefully enough e.g. answering a question specifically asking about arguments **for** by including arguments both for and against an issue.

Lack of reference to sources in many areas is a significant weakness. Where a question asks for specific religious teachings this is usually presented adequately, but very few candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding of other sources. This is particularly noticeable in the Making Moral Decisions unit —candidates show no awareness of Egoist sources such as Nietzsche or Stirner. Few candidates refer to secondary sources such as newspaper articles, government reports or reports from charitable organisations. Use of these materials would significantly improve marks in all units, but especially Global Solidarity and Religion & the Social World.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Assignment

- ◆ Ensure that candidates clearly identify an issue from within the RMPS course. Where candidates choose an issue which is not acceptable they may lose all of the marks normally allocated to identification and retrieval of information.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to make full use of the planning pro-forma. If possible identify the unit from which the issue has been taken.
- ◆ Candidates must ensure that the aims of their assignment are clearly stated in the assignment itself since the pro-forma is not marked.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to do some personal investigation. It has been more apparent this year that some centres are teaching the whole class how to write the same assignment. This goes against the ethos behind this piece of assessment and often means that candidates perform poorly because they lack the insights necessary to present good analysis and evaluation.
- ◆ Candidates listing web-site searches as part of their resource list should remember to give specific addresses. A brief description of the site would also help the examining team.
- ◆ Within the assignment, specific viewpoints should be identified and commented on. Avoid sweeping, generalised statements such as “**Christians** believe that capital punishment is wrong...”
- ◆ Candidates who perform best are those who have are able to demonstrate some personal opinions on the chosen issue and to discuss the issue from different viewpoints.

Question Paper

- ◆ Ensure that candidates are well prepared to tackle the exam paper. Use past papers to practice finding the correct units and questions to answer.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to take plenty of time to read questions carefully and remind them that they must answer the specific question asked.
- ◆ Warn candidates of the dangers of answering questions on topics that they have not been taught.
- ◆ Teach candidates to use sources in all topics, not just those which specifically ask for religious teachings.
- ◆ When answering questions relating Egoism to any of the issues in Making Moral Decisions, candidates should be taught to relate the moral stance of Egoism to the issue within the question. Candidates often attempt to answer these questions by simply giving a general definition of Egoism.
- ◆ Centres presenting this course as part of the core RME programme in S3/4 are encouraged to continue doing so. However care should be taken to ensure that candidates are given enough teaching time to be thoroughly prepared for the exam and that candidates have the motivation to prepare themselves for the rigours of the examination.