

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Religious Studies

Qualification area

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

Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies Int 1

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003 (pre appeal)	601
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Number of entries in 2004 (pre appeal)	688
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General comments re entry numbers

The examining team is pleased by the continual increase in demand for this course. This level of increase has been a feature every year since establishment of the Course in 2001. Increased numbers tend to be S4 candidates who are most likely following the course as part of core RME.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards and grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	16.6	16.6	114	36
B	19.6	36.2	135	31
C	21.2	57.4	146	26
D	10.6	68.0	73	23
No award	32.0	100.0	220	

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

Overall, pass rate and results at each of grades A-C are all slightly lower than in 2003 although they are still in line with previous years' results. The difference is not a dramatic one this year. Comparison with results at Int 2 and with the results at both levels in 2003 would seem to suggest that more candidates are being presented at the most appropriate level for them.

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

Grade boundaries are set at a priori level as they have been for all previous years. Since the Question Paper has not significantly changed in any way there is no good reason to alter the grade boundaries.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The pass rate has slightly fallen this year indicating that candidate performance was not as good as in 2003. However performance this year is in line with that of previous years and it therefore seems that in 2003 a particularly good cohort of candidates was presented. Most candidates seem to be better prepared for the exam this year, only a small number did not complete the required number of questions or answered too many questions. The availability of past papers for helping to prepare candidates may well be proving useful to centres.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

As in previous years, candidates generally performed well in the Assignment and this has helped to boost the overall achievement of some. Markers report that the majority of Assignments were well structured and showed good knowledge and understanding of the chosen area of study. Most candidates wrote essays on some aspect of Making Moral Decisions and those candidates who included analysis of the moral stances in relation to the issue within these essays did very well indeed.

Within the exam candidates generally showed good knowledge and understanding of the topics and this was particularly evident in answers to Making Moral Decisions – Human Rights questions and also those who answered questions from the section on Religion and the Social World.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Candidates, in the main, appear to be unschooled in the use of sources both within the Assignment and in sections of the Question Paper. A large number of candidates still fail to answer the specific questions asked in the exam, instead they apply general knowledge and understanding of the issue to their chosen question. Such candidates often miss out on the opportunity to gain marks for specific information which a marker will be looking for.

Too many candidates lose marks for simply not stating an aim at the outset of the Assignment. Since the planning proforma is not allocated marks it is not sufficient to simply give the aim or assume that the aim is the same as the essay title.

Within the Science and Belief section a large number of candidates did not fully appreciate the difference between question 2 & 3. Question 2 relates to the issue of the beginning of the universe as a whole and requires reference to Creationism and Big Bang Theory. Question 3 relates to the Origins of Life and requires knowledge of Biblical stories relating to the origin of life and to Darwin's theory of evolution. Candidates who confused these issues did not score well. Some candidates also appear to be confused by the question on the Scientific Method.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Assignment

- ◆ Candidates must choose an issue which is clearly identifiable within the Units of the RMPS Course. Centres who are unsure about this should contact the SQA for prior moderation of titles. Candidates who choose to write on an issue which is not acceptable are likely to lose all of the marks normally allocated to identification and retrieval of information. This is a total of 4 marks.
- ◆ Candidates must make sure that the aim of their Assignment is clearly stated in the actual Assignment in order to achieve the mark allocated.
- ◆ Candidates should be taught the difference between the essay title and an aim. The aim should clearly state what the candidate hopes to achieve in the Assignment. Candidates could refer to the viewpoints they intend to discuss or a specific hypothesis they wish to analyse.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to participate in personal investigation of their chosen issue. The practice of presenting whole classes with the same essay title has again been disappointing this year. Where this happens many candidates perform badly because they cannot give a reasonable analysis of the issue and often fail to present well supported personal opinions.
- ◆ Candidates should be made aware that marks are specifically allocated to the use of sources within the assignment. Quotations should be included and discussed in order to highlight areas of agreement/disagreement. At least two appropriate sources should be used.
- ◆ Candidates should try to avoid giving excessive description of background information and lists of facts in the form of bullet points. Instead they should focus on the identification of different viewpoints and areas of agreement/disagreement concerning their chosen issue.

Question Paper

- ◆ Ensure that candidates are given sufficient teaching time to allow for adequate revision and exam preparation. This is particularly important when presenting candidates in S4 who have been following this course as part of core RME.
- ◆ Remind candidates that they must answer the specific question asked. Steer them away from simply giving lots of general knowledge and understanding of a topic.
- ◆ Emphasise that candidates must refer to sources in all topics. At this level sources can be specific quotations from scripture or relevant text. However, a brief summary in the candidate's own words is also acceptable. A clear reference should be given eg. Genesis chpt 1, Surah 95 etc. it is not enough to make vague references such as "the Bible". Other appropriate sources could be video material, newspaper articles, interviews, surveys etc. There is no need for candidates at this level to distinguish between primary and secondary sources.
- ◆ When answering questions on Making Moral Decisions, candidates must be taught to relate the stance of Egoism to the actual issue. No marks are awarded to simple definitions of the moral stance.