

## Principal Assessor Report 2003

**Assessment Panel:**

Religious Studies

**Qualification area:**

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

RMPS Intermediate 2

## Statistical information: update

<b>Number of entries in 2002</b>	
<b>Pre appeal</b>	452

<b>Number of entries in 2003</b>	
<b>Pre appeal</b>	465

### General comments re entry numbers

Slight increase in entries this year. Following a 100% increase last year it seems that things have levelled out at this point in time.

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

C —	41
B —	50
A —	59

### 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 years.

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

Candidate performance at this level is not as good as in the previous year. In both the Assignment and in the Question Paper the average mark achieved by candidates is lower than in 2002. Although the overall pass rate has slightly increased from 2002 there is a significant decrease in the percentage of candidates achieving Grade B and Grade A at this level. There is a particularly notable drop in the number of candidates achieving the highest grade available. Approximately 70 % of candidates are presented at S4. It would therefore appear that perhaps many of these candidates are not really coping with the demands of Intermediate 2. Markers report a lack of depth to the answers given by Intermediate 2 candidates. Many of those who perform well in Knowledge and Understanding do not demonstrate adequate evaluation skills, perhaps indicating that they are being well taught in respect of course content, but lack the maturity necessary in order to give a satisfactory discussion of somewhat challenging issues. 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 better in the Extended Essay than in the Question Paper and this helps to boost the overall achievement. Candidates who did best were those with a well structured plan and clear aims to the essay. Candidates demonstrated reasonable knowledge and understanding as well as analysis. Those candidates who chose essay titles related to Making Moral Decisions were able to demonstrate knowledge of different viewpoints by referring to the different moral stances studied. This aspect was not so well done in essays on other issues.

Within the exam candidates have performed well in the Making Moral Decisions unit, particularly the Human Rights section and those answering on Buddhism generally seem well prepared for the exam. 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.

It is pleasing to see a growing number of candidates being presented for the Metaphysics unit.

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

Some candidates lost marks in the Extended Essay because the issue chosen was not from within the RMPS course. Others presented essays with little or no RMPS content and therefore were penalised for lack of appropriate analysis and interpretation of information.

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 number of candidates fail to separate out different parts of the exam question and thus present a holistic answer often missing out key information relating to specific parts of the question.

A large number of candidates failed to answer the specific questions within the exam paper. Instead they presented 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. Evaluation skills are generally weak. Many candidates do not present balanced discussion of the issues in the 10 mark questions. Too many answers are simply based on personal opinion rather than weighing up strengths and weaknesses of other people's arguments. Many candidates also give very simplistic answers showing little awareness of different interpretations of religious scriptures and alternative viewpoints.

Lack of reference to sources in many areas is a significant weakness. In all topic areas other than World Religions. This is particularly noticeable in the Making Moral Decisions unit – candidates show no awareness of Egoist sources such as Nietzsche or Stirner or Utilitarian sources such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. 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. Candidates might also use references from video material or outside speakers, as well as references from other authors.

Candidates using sources did not always use them appropriately. Too often they gave very long accounts retelling stories from scripture such as the Creation Story from Genesis Chpt 1 or the story of Kisa Gotami in Buddhism. Other candidates gave very long accounts of the Derek Bentley story when answering the question on Capital Punishment. Candidates need more training in how to summarise sources and use them to demonstrate analysis rather than focusing on retelling the stories.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

#### Extended Essay

- ◆ 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. Planning may be presented in any format useful to the candidate, so encourage spider diagrams, mind maps etc if these are more helpful than the more common bullet point approach.
- ◆ Candidates must ensure that the aims of their essay 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 essay. 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 essay, 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.
- ◆ Candidates must refer to sources within the essay. These can be quotations from appropriate scripture or from relevant authors, reports, video material or classroom visitors.

#### Question Paper

- ◆ If candidates are to be presented at the end of S4 centres must be confident that enough time has been allocated to the teaching of the units and for exam preparation. Teachers should ensure that they are fully aware of the assessment demands at this level and that candidates are motivated to prepare thoroughly for the examination.
- ◆ Ensure that candidates are well prepared to tackle the exam paper. Use past papers to practice finding the correct units and questions to answer. Centres should be aware that the Specimen Question Papers and Marking Instructions issued in 2000 are now out of date. Marks allocations for questions should be adjusted in line with recent question papers.
- ◆ 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 and Utilitarianism to any of the issues in Making Moral Decisions, candidates should be taught to relate the moral stances to the issue within the question. Candidates often attempt to answer these questions by simply giving a general definition of Egoism and Utilitarianism as moral stances.