

## 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 2**

### **Statistical information: update**

<b>Number of entries in 2003 (pre appeal)</b>	541
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<b>Number of entries in 2004 (pre appeal)</b>	663
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### **General comments re entry numbers**

The examining team is pleased by the continual increase in demand for this Course especially since it had been felt that things had perhaps levelled out with only a small increase last year. Increased numbers tend to be S4 candidates who are most likely following the Course are 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	14.0	14.0	93	59
B	22.8	36.8	151	50
C	20.1	56.9	133	42
D	10.6	67.5	70	38
No award	32.6	100.0	216	

### Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

Although there is a slight increase in the percentage of candidates achieving No Award, there is also a significant increase in the number of candidates achieving grade A and B. This would indicate that the course has attracted candidates of a higher calibre than last year, but more in line with previous years. For comparison of results from all previous years it seems that this years' results are more the norm than those achieved in 2003.

### 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 have been raised to a priori level this year. Since the Question Paper is now stable and centres have a good stock of past papers to enable suitable preparation there seems no good reason to set grade boundaries any lower.

## **Comments on candidate performance**

### **General comments**

On the whole candidate performance seems to have improved on 2003. This is especially evident in that the average mark gained for the Question Paper is higher than in any previous year. There is a significant increase in the number of candidates achieving passes at grade A and grade B.

### **Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well**

As in previous years, candidates generally performed well in the Extended Essay and this has helped to boost the overall achievement of some. Markers report that the majority of Extended Essays ranged from the good to excellent categories. Candidates appear to have been well briefed about the expectations for this piece of work and had taken time to prepare themselves properly. 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. There were also some very good essays on World Religions.

Within the exam candidates generally showed good knowledge and understanding of the topics and this was particularly evident in answers to Making Moral Decisions questions. Questions in the Justice in the World Unit were generally answered well.

### **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 Extended Essay 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 clear aims at the outset of the Extended Essay. 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. A large number of essays were of excessive length and some of these candidates penalised themselves by giving too much background factual information and not enough analysis and evaluation.

Within the Making Moral Decisions questions, candidates often appear to have a simplistic understanding of the moral stances, particularly Utilitarianism. They could gain more marks by being able to give a variety of utilitarian responses to the given issue.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

#### Extended Essay

- ◆ 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 7 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 aims. The aims should clearly state what the candidate hopes to achieve in the essay. 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 conclusions.
- ◆ Candidates should be made aware that marks are specifically allocated to the use of sources within the Extended Essay. Quotations should be included and discussed in order to highlight areas of agreement/disagreement. At least three 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 analysis and evaluation of different viewpoints. Candidates who attempt to interpret information relating to the issue are likely to gain more marks than those who do not.
- ◆ Try to encourage candidates to keep within the recommended length for the Extended Essay.

#### 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 moral stances to the actual issue. No marks are awarded to simple definitions of the Egoism and Utilitarianism
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to bring something new into the conclusion of their essays. Often they simply repeat points made previously and therefore cannot gain additional marks.