

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

RMPS

Qualification area

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

**Religious, Moral & Philosophical Studies
Advanced Higher**

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	78
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	95
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

The numbers of candidates entering for the exam continues to show a pleasing upward trend.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 100	-	-	-	-
A	23.2	23.2	22	70
B	26.3	49.5	25	60
C	31.6	81.1	30	50
D	9.5	90.5	9	45
No award	9.5	100.0	9	-

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 any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

The increase in the number of candidates gaining an upper A grade and the increase of candidates achieving a C grade endorses the impression gained by the markers that the overall standard remains the same as for previous years.

These are the same grade boundaries as for the previous four years.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Good answers in the question paper indicated:

- ◆ Thorough preparation in knowledge and understanding
- ◆ Individual research that went beyond the support materials
- ◆ A knowledge of recent developments in the study of religious experience and the field of bio-ethics
- ◆ An ability to apply this knowledge to the specific question asked
- ◆ An ability to engage in coherent argument

Good dissertations:

- ◆ Indicated a coherence between analysis and evaluation throughout the text
- ◆ Presented a detailed bibliography
- ◆ Used footnotes to indicate when references were used in the text
- ◆ Cited the use of the internet in the text.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Poor answers in the question paper indicated:

- ◆ An inability to answer the question set
- ◆ A tendency to be descriptive
- ◆ A reliance on 'I believe', 'I agree', or 'I feel' instead of cohesive analysis and evaluation.

Section A

Philosophy of Religion

Generally the candidates were reasonably well informed. The better students however did not merely set out facts or the views of authors which they thought were relevant but also used what they knew to answer the specific question asked and to engage in argument. Too many candidates merely listed information. Almost all the candidates had evidently taken the course with some seriousness.

Section B

Religious Experience

Candidates were well prepared in knowledge and understanding. However in many cases the question set was not kept in focus and clear cues were not picked up. Most answers were passes and a few were very good.

Section C

Bio-ethics

There was far too much evidence of candidates simply writing ready prepared answers. The fact that a specific question was asked did not seem to matter. Many candidates seemed to understand analysis/evaluation to mean a personal opinion on the issue in hand. No centres were particularly noted for the quality of their

answers and some which produced very good dissertations did not also produce good examination answers.

Dissertation

This gives candidates the opportunity to engage in enquiry/research which is to some extent independent. There was a genuine independence and enthusiasm for this type of project which was more marked than in previous years.

Less good dissertations:

- ◆ Did not go beyond the support materials for the research
- ◆ Did not provide bibliographies or footnotes
- ◆ Produced work which was alike in content from the same centre
- ◆ Used internet sources in an indiscriminatory way
- ◆ Introduced any evaluation given with, 'I think', 'I feel' or 'I believe'.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Candidates need to:

- ◆ Be encouraged to think for themselves
- ◆ Be able to back their own view with appropriate and up to date knowledge of the subject in hand
- ◆ Be aware that the question must be kept in focus
- ◆ Be aware that the wording of the question gives clear cues as to what is expected
- ◆ Be encouraged to produce footnotes, bibliographies and website references in the Dissertations
- ◆ Be aware that although marks are not deleted for bad handwriting, spelling and grammar, it is to their advantage that the marker can make sense of what they have written.

Centres need to:

- ◆ Be aware that if a Dissertation title is not submitted to SQA for approval there is a danger that it is so inappropriate that the work will lose marks
- ◆ Be aware that although marks are not deducted for exceeding 5000 words in the Dissertation, to do so is often counter-productive.