

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

RMPS

Qualification area

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

RMPS Intermediate 1

Statistical information: update

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|---|-----|
| Number of resulted entries in 2004 | 688 |
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| Number of resulted entries in 2005 | 816 |
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

Once again there has been a healthy increase in the number of candidates at this level. More than 90% of the candidates were in S4 and largely represent a small number of centres who present whole year groups.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

| Distribution of awards | % | Cum % | Number of candidates | Lowest mark |
|------------------------|------|-------|----------------------|-------------|
| Maximum Mark- 52 | - | - | - | - |
| A | 20.0 | 20.0 | 163 | 36 |
| B | 18.1 | 38.1 | 148 | 31 |
| C | 20.8 | 58.9 | 170 | 26 |
| D | 10.3 | 69.2 | 84 | 23 |
| No award | 30.8 | 100.0 | 251 | |

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

Since the question paper has now become standardised with no significant differences from that of previous years, grade boundaries remain the same as in previous years.

There has been an increase in the number of candidates achieving a grade A or B, however less candidates achieved a grade C than in any previous year. There is a slight decrease in the number of candidates achieving No Award although this figure is still rather high given the predictability of the question paper. The percentage of candidates achieving an award at this level is significantly lower than predicted by centres' estimates.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Some candidates managed to achieve the top grades and produce excellent work in both components of the external assessment. However, the mean marks for both components show an increase in the average mark achieved in the Question Paper but a lower average mark achieved in the Assignment. Most members of the marking team commented on poor or at best average performance in their reports. In Assignments it is disappointing to see that in some centres all the candidates used the same or very similar essay titles. A large number of Assignments were very repetitive and candidates often failed to gain marks for analysis and evaluation.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Assignment: Most candidates demonstrated good or at least reasonable knowledge and understanding of their chosen issue. A general improvement within the structure and presentation of Assignments was noted. Most candidates made good use of the planning pro-forma.

Question Paper: Most candidates were awarded marks for knowledge and understanding and in general performance in this skill was at least satisfactory. Candidates who answered on Medical Ethics generally did better than those who chose other options within Making Moral Decisions. Those who answered questions from Religion and the Social World also tended to achieve reasonable marks. However, since there are so many options within the question paper it is difficult to make any specific deductions.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Assignment: Candidates who performed least well in this area were those who presented essays with too much factual content and not enough analysis and evaluation. There was a lack of reference or appropriate use of sources in a large number of Assignments and few candidates seemed able to make clear reference to areas of agreement and disagreement within their chosen issue. Personal conclusions often amounted to no more than an opinion on some aspect of the issue but without valid supporting reasons.

Question Paper: The majority of candidates failed to make appropriate use of sources within their answers and therefore could not achieve full marks for part a) or part b) of the questions. Q1 a) on Medical Ethics was poorly answered by a large number of candidates who simply did not have knowledge of the current Abortion Law in the UK.

A large number of candidates either misread questions and/or did not direct their answers to the specific question being asked. A good example of this is question 3 a) in Medical Ethics where some candidates made the assumption that all religious people would be against voluntary euthanasia when the question asked about religious beliefs which support it.

Some candidates confused “origins of life” with “beginning of the universe” in the Science & Belief section and therefore failed to achieve high marks for Q3.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Assignment:

- ◆ Within the marking instructions, 1 mark is allocated for a clearly stated aim. Candidates must make sure that the aim of their Assignment is clearly stated in the actual Assignment in order to achieve this mark.
- ◆ 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 intend to analyse.
- ◆ Centres should 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. There is no need to distinguish between primary and secondary sources and although detailed references are the ideal, they are not expected at this level. Rather than trying to spend lots of time memorising the chapter and verse for a specific quotation, candidates should concentrate on developing and utilising skills of analysis and the ability to introduce and interpret sources appropriately. Including the name of a book of the Bible or chapter from the Qur'an or other scripture is acceptable as is including the name of a person being quoted or whose views are being paraphrased.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ If the recommended 160 hours of time is not being given over to the course then centres should think carefully about whether or not candidates are being treated fairly in being asked to complete external assessments for a course which they may not have a personal commitment to. Centres are asked to present only those candidates who have clearly demonstrated the required level of ability and have a good chance of achieving the course award.
- ◆ Centres might do well to consider if some candidates should only be presented for unit awards.
- ◆ Remind candidates that they must answer the specific question asked.
- ◆ Emphasise that candidates must refer to at least one source in part a) and part b) of all questions. At this level sources can be specific quotations from scripture or a relevant text. However, a brief summary in the candidate's own words is also acceptable. 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 stances of Egoism and Religious Authority to the actual issue. No marks are awarded to simple definitions of the moral stance.
- ◆ Centres who are moving over to the New Arrangements in 2006 will be fully aware of the changes in external assessment which will be implemented. They are reminded that the new question paper will sample across the entire content of each unit and therefore it will be a much less predictable exam. Without the benefit of the assignment to boost marks, candidates will need to be thoroughly prepared and ready to answer questions on any aspect of the units they have studied. Centres should make full use of the Arrangements Document, support materials and specimen question papers in helping to prepare candidates for the new style exam.