

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

RMPS

Qualification area

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

RMPS Intermediate 2

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	663
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	797
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

Once again the number of entries for this level have increased. However, as will be highlighted later, unfortunately, the increased number of candidates is not having a positive effect on overall results. Almost half of the candidates presented are from S4 and there are some concerns that these candidates may not be properly prepared for the examination. This particular cohort of candidates represent only a small number of centres who are presenting a whole year group at the end S4.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 85	-	-	-	-
A	9.8	9.8	78	59
B	12.0	21.8	96	50
C	20.5	42.3	163	42
D	11.7	54.0	93	38
No award	46.0	100.0	367	-

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 2004.

There is a disappointing increase in the number of candidates gaining No Award. This is the highest percentage since the first examination in 2000. There has been a decrease in the number of candidates achieving awards at all levels. Centres' estimates predict a significantly higher pass rate of just under 80%. This indicates a marked difference in what centres feel candidates are capable of and how candidates have performed in the final exam. Since the question paper continues to cover all course content rather than sampling it has now become quite predictable. This huge discrepancy between centre estimates and actual results is yet another indication that some centres were not fully aware of what is required to pass the examination and a large number of candidates were not well enough prepared for the external assessment.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Although some candidates still managed to achieved the top grades and produce excellent work in both components of the external assessment, on average, candidates this year performed less well in both the Extended Essay and the Question Paper than in previous years. Most members of the marking team commented on poor performance in their reports. A large percentage of candidate responses were disappointing, this is mainly due to candidates presenting over generalised responses rather than focusing on what was required for specific questions. Too many candidates presented a great deal of irrelevant knowledge and understanding and not enough analysis and evaluation of particular issues.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Extended Essay: Most candidates demonstrated good or at least reasonable knowledge and understanding of their chosen issue. There was greater evidence of appropriate use of sources than in previous years and more candidates remembering to include a clearly stated aim for the essay. Most candidates were awarded some marks for structure and progression of the essay.

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 Judaism within the World Religions section were obviously well prepared for the examination. Their responses showed an excellent knowledge and understanding of the Key Concepts as well as the ability to apply appropriate analysis and evaluation to the particular question being answered. Candidates who answered Q1 on Marriage in the Human Relationships section also performed well. Those who answered Q1 on Existence of God did well in parts (a) and (b) but often seemed confused by the term “reasoned argument” in part (c).

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Extended Essay: There is still a large number of candidates who lose a mark because they do not present a clearly state aim within the body of their essay. Analysis of issues was often weak and the majority of candidates made few attempts to evaluate their chosen issue. Quite often candidates presented essays which were more like reports on a topic rather than analytical and discursive. Conclusions tended to be simple repetition of a point made earlier or sometimes a description of the actual research process with a list of resources used. Many candidates appeared to find it difficult to present appropriate conclusions supported by valid reasons and some appeared to have no understanding of how to conclude an essay properly.

Question Paper: In a number of different questions, candidates failed to give appropriate responses to questions requiring analysis and evaluation. Markers reported that a large number of candidates tended to present a lot of irrelevant factual information about a topic and did not direct their responses to the specific question. This was particularly evident of a number of candidates who answered questions on Buddhism in the World Religions Questions. Q1 on The Human Condition was poorly answered by many candidates because they chose to retell very detailed versions of the story of the Buddha’s life rather than focusing on the concept of Anicca and how it relates to the Human Condition.

Within the Making Moral Decisions section, candidates did not perform well in questions which asked about “different moral stances”. They appeared not to understand that they were meant to refer to the specific moral stances covered within the course content and instead often simple referred to “some people...” A number of

candidates appeared to misread questions and so often gave irrelevant answers, eg. in response to the question, “In what ways might an Egoist and a Utilitarian agree on the Just War Theory?” too many candidates failed to focus on areas of agreement and instead gave general answers about Egoist and Utilitarian responses to Just War Theory.

In Section Three - Science and Belief, a number of candidates answered Q2 (a) poorly because they focused on the origin of life and therefore gave lots of detail about evolution rather than scientific accounts of the origins of the universe.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Extended Essay:

- Candidates must choose an issue which allows them to analyse and evaluate. An essay which is too factual and focuses on knowledge and understanding will not achieve a pass mark.
- Essays titles and the subsequent content of the essay should relate to RMPS. Candidates writing about moral issues should remember to include specific moral stances and/or religious views. Those candidates who submit an essay with no RMPS content will gain no marks for the Retrieval & Identification of Information.
- Every essay should have a clearly stated aim within the body of the essay. Since the planning proforma is not marked it is not sufficient to simply note the aim here.
- The aim should highlight the areas of discussion which will be covered in the essay. Candidates should avoid stating an aim which simply says things like “I will present arguments for and against and then give my personal opinion” or “I will tell you what I have found out about this topic and then give my own views on it”.
- Marks are awarded for use of sources. At Intermediate 2, candidates must make appropriate use of at least three different primary or secondary sources. Sources must be specified when referred to in the essay. Candidates should state the origin of all quotations with some degree of accuracy, eg. rather than just saying “the Bible says...” reference to which book of the Bible the quotation is from should be made. The same would apply to other scriptural sources.
- An essay which presented a range of different specified viewpoints on an issue will gain more marks than an essay which presents generic arguments only. Discussion of different viewpoints and areas of agreement/disagreement plays a major role in analysis and evaluation.
- 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 taught to write suitable conclusions to such an essay. The conclusion should relate to the issues raised within the essay and be supported with valid reasons.
- Candidates should avoid giving a summary of the research process either in the introduction or in the conclusion to their essay. It is not necessary to make statements like “I found most of my information for this essay on the internet and I used a book called Making Moral Decisions by Joe Walker ...” There is space on the plan for listing resources, completion of this is sufficient. Too many candidates waste a large number of words in their essay by including such unnecessary information. It also detracts from the quality of discussion within what might otherwise be a good extended essay.

Question Paper:

- Candidates must refer to sources in all topics. Marks are specifically awarded for use of sources in part (a) and (b) of a three part question and part (a) of a two part question. Therefore candidates who do not refer to appropriate sources in these answers cannot achieve full marks.
- Those candidates answering on Buddhism should be trained to make reference to appropriate sources without necessarily giving long detailed accounts of the various extracts. It is not usually necessary to give a detailed account of the life of the Buddha or the story of Kisa Gotami. Instead short summaries should be used to highlight the relevant teaching on the key concept or organising principle which is being asked about. This use of sources has become more evident in the Buddhism section but of course applies to candidates on other World Religions also.
- Within all sections of Making Moral Decisions, candidates are required to relate their knowledge of moral stances to the specific issue being addressed. No marks are awarded to simple definitions of Egoism and Utilitarianism and so candidates could save time in the exam if they avoid stating these definitions at the start of each answer.
- Past papers could be used to teach candidates how to apply what they have been taught in order to answer the specific questions being asked. Too often candidates fail to gain marks because they

present all they know about a topic without answering the actual question.

- Some candidates answer too many questions and obviously answer on sections of the course they have not studied. Centres should make use of past papers to ensure that candidates understand the rubric on the front of the question paper and are clear about which sections they should answer. They need to spend maximum amount of time on questions which relate to the three units studied in order to achieve good results.
- 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 since statistics show that a large percentage of these candidates fail to achieve a course award.
- The recommended time allocation for the RMPS course is 160 hours. If this amount 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.
- 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 extended essay 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.