



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	RMPS
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Markers reported that overall the performance was similar to previous years. There was a slight increase in candidate numbers, but new presenting centres accounted for almost 20% of candidates. Just over a quarter of candidates had no previous attainment. This figure is encouraging since it provides evidence of the appeal of the course and that it is feasible for candidates to complete a course in AH RMPS over one academic year.

The most popular option by far is Medical Ethics whilst numbers continue to fall steadily in Religious Experience with around 10% of presenting centres opting for this section. There is a similar fall in numbers of candidates attempting dissertations on Religious Experience.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Markers were very positive about the exam paper performance. Candidates appear to have understood the need to maintain relevance to the question. There was also an encouraging increase in the use of sources, which improved the quality of the essays.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Some centres are taking unnecessary risks with candidate dissertation topics by stretching the interpretation of the titles to their limit. Centres should ensure that the connection with the dissertation topic list is strong and that markers are in no doubt as to what the connection is.

Concern was expressed too on the quality of some bibliographies. In some cases it was difficult to see how candidates could produce some of their dissertation content using the bibliography they had listed. Furthermore there was some evidence of 'cutting and pasting' from various sources. In an attempt to discourage this practice a number of candidates' dissertations were referred for possible plagiarism. Whilst none of the referrals resulted in penalties, centres should be aware that this vigilance will continue and that candidates should be aware of this

Too many candidates launched straight into their dissertation without constructing an introductory section which explained the topic, the issues to be addressed and the manner in which they were going to be addressed in the dissertation. An introduction helps provide the candidate with both a focus and checklist of what they have to do in their dissertation.

In the exam there was a tendency at times for weaker candidates to simply follow the prompts below each question. This resulted in candidates simply rhyming off content without relating it to the questions. Candidates should use these prompts as a guide to which parts of their course they should relate to the question.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Markers expressed concern over the number of centres allowing candidates to complete dissertations that were in excess 4,000 words. The arrangements state that dissertations should be approximately 4,000 words, which means that some leeway is given, however, it does not extend to dissertations being several hundred, and in some cases a couple of thousand words, over the limit. This disadvantages candidates because they can only be assessed on approximately 4000 words.

General advice based on markers observations:

- ◆ observe the word limit for the dissertation
- ◆ be particular with the bibliography
- ◆ avoid cutting and pasting- better to attribute the source
- ◆ remember to keep referring back to the question and to use some of the terms in the question to maintain relevance

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	266
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	268
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	41.0%	41.0%	110	70
B	23.5%	64.6%	63	60
C	17.9%	82.5%	48	50
D	6.7%	89.2%	18	45
No award	10.8%	100.0%	29	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). 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 management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ 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, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry this 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.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.