



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	RMPS
Level(s)	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

There was a slight increase in the number of candidates being presented this year, the figure being just over 4,500. RME departments nationally have a presentation capacity based on timetabling constraints, so this levelling off in demand was expected. Nevertheless, we had the highest ever number of presenting centres standing at 225. This is very encouraging and an indication of the level of confidence centres have in their RME staff, who create meaningful, relevant and successful courses for candidates. Their efforts are to be applauded.

Crime and Punishment maintained its position as the most popular moral issue, whilst Buddhism maintained its position as number one choice in the World Religions paper.

Over three quarters of pupils being presented at Higher have no previous record of attainment in the Course. Around 60% of presentations are S6 pupils, so from this one can assume that many candidates are S6 pupils completing a 'crash' course in Higher RMPS, which makes the attainment all the more impressive.

Attainment was similar to previous years but there was significant evidence that there were a number of candidates whose responses were barely Intermediate 2 standard.

It is recognised that there is pressure to make sections viable, and that some borderline candidates may be admitted into RMPS Higher classes to achieve viable numbers. Having been presented for the Higher, these candidates presumably passed all of their internal assessments. The disparity in performance between passing internal assessments and exam performance was so significant that some presenting centres need to give serious thought as to why this disparity exists.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidate performance in KU questions and low-value AE questions was good across all options. The performance in paper 2 was slightly stronger than in paper 1, and both were comparable with previous years.

Candidates continue to be disciplined in their approach to questions that specify a stated number of views or responses. Teachers are to be commended for their work in this area.

There does not appear to have been significant differences in performance between the various options on offer, which suggests that the level of parity between them remains good.

Areas which candidates found demanding

There are several observations here, the first of which is a repetition of an issue raised in previous years.

Sources

The use of sources is rather sparse. Whilst this may not disadvantage candidates, there needs to be recognition that the use of sources can enhance the quality of an answer, especially in AE questions. Marks are not deducted for failing to use sources, but marks can be gained for using sources appropriately. Candidates should be encouraged to do so in future. Centres should note that in the arrangements for the new Higher World Religions there is a particular focus on sources and that they would do well to begin preparing strategies for the teaching of this in session 2014-15.

Paper 1

In preparations for the central marking event examiners became aware of potential issues with certain questions. The attention of markers was drawn to these questions, and they too raised potential issues with the questions. There was also some correspondence from centres relating to the same questions. SQA welcomes comments on external exams that are professional and constructive in their tone. The vast majority of correspondence is written in this spirit.

Issues were raised on the following questions in paper 1:

1a) all sections

Issues:

- ◆ Concerns that the phrase was not part of the arrangements
- ◆ Many candidates scored one mark in this answer. They knew what respect of persons meant but were unable to expand on its meaning.

Response:

- ◆ The phrase is clearly stated on page 53 of the arrangements. It is reasonable to expect that centres prepare candidates to an appropriate level on terms used in the arrangements.

2c) all sections

Issue:

Concerns here related to asking pupils to discuss the justification of moral actions or views that were morally challenging.

Response:

In the assessment objectives of the course it states 'candidates should demonstrate competence in knowledge and understanding of specified moral issues and competence in the analysis and evaluation of viewpoints including reasoned personal viewpoints on specific moral issues which are guided by religious belief and viewpoints which are secular.' This question gives the candidate the opportunity to analyse viewpoints from one side of the argument.

The added value of the Course Assessment includes 'the opportunity to demonstrate the greater level of attainment appropriate for a graded 'Higher' Course award by:

- ◆ answering questions in which the more complex skills of analysis and evaluation attract a higher proportion of the marks available than those in Unit assessment
- ◆ applying and adapting the skills of analysis and evaluation in a variety of contexts'

The study of ethical issues, by its very nature, involves candidates in studying perspectives on these issues which maybe, for some, unpalatable. It is in cases like this that 'candidates have to apply and adapt skills of analysis and evaluation in a variety of contexts,' as stated in the arrangements. This question also allows candidates to apply and adapt their skills of analysis in a context which is new.

Candidates actually coped well with this question and applied many mature and thoughtful insights in their answers.

3a) all sections

Issue:

- ◆ Concerns here related to pupils using up all of their AE before doing question 3b.
- ◆ Some concerns that candidates tried to describe opposing views on the issue and were unable to because they had only been taught one side of the moral issue

Response:

- ◆ The arrangements state that 'In **Area 2** candidates develop the knowledge and skills necessary to understand contemporary moral issues....**Two** different viewpoints which are guided by religious belief and one secular viewpoint are also studied.'
- ◆ The question complies with the arrangements. It was considered reasonable to assume that candidates would know three marks' worth of information for each religious response at Higher level. There is no ambiguity in the wording which clearly asks candidates to 'describe two religious responses'. There is no suggestion of AE in the question although some candidates did include AE in their answers which could not be credited.
- ◆ There is no requirement in the arrangements that opposing views/responses are taught. Similarly there is no suggestion in the question that opposing views should be discussed. Where this happened, candidates were adding a layer of complexity to the question that was not there. The teachers' mantra has to be repeated here to candidates...'read the question.'

3b) all sections

Issue:

- ◆ Some markers expressed concern that this question was misleading because candidates were used to expressing balanced views on religious responses and had already done so in question 3a, leaving them with little to write in 3b.
- ◆ Some markers expressed concern that when candidates agreed with the religious views expressed they had difficulty in writing ten marks' worth of agreement points.

Response:

- ◆ There was no concern about the validity of the question, it was more to do with the number of marks attached to it. Where it became difficult was when candidates supported religious views on the issue and were unable to develop their own point of view on it. Some candidates produced superb, well organised answers, but many struggled to gain half marks in this ten-mark question. This is a concern because candidates of ten years ago had to write 10, 15 and 25-mark essays which contained their views and coped well, whilst candidates today find writing 10 marks on their own viewpoint to be more of a challenge.

Centres are encouraged to reflect on the reasons for this, especially in the light on the new National Qualifications and their emphasis on the development and assessment of skills encompassing the expression of reasoned opinions. Issues to consider are: the depth of course materials on different sides of the debate; the opportunities candidates have for extended writing such as this; the academic ability of candidates

Paper 2

This paper attracted a very small number of comments, but on the whole it was well received.

2c) all sections

Issue:

- ◆ The wording here drew some criticism

Response:

- ◆ Grammatically the question was correct but it is accepted that the insertion of the word 'that' would have made the question clearer. Anecdotal evidence suggests that those who read it correctly the first time had no problem with the question, but those who inserted punctuation that was not there, struggled.

The question was well answered in all religions, so the concerns expressed turned out to be unfounded.

2b) Christianity

Issue:

- ◆ The phrase 'nature of god' is one with which candidates were not familiar.

Response:

- ◆ The question was well answered. Candidates seem to have been familiar with the term judging by the range and quality of answer.

3b) all sections

Issue:

- ◆ Candidates were asked to reflect only on one side of the argument and would struggle to write ten marks on the question.

Response:

- ◆ Markers accepted that the question was valid but noted that, whilst there were some excellent answers, too many candidates had difficulty in sustaining an argument and were only scoring around half marks. The marking instructions allowed candidates to use benefits, importance and significance as part of their arguments for relevance. They were also allowed to introduce drawbacks, difficulties, disadvantages too in the context that the belief was so relevant that the challenges were overcome.

This was another example of candidates failing to adapt and apply their learning in different contexts. The issue is not new and, in the light of future developments in Higher RMPS, centres are urged to have a focus on developing candidate skills in this area.

The grade boundaries were adjusted because the balance of question-types was deemed to be slightly harder than in 2012. In paper 1 3b in Moral Issues, and 3b in Science and Belief, both looked for reasoned and personal views in the 10-mark question, whilst in 2c Morality and 3b World Religions, candidates were asked to write about one side of the argument. It was this combination that added to the difficulty of the paper.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates are being presented at an appropriate level. Several hundred candidates are being presented at Higher who simply do not have the ability to cope with the Higher.
- ◆ Borderline candidates suffered the most in the 10-mark questions, with many struggling to get anywhere near five marks. The KU of these candidates is secure enough, and it may be that there should be a focus on their extended writing because in some cases the marks lost in the 10-mark questions made the difference between a No Award and a pass.
- ◆ Centres should emphasise the need to read questions carefully (which is almost certainly done every year by every teacher). Cheap marks are thrown away simply because candidates do not answer the question. The information they use might be very good, but if it is not relevant there is little the markers can do to help.
- ◆ There is a dependence by some centres on commercial publications related to RMPS Higher. The SQA has no view on this. However, centres should note that the SQA uses only the Course Arrangements and Course Assessment Specifications to formulate exams. Commercial publications are the author's interpretation of the arrangements for content and assessment, based on the contract issued by the publisher. No inference of examination content should be taken from any commercial publication, and centres should exercise their own professional judgement as to the appropriateness of the content and depth of these publications.

- ◆ The attention of centres is drawn to the Course Arrangements and the requirement that candidates should be fully prepared in all aspects of the moral issue. The moral issues identified are issues because there are differing views on them. In every topic there are issues that, from our own personal perspective or a generally accepted perspective, merit only one response — ie they are wrong. Examples may include: the death penalty, designer babies, violence against women, refusal to give aid, and the use of chemical weapons on civilians. The fact is that there are individuals, nations and cultures who have no difficulty in justifying actions in these areas, and as part of the coursework these justifications should be examined. A strong case can be made that by teaching the justifications for actions that may be considered unacceptable by some, candidates are in fact developing an even more informed viewpoint on why these actions are unacceptable.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	4053
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	4136
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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 120				
A	25.4%	25.4%	1051	83
B	27.2%	52.6%	1123	70
C	23.0%	75.6%	952	58
D	9.2%	84.7%	379	52
No award	15.3%	100.0%	631	-

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.