



External Assessment Report 2012

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

Markers reported that the performance overall seemed to be broadly in line with the performance in 2011. Markers viewed the questions as being fair, clear, appropriate and relevant to the Higher RMPS course.

The number of candidates presented was just over 4,100, an increase of about 400 on the previous year. The proportion of S6 candidates to S5 remained at around 60-40%. Over three quarters of candidates sat the Higher without any previous attainment in the subject. Once again this increase can be attributed to the quality of these courses and their delivery further down the school. RME departments are to be commended for their work in this area.

A number of candidates were presented at the wrong level, since they clearly did not have the ability for Higher.

In Paper 1 Crime and Punishment remains the most popular option. The Global Issues section has few centres attempting it. In Paper 2 Buddhism and Christianity are by far the most popular options. The remaining options attract around 500 candidates in total.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Contemporary Moral Issues: The KU questions were answered well. Markers reported that question 1 across all topics was well done. It was also reported that performance was very similar on the whole to previous years.

Science and Belief: Markers reported that this section was done well both in KU and in AE. There was a feeling that the performance here was better than in Contemporary Moral Issues. Candidates seemed to have a better grasp of the issues raised by AE questions.

World Religions: candidates displayed good recall and analytical skills.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Several observations here, the first of which is simply a repetition of an issue raised last year:

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.

Overlap

Markers commented on the amount of repetition across the board in Contemporary Moral Issues, especially in questions 3(a) and (b). The majority agreed that the questions were distinct, nevertheless some concerns were expressed over the potential for overlap — candidates were guilty of using the same information in 3(b) as they used for 3(a). The failure to recognise that one question was testing factual knowledge and the other was testing for AE skills was a failure that cost candidates marks. Previous marking instructions have made it clear that candidates will not be awarded marks for giving the same information in two questions.

Information

Candidates tackling Gender Issues displayed poor knowledge of trafficking and the issues it raises. Markers reported that some did not understand what it was, whilst others resorted to generalisations in an attempt to disguise their lack of knowledge.

In Belief and Science there were some concerns about the quality of answers on evolution. Some candidates struggled to give even basic descriptions of its key features.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

General advice based on some of the observations of markers:

- ◆ Candidates should be clear about what constitutes KU and AE.
- ◆ Candidates should avoid complacency on topics which are familiar.
- ◆ Candidates should try to avoid using bullet points in AE answers because where they are used there is a tendency to list AE points without elaborating on them. This has an impact on the quality of the answer.
- ◆ Centres must ensure candidates are entered at the correct level
- ◆ Centres must cover all of the mandatory course content and thoroughly prepare candidates for taking the exam.

Appeals

There were encouraging signs at appeals this year that centres have understood the standards of the exam better. However:

- ◆ It was disappointing that evidence still contained questions worth two marks, split KU and AE questions, and avoidable clerical errors. This impacted both on the validity and reliability of the evidence, which in turn influenced the result of the appeal.
- ◆ The most convincing evidence came from centres that replicated the exam exactly.

- ◆ These centres had clearly consulted course assessment specifications on KU/AE balance and on permitted question value ranges. They had given clear indications of where marks were awarded (eg a simple tick over or at the end of a point) and of the total mark for all sections of the prelim.

Centres should note that it is their responsibility to ensure that the evidence submitted is valid and reliable, and that staff are familiar with current arrangements and course assessment specifications.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	3756
------------------------------------	------

Number of resulted entries in 2012	4053
------------------------------------	------

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	27.0%	27.0%	1094	84
B	23.3%	50.3%	945	72
C	23.4%	73.7%	949	60
D	8.8%	82.5%	357	54
No award	17.5%	100.0%	708	-

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.