



Course Report 2015

Subject	RMPS
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

Candidates answer questions from one part in each of three sections of the paper. World Religions and Morality and Belief have two 10-mark questions — one assesses Knowledge and Understanding and Analysis, and the other assesses Knowledge and Understanding and Evaluation.

There is one 20-mark question in the Religious and Philosophical Questions section. The 20 marks are distributed as 10 marks for Knowledge and Understanding and 5 each for Analysis and Evaluation.

Component 2: Assignment

The assignment is worth 30 marks and completed in centres under controlled conditions. It is externally assessed. The assignment was assessed using three headings for the skills with the marks distributed thus:

Knowledge and Understanding 12 marks

Analysis 7 marks

Evaluation 11 marks

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

There was one question paper. Candidates had to answer questions on one topic from each of the sections. There was no evidence of any confusion. Very few candidates missed out questions, and very few answers were too brief. Most candidates appear to have understood the demand of questions in terms of the length of their answers. Candidates had no difficulty in identifying Knowledge and Understanding skills, but there was considerable evidence that they did not have a clear understanding of Analysis and Evaluation. RMPS skills were identified as:

- ◆ Knowledge and Understanding — factual information
- ◆ Analysis — doing something with information
- ◆ Evaluation — making a judgement or measurement of information

For clear differentiation between National 5 and Higher, there was a focus on relevance, accuracy and detail. The common approach adopted by markers was:

- ◆ Relevance — is this information essential in answering the question?
- ◆ Accuracy — is this information correct?
- ◆ Detail — does the information go beyond a straightforward presentation of information?

The first two areas were easily identifiable. The biggest challenge was presented by the notion of 'detail' and exactly what was meant by that. For example, if a candidate was asked about meditation in Buddhism, it would not be enough to write 'meditation is calming the mind.' The information is correct but it is not detailed and would therefore not be worth a mark. If the candidate wrote, 'Meditation is calming the mind. It is an attempt by Buddhists to control their thought processes and can include breathing exercises, posture exercises and acts of loving kindness,' this gives detail beyond a straightforward presentation of information. There was evidence that centres had understood the notion of detail in the quality of information in candidate answers.

Component 2: Assignment

The assignment was completed in centres over 1h 30m under controlled conditions using the RMPS resource sheet. The assignment provided an opportunity for candidates to explore issues covered in class and beyond in more depth. Most assignments were between 1500 and 2000 words in length, but this should not be interpreted as a guide to the length — this is simply what markers discovered during the marking procedure. A check was made by markers to ensure that the RMPS resource sheet was present and that candidates had not simply copied their assignment from that.

The assessment procedure adopted was holistic in nature as a result of issues arising from the proposed assessment arrangements. There were 12 marks available for Knowledge and Understanding skills, 7 for analytical skills and 11 for evaluative skills, all of which were identified in course documentation. Markers used grade related criteria for each skill which will be available in the Course Assessment Task document. The overall view of markers was that the revised method of marking was fair, clear and practical.

Overall performance in the assignment was fair. Candidates scored well in Knowledge and Understanding and Analysis but Evaluation was not done well.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

There was considerable evidence that candidates had been well-prepared to write essays, so only a small number of candidates produced answers that were short of Higher quality as far as length goes. Many candidates found the presentation of relevant, accurate and detailed Knowledge and Understanding information straightforward and scored well in this in both the 10 and 20 mark essays.

Candidates also performed well where they:

- ◆ carefully read the whole question and did not simply latch on to familiar terms
- ◆ used words or phrases from the question
- ◆ regularly referred back to the question
- ◆ used words or phrases appropriate to the skill being examined
- ◆ made some use of sources
- ◆ provided additional detail to explanations

- ◆ drew conclusions in analysis or evaluation questions

Component 2: Assignment

In the assignment candidates performed well in the Knowledge and Understanding. It was common for candidates to score around 8/12 for the Knowledge and Understanding skills. This was to be expected at Higher level, and it would be good practice to advise candidates that they can give themselves a good start by ensuring that they have relevant, accurate and detailed Knowledge and Understanding in their assignment.

Candidates also performed well where they:

- ◆ set a question
- ◆ asked open-ended questions
- ◆ covered an issue within their centre's course content
- ◆ had a clear focus on the religious, moral or philosophical implications in their assignment
- ◆ had a clear idea of the range of evaluative skills they had to display

Section 4: Areas in which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

World Religions

Buddhism Q1: Candidates experienced difficulty in evaluating the significance of the life of the Buddha. Instead they tended simply to provide a re-telling of the Buddha's life story without making any clear reference to the question. The result of this was that a noticeable proportion scored poor marks by not reading the question properly. It would appear that they saw the phrase 'life of the Buddha' rather than the words around it and launched into a biography.

Buddhism Q2: A very small number of centres expressed concern over the use of the word 'purpose' in meditation. No issues were identified by the markers with this question.

Morality and Belief

Religion and Justice Q13: A very small number of centres raised concerns about the use of the phrase 'purposes of punishment' when in the Course Specification it states 'perspectives on punishment.' Markers did not report any issues with the answers to this question.

Religion and Justice Q14: Concerns were raised about potential overlap in content with Question 1 during the marking process. Whilst it did not give candidates an advantage, this will be taken into account during the review of the Course.

Religion and Relationships Q16: Concerns were raised by one authority about the use of the word 'divorce', which does not appear in the Course Specification. No issues were reported by the markers with answering this question and candidates coped well with this.

Religion, Medicine and the Human Body Q19: Markers reported that many candidates performed poorly in this question because they focused on the use of embryos and not the status of embryos. Whilst some information on the use of embryos would have been relevant, the focus had to be on the status and too many candidates failed to pick up on this important point.

Religion and Conflict Q21: Candidates performed poorly in this question. Instead of focusing on the causes of war, many candidates simply answered generally about war, with some making no reference at all to the causes of war. This is another example of candidates seeing a familiar word or phrase, latching on to it and writing all they know about it, to their cost.

Religious and Philosophical Questions

Origins of Life Q23: There was considerable confusion amongst candidates in answering this question. Markers agreed that the question clearly asked about the origins of the universe and that there was every justification for expecting candidates to write about the origins of the universe and God. Instead they wrote about the evolution of life on earth sometimes completely, sometimes in parts of the essay. Markers worked hard to ensure that relevant information was credited, but many candidates struggled to attain half marks in the essay because of their focus on evolution.

Whilst candidates must accept some responsibility for this error, the unit title 'Origins of Life' undoubtedly contributed to the confusion in candidates' minds. Whilst recognising that the origins of the universe are inextricably linked to the origins of life, there is a clear distinction made between the origins of the universe and the origins of life in the teaching of the topics and in popular science. This was taken into consideration when deciding grade boundaries, along with the suggestion that the title of the unit be reviewed so that the matter can be clarified.

Existence of God Q24: There was evidence here that some candidates were not adequately prepared for this unit. The focus of many answers was simply on the works of Aquinas and the traditional objections and responses. At times markers found it difficult to distinguish between candidates answering a question on the Origins of Life and answering a question on the Existence of God. Centres should note that the Existence of God part can also involve content not previously taught in the existing Higher, eg fallacy of composition; irreducible complexity; concepts of infinity; the nature of evidence and argument; a priori and a posteriori arguments, and the principle of sufficient reason. This list is not the course content, but it should give centres an idea of how the course content might be adapted to prepare candidates.

Component 2: Assignment

Some candidates were very adventurous when it came to selecting their topic. Whilst there were excellent examples, all too often this spirit of adventure carried a heavy price. Candidates were often out of their depth and were unable to perform well. They often had

insufficient resources to study the issue, limited understanding of the issue, and limited premises on which to base their assignment.

Some titles could not be described as religious, moral or philosophical, and read more like Modern Studies than RMPS. An example of this would be the high number of candidates who chose topics in Religion and Justice, especially in relation to punishment. Some focused purely on the effectiveness of punishment. Whilst this can be made into a moral issue, the fact is that very often it was not. For that reason it might be helpful to insert the word 'moral' or the words 'right' or 'wrong' into the question to ensure that the moral content is strong.

World religions assignments often resulted in descriptive pieces of work and consequently did not score well. There was not a high number of them but candidates need to ensure that they are tackling something that is a genuine issue within the religion.

The key area of concern is that of evaluation. There was considerable evidence that candidates were not conversant with the demands of evaluation. Too many of the assignments were descriptive/analytical pieces containing little evidence of evaluative skills. This meant that candidates were cutting themselves off from eleven potential marks. Even evaluation as basic as identifying strengths and weaknesses of arguments was conspicuous by its absence. Candidates seemed to understand evaluation as simply going through descriptions of arguments for and against. This is not evaluation. At best it may contain analysis and good Knowledge and Understanding but it does not contain any measurement or judgement of the argument. It simply records that there are different points of view.

The requirement to have a religious view within the assignment was at times problematic. In some instances the religious view was fabricated, or did not sit comfortably with the moral or philosophical topic chosen. This has been reviewed and the revised Course Assessment Task document specifies that a religious, moral or philosophical view is required.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Knowledge and Understanding is not a problem, nor is analysis. Every RME teacher and their learners enjoy the challenges of class, group and paired debate. RME teachers see candidates using high-order evaluative skills in these discussions, and yet, when it comes to the question paper, the skill deserts them and they simply list arguments for and against, or simply show how people agree with each other or disagree, as the case may be. What we are looking for is a demonstration of an ability to judge or measure an issue or position, not a rote-learned list of who says what about something or other.

It might be useful to list the key words and phrases that usually mean that a certain skill is in the process of being demonstrated. The lists at the end of this report are neither exhaustive nor authoritative. They have been made up by reviewing a number of assignments and question paper answers to see how candidates introduce these skills rather than guessing from a teacher's perspective about how we would imagine they should introduce these skills.

It should be noted that some of the phrases or words can cover two skills, depending on the information that follows. There is no space here to get into a debate about whether it is analysis or evaluation. That is a debate for another day and something that may become clearer as experience of the exam grows. Feel free to share the grids with candidates, and encourage them to add to them — because the more they think about the vocabulary they use in their essays, the more they will understand the skills we are looking for.

Component 2: Assignment

Centres should explore developing their management of the assignment taking the following into account:

- ◆ It can be a disadvantage to choose a topic that is deliberately obscure (even if it is fascinating).
- ◆ Assignments are best based on open-ended questions to ensure a debate.
- ◆ Evaluation skills should be highlighted both in content and in number (Knowledge and Understanding and Analysis seem to come much more naturally to candidates).
- ◆ Evaluation involves more than just going through arguments for and against.
- ◆ A clear focus on the religious, moral or philosophical implications in the assignment is essential, otherwise the assignment could become a meandering piece of description.
- ◆ Where a candidate's writing is illegible, centres are strongly advised to consult their pupil support department. Marks will not be deducted for poor writing, but if it cannot be read then marks cannot be awarded.
- ◆ If a moral issue is chosen, ensure that the moral arguments are clear, analysed and evaluated. Religion and Justice is a massively popular option but too many candidates tackled topics which were of sociological, political, legal or psychological interest, but not of moral interest. Ensure that the focus is clearly a moral issue.
- ◆ If a world religion is chosen, ensure that there is a debate about the issue chosen. It is very easy to write a descriptive piece on world religions, with the most common one being around themes of death eg 'Is there life after death?' 'Do Christians believe in the

Resurrection?' Again, the need to have an open-ended question here is essential, along with something that is clearly an issue.

- ◆ If a religious and philosophical question is chosen, there is a temptation to have the closed question like Did God create the universe? Or Does God exist? These questions risk 'yes or no' type answers with little evaluation, but with some careful phrasing of the questions this can be the basis of a good assignment.

Skills phrases

Knowledge and Understanding: being able to show that they know and understand beliefs, ideas, concepts and issues through descriptions of facts and relevant information	
Refer to the words of the question, eg a moral issue arising from ... is ...	One argument is ...
One way Buddhists practise meditation is ... Another is ...	Another argument is ...
One key principle is ...	X is an example of ...
An example of this is ...	X is when you ...
One religious viewpoint on X is ...	The main argument for this is ...
A secular view is ...	X is one of ...
The Buddha said / the Bible states (or other source) ...	It is believed that ...
Hindus believe ...	This is illustrated by ...
X think this is an issue because ...	An influence is ...
Other Jews believe ...	One factor is ...
55% of people ...	One aspect is ...
Christians believe that ...	The explanation offered by X is ...
The Bible describes x as ...	The argument for/against X offer by Y is ...
This is also called ...	X tells us that ...
	X also offers another explanation of ...
There is also ...	X is backed up by much evidence such as ...
X is one example of ...	This is known as ...

Some would argue that ...	To explain: ...
X involves ...	Many people would also believe ... because ... this shows that ...
A Christian response to the issue might be ...	
This can/does/often include ...	
There is also the fact that ...	

Analysis: being able to show that they can pull apart a belief, make connections between beliefs, explain consequences, explain issues, explain implications	
Mirror the question!	They would/would not see/agree since ...
One way practice/viewpoint X links with practice/viewpoint Y is ...	This makes people wonder if is justifiable because ...
Some people think that ...	It could allow x because ... it says in y ... which means ...
Other people think that ...	X is a way of saying ...
One way practice/viewpoint X is similar to practice/ viewpoint Y is	However doing x could result in ... because
A consequence of this might be ... another could be	Nevertheless there are consequences ... because
One way this source can be interpreted is ...	However, if this is followed ... then ... which means ...
As a result of this ...	It follows then that x would happen because ...
This could cause ...	The use of ...means that ...
This is related to ... because ...	This can also be seen as ... because
An implication arising from this is ...	This view encourages ... because
They think this because ...	Supporting this idea is the fact that ...
This is because ...	In this way ...
This results in ...	This is an example of x because ...
This means that ... explanation	X is a key concept because ...
An interpretation of this passage could be ...	Followers of x do y and therefore become z because ...
This passage could also mean ...	To illustrate that point X said ...this shows that ...

This means that ...	X's example teaches that ... because ...
This shapes Muslim views ...	This is why/the reason for ...
Both would look at ...	The importance of this is derived/comes from ...
Both agree that ...	This shows ...
It might cause ...	This highlights ...
Again this shows that ...	This helps them to ...
X will often use y as evidence that ...	X differs from Y because ...
As a result ...	X is when someone does y ...this can be as simple as doing z ...
It is important to note/point out that ... because ...	
This is something x finds difficult to accept because ...	
It would seem that x is true because ...	
The view of x is mainly centred on the idea that ...	
This relates to ...	
Another way in which x and y are linked	
Behind this view is the belief that ...	
In addition to this it can also be seen that ...	
X suggests Y because ...	
It is likely/not likely x is the case because ...	
An idea to oppose this view is ...	
However, there are issues with view x that would suggest ...	
X has a problem with this view because ...	
However, religious people would respond to this by arguing that ...	
Therefore if X believes Y it must mean Z because ...	
X poses difficult questions for Y because ...	
This is further evidence that ...	
X has opened up the possibility/made it harder to ...	

X and Y arguably impact on ... because ...	
What makes x attractive is ... because ...	
Throughout the argument ...	
By this reasoning it can be argued that ...	
X is based on the idea y that ...	
This perhaps suggests that ...	
Another issue is created by x because ...	

Evaluation: being able to make a judgement or measurement of: strengths, weaknesses, benefits, drawbacks, advantages, disadvantages, impact, importance, effects, veracity, agreement, disagreement	
Mirror the question!	They would also not be in favour ...but when
A strength of this belief/practice/viewpoint/argument is ...	Rather than doing x ...religious people should ... because
One weakness of this belief/practice/viewpoint/argument is	However under certain circumstances x is acceptable because ...
Another strength/weakness etc	If ...then ... because ...
I think a benefit of this is ... because ...	This is the most popular stance because ...
I think a disadvantage of this is ... because ...	Using this view it can be concluded ... because ...
A positive way this can affect Buddhists is	One of the main criticisms is ...
I think there are advantages and disadvantages of this	There are other concerns/criticisms ...
I agree to a certain extent, because ...	The most prominent issue is ... because ...
An implication of X is This is a possible weakness because, ...	This is effective/relevant because ...
This is very important/ a key issue because ...	This shows that in some cases x is acceptable/unacceptable to an extent because ...
Christians would disagree strongly because ...	To some this is perfectly reasonable because ...
This is important/significant because ...	A view of x would be that x is more effective than y because ...

Muslims would not completely accept ...	However doing x could increase the risk for y because ...
Belief X is very significant becauseit is morally wrong because ...
A negative way this might affect Buddhists is ...	From a religious viewpoint this cannot ever be accepted because ...
X is very important to Y because ...	Some argue that this is a valid view because ...
X is important, but Y is more important because ...	Due to this it could be argued that ...
As an overall conclusion, I would say that ...	It is not fair that x ... because ...
This means that ... implication	X is significant because ...
This might make them ...	X has a significant influence because ...
This could mean	This highlights the importance because ...
They could argue ...	X is very significant because ...
As a result of this ...	X is a major influence because ...
This contradicts X because	This argument is not completely implausible because ...
I agree strongly because ...	This concern/objection/criticism can be justified on the grounds of ...
A major benefit might be ...	Taking this into consideration it may be reasonable to argue ... because ...
I would partly agree ...	Just because X is true it does not mean that Y is true because ...
This therefore makes clear that ... because ...	
Despite this ...	

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	2479

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 90				
A	23.4%	23.4%	581	61
B	23.7%	47.1%	587	52
C	26.1%	73.2%	647	43
D	10.5%	83.7%	261	38
No award	16.3%	-	403	0

Overall the course assessment proved to be more difficult than intended. This was due to the clarity of content within The Origins of Life and Existence of God sections. The grade boundaries for C, A and Upper A were lowered by 2 marks.

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.