



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	RMPS
Level(s)	Intermediate 1

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 fall in the number of candidates presented for Intermediate 1. Markers' overall impression was that the quality of response from candidates was not as good as in previous years. Actual results were much worse than expected, with only 47% of candidates achieving a pass at A–C, compared with 76% of candidates in 2011. A matter of particular concern is that 48.8% of all candidates received a 'no award', which suggests that almost half of all candidates were presented at an inappropriate level.

In 2007 some changes took place to the marking of AE questions. Analysis and evaluation would be acknowledged as higher skills and every AE point would be awarded two marks. In addition to this, if a candidate made a KU point in an AE answer that is then developed into a relevant AE point, this would be credited with one additional mark for KU (providing the maximum KU for the question is not exceeded). This was well-publicised by SQA and all centres were informed but, judging by evidence submitted for absentee candidates and appeals, the majority of centres have not yet adopted this practice. This is a serious concern because candidates are being disadvantaged through no fault of their own. Please encourage your colleagues to read this report and introduce this practice.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Markers noted that candidates from a small number of returning centres gave consistently good responses showing that course descriptors were being followed closely. Fewer able candidates appeared to have difficulty with the rubric of the exam paper.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Some candidates (sometimes all candidates from a centre) did not seem aware of all of the mandatory content in the units they were attempting. This suggests that the mandatory content may not have been taught thoroughly. It is worth underlining again that it is important that all mandatory content is taught — candidates can be examined on all aspects of the mandatory content in the final exam and will be disadvantaged if not properly prepared for the external assessment. The course content is clearly laid out in the Appendix of each National Unit Specification in the Arrangements document, and centres must use the most recent version of this document to ensure that the mandatory content is delivered to all candidates. This is available on the SQA website www.sqa.org.uk.

Markers raised particular concerns regarding the poor quality of candidates' responses to any question asking for a specific viewpoint (whether religious or secular), particularly in Section 2. Many candidates merely gave a personal opinion rather than a recognised viewpoint. It is important that candidates are taught specific viewpoints and are taught to write about the viewpoints they have studied, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Humanism,

Utilitarianism, Feminism etc. Candidates giving generalised answers when a specific response is required will not be able to access all available marks.

Section 1

Christianity Q 1 (d) some candidates seemed to think they could only refer to prayer as worship.

Section 2

Gender Q (b) a small number of candidates appeared to misunderstand the term 'contemporary'.

Medical ethics Q (a) a significant number of candidates gave wrong information in their answers to this question. It is important that teachers ensure accurate information is delivered in lessons. The confusion regarding the meaning of Genetic Selection suggests some centres appear to be delivering courses based on outdated arrangements. 'Genetic Selection' applies to procedures carried out in the womb (pre-natal screening) or outside the womb (pre-implantation genetic diagnosis or pre-implantation tissue typing). It involves selecting the most appropriate embryo for the purpose required — not to changing the attributes of those embryos. It is not the creation of 'designer babies' to prevent or help cure a family illness. Therefore it does not refer to any form of genetic engineering such as germline therapy (altering the genes of an embryo by adding/removing genes). At the time of writing, this type of procedure is still illegal in the UK. Social sex selection and any other forms of feature selection are also illegal in the UK. Genetic selection must be prescribed for medical purposes and individual licences obtained from HFEA. Information about genetic selection in the UK can be obtained from www.hfea.gov.uk

War and Peace Q (e) this was poorly answered by many candidates, who did not appear to recognise the UN Charter — often confusing it with the Geneva Convention of 1925.

Section 3

Existence of God Q (b) & (c) a significant number of candidates confused the First Cause Argument and the Design Argument with worrying regularity.

Existence of God Q (d) similarly, a number of candidates confused the Big Bang Theory and the Theory of Evolution.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

While some candidates seem capable of answering KU questions, the majority struggle with the skills required for AE questions. Centres would benefit from spending time with candidates developing skills that enable them to compare/contrast arguments and recognise the difference between making a statement and presenting a viewpoint supported by valid reasons.

Few candidates show any real ability to be able to judge the value of an argument or to present a valid conclusion.

Candidates should also be made aware of the importance of noting the number of reasons asked for in a question and the number of marks allocated to each reason.

Central Marking once again proved to be a positive experience for those involved. The continuous quality assurance ensures standardisation of the marking process and ensures all candidates are treated fairly.

The opportunity to work alongside colleagues in a supportive atmosphere is valued by all who participate in this process. If you are not already involved in exam procedures and you have appropriate experience, you are advised to apply to become a marker as this is certainly one of the best, and most useful, professional development activities you can share in.

The Arrangements document and the Marking Instructions are published on the SQA website (www.sqa.org.uk). While the Marking Instructions do not provide full or conclusive answers to all the exam questions they can be a useful resource for teachers in preparing their own marking instructions and as a guide to the kind of responses expected from candidates in the exam. This is a free resource that centres should use to their benefit.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 1

Number of resulted entries in 2011	579
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	559
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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 60				
A	10.9%	10.9%	61	42
B	14.7%	25.6%	82	36
C	21.3%	46.9%	119	30
D	4.1%	51.0%	23	27
No award	49.0%	100.0%	274	-

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.