



## External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	<b>Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies</b>
Level	<b>Advanced Higher</b>

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 an improvement on previous years with candidates displaying an increased awareness of the need to maintain relevance in both the dissertation and the external exam. Candidate numbers increased a little with the majority studying Medical Ethics as their optional section.

Markers considered the exam to be fair and challenging, both in the breadth and depth of its content.

The dissertation proved challenging to mark at times because a number of candidates had not entered the dissertation topic number and some also wrote dissertations that did not appear to fit comfortably with any of the prescribed topics.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

Philosophy of Religion was done reasonably well with some outstanding answers to Question 2. There is still a tendency at times for candidates to be over descriptive. Whilst description is an important element of the exam, it should be remembered that the bulk of the marks available are for analysis and evaluation.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

No significant areas of difficulty were identified by the Markers.

## Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

### General

#### Dissertation

Centres should take care to give candidates appropriate advice when choosing a dissertation topic. For session 2011–12, around one-third of the titles have been changed. Centres should take steps to ensure that candidates are aware of this change because if a title chosen is no longer on the list of prescribed titles, no marks can be awarded.

Furthermore, a number of centres did not seem to be aware that dissertations should have been 4,000 words. This was a change from previous Arrangements. Markers will be instructed to stop marking at around 4,000 words next session so it is in the interests of the candidates that dissertations are around that number of words.

In terms of relevant titles, a minority of candidates had titles that did not seem to be derived from the prescribed list of topics. These candidates often scored very low marks. The connection between the prescribed topics and the candidates' dissertation was, in some cases, difficult to ascertain. It would be good practice in future if candidates spent part of the introduction to their dissertation explaining what the connection is between their work and the prescribed topic. Furthermore, a number of candidates set themselves questions

relevant to the prescribed topic however then failed to answer their own questions. This had a significant impact on the performance of a number of candidates.

## **Essays**

Centres are to be congratulated on the improved performance of candidates and on the improving essay-writing skills. A continued focus on these skills should be maintained.

## **Marking**

Marking at Advanced Higher is holistic. Over the years, Markers have recognised that certain features appear at different levels of performance in the dissertation and the external exam. The information below may help centres improve the consistency of their marking.

### RMPS Advanced Higher exam typical features

#### A Grade

- ◆ Relevant to question nearly all the time, or all of the time
- ◆ Regular comparisons between a wide range of views, conflicting or otherwise
- ◆ In-depth explanations of ideas, concepts and viewpoints
- ◆ Accurate and concise descriptions
- ◆ Regular reference to various forms of sources
- ◆ Conclusions drawn regularly

#### B Grade

- ◆ Relevant to question for the greater part of the essay
- ◆ Regular comparisons between different views but not demonstrating a wide range or consistent approach
- ◆ Clear explanations of ideas, concepts and viewpoints
- ◆ Accurate descriptions but at times too descriptive
- ◆ Regular reference to sources with some specific sources used but on the whole general sources are used
- ◆ Conclusions drawn regularly

#### C Grade

- ◆ Relevant to question but loses track regularly and then recovers
- ◆ Describes viewpoints but does not really do anything with them
- ◆ Variable depth on issues — easy ones are well done, but more complex ones are avoided
- ◆ Essay has more description than analysis and evaluation, but descriptions are decent
- ◆ Vague general references with an occasional specific source to garnish
- ◆ Conclusions usually drawn in the last paragraph

### D Grade

- ◆ Makes little or only vague reference to the question
- ◆ Tells everything they know about the topic
- ◆ Ideas and explanations are superficial
- ◆ A lot of description, some of it irrelevant
- ◆ Occasional use of vague references
- ◆ Question is finally answered in the last paragraph

### RMPS Advanced Higher dissertation typical features

#### A Grade

- ◆ Within the rubric of the topic chosen
- ◆ Appropriate bibliography which has been well used and corresponds with content
- ◆ Considerable use of sources
- ◆ Expressed in own words
- ◆ Relevant and focused on identified issues
- ◆ Comparisons and connections well covered
- ◆ Factually correct
- ◆ Clear conclusions

#### B Grade

- ◆ Within the rubric of the topic chosen
- ◆ Bibliography is reasonable but does not always correspond with content
- ◆ Regular use of sources but there are some generalised statements
- ◆ Mainly in own words but some evidence of overuse of sources to express views
- ◆ Mainly relevant but the depth, at times, is not there.
- ◆ Comparisons are regularly personal views rather than working with other views
- ◆ Factually correct
- ◆ There is a mix of personal and more academic conclusions

#### C Grade

- ◆ Topic is appropriate and relevant
- ◆ Bibliography is limited, over-dependence on class notes — bibliography does not correspond well to content
- ◆ Use of quotes and ideas often lifted out of certain texts or class notes
- ◆ Expressed in own words at times but use of class notes or websites is obvious by change of voice
- ◆ Tendency to write all they know about a topic
- ◆ Personal views of issues and unsubstantiated claims of who would say what
- ◆ Factually correct
- ◆ Acquired conclusions

## D Grade

- ◆ Topic may be relevant or marginally irrelevant
- ◆ Bibliography depends on few sources, can make extravagant claims but is usually a summary of teacher notes
- ◆ Infrequent use of sources but there are some generalised statements
- ◆ Superficial and incomplete knowledge of the topic but some attempt to analyse
- ◆ Comparisons are regularly personal views rather than working with other views
- ◆ Highly descriptive
- ◆ Conclusions not done or highly personal

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	243
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	266
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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	34.2%	34.2%	91	70
B	30.5%	64.7%	81	60
C	20.3%	85.0%	54	50
D	4.9%	89.8%	13	45
No award	10.2%	100.0%	27	-

## **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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.