



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies
Level	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 rise in the number of candidates presented for Intermediate 1 with Markers stating that their overall impression was that the quality of response from candidates was improving. Generally, candidates appeared comfortable with the style and wording of questions in the paper, seeming well prepared and giving good responses to many questions. This impression was borne out by the results with 76% of candidates achieving a pass at A–C. The number of candidates receiving a 'No Award' is the lowest it has been for a number of years. The vast majority of candidates answered questions on Christianity in Section 1, with Medical Ethics the most popular choice in Section 2, followed by War and Peace and Global Issues.

In 2007, some changes took place to the marking of analysis and evaluation (AE) questions. This has been well publicised by SQA in a number of ways and details sent to all centres but, judging by evidence submitted for Absentee Candidates and Appeals, many centres have not yet adopted this practice. This is a major concern as candidates are being disadvantaged through no fault of their own. Please encourage your colleagues to read this report and introduce this practice. In 2007, it was agreed to acknowledge analysis and evaluation as higher skills and award every AE point 2 marks. In addition to this, if a candidate made a relevant knowledge and understanding (KU) point in an AE answer, which is then developed into a relevant AE point, this is credited with one additional mark for KU.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Most candidates performed well and were presented at the appropriate level. Candidates from a number of centres were well prepared giving good responses to questions. Markers stated that responses to Christianity and Hinduism in Section 1 were particularly good and responses to Global Issues in Section 2 showed evidence of good preparation. Existence of God usually causes candidates at this level some difficulties as it requires abstract thought. However, Q (e), asking for a description of the Design Argument, was answered well by most candidates with Markers noting that many were fluent in describing Paley's watch analogy. Compared with previous years, an increasing number of candidates appear to be better prepared for answering the AE questions.

Areas which candidates found demanding

As with previous years, there are still some candidates who do not appear to understand the rubric of the exam paper. They answer too many questions or fail to complete the relevant question from each section and thus penalise themselves. Markers also commented that in Section 1 responses to Islam were generally poor.

Section 1

Buddhism: Q 2 (b) A significant number of candidates could not describe one of the additional precepts required of monks or nuns.

Q 2 (c) Candidates confused meditation and worship with many failing to describe an act of worship.

Christianity: Q 2 (c) Many candidates confused 'service to the community' by Christians with 'community service' as a punishment.

Section 2

Although there were signs of improvement in responses to AE questions across the whole paper, there were still a significant number of candidates who struggled with AE questions in this section and who could not identify a specific religious or secular viewpoint. Some confused the two, eg egoism presented as a religious viewpoint.

Medical Ethics: Q (e) A number of candidates were not able to accurately describe stem cell research.

War and Peace: Q (e) Many candidates confused the Geneva Protocol with the Geneva Convention or did not appear to know this and missed the question out altogether, or wrote that they had not been taught this information.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

With some candidates still confusing the rubric of the exam paper it is important to take time to familiarise them with the sections they must answer when preparing them for the external exam. Some centres use past papers to reinforce this with candidates in class and others prepare a full paper for the prelim exam helping candidates to familiarise themselves with it under exam conditions. This is worth doing and may prevent candidates from penalising themselves by spending time answering unnecessary questions during the exam.

With a number of candidates stating that they had not been taught basic aspects of the Course it is worth reminding centres of the importance of teaching all of the mandatory content. Candidates can be examined on a wide range of 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 National Unit Specifications in the Arrangements document and centres should use this to ensure that the specified content is delivered to all candidates. Likewise, the many poor responses to AE questions in Section 2 make it worthwhile to remind centres that it is important that candidates are taught specific viewpoints and can write about the viewpoints they have studied such as Humanism, Utilitarianism, Feminism, etc. Candidates giving generalised answers when a specific response is required will only penalise themselves. Centres would benefit from spending time with candidates developing skills that enable them to compare/contrast arguments and to recognise the difference between making a statement and presenting a viewpoint supported by valid reasons. The Arrangements document and the marking instructions are published on SQA's 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.

Central Marking

Central Marking once again proved to be a very positive experience for those involved. The continuous quality assurance ensures standardisation of the marking process and makes sure all candidates are treated fairly. Also, the opportunity to work alongside colleagues in a very supportive atmosphere is valued by all who participate in this process. If you are not already involved in exam procedures, SQA welcomes applications to become Markers from suitably qualified individuals. Feedback from current Markers has described Central Marking as one of the best, and most useful, professional development activities you can share in. You can find out more at www.sqa.org.uk/appointees.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 1

Number of resulted entries in 2010	535
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	579
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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	29.9%	29.9%	173	42
B	19.7%	49.6%	114	36
C	26.1%	75.6%	151	30
D	2.6%	78.2%	15	27
No award	21.8%	100.0%	126	-

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.