



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies
Level	Intermediate 2

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

This year there was a significant rise in the number of candidates presented for Intermediate 2.

Just under half of all candidates answered questions on Buddhism in Section 1. A significant number attempted Christianity with about half as many again attempting either Islam or Judaism. One candidate attempted Sikhism. Crime and Punishment was the most popular option in Section 2 followed by Gender and Medical Ethics. Just over half of all candidates chose Section 3 — Existence of God — with the remaining candidates opting for Section 4 — Christianity: Science and Belief.

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 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

Markers generally felt that most candidates were performing well and were presented at the appropriate level. There was evidence that some centres have made good use of past papers and marking instructions published on SQA's website when preparing candidates for the exam. This is good practice and good use of a free resource. Markers stated that responses to Islam and Judaism were usually well written, as were responses to Existence of God with many candidates achieving high marks. Some candidates made good use of quotes and gave very detailed answers that showed evidence of very good learning and teaching. An increasing number of candidates appear to be better prepared for answering the AE questions.

Areas which candidates found demanding

A small number of candidates appeared confused by the rubric of the exam paper, in particular confusing Section 3 and Section 4, with a few attempting questions in both sections.

Many candidates are still failing to give a specific viewpoint in AE questions, giving instead a generic religious or secular view. These candidates are placing themselves at a disadvantage as these questions are usually worth 6 or 8 marks.

Section 1

Buddhism: Q (c) Few candidates accurately identified a reason why the Noble Eightfold Path is called the 'middle way'.

Christianity: Q (b) A significant number of candidates failed to describe the two basic ways of understanding the resurrection of Jesus — physical and spiritual.

Q (d) Many candidates described how an individual might worship rather than describing community worship.

Q (e) Few candidates answered this correctly describing how an individual might pray or fast rather than describing how an individual might serve God by giving time, money or effort in the service of others.

Islam: Q (f) Only a few candidates appeared to recognise the term 'Ihram' and answered this question correctly. Many candidates left this question unanswered.

Section 2

Gender: Q (b) A significant number of candidates failed to identify the EHRC.

Q (e) and (f) These questions were poorly answered with candidates failing to identify viewpoints relating to the developing world.

Global Issues: Q (e) There was a lack of knowledge among candidates regarding the work of the UN in relation to global warming.

Medical Ethics: Q (a) and (d) Some candidates were confused between euthanasia and assisted suicide. The latter is not part of the Course.

Section 4

(c) A number of candidates gave detailed descriptions of the six-day creation story instead of only describing the creation of the universe.

(d) Many candidates answered the question based on Genesis 1 and not Genesis 2.

Many of the above areas causing candidates difficulty relate to a lack of basic knowledge of mandatory Course content.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

As some candidates appeared not to recognise some key terms that were used in questions, 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 National Unit Specifications in the Arrangements document. 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 SQA's website.

Likewise, it is important that candidates are taught specific viewpoints and can write about the viewpoints they have studied such as Humanism, Utilitarianism, Feminism etc. It will also benefit candidates if they can accurately link individuals to their viewpoints, eg Singer, Warnock, Hume etc. Candidates who give generic answers when a specific response is required will only penalise themselves. The marking instructions published on SQA's website can help to direct centres to some recognised viewpoints.

In an attempt to encourage the sharing of the standard for marking, those attending the Markers' meeting were encouraged to take the photostats away and to use them with the marking instructions (when published on the website) by delivering continuous professional development on marking to other RMPS teachers in their local groups. Please make use of the expertise they have gained at Central Marking.

As some candidates are still failing to relate the length of their responses to the number of marks allocated to a question, it is worth asking centres to remind candidates of the importance of noting the number of reasons asked for in a question, and the number of marks allocated to each reason. Where there is no number of reasons specified, candidates can choose to present several brief reasons or to give fewer extended reasons. Questions beginning 'Give', 'State' or 'Identify' require a brief response usually a short phrase or a one-word answer. Questions beginning 'Describe' require more information, eg identifying an item and then adding a fuller description. Centres should also remind candidates of the time restraints upon them in the external exam and teach them how to give sufficient time to providing detailed answers to those questions worth more marks.

As mentioned in previous reports, centres will benefit from spending time helping candidates to develop analytical and evaluative skills. This can be achieved by helping candidates to compare/contrast arguments in an issue, to recognise the difference between making a statement and presenting a viewpoint supported with valid reasons, and teaching them how to judge the value of an argument and present a valid conclusion. The latter is a skill candidates need to develop if they are to progress on to study the Higher Course.

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.

It is encouraging that the majority of candidates performed well in the RMPS Intermediate 2 exam this year. However, there was some concern over the number of 'No Awards' for S5 pupils. This suggests that these pupils are being presented at the wrong level. Centres are advised to consider whether it is more appropriate for some candidates to be given the opportunity to achieve at Intermediate 1 level.

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 2

Number of resulted entries in 2010	963
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	1,178
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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 90				
A	26.7%	26.7%	314	63
B	16.5%	43.1%	194	54
C	16.8%	59.9%	198	45
D	6.6%	66.6%	78	40
No award	33.4%	100.0%	394	-

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.