



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	RMPS
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 no feedback from centres on this year's examination, which suggests that there was general satisfaction with its content and level of difficulty. Markers felt that the paper was fair and of an appropriate standard.

There was a general feeling amongst markers that the cohort was weaker than usual, with a significant minority of pupils not having the skills required to pass a subject at this level. A number of the weaker candidates did perform relatively well, which suggests that they were both well taught and well-motivated. Credit for this should go to RMPS teachers. It is strongly recommended, however, that centres enter candidates at the appropriate level.

Markers were satisfied with the standards expected but concerned about candidates' inability to understand what appeared to be relatively straightforward stems in the questions. Candidates, as in previous years, found ten-mark questions demanding. This is a point that centres moving to the new Higher would do well to remember as they prepare their candidates.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1: Science and Belief

Candidates answered this section very well and in many cases it was their performance in this area that secured a pass because other sections had not been done so well.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Morality: Question 3(a) and (b)

Candidates performed poorly in this question. The first part of the question asked for religious views on a moral issue. Markers agreed that this was a question where candidates could score well, and some did. However, (b) asked candidates to 'evaluate' and candidates did not perform well here. Candidates tended to add more KU about the religious views with any attempt to evaluate meaning that many candidates scored very low marks. The arrangements are very clear and indicate that candidates should be able to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different points of view.

For many teachers this will be surprising. One of the key features in teaching the course is that candidates will spend time discussing a wide range of views and their relative strengths and weaknesses. So much of what is done in class involves this skill, yet, in the exam, the word 'evaluate' seems to throw candidates. It may well be that teachers need to be even more explicit in terms of teaching the meaning of command words in questions.

Paper 2

Question 2(b)

Candidates were asked to put one side of an argument in their answer. Many candidates failed to follow the command and put in both sides of the argument and could not be given marks for why the belief was not a challenge. The purpose of this question was to go for depth by focusing on one side of the argument rather than breadth (which would include both sides of the argument).

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Next year sees dual running of the Higher exam so the advice will cover both of the exams.

Existing Higher

Candidates demonstrated weakness in the longer answers worth 8–10 marks. The main weakness was sustaining an argument beyond more than three or four paragraphs. There is a need for candidates to effectively construct a point and to build in references that can be used to reinforce or enhance the point being made. There are various techniques that can be used. Candidates should know that they need to introduce the problem and explain what the issue is. They can then use devices such as exemplars, analogies, references to authoritative writers or texts, hypotheses, anecdotal evidence and so on to make their point. There is evidence suggesting that candidates require these skills to be developed further.

New Higher

The style of the questions in the new Higher is quite different from the existing Higher. The marks range is from 8–20 marks for each question, except in World Religions. Centres should ensure that candidates are familiar with the skills identified in the arrangements, and in particular what they have to do for analysis and evaluation. The specifications make a very clear distinction between these two skills, so it is advisable that this distinction is clearly taught. Centres should also note that KU on their own in the new Higher will receive marks only if KU information is used as part of an analysis or evaluation.

The need to be able to present a sustained argument is also of critical importance. An essay of 20 marks will contain both analysis and evaluation and will require candidates to write at length so, clearly, the need to develop these skills is absolutely essential.

In the existing Higher, reference to relevant and appropriate sources attracts credit. The existing Higher has a minimum of one mark for the inclusion of sources and more marks awarded depending on the quality and effectiveness of other sources used. Candidates in the existing Higher reference sources, paraphrase sources and quote sources, and the practice of crediting this will continue. Candidates who do not use sources are not penalised in the existing Higher nor will they be in the new Higher. However, when writing longer answers the absence of sources will place increased demands on candidates' analytical and evaluative skills.

General

Performance overall was the poorest in recent years. In paper one candidates performed better than in paper two where the average mark was not much above the pass mark. RMPS continues to attract a high proportion of candidates without previous experience in the subject with more than 75% sitting the exam as a 'crash' higher. There is no evidence to suggest that this pattern will not continue. The majority of candidates appear to be S6 pupils taking it as a crash course.

In terms of the options, Buddhism was by far the most popular option closely followed by Christianity. The other four religions attracted around 20% of all candidates. No centres presented Global Issues as their topic of choice in morality. Crime and punishment was, by far, the most popular morality option followed by medical ethics, gender and war and peace experienced a drop in numbers. For both of these topics this was a trend that was continuing from previous years.

Teachers are once again to be congratulated on their efforts. There are very few subjects in the curriculum where 75%+ of candidates are doing a 'crash' Higher. Year upon year the RMPS Higher pass rate is 70%+, and in that number will be a significant number of pupils for whom Higher RMPS is the only Higher that they have achieved. This is not the result of any easy exam, as comparator statistics show. It is the result of something that is very hard to measure which is the skill of RMPS teachers in attracting pupils to higher and leading pupils to success in it.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	4136
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	4318
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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 120				
A	21.8%	21.8%	941	83
B	24.6%	46.4%	1061	71
C	26.0%	72.3%	1122	59
D	10.1%	82.5%	438	53
No award	17.5%	-	756	-

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.