



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	RMPS
Level(s)	Advanced 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, as a whole, being presented an appropriate level with only a very small number of candidates who were clearly not Advanced Higher standard.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Essay writing skills were very good. It is evident that candidates have been well drilled in their essay skills because they are marshalling arguments well, clearly evaluating and being more and more specific in their sources and more effective in their use of them.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Dissertation

These were done well but there are instances of candidates who do not clearly relate their dissertation to an approved topic, who submit hybrid titles of more than one approved topic and exceed the word limit. In cases where this happens markers can only award marks if the dissertation topic is relevant. Where it is of excessive length markers do not read the additional words and base their mark on approximately the first 4,000 words.

Exam

Question 1: Philosophy of Religion

This question was done poorly, with many candidates reading it as a question about the teleological argument. The question was about beginnings and therefore about the cosmological argument. A few candidates did manage to work the teleological argument into their answer in relation to possible design in the Big Bang theory; this approach showed considerable insight and initiative, and was given credit.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Other than ensuring that dissertations strictly follow SQA Arrangements, the only advice is to continue the excellent practice that is in evidence just now in terms of the ability of candidates being presented and the teaching of essay writing skills.

General

Performance overall in Advanced Higher continues to improve. This is not the result of the exam becoming easier. It is clear that centres are making excellent judgements on which candidates should be presented. In the past it was not unusual to have a few candidates in

each centre who were simply not Advanced Higher standard. This is increasingly not the case — it is almost the exception where a centre presents a candidate who does not have the ability to sit Advanced Higher, and even then it is more likely that the candidate expressed a desire to sit the exam rather than the centre going ahead with the presentation regardless.

The Advanced Higher is a fine course, with much anecdotal evidence that it is well received by pupils, particularly those who were planning to go on to university to study Law or Medicine.

~~Specific advice on the new Advanced Higher will be contained in next year's external assessment report.~~

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	248
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	220
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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	40.9%	40.9%	90	70
B	25.0%	65.9%	55	60
C	19.5%	85.5%	43	50
D	6.4%	91.8%	14	45
No award	8.2%	-	18	-

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.