Course report 2019

Subject	RMPS
Level	National 5

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The 2018 question paper was found to have not enough challenge and, as a consequence, the grade boundary for an A in 2018 was raised by 4 marks. There were a number of possible reasons for this, and it is likely they all contributed to the decrease in challenge.

The aim was to increase the level of demand in the 2019 question paper by about 4 marks. We did this in four ways: by sampling new content; by asking questions which drilled into the detail; by asking for more application than straight knowledge and understanding (KU); and by asking five questions in each section. This meant a slight adjustment to the balance between breadth and depth in the sampling.

The average assignment mark remained stable at around 12/20, suggesting the cohort was of similar ability to the last three diets. The increase in difficulty in the question paper was shown to be by the desired amount. As a result, the question paper was judged to be on standard and the grade boundaries were set at notional. Centres should therefore expect future question papers to follow a similar pattern to the 2019 question paper.

A significant number of candidates were not of National 5 level this year. This may have been linked with the change in the grade boundary for a D to 40% which resulted in more candidates attempting the question paper, along with the safety net of National 4 units. Changes to the arrangements for 2020, with the need to enter candidates for one level only, may result in fewer level 4 candidates attempting the National 5 question paper next year.

Assignment

The assignment task is unchanged and continued to differentiate well. The average mark continued to fall at around 12. Most candidates tackled the task as intended, with an appropriate degree of personalisation and choice. There was evidence of positive engagement with both the research and reporting parts of the task.

It is possible that bi-level delivery of the assignment task has caused some issues at National 5. There was evidence that some candidates were following advice for the Higher task, which has different standards and different mark allocations. For example, 30% of the marks at National 5 are for concluding but, at Higher, conclusions are worth 13% of the total marks. It is therefore important that centres make candidates aware of the distinct requirements of the task specific to their entry level.

As in past diets, the choice and wording of titles significantly affected candidates' success in the task. At National 5 we do not recommend using exam-style questions as these are designed to assess a particular bit of knowledge or a skill rather than ranging across elements. Some candidates disadvantaged themselves by answering on questions that did not suit the task, for example 'Explain moral issues arising from capital punishment'. This is an analysis question and does not invite a conclusion on an issue, making it hard for candidates to access all the marks. We also saw over-complicated titles such as 'Evaluate religious viewpoints on moral issues arising from capital punishment', when it would have been more straightforward to simply ask 'Is capital punishment morally right?' and to then analyse and evaluate a range of views on the wider question.

In a few centres, all candidates answered on the same area of the course, and/or seemed to depend heavily on notes from the teacher or lecturer or on areas that had already been taught.

At National 5, candidates should propose an issue themselves, and undertake their research with a high degree of independence. It is not recommended for candidates to stick to course content, especially if it has already been taught, as this can constrain them in a way that disadvantages them.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

The majority of candidates found the questions clear, and understood what they were being asked to do. Where they didn't answer, it tended to be because they were not confident about the course content or topic-specific vocabulary. Some candidates achieved full marks in all three sections.

Questions 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, and 22

Where candidates had a good grasp of religion-specific vocabulary, they performed well in the (a) (b) questions that focused on a belief and its impact.

The average mark for the world religion section was down on last year. However, candidates writing about Judaism performed especially well.

As in past diets, candidates scored best in the morality and belief section. Candidates who answered on justice, relationships and medicine achieved good marks. Candidates clearly enjoyed having an opportunity to write about their own views in the 8-mark skills question, and they did this well, drawing on their own reasons as well as arguments studied to give a well-argued moral judgement.

It was clear that many candidates were well-prepared to structure answers carefully, for example by presenting a series of points that were then developed with examples or explanation. This allowed them to achieve 2 or 3 marks for each. Many candidates also made good use of the marks allocation in judging how much they should write. As in past diets, a number of candidates gave considerably more detail than was required by the prompt.

Across the paper, we continued to see an improvement in the approach to questions asking candidates if they agreed with a statement. Instead of descriptions of views they had studied, we saw good application of knowledge and views in support of a clear judgement.

Assignment

Candidates consistently performed well where we could see that teachers and lecturers had given good advice about structure, wording of titles and how to carry out and report on research effectively. It was good to note that some candidates had been encouraged to pursue an issue of particular interest to them. This enabled them to show off their research skills effectively and produce very good reports that demonstrated real personal engagement, with their own voice and interest clearly discernible in their writing.

Candidates who did best started with a straightforward title expressed as a question about religion, morality or philosophy. Candidates who looked at a range of viewpoints had plenty to analyse and evaluate, for example by comparing, contrasting and commenting on strengths and weaknesses, thereby increasing their marks for B-D.

Part A (significance and/or impact) continued to score especially well for those exploring moral questions. This is because the standard tends to be covered naturally throughout the report, especially where comments on morality are expressed in terms of what might or might not happen. Case studies also provided useful evidence of impact and significance. For those studying religious or philosophical questions, the most successful strategy was to start by directly addressing the question of significance and impact in a dedicated section, before going on to consider viewpoints and working towards a conclusion. Many candidates did this successfully.

Candidates who took time to evaluate views as they went along were able to build up marks for analysis and conclusions as they explained their judgements and applied them to their titles. While it is not an explicit requirement for candidates to consider contrasting views, doing so made it easier for many to produce reports that stayed focused on the question. Issues that are genuinely controversial tended to produce more interesting, and successful reports. In moral questions, candidates who stuck to the moral dimension and avoided straying into more sociological aspects of their questions, such as the impact of an action that could be seen as right of wrong, achieved high marks and performed well.

Some candidates evidenced their research process very well, for example by citing the websites or books they had used to locate information, or drawing on information gained through personal interviews. It was clear these candidates understood the requirements about displaying their use of sources, and had planned to do so as part of their preparation for the write-up.

Many candidates presented strong conclusions, especially where the title was a clear religious, moral or philosophical issue. Where candidates offered mini-conclusions on the views and arguments they were exploring throughout their report, they had achieved most of their concluding marks before they offered their final conclusion. This was a useful way to avoid losing a lot of marks if they ran out of time.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

A lot of questions in the world religion parts were not attempted, and this impacted on average marks for this section.

Some candidates lost all 8 marks available for the linked (a) and (b) questions that asked about a key bit of content. Questions affected were 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, and 22. Some candidates coped well with the KU part of these questions, but found analysis of the impact of the belief harder, or wrote about the impact of the concept within the context of the religion rather than *belief in* the concept.

Where questions asked for the main points of a story (questions 5, 9, 13 and 17), a few candidates wrote about the point of the story — its meaning or message. We gave credit where this could be seen as part of the narrative. For example in Hinduism, Krishna teaches Arjuna about the importance of doing your own dharma and how it will lead to positive karma.

Questions 4, 8, 12, 16, 20 and 24
Across the world religion parts, the prompt in the speech bubble was interpreted in an unexpected way. The intention was for candidates to explore whether the demands of the specified practices were too much, or impractical, but many read the question as a challenge to whether there **should** be an expectation, and wrote about the importance of the practices in the context of the religion as a whole.

Where candidates made a good case for or against the importance or centrality of the practice, they were given full credit as this was felt to be a fair reading of the statement in the prompt, and a good way to demonstrate their evaluation skills.

Morality and belief section
Questions 26(b), 31, 36, 41 and 46
Candidates are expected to study specific non-religious viewpoints. However, for this question many candidates gave very generic answers that were not tied to a particular perspective and were, in some cases, just as likely to be said by a religious person. Where we could discern a viewpoint (for example if they mentioned the Greatest Happiness Principle) we awarded up to full marks. However, where the answer was extremely general but had some merit, we capped marks at 2. This difficulty may have been because of the use of the word 'view', which was taken to mean any sort of opinion.

As in the world religion section, going into specific detail from the course specification made it harder for some candidates to gain marks. This improved the level of differentiation in this part, which was one of our aims. Areas where candidates particularly struggled with detail were reproductive use of embryos (question 40) and smart weapons (question 45).

In the morality and medicine part, candidates continued to confuse assisted dying and the different kinds of euthanasia. They often showed awareness of the distinction in their explanations, but got the labels wrong.

Candidates answering on morality and conflict struggled with the question about moral issues raised by smart weapons, and the 8-mark question which asked if diplomacy was the best way to deal with an enemy. This seems to have been due, at least in part, to a lack of confidence about the technical terms in the questions.

Religious and philosophical questions section
Origins was the lowest scoring part in this section. Many candidates confused the two scientific theories and their evidence. For example, some candidates offered red shift and cosmic microwave background radiation as evidence for evolution in the first question.

Explanations of a religious view on the origin of the universe were also rather thin and tended to stick to retelling the creation narratives rather than applying what they were teaching or a wider religious view on the meaning behind creation stories.

Candidates also continued to confuse cosmological and teleological in the existence of God part.

Assignment

Candidates set their own question, so their performance was in part down to how well they managed to do this.

Some candidates continued to set themselves questions that were not truly RMPS, and were therefore a poor vehicle for demonstrating the candidate's ability to meet the required standards — especially in concluding, which is worth 6/20 marks. For example, titles such as 'How do different gender roles impact on women?' is a social sciences question rather than an RMPS issue because it can be answered as a matter of fact. Where candidates propose such a title, teachers and lecturers could help them to focus on the moral dimension by changing the wording to, for example, 'Are different gender roles morally acceptable?', or 'Should women stick to traditional gender roles?' This would allow candidates to concentrate on views about right and wrong, and to work towards a valid conclusion.

Some reports still lacked evidence of use of sources. The report should include information about the research process and how the candidate made use of a range of sources of information. The candidate section of the course assessment task gives some helpful examples of the kinds of sources that would be appropriate to consult. Quotations alone is not enough to demonstrate use of a source and, while well-deployed quotations can be useful, they are not a requirement of the task. A report can achieve full marks with no quotations, provided the candidate has made their sources clear and explained their findings in their own words and in good detail.

Some reports gave very thin detail on viewpoints, or depended on quotations that were then simply summarised or re-worded. This meant there was not enough depth or detail to support analysis or explanation. Quotations are not necessarily better than a clear explanation in the candidate's own words that explores the reasoning and arguments behind a viewpoint.

In a significant number of reports, the conclusion merely recapped the views already described, and did not include a decision on the issue in the title. This limited the number of marks that could be awarded. While it is fine for the conclusion to be that the candidate is undecided, to score well for this part they need to develop the reasoning behind their view and offer clear justification.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

♦ Centres should ensure they are working with the revised National 5 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies course specification.

♦ In planning centre-based assessments, and especially prelim exams, centres should pay particular attention to the 2019 paper as it best demonstrates the standard. This could include using similar wording but different content. Each section should have 12 marks for showing skills (including the 8-mark question) with the remaining marks allocated to KU. The published marking instructions can be a useful reference resource for centres as they develop their own assessments.

♦ Teachers and lecturers should continue to emphasise the importance of knowing the specialist vocabulary across all three sections. For each term in the world religions section, candidates might need to demonstrate up to 6 marks of KU, or write about the impact of practices or beliefs. Centres could give candidates a copy of the mandatory content in the course specification as a checklist, or to support revision in class.

♦ In the morality and belief section, candidates should be prepared to unpack moral issues raised by all aspects of the mandatory content.

♦ Religious and non-religious viewpoints studied should relate to the wider headings given *before* the colon in the mandatory content. Candidates need to know at least one of each.

♦ Candidates should avoid writing about the impact of a concept within the framework of the religion when they are supposed to be writing about the impact of *believing* in it. Candidates could ask themselves how a belief might make someone **feel** (for example reassured, scared or hopeful) as well as what a follower might **do** or avoid doing because of it.

♦ Candidates may be asked to describe non-religious responses in the issues sections. The most straightforward way to do this is to study the view of a specific group, organisation or thinker, especially where the group/organisation/thinker has made a clear statement on the issue in question — for example, the Peace Pledge Union for conflict, Amnesty or Reprieve for justice, or Dignity in Dying for medicine. Candidates can struggle to apply Utilitarianism because it is really a method rather than a specific view, but where they focused on a particular Utilitarian thinker they gave better explanations. For example, Peter Singer sometimes gives a useful perspective.

♦ In origins, and existence of God, candidates continued to struggle to distinguish the terminology relating to the theories and arguments. This is therefore an area to focus on in revision.

♦ When exploring religious views on the origins of the universe, there is no need to look at religious creation stories, especially as they do not describe the universe as we understand it today. Views that give a wider explanation, perhaps including some interpretation of the meaning behind scripture and views on current philosophical and scientific thinking, tend to give candidates more to write about in the question paper.

♦ There is no need to use Higher question paper technique in the 8-mark question. This year some candidates gave lots of KU before going on to skills. It would be helpful for centres to remind National 5 candidates to focus on the question, and the specific knowledge and understanding or skills. In the 8-mark evaluation question, marks are

awarded for reasoning, so KU is only given credit if, for example, it is used to back up an evaluative point.

♦ A number of candidates attempted all questions. It would be useful for centres to remind candidates to answer questions only on the three areas they have studied.

Assignment

♦ At National 5, candidates should decide themselves what they would like to explore. However, teachers and lecturers should continue to support them in wording their assignment titles, and encourage them to choose something truly controversial, ensuring the candidate can identify a good range of sources of information before they start. Candidates should write their title in the form of a question that will generate a good debate. To check the question is truly RMPS, candidates could ask themselves if it explores whether something is morally right or wrong, or whether it is reasonable to believe something is true. If it is possible to definitively answer the question, it is probably not an RMPS question!

♦ Candidates should avoid issues that may be hugely concerning but are not particularly controversial. This includes issues that most people would agree are morally wrong (for example racism, human trafficking or cruelty to animals).

♦ Centres should encourage candidates to look for a range of views and to explore the thinking or reasoning behind the views. This will help them to gain marks for analysis and explanation. There needs to be a balance between breadth and depth. Three viewpoints is usually enough to allow for a useful exploration of the issue in sufficient depth to allow for analysis and explanation. However, this is not prescriptive. Some titles will suit a detailed study of two opposing views, while others may be worth exploring from a wider range of viewpoints.

♦ It is best to approach the task as a discursive rather than a persuasive piece. This helps candidates to take account of the main arguments around the issue, and to avoid missing out key aspects of the debate. It also makes it easier to offer detailed conclusions.

♦ Candidates should continue to use case studies. However, teachers and lecturers should encourage them to focus on the relevant aspects rather than giving lengthy narratives as the latter tend to be descriptive and can distract from the issue and arguments being explored. Similarly, background information should not take up too much of the report. For example, candidates should avoid potted histories of the death penalty and various ways in which it has been carried out.

♦ It is possible for candidates to produce an excellent piece of writing but miss the required elements of the task, so it is a good idea for teachers and lecturers to share with candidates the marking grid used for assessing the report. Marks are only awarded for the six standards for the task, and as described by the differentiating statements shown in the grid. Candidates can use the grid as a checklist to ensure they cover all the required elements.

♦ Centres should adhere to the controlled conditions for the assessment. This includes completing the write-up in one hour and in one sitting, and ensuring candidates only have access to the resource sheet. How candidates use the resource sheet is up to them. However, it must be included with the report. Centres should also remind candidates that the word limit for the resource sheet at National 5 is 200.

These sheets are not marked but must be submitted to SQA along with the candidate's assignment. In session 2019-20, a penalty of 20% of the candidate's overall mark for the assignment component will be applied in the case of non-submission. Further information can be found in the Coursework for External Assessment document and the course assessment task on the subject page of the SQA website.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	2309

Number of resulted entries in 2019	2419

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	34.3%	34.3%	829	70
B	17.1%	51.4%	415	60
C	17.0%	68.4%	411	50
D	13.5%	81.9%	325	40
No award	18.1%	-	439	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
♦ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
♦ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.