



Course Report 2018

Subject	Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper

The component performed as expected. Candidates did not perform well in question 1 of philosophy of religion and they performed poorly in question 2 in medical ethics. These were valid questions and therefore grade boundaries were not adjusted.

Component 2: dissertation

The component performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Candidates performed well in questions 1 and 4 with average marks being above the pass mark, especially in question 4. As a whole, performance in religious experience was strong because candidates focused on the questions asked.

Component 2: dissertation

There was a notable reduction this year in dissertations which appeared formulaic. Markers had a strong sense that the work submitted was candidates' authentic work. This was due to the level of language, variety of approaches to similar issues, complexity of the titles, and the bibliographies used. This resulted in a greater spread of marks within centres. A number of candidates who performed very well in the dissertation lost a significant number of marks in one of the essays in the question paper, especially in medical ethics.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

A number of candidates performed poorly in question 1 of philosophy of religion. The question is about the presumption of atheism, a term with which all candidates should be familiar. A noticeable number of candidates simply completed an essay on the arguments for and against the existence of God, with no reference to the question: it seemed almost as if candidates were working with a prepared answer. Candidates should be aware that a failure to address the issue in the question will lead to a poor mark.

Candidates performed very badly in question 6 of medical ethics. The question was about organ allocation and not organ procurement. A noticeable number of candidates answered the question in relation to organ procurement and, in particular, to opt-in and opt-out systems of organ donation. Most of these essays made no reference to the issue of organ allocation, which is an important aspect of the debate surrounding organ transplants and one with significant moral issues. A small number of candidates tried to adapt the question by briefly arguing that allocation would not be a problem if there was an opt-out system of donation. Markers did not view this as a valid interpretation of the question.

Component 2: dissertation

Markers did not detect any significant difficulties, but there was evidence that a number of candidates had issues with research and presentation. It seemed that these candidates had not devoted sufficient time or research input when completing their dissertations. Candidates should note that there are many dissertations which have been well-researched and well-presented, rushed and under-researched work is very obvious to markers and invariably impacts on the quality of the final product.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

This advice builds on the advice given in previous years. Candidates should note the following:

- ◆ Always answer the question. It can be helpful to explain early on how you have interpreted the question.
- ◆ Once you have identified the topic of the question, work out what the question is asking about the topic. Avoid writing everything you know about the topic or issue. Markers have instructions to ensure essays clearly answer the question.
- ◆ Relevance is often sustained by regularly referring to the question throughout your essay.
- ◆ You should refer to sources and be specific. For example, avoid phrases such as 'Christians say' or 'some people' or 'religious people'. Show that you know who says what. There is no need to cite chapter, verse, paragraph and page number, but you should cite like this: 'In Luke's Gospel', rather than 'In the Bible it says'. Or, when quoting an authority: 'Pope Paul VI argued' rather than 'Roman Catholics argue', or 'William James pointed out' rather than 'psychologists point out', or 'The BMA supports', rather than 'doctors say'. You will not be penalised for vague references but you will certainly be given credit for consistent use of more specific sources.
- ◆ Avoid simply listing arguments for and against. A common feature of essays is that candidates list points on one side of an argument and then list points for the other side of the argument. Essays like this rarely perform well because they become quite descriptive: you have to do more than this at Advanced Higher. You are likely to gain more marks by using a process similar to this:
 - explain an argument using examples and/or sources
 - support the argument using examples and/or sources
 - give personal or academic criticisms of the argument using examples and/or sources
 - give counter-arguments against the criticisms using examples/and or sources
 - give responses to the counter-arguments using examples and/or sources
 - make concluding remarks on the point and link to the next pointThe 'examples' referred to may include: real-life examples, hypothetical examples and the candidate's own supported reasoning.

Component 2: dissertation

Candidates should note the following:

- ◆ Ensure that the content of the dissertation is consistently relevant to the title.
- ◆ Be accurate in the bibliography. For example, if you have read extracts from a classic text in an anthology or from a secondary source, cite this rather than the complete classic text.
- ◆ Ensure the aims of your dissertation are clear. If you do not state aims you can lose marks, especially if your dissertation does not have a clear focus.
- ◆ Always reference your sources. (Note: there is no requirement to use a particular referencing system.)

- ◆ The dissertation accounts for 40% of the total marks available for the course assessment. Bear this in mind in terms of how much time you spend researching and presenting your dissertation.
- ◆ Remember that you have full control of your dissertation. You decide the topic and can change or realign it during the research and writing-up process. The quality and quantity of research is entirely down to you: you can decide whether to undertake research that will give you the best opportunity to score well. The marking grid used by markers is on SQA's website: use this as a checklist to ensure that you meet the criteria for the different skills. Make the most of this opportunity: you do not have the same control in the question paper.
- ◆ Do not underestimate the importance of the dissertation. A poor dissertation can make the difference between passing and failing the course: almost a quarter of candidates who scored 23 or less for their dissertation this year failed Advanced Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	172
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	157
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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	22.3%	22.3%	35	70
B	22.3%	44.6%	35	60
C	22.9%	67.5%	36	50
D	8.3%	75.8%	13	45
No award	24.2%	-	38	-

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 which 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.

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 Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of SQA's management team.

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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.

Grade boundaries from exam 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 exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.