Course Report 2016

Subject	RMPS
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

Performance in the question paper was poorer than 2015. The question paper was very well received but nevertheless some questions weren't answered well. In particular, questions testing evaluative skills were done very poorly, especially in Religious and Philosophical Questions, with a significant number of candidates demonstrating little or no evaluation. Markers reported that candidates had written very full answers on the topic but had often not related the content to the question. This observation may help centres understand why candidates left the exam expressing confidence and feeling that they had written sufficient responses, yet had scored poorly.

It was agreed at the awarding meeting that, exceptionally, allowance should be made in setting the boundaries to allow centres further development and delivery experience of evaluation.

Candidates answer questions from one part in each of three sections of the paper. World Religions and Morality and Belief have two 10-mark questions each. One assesses knowledge and understanding and analysis, and the other assesses knowledge and understanding and evaluation.

There is one 20-mark question in the Religious and Philosophical Questions section. The 20 marks are distributed as 10 marks for Knowledge and Understanding and 5 marks each for analysis and evaluation.

Markers considered the questions to be fair. No correspondence was received in relation to the content, difficulty or validity of the question paper.

Component 2: Assignment

The assignment performance showed a marginal improvement on 2015. The problems remained the same, however, with many candidates failing to demonstrate some or any evaluation skills. There is clearly an issue needing to be addressed here. Too many candidates do not seem to have a grasp of evaluation and consider it to be simply noting two sides of an argument without making any comment on the quality, relevance, significance etc of the arguments — and where they do comment, offering just a few words of support for their comment.

Some candidates are disadvantaging themselves in their choice of topic where the topic is obscure and they cannot access sufficient information to present an assignment, where the question is closed or framed as a descriptive question, or where the candidate has attempted and failed to adapt extended written pieces from other courses.

Centres are to be commended for the adherence to conditions attached to the resource sheet and for monitoring plagiarism. There were very few suspected cases of malpractice this year.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

There was one question paper. Candidates had to answer questions on one topic from each of the sections. There was no evidence of any confusion. Few candidates missed out questions, and very few answers were too brief. Most candidates appear to have understood the demand of questions in terms of the length of their answers. Candidates had no difficulty in identifying knowledge and understanding skills, but there was considerable evidence that they did not have a clear understanding of analysis and evaluation.

Information on the marking process might be helpful. 10-mark essays had a 6/4 split for knowledge and understanding and analysis or evaluation. There was no 'borrowing' of knowledge and understanding marks for analysis or evaluation so as to ensure a consistent application of marks. In 20-mark essays the split was 10 for knowledge and understanding; five for analysis; and five for evaluation. Again there was no borrowing. Markers considered this approach to be fair and practical.

Questions 1,3,5,7,9,11,13,15,17,19 and 21. Performance in all of the knowledge and understanding and analysis questions in Morality and Belief and in World Religions was reported to be good. Candidates had clearly understood the questions and had successfully analysed the knowledge and understanding required by the question. Centres are to be commended for building secure knowledge and understanding in candidates.

There was considerable evidence that candidates had been well-prepared to write essays, so only a small number of candidates produced answers that were short of Higher level quality as far as length goes. Many candidates found the presentation of relevant, accurate and detailed KU information straightforward, and often performed satisfactorily in this in both the 10- and 20-mark essays. It may be worth pointing out to future year groups that they should be able to access the 20 knowledge and understanding marks without significant difficulty if they have a sound grasp of course content. Markers noted that candidates performed well where they:

- carefully read the whole question and did not simply latch on to familiar terms within the question
- ensured that their answer was relevant to the question
- wrote about the question and not the topic
- used words or phrases from the question
- regularly referred back to the question
- used words or phrases appropriate to the skill being examined
- made some use of sources
- provided additional detail to explanations
- drew conclusions in analysis or evaluation questions

Component 2: Assignment

The assignment was completed in centres over one hour and 30 minutes under controlled conditions using the RMPS resource sheet. The assignment provided an opportunity for candidates to explore issues covered in class and beyond in more depth. Most assignments were between 1500 and 2000 words, but this should not be interpreted as a guide to the length. This is simply what markers discovered during the marking procedure. A check was made by markers to ensure that the RMPS resource sheet was present and that candidates had not simply copied their assignment from that. No further use or reference was made to the resource sheet after this administrative check. There were very few instances of resource sheets being in excess of 250 words.

The assessment procedure adopted was holistic in nature. There were 12 marks available for knowledge and understanding skills, 10 marks for analytical skills and 8 marks for evaluative skills, all of which were identified in course documentation. The overall view of markers was that the method of marking was fair, clear and practical.

Overall performance in the assignment was fair, and a marginal improvement on 2015. Candidates scored well in knowledge and understanding and analysis, and it is clear that centres have been successful in communicating the demands of Higher level. A feature of the knowledge and understanding was its relevance to the question or topic of study.

Markers reported that their impression was that candidates performed better when the:

♦ issue was drawn from Religious and Philosophical Questions
♦ question asked was open
♦ issue had already been covered in course content
♦ issue was obvious, with a range of views
♦ structure was clear
♦ candidate had a secure grasp of evaluation involving an evaluative discussion of responses and their consequences, support and criticism

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Anecdotal evidence indicated that candidates in general felt that they had written sufficient for each question they answered. The poor performance of these candidates may be something of a puzzle to their teachers and lecturers. However, markers were clear on the causes of the poor performance — overall, for all options, too many candidates wrote about the topic and not about the question, and therefore could not access all marks, mainly because of a lack of relevance and a failure to answer the question.

World Religions

Questions 1,3,5,7,11: making the connection between the two aspects of the religion was reasonably well done, but some candidates simply wrote everything they knew about the religion and failed to make clear the connection they were discussing.

Questions 2,4,6,8,10,12: assessing the extent to which one aspect of the religion presented more challenges than benefits was not so well done. All too often, candidates simply wrote a list of the challenges and benefits. This information was relevant to the question, but candidates did not discuss whether or not there were more challenges than benefits or vice versa — they did not do the evaluative part of the question.

Marking policy is that if a candidate makes no attempt to demonstrate the skill demanded in a question, they should achieve no more than four marks. In many responses absolutely no evaluation was attempted so the candidate scored four marks. Markers worked hard to find marks for evaluation, but too often they were confronted with lists of challenges and benefits and nothing more. The pity was that the benefits and challenges were well done in many cases and the candidates wrote sufficient, but the demand to demonstrate the skill was clear and, candidates often failed to answer the question.

Morality and Belief

Questions 13,15,17,19,21: the analysis was done quite well, but some candidates wrote everything they knew about the topic to the extent that they actually wrote too much rather than having a focus on the question content.

Questions 14,16,18, 20, 22: the question used the word 'evaluate' in an attempt to ensure that the skill requiring demonstration was crystal clear. Too many candidates simply noted down the religious views and offered absolutely no evaluation of them, meaning that the answers were almost exclusively knowledge and understanding and not directly addressed to the question. The consequence of this was that many answers to these questions scored four marks.

Again, markers worked hard to find ways of giving credit for evaluation but in most cases where views were described that was all that was there — description. It was clear that the candidates knew their topic in terms of knowledge and understanding but that they were unable to apply evaluation skills to it. We actually sampled a small number of scripts and discovered that those who just did a description scored four or less, whilst those who knew how to evaluate often scored eight or more. In other words, those who knew the demands of the skill often scored high in the question.

Religious and Philosophical Questions

Questions 23, 24, 25, 26: Of the candidates presented, the vast majority did the Origins topic. Through sampling a small number of scripts and discussions with the marking team and team leaders, the recurring themes were:

♦ failure to answer the question
♦ failure to evaluate
♦ highly descriptive answers
♦ irrelevance in answers

The same pattern was reported for the second most popular topic, Existence of God. The other options attracted much lower numbers, so conclusions there are much more tentative although along the same lines as the two most popular choices.

Question 23 was about the origins of life. It was anticipated that candidates would include a discussion of issues like evolution, the nature of God, and aspects of the design argument in their answers. This was not the case — candidates often paid little attention to the question and simply wrote about the topic of origins. This meant that markers read many responses which made little reference to the origins of life but instead focused on the origins of the universe with no reference to the origins of life. Another common error was simply to go through the Genesis creation accounts, discuss different interpretations of them and again make no reference to the issue raised in the question. Markers noted that in many cases the essays written were lengthy and the content accurate and of good quality. However, the content was relevant to neither the origins of life nor to the question, resulting in a significant number of candidates scoring nine or less.

Question 24 was about suffering and the existence of God. It was anticipated that candidates would include discussion of issues like the nature of God and various aspects of the design argument along with theodicy. Again candidates all too often simply wrote about the existence of God in general, regularly without any reference to the issue of suffering and evil as a challenge to belief in God's existence. Candidates wrote extensively on the arguments supporting belief in God and general criticisms of them, but failed to focus on the specific issue in the question. Many essays scored less than nine marks as a result, even although the content on the topic was good — they did not answer the question sufficiently or did not attempt to address the issue in the question at all.

There was evidence of similar errors in the remaining two questions, though the problems there were not as acute as they were in the most popular sections.

Component 2: Assignment

There continues to be evidence of poor choice in assignment titles. This was particularly the case in moral issues and in titles outwith course content. In poorly-selected moral issues the following issues were identified by markers:

♦ a lack of religious, moral or philosophical content, leading to low marks because moral issues in particular had not been identified
♦ titles that did not lend themselves to evaluation, leading to difficulties in scoring well in analysis and evaluation
♦ moral issues that were both contrived and unlikely, leading to assignments that were confused and contained implausible conclusions
♦ titles that were so obscure that candidates had difficulty accessing research, which led to brevity and repetition
♦ titles that were too difficult for Higher, which led to serious under-achievement
♦ titles that had a closed question leading to a descriptive piece of writing

Similar issues to 2015 were apparent, and a repetition of last year's comments might be helpful: 'Some titles could not be described as religious, moral or philosophical and read more like Modern Studies than RMPS. An example of this would be the high number of candidates who chose topics in Religion and Justice, especially in relation to punishment. Some focused purely on the effectiveness of punishment. Now, this can be made into a moral issue, but the fact is that very often it was not. For that reason, it might be helpful to

insert the word "moral" or the words "right" or "wrong" into the question to ensure that the moral content is strong.'

There were no issues about the use of the RMPS resource sheet.

In 2015, world religions assignments often resulted in descriptive pieces of work and consequently did not score well. The same pattern was repeated again this year. The perennial problem of evaluation was, once again, to the fore. Candidates seem to understand evaluation as the following:

♦ describing arguments for a stance
♦ describing arguments against a stance
♦ making a very brief comment on the stance from time to time (one sentence, no reason)
♦ restricting any brief evaluative comments to the final paragraph of the assignment
♦ comparing stances on issues

Candidates will continue to be unable to access marks for evaluation until this is addressed for both the assignment and the question paper.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Many markers could not explain why candidates were failing to read questions properly. The marker reports, whilst containing some suggested modifications to the language, overall did not criticise the question or the marking instructions. However, markers did suggest that centres consider the following:

♦ the literacy levels of some of the candidates presented
♦ rigorous marking regimes in school to ensure that candidates are not credited for knowing the topic — only for answering the question
♦ strongly discouraging candidates from the 'write everything you know' approach
♦ developing activities which involve candidates interpreting evaluation questions under pressure, eg show them a question and ask them to spend 2 minutes writing down the key knowledge and understanding points and the key evaluation points **and/or** further reinforcing the use of key skills and phrases published in the 2015 Course Report **and/or** highlighting evaluative content in their own essays or those of their peers **and/or** looking for examples of evaluation in class discussion

The advice contained in the assignment notes above may also prove useful since skills are very similar.

General

There is some uncertainty about the best use of sources. There are various ways to do this and the excellent advice below provided by one centre to its candidates could well be a very

useful tool for candidates to use in their assignment and in the question paper. Thanks are due to the centre for sharing this information.

How to Use Sources in Higher RMPS

Example 1:

KU In the book of Exodus in the Bible it says 'If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth…' (Chapter 21)

A I think this means that if a person kills another person then they should lose their life as a result. This suggests that the Bible thinks death is a fair punishment for murder and that it supports capital punishment.

E I find this a very strict viewpoint and I don't think it is necessarily fair. If someone kills someone by accident or in self-defence then I don't think they should be killed but should be punished in some other way.

Example 2:

KU Pope Francis was recently quoted in The Independent newspaper as saying that evolution and the Big Bang are real and God is not 'a magician with a magic wand'.

A I find this is a very interesting viewpoint because it goes against what most people think Christians believe. Most Christians actually don't take the creation stories in Genesis as being literally true. Those who do – Creationists – are in the minority.

E I think Pope Francis's opinion is very useful because it shows that you can be a religious person who believes in God but also accept the findings of modern science. If the leader of the biggest Church in the world can move with the times then perhaps religion will become more popular in countries (like Britain) where it is on the decline.

Example 3:

KU I found a quote from the Buddha on the BBC Religion website where he said: 'An action, even if it brings benefit to oneself, cannot be considered a good action if it causes physical and mental pain to another being.' The website also said that the Buddha did not actually say anything about capital punishment.

A I think Buddhists could use this passage to come to a view on whether capital punishment is morally acceptable. What the Buddha is saying is that an action cannot be good if it brings pain to another being – and capital punishment is a painful way to die. The BBC documentary 'How to kill a human' showed that all methods of capital punishment can be inhumane and cause agony to the victim.

E I think this viewpoint is very convincing because I don't think it is right to try and make yourself feel better by hurting someone else. This would make us just as bad as the criminal who committed a violent crime in the first place. On the other hand, Utilitarians might disagree with the Buddha because if killing a murderer brought happiness to most people then that would make it a good action because it would follow the Greatest Happiness Principle.

Component 2: Assignment

Evaluation

Over the past few years the need for a clearer understanding of evaluation has become increasingly apparent. One approach that might help emphasise the difference in skills could be by having clear definitions expressed at the level of candidates:

Knowledge and Understanding = know that. For example, know that religious people consider life to be sacred.

Analysis = know why. For example, explain that religious people believe that life is sacred because humanity is God's special creation and God is sovereign over life and death.

Evaluation = judge the 'that' and the 'why'. For example, *judging the Knowledge* — religious people are making assumptions that life is always sacred and not considering the possibility that life loses its sanctity at some point because the beauty is removed from it as a result of extreme suffering.

Another example, *judging the Analysis* — humanity is not necessarily God's special creation; we have nominated ourselves as his special creation to allow us to exploit other creatures and protect ourselves. The belief that God is sovereign over life and death is a claim that is difficult to prove and to justify. If God is sovereign over life and death, it leaves religious people with the problem of why some individuals die an agonising death and others a peaceful death seemingly on a whim of God.

These examples are not from the writing of candidates. The examples are to show how an evaluation exercise could be done with candidates demonstrating their knowledge and understanding and then being asked to do different things with it. After this, demonstrating the analysis and again, doing different things with it.

The table below suggests other approaches to and contexts of evaluation. The suggestions are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive but illustrate common evaluative activities. It may be possible to adapt the content of this table into some kind of activity which could even be used as evidence for internal assessment.

Evaluation Content	Evaluation Method
Comment on the quality of an argument	Decide on whether or not the argument is strong or weak using either or both argument and evidence
Comment on the quality of evidence	Decide on whether or not the evidence is strong or weak using either or both argument and evidence
Comment on the quality of a criticism	Decide on whether or not the criticism is valid or invalid using either or both argument and evidence
Comment on the quality of support	Decide on whether or not the support is valid or invalid using either or both argument and evidence
Comment on the relevance of a stance or	Decide on whether or not the stance or action is relevant or irrelevant using either or both argument and evidence

action	
Comment on the validity of a stance or action	Decide on whether or not the stance or action is valid or invalid using either or both argument and evidence
Comment on the effectiveness of a stance or action	Decide on whether or not the stance or action is effective or ineffective using either or both argument and evidence
Comment on the benefits/advantages of a stance or action	Decide on whether or not the stance or action is a benefit/advantage using either or both argument and evidence
Comment on the drawbacks/disadvantages of a stance or action	Decide on whether or not the stance or action is a drawback/disadvantage using either or both argument and evidence
Personal view on a stance or action	Decide on a personal position on the stance or action including counter-arguments against the personal position

It might be useful to see a few worked examples in different contexts. These examples of evaluation have been taken from assignments. The 'developed evaluation' is the actual evaluation that the candidate wrote, the 'undeveloped evaluation' is the same candidate's work with the developed evaluation stripped out to highlight the issue that markers frequently identified.

Evaluation Context	Personal observations directed at the stance/issue

Undeveloped Evaluation	I disagree with abortion because every embryo deserves the chance of life and nobody has the right to take anyone's life.

This is typical of the kind of personal evaluation found in assignments with low marks for evaluation. The evaluation exists but it has not been developed to Higher standard. Two reasons have been given but there is no explanation of the reasons which reduces them to evaluative statements and not evaluative explanations. It is the explanations that are required.

Developed Evaluation	I disagree with abortion because every embryo deserves the chance of life. This is because there is no agreement as to when life begins so we are taking a chance with something whose nature is not agreed. Nobody has the right to take anyone's life because as humans we value our lives above all other living things. It is because of this respect that humans can exist believing that their life has value. Abortion devalues the life of a living thing without knowing its exact nature.

This is typical of a personal evaluation found in assignments with high marks for evaluation. Each evaluative statement is accompanied with an explanation of the evaluation.

Evaluation	Opposing/Supporting positions directed at the stance/issue being discussed

Context	
Undeveloped Evaluation	Science argues that the first cause is something called singularity followed by a rapid expansion from a single dense point. The cosmological argument fails to prove God since singularity is the first cause.

Religious people could argue that science fails to consider other possibilities so it is unreasonable to totally reject religious ideas about origins.

The candidate's edited response is using the ideas of science to criticise the cosmological argument as proof of God's existence rather than a personal viewpoint. This is typical of how candidates carry out evaluation. Nothing they have written is actually wrong but there is little in the way of developed evaluation. This kind of response is frequently considered by candidates to be evaluation across all units. It is not. All this is doing is stating two points of view (both correct) and doing very little with them. |
| Developed Evaluation | Science argues that the first cause is something called singularity followed by a rapid expansion from a single dense point. Hawking argues that the laws of physics break down at singularity and therefore things could be uncaused. We can't get our heads around this because we are used to causes and effects. Hawking argues that it is only <u>since</u> singularity that everything requires a cause, In taking this into account the cosmological argument may well fail to prove God since singularity as the first cause cannot be ruled out.

However, in response to this, religious people could argue that Hawking fails to consider other possibilities. He suggests that the laws of physics broke down. This has neither been witnessed nor proved. Put this unwitnessed and unproved event against a widespread belief in a being with whom people have felt a connection and you find yourself in the position of asking whether it is so unreasonable to consider a supernatural first cause as the origin of the universe than a scientific idea that is based on similar kind of conjecture.

The candidate's actual answer shows the evaluative point being developed. This is a high quality piece of evaluation using the views of one side against the other and making clear connections between the two and the issue being discussed (to what extent is it reasonable to believe that God is the first cause?). Evaluative language is clear, eg taking this into account, may well, since, cannot, in response to, fails, against, whether or not, similar kind of — this kind of language does not appear in undeveloped evaluation in many cases. Note, too, the amount of explanation accompanying the points. It is KU and Analysis but it is all being loaded into the evaluative point. There is never the feeling in this piece of writing that you are reading a description. There is a dominant feeling that you are reading a case for or against something. |
| Evaluation context | Sources directed at the stance/issue being discussed |
| Undeveloped | Dieter Meith, professor of ethics, said 'since the embryo is the weakest link in our |

evaluation	process of life it deserves the greatest protection.'
	On the other hand, Frederica Matthews-Green argued that, 'no woman wants an abortion as she wants a Porsche or ice cream cone. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap wants to gnaw off its own leg.'
	These two arguments highlight the positions of the two sides in the abortion debate.
	The assignment was on foetal rights and the mother's rights in the abortion debate. Candidates often choose quotes well in their assignments but too often just line them up against each other without doing anything with them. In this edited response this is what is commonly seen. Great quotes but basically, 'he says- she says' giving the marker very little to give credit for.
Developed evaluation	Dieter Meith, professor of ethics, said 'since the embryo is the weakest link in our process of life it deserves the greatest protection.'
	On the other hand, Frederica Matthews-Green argued that, 'no woman wants an abortion as she wants a Porsche or ice cream cone. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap wants to gnaw off its own leg.'
	These two arguments highlight the positions of the two sides in the abortion debate. Meith's position clearly discounts the importance of the woman in any decision about abortion because the embryo must receive the greatest protection, not the mother. Consequently, this position asserts the right to life over the right to choose without very much room for negotiation.
	Matthews-Green's graphic criticism delivers a telling blow to Meith's position because it very much makes the embryo a part of the woman and shows that it is not a decision that is ever taken lightly by any woman. The point is that for Matthews-Green there is no doubt that woman is a human being whereas, whether Meith likes it or not, the same claim cannot be made for a foetus that has yet to be born. It is not just that a woman's rights should be respected over those of a foetus; the living have a right over the life of something that is not yet living in the accepted sense of the word.
	The actual response sees the candidate working with the quote using a mix of KU and Analysis as they build up their case. Note here that the candidate has not gone for the formulaic 'a strength of this argument is' etc. That approach is perfectly acceptable and will gain decent evaluation marks. The approach above is equally acceptable as a form of evaluation where it is almost as if the two sides are in some kind of dialogue with each other.

The published changes to the unit specifications in April 2016 and to the Unit Assessment Support Packs should support the development of evaluation skills. At Higher level, in each unit the second assessment standard has a focus on evaluation. This was done with the

question paper in mind so that candidates could get practice at writing evaluative answers and recognising evaluative activities and questions.

Titles

There is a need for candidates to be more cautious in their selection of title for the assignment. Noted below is some specific advice on possible titles. The content can be adapted depending on the options selected by centres.

If a **moral issue** is chosen, ensure that the moral arguments are clear, analysed and evaluated. Religion and Justice is a massively popular option but, as previously indicated, too many candidates tackled topics which were of sociological, political, legal or psychological interest but not of moral interest. Other moral issues did not suffer from the same problem. Candidates managed to maintain a good moral focus throughout. The suggestions below might help centres and candidates secure a moral focus in the assignment.

- To what extent is morality important in the debate about the death penalty?
- Assess the claim that 'life imprisonment is more unethical than the death penalty'.
- To what extent is it morally justifiable to punish people?
- To what extent are the causes of crime a moral issue?
- Evaluate the approaches of religion to the death penalty.

If a **world religion** is chosen, ensure that there is a debate about the issue chosen. It is very easy to write a descriptive piece on world religions, with the most common one being around themes of death eg Is there life after death? Do Christians believe in the Resurrection? Again, the need to have an open-ended question here is essential, along with something that is clearly an issue. The suggestions below might help centres and candidates secure a moral focus in the assignment.

- To what extent is belief in life after death essential to [name of religion]?
- How far do you agree that [religion] has been a force for good in countries where it is the main religion?
- Assess the claim that living a religious life is no longer relevant.
- Evaluate the role of [key figure] in [religion] today.
- To what extent are the expectations of [religion] realistic in the 21st century?

If a **religious and philosophical question** is chosen, there is a temptation to have the closed question like Did God create the universe? Or Does God exist? These questions risk yes or no type answers with little evaluation, but with some careful phrasing of the questions this can be avoided eg

- To what extent are arguments for the existence of God stronger than those against?
- How far do you agree that scientific accounts of the origins of life have no room for a divine creator?
- To what extent can the existence of evil and suffering be used to support belief in God?
- Assess the claim that miracles are 'more of a problem for scientists than they are for religious people.'
- How far do you agree that the claims of religion are based on faith and guesswork?

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	2479

Number of resulted entries in 2016	4383

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	22.0%	22.0%	963	59
B	19.7%	41.7%	865	50
C	23.1%	64.8%	1013	41
D	11.1%	75.9%	487	36
No award	24.1%	-	1055	0

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.