



Course Report 2018

Subject	Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies
Level	National 5

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

As the number of marks available in the question paper has increased from 60 to 80, the relative proportions of knowledge and understanding (KU) and skills had to change. This was to ensure that together the two elements award 50% of the marks for KU, and 50% for skills. This means that 12 marks are now available for skills in each section of the question paper, with the remainder allocated to knowledge and understanding. The familiar 8-mark questions were retained as they have been shown to differentiate well. The remaining skills marks were used to sample analysis and/or evaluation through 4-mark questions.

In 2017, grade boundaries were set at notional for the second year. Our aim was to maintain this standard in the 2018 paper, which was written with reference to the revised specification. The question paper has been differentiating well, and the marks ranges used in past diets were deemed appropriate for National 5, so these were maintained.

Average marks in the assignment remained steady at around 12, suggesting that the cohort was of similar ability to the last three diets, but performance in the question paper improved significantly. This is likely to be a result of additional time for thinking, reduced impact of poorly answered questions, and a slight decrease in demand in some questions which did not differentiate as well as expected. As a result, grade boundaries were adjusted up, with the C boundary settling at 53% and the A boundary at 74%. Even with this adjustment, the proportion of candidates achieving a grade A-C and those achieving an A both increased.

Component 2: assignment

The task is unchanged and continues to differentiate well. In 2014-17 the assignment contributed 25% to the total mark, but the longer question paper means it now contributes 20%.

Candidates set their own question — as in previous years, how well they performed was often down to how well they did this. We could see that some candidates had better support with wording than others, and that some continue to set questions that are not truly religious, moral or philosophical. Such questions were a poor vehicle for demonstrating candidates' ability to meet the required standards.

Evidence of use of sources is still lacking in many reports. Quoting a thinker or explaining a view is not enough to demonstrate use of a source — candidates need to make clear where the information has come from. This means the report needs to describe aspects of the process by explaining where information was located.

Centres are reminded that the task requires candidates to propose an issue themselves, and pursue their research with a high degree of independence. Centres should check the published advice relating to the acceptable amount of teacher or lecturer help. Candidates did best where teachers and lecturers had given robust advice about structure, wording of titles and how to carry out and report on their research effectively. When candidates pursued an issue of particular interest to them, they tended to produce very good reports which demonstrated real personal engagement.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

The majority of candidates found the questions clear, and understood what they were being asked to do. As in past diets, candidates scored best in the morality and belief section, but world religion answers also performed very well this year.

There was evidence that many candidates had received good advice on structuring answers. A number of candidates presented a series of points which were then developed, allowing them to achieve 2 or 3 marks for each. These candidates also tended to make good use of the marks allocation in judging how much to write.

Questions 1(a), 3, 6(a), 8, 10(a), 12, 14(a), 16, 18(a), 20, 22(a), 24 — all 4-mark questions. The majority of candidates were comfortable with the religion-specific vocabulary and had plenty to say about the beliefs and concepts sampled in these questions.

Questions 29, 33, 37, 41, 45 — all 8-mark questions. These questions used ‘talking heads’ to suggest two viewpoints on an issue, followed by the prompt ‘*What do you think? Give reasons for your answer*’. Candidates answered these in a range of ways. Many enjoyed going beyond the views given in the stimulus to give alternative ideas. Responses suggest that candidates felt comfortable giving a genuine, unrehearsed answer to these questions, drawing on good understanding of the part they have studied.

Question 42 (a-b) — 4-mark questions. Candidates gave very good explanations of reasons for going to war, and the moral issues raised by going to war.

Question 51(b) — 8-mark question. Candidates did particularly well in this question, and seemed to enjoy thinking on their feet and applying their learning about the nature of God and theodicies to the prompt.

Across the paper, there was a notable 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.

Component 2: assignment

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

Although evaluation isn’t explicitly required by the task, those who evaluated views as they went were able to build up marks for analysis and conclusions as they explained their judgements and applied them to their titles. Candidates are not required to consider contrasting views, but doing so made it easier for many to produce reports that stayed focused on the question. Genuinely controversial issues tended to produce more interesting and successful reports. The best reports also referred back to the question regularly in the

course of the write-up. In moral questions, the best candidates stayed focused on the moral dimension and avoided straying into more sociological aspects of their questions.

Part A (significance and/or impact) continues 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 consequences. 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 to work towards a conclusion. It was good to see an improvement in this part in reports dealing with philosophical questions.

Some candidates demonstrated their use of sources very well, for example by making clear which websites or books they had used to locate information. It was clear that these candidates understood the requirements of the standard, and how to demonstrate their use of sources, and had planned to do so as part of their preparation for the write-up.

There were some very well-expressed conclusions, supported with thoughtful evidence and argument. This was especially evident where candidates had chosen an issue of particular personal interest, and it was great to see them engaging in a genuine way with the issue. Where candidates opted to offer mini-conclusions on the views and arguments they were exploring as they went, most of their concluding marks had already been achieved before they offered their final conclusion.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

As in past diets, the most challenging section was religious and philosophical questions.

Questions 1(b), 6(b), 10(b), 14(b), 18(b), 22(a) — all worth 4 marks. In the world religion section candidates were asked to write about the impact of ‘belief about’ a concept, but many homed in on the concept itself, and as a result lost marks. Part (a) should have helped them, so the issue wasn’t the question, but their misreading of it.

Questions 2, 4, 7, 9(a), 11, 13(a), 15, 17(a), 19, 21(a), 23, 25(a) 27, 31, 35, 39, 43, 46(a), 52(a) — all worth 4 marks. In these ‘describe’ questions, candidates often went beyond the requirements of the prompt, offering analysis and explanation rather than just giving a description. The questions were intended to be straightforward, but candidates wanted to do more and this disadvantaged some.

Question 9(a) — worth 3 marks. ‘Describe one teaching of Jesus’ was interpreted in an unexpected way by some candidates, who either wrote about what Jesus did (a different part of the mandatory content) or teachings about Jesus. In future, it is likely that the question would ask candidates to ‘Describe one thing Jesus taught.’

Question 26(b) — worth 4 marks. This question asks for moral issues raised by reasons for crime, but many just wrote about crime generally. The focus of the question is in line with mandatory content, and links with part (a), which should have helped. Perhaps using bold

text for 'reasons' would have given a clearer steer to candidates, but the question as it stands is fine.

There were some issues with candidates' interpretation of terms from the mandatory content, for example 'retribution' in Question 29 (8 marks); 'end-of-life-care' in Question 40 (5 marks). The questions are valid, however this highlights the need for centres to ensure candidates are prepared to write confidently about terms specified in the course content.

Question 43 — worth 6 marks. Few candidates managed to achieve all the marks for this question which asked for a description of two modern armaments. KU questions won't ever exceed 6 marks, so it would be wise for candidates to be ready to describe up to three kinds of modern armament in some detail (at least three points about each).

Question 46(b) — worth 4 marks. The question asked for a creation story, but many wrote about the Big Bang Theory. This wasn't credited, because creation stories and ways of interpreting them are a key part of the mandatory content, and are distinct from the Big Bang Theory which is a scientific explanation. Although specifying 'religious' in the question may have avoided the confusion, this isn't required in the course specification, and would rule out creation myths that could be seen as cultural rather than religious.

Question 48 (b-c) — worth 5 marks each. These questions asked why people might agree or disagree with the cosmological argument. Some candidates wrote very well about these, but others found it difficult to go beyond just restating the argument itself.

Question 50 (a-c) — worth 4, 4, 5 marks. The focus of the question is evil, but some wrote about suffering instead and as a result did not receive marks. This is due to a change in the expression of the content in the course specification which separates evil and suffering, whereas in past diets they were seen as part of the same issue. The questions are valid in terms of the mandatory content, and many candidates wrote about the problem of evil very well.

Question 53(a) — worth 4 marks. Some candidates struggled to explain what people might believe about laws of nature.

Component 2: assignment

Assessment standards are unchanged, and candidates set their own title. The task still permits some reports to achieve full marks.

We are continuing to see titles which read like exam questions. These are not generally appropriate at National 5 because question paper questions focus on KU or skills, and are not designed to sample all the elements required in the assignment. The best titles are expressed as a simple question, which focuses on a clearly religious, moral or philosophical issue (a question that divides people). Single-word titles which state a topic, or questions that could be explored and possibly answered by the social sciences, didn't function as well because they don't lead the candidate towards a valid conclusion.

There is an ongoing issue with a few candidates reporting on a different question to the one written on the fly-leaf. This is in part because of difficulty expressing their title, so this is an area in which centres could perhaps offer more help and advice.

The assignment task continues to perform differently depending on whether candidates opt to study a religious, moral or philosophical question. This year we have seen a pleasing improvement in marks for significance and impact for those pursuing philosophical questions. Candidates find questions exploring moral issues most straightforward and few opt to explore a religious issue.

Candidates seem to be confusing using lots of quotations with using a range of sources of information. It should be possible to achieve full marks without any quotations, and a lot of quotations could be taken from one source. The top mark for use of sources was therefore limited to those who referenced a wide and appropriately demanding range of sources explicitly.

Some candidates were not able to gain marks for conclusions because they ran out of time, so offering conclusions on viewpoints as they go can help to avoid this. It's important that conclusions include clear supporting reasons. A few candidates presented lengthy descriptions of their views, but with no justification, and this limited the marks available to them.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

Centres should ensure that they are working with the revised National 5 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies course specification, and that candidates are prepared to answer on all aspects of the mandatory content. This includes familiarity with subject-specific vocabulary, as it is likely that this will be used in questions. The three sections will continue to each contribute approximately one-third of the total marks available for the question paper. Centres will find it useful to revisit their own assessment items to ensure that they fit with the revised arrangements.

Candidates will not need to spend time in the exam distinguishing between ‘types’ of question. Instead they should focus on the prompt given. They will receive credit for any reasonable response. Some candidates disadvantaged themselves this year by offering analysis and explanation where they were asked for straightforward description. Teachers and lecturers should spend time with candidates looking at how to interpret questions, and how to avoid reacting to key words which may take them in the wrong direction. Teaching candidates how to mark is a very useful way of helping them to spot common mistakes and to recognise what makes successful responses.

Unlike the course specification for Higher, content in the world religion section is not organised under the headings ‘belief’ and ‘practice’. This has proved to be a helpful change, as some concepts are difficult to categorise, for example dharma in Hinduism can legitimately be written about as either belief or practice. The National 5 question paper may ask about belief and practice, but content in relation to these will not be prescribed. This is intended to encourage candidates to reflect on and apply what they have learned about how religious followers understand the world, and what they do as a result. Any reasonable response to a question will be awarded marks.

Utilitarianism is no longer prescribed as a moral perspective, but it is commonly offered as a non-religious response in the morality and belief section. Because utilitarianism is a way of making moral decisions rather than a particular viewpoint, it can be tricky for candidates to apply successfully. It would be helpful, therefore, for candidates to study specific utilitarian (especially contemporary) thinkers, or the views of non-religious organisations or groups who have given a clear position on the moral issues they are studying.

The question paper will continue to ask candidates to show links between concepts, beliefs and practices. To be awarded marks in these questions, candidates should make the link or connection clear. Explanations of key terms, no matter how good, will not attract marks on their own.

In the ‘existence of God’ part, perceived strengths and weaknesses of the cosmological and teleological arguments are a key aspect of the mandatory content. Centres should ensure that candidates are able to write about reasons why these arguments can be seen to work, or not work well. The focus here needs to be the debate around whether the arguments are reasonable rather than whether God exists as such.

The 8-mark questions are designed to allow candidates to demonstrate skills of analysis and evaluation by applying the knowledge they have gained in the course. It is important that candidates go beyond simply reporting a variety of views they have studied, as this only demonstrates knowledge and understanding. Instead they are advised to take a position and then build a case for it. It's fine to adopt and apply arguments they have studied as they make their case, and there is no requirement for the response to be a personal one. Candidates can argue for whichever position they feel they can write about best. Similarly, there is no requirement for an evaluation answer to show both sides, but candidates may find it easier to build up marks where they do.

Question paper writers will continue to use bold text to draw attention to important aspects of questions. Candidates should look out especially for numerical prompts. For example where the question specifies one thing, they should aim to show depth in their answer. They will not receive marks for ranging further in their answer.

Centres should continue to assess candidates to ensure their suitability for entry at National 5 level. In the event of an exceptional circumstances request becoming necessary, robust evidence that closely mirrors the demand of the external assessment is particularly helpful. A prelim exam is not required, but continues to offer useful evidence of what a candidate can do.

Centres are reminded that the National 5 course is not an appropriate vehicle for core religious education classes unless they have had adequate time to cover the required content, which is still notionally 120 hours, excluding work on the coursework element.

This year the world religion section had six questions, four of which were worth 4 marks. This was felt to have contributed to the exam being slightly less demanding than intended. In 2019 the question paper will ask five questions in each part, with the marks range unchanged at 3 to 8. It will continue to include a variety of single and linked questions.

Finally, candidates should be reminded that they are only required to answer one part from each section. This year, a number of candidates attempted more than the required number of parts. Candidates should check the headings, especially in the religious and philosophical questions section where there can be similarities between the 'origins' and 'existence of God' parts.

Component 2: assignment

It is advisable to share the published assessment task with candidates, as well as the marking grid used to assess the report. Candidates can refer to this as they research and prepare to write their reports. Candidates should particularly note the instructions on how to demonstrate use of sources.

It's a good idea to ask candidates to identify some sources of information right at the start of the process, when they are proposing their title. These can include books, people, websites, video, audio and print media. If candidates have difficulty identifying sources, it means they may struggle with the research stage, and should maybe rethink their title.

Marks are awarded for evidence of the use of sources. The resource sheet is not marked, so it is essential that candidates use the report to let the marker know where they got their information from. Copying out lengthy URLs is a waste of limited time, but the reference

should provide enough information for the source to be verified by the marker. Candidates can show where they are using information from a source by writing, for example, 'In John Lennox's book, *God's Undertaker*, I found out ...' or 'Humanism UK's website shows ...'

Quotations alone are not classed as sources, because a candidate could include lots of quotations which all came from one chapter in one book. In fact, it is possible for candidates to achieve full marks without including any quotations at all, provided they made clear where they found the information they included. Paraphrasing is a perfectly acceptable way of showing a viewpoint.

Teachers and lecturers should support candidates to identify a suitable issue for research. Titles — ideally in the form of a question — should allow candidates to explore different points of view; and to reach, express and support a conclusion. Titles which ask questions which would not be seen as controversial tend to produce poorer assignments because it is difficult for candidates to gain marks for skills of analysis and concluding. Candidates should avoid one-word titles, and questions that belong more to areas like psychology or sociology. Reworking a Modern Studies or History assignment is not recommended. Although good candidates can sometimes do so successfully, these assignments often fail to meet the required standards.

Examples of well-expressed questions might include:

- ◆ Religious — *Should Hindus see samsara as a blessing or a curse?*
- ◆ Moral — *Is it morally acceptable for the UK to have nuclear weapons?*
- ◆ Philosophical — *Do human beings have free will?*
- ◆ Of course, many questions will include a combination of religious, moral and philosophical, for example *Should Christians support assisted dying?* or *Does Buddhism offer a good explanation for suffering?*

Candidates studying a religious or philosophical question should take care not to neglect the standard relating to impact and significance. As comments in relation to this aspect are less likely to arise in the course of the assignment, it would be useful to present them at the outset, or in a dedicated section. The significance of philosophical questions can be explored in terms of how possible answers might impact on related questions. For example 'If it could be shown that the universe came to be by design, this would mean that there must be a designer and therefore it may be reasonable to believe in God. If God is real, people might then need to decide if they should be religious.'

For those exploring moral issues, case studies can be a useful way to show impact and significance, but candidates should avoid giving very lengthy narratives, which don't get to the point. Ideally they should explain how the case study shows significance and/or impact. Given the limited amount of time available for the write-up, they should concentrate on getting into the moral arguments.

While there is still a requirement for at least one viewpoint, this does **not** have to be religious. The key consideration is that it is a religious, moral or philosophical view that relates appropriately to a valid issue. There is no need to shoehorn a religious viewpoint into the assignment if it is not appropriate or helpful. The best assignments look at two or three viewpoints as this supports an exploration of the reasons for disagreement about the issue.

Attempting to write about more than three viewpoints is not recommended because the time limit for the write-up limits scope for depth.

Good assignments tend to be discursive in nature rather than persuasive. Centres should advise candidates to avoid setting out to build an impassioned case for a particular point of view, as this will be deemed to demonstrate a lack of balance. It is entirely acceptable however for them to offer a reasoned conclusion which is firmly for one perspective.

Centres should advise candidates on how to use the resource sheet effectively. This year we have continued to see clever use of mnemonics and images, as well as noting key points and references. Resource sheets are checked to ensure that they contain no more than the permitted 200 words, so candidates should be reminded to be careful about this.

A mnemonic or picture counts as one item. It is fine to type resource sheets, and this allows for an easy word count as well as easy editing.

Marks for conclusions are awarded wherever they appear in the assignment. Offering conclusions on viewpoints presented, as they go means that candidates who run out of time can avoid losing 6 marks for this element. It's important that conclusions relate to the issue set in the title of the report, and that they include clear reasons.

The Understanding Standards website is a really helpful resource for teachers who want to get a feel for the standard, but candidates can benefit enormously from looking at exemplars there too, in order to identify the features of reports that do well.

Candidates are expected to use the resource sheet to generate the evidence under controlled conditions, and they **must** submit it with their evidence. The resource sheet is not assessed formally. However it is important that teachers and lecturers ensure that candidates know how to use and submit resource sheet(s) which are reviewed during the marking process.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	2624
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	2309
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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	34.0%	34.0%	786	74
B	19.4%	53.4%	447	63
C	16.4%	69.8%	379	53
D	14.9%	84.7%	343	42
No award	15.3%	-	354	-

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 the management team at SQA.

- ◆ 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.