



Course Report 2016

Subject	RMPS
Level	National 5

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

In 2014 and 2015 the question paper had performed well, though discussion at the awarding meetings identified a need to increase the demand slightly, with a view to achieving an exam that was firmly at SCQF Level 5, and with grade boundaries that were at, or close to the notional cut-offs.

This year we avoided questions asking for **two** things for 4 marks, as these were seen as too easy and therefore poor differentiators. We also avoided questions looking for very straightforward knowledge and understanding about content, and asked for more application of knowledge and understanding, and for more depth in responses for the marks — for example by asking candidates to focus on one thing. This resulted in a more demanding exam with questions that served more usefully as differentiators. As a result, we were able to set the grade boundaries at the notional levels this year.

The exam was well received, and there were no concerns raised formally by centres. Informal feedback from both teachers and candidates suggests that it was challenging, but fair, with candidates commenting that you had to think about the questions, but that they were all solvable.

Most candidates attempted all of the questions for their chosen options. As in previous years, most candidates were able to navigate their way to the correct sections, and to tackle all of the required questions in the allocated time. A few candidates did still attempt to answer all of the options.

Questions performed largely as intended, with the exception of the 8-mark question in the morality section. This question was intended to invite an answer that included comparison and contrast of religious and non-religious perspectives, but many candidates did not answer the question in this way, and some compared views within religious or non-religious perspectives, or simply gave descriptions of religious and non-religious views with no attempt to compare them. Difficulties with interpreting the question were identified and addressed during the marking event to ensure that candidates were not disadvantaged.

There was a perception that the 8-mark question in the World Religions section may have been more difficult for candidates tackling Buddhism, because Buddhism does not focus on life after death. However, candidates were able to achieve full marks for this question, and marks achieved were similar to those for the equivalent question in other sections. In all sections, we were pleased to see many candidates skilfully explaining the relationship between what people do in this life and what happens after death.

Component 2: assignment

The assignment this year performed as expected, with many candidates producing good or excellent reports on a range of religious, moral and philosophical issues, and some achieving full marks. The average mark was one mark higher than last year, which may be a

consequence of minor changes to the standards and assessment criteria having increased the scope for gaining marks, eg by removing the requirement for comments on Impact and Significance to be limited to the contemporary context. This has been particularly helpful for those dealing with religious and philosophical questions where the significance can be historical as well as contemporary.

As in 2014 and 2015, the majority of candidates tackled a moral question, with many opting for issues in Medicine, Justice and Conflict. It was good to see some candidates ranging beyond areas prescribed in the course content, and it was clear that for many candidates the assignment was truly a personal piece of research, which they had tackled themselves, and with appropriate support.

While all of the standards can be achieved in relation to a religious, moral or philosophical question, it remains the case that candidates studying a moral question find it easier to access marks for Impact and Significance. This is in part because this standard tends to be covered naturally throughout the report, especially where comments on morality are expressed in terms of consequences.

Where candidates lost marks, this was rarely because of the requirements of the task, but the appropriateness of the title as a vehicle for demonstrating achievement of the standards. This is something learners should be made aware of as they plan for their Assignment.

There was some evidence again this year of over-direction, with groups of candidates producing reports with identical structure, content and sources. There is a continuing expectation that a pack of assignments will contain a range of titles, and that these will provide good evidence of the candidates' ability to propose an issue, and research and report on it themselves. While it is absolutely appropriate for teachers to monitor the progress of their learners, and to offer guidance and advice, including on how to structure a report well, it is contrary to the purpose of the task for teachers to set issues and prescribe resources.

Conversely, as in previous years, a number of candidates appeared to have had little or no support, both in the identification of an appropriate issue, and in understanding the requirements of the task, and as a result these candidates tended to score very low marks.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

There was a wide range in standard in the question paper this year, but sections where candidates performed particularly well were Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, in World Religions; and Evil and Suffering, and Existence of God, in Religious and Philosophical Questions. Markers commented on especially good explanations of the teleological argument.

Candidates continue to demonstrate impressive knowledge and understanding in the World Religion section, making good use of specialist vocabulary, and drawing useful connections between the beliefs and practices studied. It is clear that learners are being taught very effectively, and have developed a joined-up understanding of their chosen religion.

The National 5 exam is designed to allow for very open questions that can be answered in a range of ways, and in which candidates are able to apply different possible content to a common prompt. For this reason, the detailed marking instructions give a range of possible answers, but these are by no means exhaustive, or prescriptive, and any reasonable response can gain marks. It was pleasing to see that candidates seemed to appreciate that they had some freedom to decide how to go about answering the questions.

Component 2: assignment

Candidates who set themselves a good title, which was clearly an issue drawn from the areas of Religion, Morality or Philosophy, did best in the assignment. Their titles were usually in the form of questions, which had the potential to prompt a range of responses or viewpoints, and this gave them lots to write about and to analyse. Good assignments also referred back to the question throughout the write-up.

Many candidates presented a range of viewpoints on their chosen issues and analysed and concluded on these as they went. This helped them to avoid producing a report that was overly descriptive, or that failed to get properly into the issue. It was good to see some candidates comparing and contrasting the views presented, and the reasons behind them, and this helped to ensure good marks for analysis and explanation.

As in previous years, good reports were thoughtfully structured, and had a good balance of depth and detail, and breadth, showing that the candidate had considered a range of perspectives in reaching their conclusion. It is not a requirement for candidates to consider contrasting views, but doing so certainly helps with analysis and reaching conclusions, so a genuinely controversial issue is likely to produce a more interesting, and successful report.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Questions 1(a), 3(a), 5(a), 7(a), 9(a) and 11(a) (3 marks): The first World Religion question asked for a straightforward description. Many candidates went beyond the terms of the question and wrote about impact and importance. This meant they lost marks, often in spite of demonstrating impressive knowledge.

Question 2(b) (8 marks): There was some concern that the question which was common across five of the religions might disadvantage those answering on Buddhism because life after death isn't a key concern for Buddhists. The question didn't ask about **life** after death, and many candidates tackled the question by pointing out that Buddhists are more concerned with this life and addressing the problem of suffering. Buddhist beliefs about rebirth, kamma, and Buddha's focus on compassionate living and the eightfold path meant there was plenty of content candidates could have applied. Some gained full marks for this question, so in light of candidate responses, it was judged to be a fair question, and a good

differentiator for grading purposes. Analysis of the marks gained for the 8-mark question suggests marks were low across the World Religions, with most falling between 3 and 6, though Judaism and Sikhism scored a bit higher.

Questions 13, 17, 21, 25, and 29 (4 marks): Many struggled this year to explain what religious morality might be based on. This was a similar issue to one encountered previously, which asked how religion might help people to make moral decisions.

Question 15 (4 marks): Candidates struggled to write well about a view on forgiveness.

Questions 16, 20, 24, 28, and 32 (8 marks): The skills question in the Morality section was intended to elicit a response that included points of comparison and contrast, and while some candidates did this well, many simply gave lengthy descriptions of one religious and one non-religious point of view, limiting their scope for gaining skills marks. Some attempted to analyse differences within a religious and/or non-religious perspective. Most attempted to give a judgement, so they had some understanding of what they were being asked to do, but didn't do it very well. The approach to marking was adjusted, so that candidates could be credited for relevant analysis, but marks were capped where they had missed out a religious or non-religious perspective, or where they hadn't attempted to compare these.

Question 34 (a) and (b): Some candidates found the Origins section challenging, with a significant number confusing evolution and the Big Bang theory.

Feedback from markers suggested that there were a significant number of candidates who only picked up a few marks in the exam, and that they were clearly not entered at the appropriate level. While it is understandable that, especially with the safety net of the Added Value Unit, some centres feel they should give their learners at the opportunity to sit the exam, it is not appropriate to set them up for failure where it is clear that the level is not right for them.

Component 2: assignment

Some candidates attempted to answer exam-style questions for the assignment, but these are not generally suitable as they are devised to elicit restricted responses with a limited focus.

While writing about Impact and Significance tends to come easily to those pursuing a moral question, candidates reporting on a religious or philosophical question find this requirement more demanding. This is because it is less likely to be woven throughout the assignment.

A few candidates struggled to complete the assignment in the permitted time. This sometimes limited scope for achieving marks for Concluding, and with 6 marks available, the impact on the final mark was significant. In some cases, we could see from the Resource Sheet that there was good content that didn't make it into the write-up.

Many candidates are not making the sources of their information clear. Marks for the use of sources can only be awarded where there is evidence of this in the assignment. Candidates who were relying on class notes tended to lose marks for this element, and some may have assumed that marks would be awarded for including sources on the resource sheet.

Many candidates scored very well for A (Impact and Significance) and E/F (Conclusion) but struggled to gain many marks for gathering accurate, detailed information and using it to explain and analyse the issue.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

Candidates should take care to read questions carefully so that they are clear about what they are being asked to do. Knowledge and understanding questions may ask for straight description of a concept or practice, but they can also ask for an explanation of impact or significance. It's important that candidates can distinguish between these two kinds of question. If the question asks for **one** thing they are expected to go into some depth, and will not be awarded marks for more than one.

The question paper samples mandatory content, so learners must be prepared to write in detail about all of the mandatory content outlined in the Course Assessment Specification. They should continue to make links between these different ideas and practices too. The skills sampled in the unit assessments are expected to be applied across the three units in the question paper, so for example, although the focus of the Religious and Philosophical Studies unit assessment is evaluation, candidates may be asked to evaluate in any of the units studied.

In the Morality unit, candidates may be asked to write specifically about the ways in which religious people and utilitarians make moral decisions. Many struggled this year to explain what religious morality might be based on. There was a similar issue in the 2014 question paper, which asked how religion might help people to make moral decisions. Teachers should aim to look at a range of sources of religious authority, eg sacred scripture, key figures, natural law, dharma etc. While it is not a course requirement, it is helpful if candidates have some appreciation of the fact that 'religious authority' means different things within different religious traditions. Candidates can't be **asked** to analyse or evaluate ways of making moral decisions, but they will have opportunities to apply this learning to prescribed areas of content, and in their responses to 8-mark questions an explanation of any concerns raised by different approaches to morality could certainly attract marks.

Eight-mark questions will always require candidates to demonstrate skills, so lots of good knowledge and understanding alone won't get the full marks. Knowledge and understanding offered as evidence for a point of analysis or evaluation will be credited. It might be helpful to remind learners that markers want to see them doing something with their knowledge. As at Higher, it would be useful to help candidates to be able to identify where they are being asked to make a judgement. In their answers, they should aim also to offer clear reasons for their judgements.

There is no requirement for candidates to develop two sides of an argument in an 8-mark question. While they will often allow a two-sided response, candidates are free to completely

agree or disagree with, for example, a given statement. The most important thing in these answers is the quality of the explanation given for their view.

The mandatory course content requires a study of religious and non-religious viewpoints in the Morality and Philosophical Questions units, and from time to time candidates will be asked to describe a religious or non-religious view they have studied. These should be distinct points of view, as expressed by an individual, organisation or group (including religions or religious denominations). It is not enough to look at a selection of generic arguments under the headings of 'Religious' or 'Non-religious.'

In the Religious and Philosophical Questions section, candidates need to be especially careful not to mix up their theories of origins, and arguments for the existence of God.

Component 2: assignment

For the assignment to function as a valid and reliable assessment, and for candidates to enjoy the process, it is important that centres are working with up-to-date assignment instructions, and adhering to the required conditions for the research and write-up. It is recommended that centres take time to share the marking criteria with candidates before they start working on the assignment, and to discuss the elements required, and the characteristics of good report-writing.

Materials on the Understanding Standards website are helpful for teachers who want to get a feel for the standard, and learners can benefit from them too. Important changes to bear in mind are:

- ◆ Comments on Impact and Significance are no longer required to be tied to the **contemporary** context.
- ◆ While there is still a requirement for at least one viewpoint (although a good report will be likely to look at more), 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.

Teachers are expected to support candidates in the identification of a suitable issue for research. Titles should ideally be in the form of a question, and they should allow candidates to explore different points of view, and to reach, express and support a conclusion. Care should be taken, especially, to avoid one word titles, and questions that belong more to areas like psychology or sociology. While candidates can have some success drawing out a moral or philosophical dimension in these kinds of assignment, they tend to struggle to reach an appropriate conclusion. If candidates have difficulty identifying useful sources it would be wise to suggest that they rethink their title.

Reworking a Modern Studies or History report is not recommended. These types of reports often fail to meet the required standards for RMPS.

Candidates should continue to be encouraged to range beyond work covered in class and to explore an issue that is of genuine interest to them. A regurgitation of class notes or something that has already been taught limits the scope for candidates to meet the requirements of the task, and compromises the validity of the assessment.

While it is acceptable for candidates to type their reports, centres need to be particularly careful to ensure that they only have access to the resource sheet during the write-up. The use of graphics, pictures, quotations etc, pasted from the internet is a breach of the controlled conditions, as is consulting online sources, and this will be seen as malpractice.

Candidates should be advised on how to use the resource sheet effectively. It is useful to include a reminder of sources consulted, but it can also be used to note prompts or a planned structure for the report, with key points to be covered.

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. There is no need to copy out lengthy URLs, but ideally 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 Joe Bloggs' book, *Modern Moral Issues*, I found out ...' or 'the British Medical Association's website shows ...'.

Candidates studying a religious or philosophical question should take care not to neglect the standard relating to Impact and Significance. As comments on this aspect are less likely to arise in the assignment, it would be useful to present them at the outset, or in a dedicated section.

Markers are asked to award marks for Conclusions wherever they appear in the report. Offering conclusions, eg on viewpoints presented, as they go means that candidates who run out of time can avoid losing 6 marks for this element.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	2117
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	2521
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	33.3%	33.3%	839	56
B	17.8%	51.1%	448	48
C	18.3%	69.4%	462	40
D	8.7%	78.1%	220	36
No award	21.9%	-	552	-

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.