



Course Report 2017

Subject	Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies
Level	Advanced 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

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper

The question paper had two sections. The mandatory section 1 was on the Philosophy of Religion, from which one question is selected from a choice of two. These questions covered two of the three topics in the unit. Each question was worth 30 marks. There were two optional parts to section 2 — either Religious Experience or Medical Ethics. Each part consisted of a choice from two questions. The pattern of questioning was the same as the Philosophy of Religion section. The total for the question paper is 60 marks.

The question paper performed as expected. The ratio of candidates opting for Medical Ethics comprised about 80% of the cohort. Less than a quarter of presenting centres chose the Religious Experience option, which actually performed well. There was a fairly even divide of candidates answering questions 1 and 2 in the Philosophy of Religion section, whilst in the optional parts questions 3 and question 6 were by far the preferred questions of candidates.

The component average mark was approximately 32/60.

Component 2: project — dissertation

The dissertation is worth 40 marks, which is broken down into 8 marks for research and presentation, 8 marks for knowledge and 12 marks each for analysis and evaluation. The dissertation performed as expected, though candidates often scored poorly in evaluation. Dissertations were heavily descriptive and analytical at the expense of evaluation.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Questions 3 and 4: Candidates performed well in Section 2, Part 2 the Religious Experience questions. Answers were clearly focused on the question, and there was evidence of good evaluation.

Component 2: project — dissertation

Candidates chose, on the whole, appropriate and realistic topics for their dissertation. Topics were often drawn from the course content. Research, knowledge and analysis were also

done well. Candidates had clearly spent time researching mainly online, and had identified some excellent sources and made good use of them. Many candidates demonstrated an ability to break concepts and ideas down in their analysis. Both knowledge and analysis averaged at around 70%, which is highly commendable.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Question 1: In the Philosophy of Religion Section 1, performance for Question 1 was disappointing with an average mark of around 15/30. Candidates wrote about the teleological argument and they also wrote about scientific discoveries, but all too often they did not relate this information to the question. They did not discuss the issue in the question, which was the extent to which scientific discoveries strengthened the teleological argument. A small number of candidates answered the questions as a critique of the teleological argument, failing to make any reference to the issue in the question.

Question 5: In the Religious Experience Section 2 Part B Q5, candidates often discussed organ transplants in general without making adequate reference to procurement and the moral issues arising from it. Furthermore, there was insufficient discussion of the moral concerns. Many candidates focused substantially on how organs are procured, and not the moral concerns raised by these methods.

Question 6: In Section 2 Part B Question 6, a significant number of candidates failed to pick up the requirement of the question which asked if abortion was **always** morally wrong. Many candidates simply gave a general discussion of the moral debate surrounding abortion. Parts of the answers were relevant, but unless there was a specific reference to the question that was asked, candidates struggled to score more than 16/30. There was some discussion amongst markers about the interpretation of the question, but it was agreed that candidates at Advanced Higher level should be able to identify the requirement asked in questions.

Component 2: project — dissertation

The presentation of dissertations from some candidates disadvantaged them. They failed to clearly state the aims of their dissertation and instead launched into it without giving any clear indication of what was to follow. Some candidates managed to have a clear structure because of superior writing skills but, generally, it would be better if candidates gave a clear description of what their dissertation was setting out to do and then checking to ensure that it is achieved.

The evaluation proved again to be problematic. It is, perhaps, worth noting that 50% of candidates gain 6 or fewer marks for this skill in their dissertation. There seems to be a perception that describing opposing views is all that is required for evaluation. This is not the case. In evaluation, candidates are expected to have developed critiques of the views, not just an awareness that they exist.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

Teachers and lecturers should continue their excellent work in preparing candidates for Advanced Higher — candidates clearly benefit from the challenges the course presents. The fact that many presenting centres are either working with a minimally-timetabled class or under some ad hoc arrangement is testament to the commitment of the teachers or lecturers involved, which deserves recognition. Furthermore, the self-discipline and motivation required by candidates under these conditions makes their success particularly commendable.

The problem of not answering the question was evident again this year in a number of questions. There can be several reasons for this, including:

- ◆ the question was misread by the candidate
- ◆ the question was not understood by the candidate
- ◆ the candidate was working with a template of answers for each topic and failed to adapt the templates
- ◆ the candidate was under-prepared
- ◆ the candidate gave an answer where they wrote everything they knew about a topic in the hope that it might gain a few marks

It may be worth encouraging the candidate to think along these lines:

- ◆ When a question is about a specific topic, consider what is being asked **about** the topic. Few questions will actually ask about a particular topic as a whole — the question will ask something specific about the topic. For example if there is a question on the teleological argument, it is unlikely to be purely about the teleological argument. Instead it will be something specific about the teleological argument like whether science supports it or whether analogies used for it work or the problems it creates for those who believe in God. This year the question in the Medical Ethics section was on abortion. Candidates were being asked whether it was **always** morally wrong, not about the abortion topic in general.
- ◆ Candidates sometimes respond to mnemonics like RAD (relevance, accuracy and detail) or MESS (make a statement, explain the statement, support with argument, support with evidence).

Component 2: project — dissertation

There is a clear discrepancy between the performance of candidates in the question paper and in the dissertation. At times, it is difficult to reconcile the outstanding performance of a candidate in the dissertation with a poor question paper performance.

It is a noticeable trend each year. On the one hand, the dissertation provides an excellent opportunity for candidates to exhibit their researching and writing skills. On the other hand, it might also present opportunities for excessive support within or beyond the teacher/lecturer. The fact remains that there is a discrepancy in performance, sometimes quite significant, and centres should be aware of this and have measures in place to ensure the authenticity of the candidate's work.

That being said, there are many talented, motivated and enthusiastic learners studying Advanced Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies, and nothing should be allowed to detract from their outstanding performance in both the question paper and in the dissertation.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	212
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	172
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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	35.5%	35.5%	61	70
B	15.7%	51.2%	27	59
C	20.9%	72.1%	36	49
D	9.3%	81.4%	16	44
No award	18.6%	-	32	-

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.