



Course Report 2017

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

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper

Performance in the question paper was slightly better than in 2016. The paper was well received, although a range of questions posed some difficulty to many candidates. Some of the 10-mark World Religion and 10-mark Morality and Belief questions were answered very poorly with many candidates misunderstanding what the question was asking of them. Markers felt that the analysis questions were still performing better than the evaluation questions, although evaluation was slightly improved from last year.

The 20-mark question in the Religious and Philosophical questions section was done much better than last year with candidates writing a plethora of content in each section. However, evaluation is still the main concern in this section — many candidates are still unable to evaluate correctly.

The 10-mark questions are still marked as a breakdown of 6 marks for knowledge and understanding and 4 marks for the application of the relevant skill. Where the candidate makes no attempt to apply either analysis or evaluation skills, the marks are capped at 4 out of 10.

The 20-mark questions are still marked as 10 marks for knowledge and understanding, 5 marks for analysis and 5 marks for evaluation.

Markers reflected on the questions and reported that they felt they were fair questions, and no correspondence was received in relation to the content, difficulty or validity of the question paper.

There are still some candidates who are being presented at Higher level who should not be. This is evident where they make little or no attempt to answer any of the questions.

It was agreed at the awarding meeting that due to the nature of the questions posed in both the World Religion and Morality and Belief sections, the grade boundaries would be lowered by 1 mark.

Component 2: assignment

The assignment performance was slightly improved from 2016. The problems with the assignment remain the same as in previous years. Some candidates are still disadvantaging themselves with their choice of topic or question. A closed or descriptive question leaves very little room for any form of debate.

Where the topic or the question is obscure, candidates struggle to present a line of argument and more often than not, struggle to write relevant knowledge and understanding points. Many candidates continue to use questions or topics from other curricular areas (such as

Modern Studies) and put themselves at a disadvantage as the line of argument can be one-sided and often lacks moral or religious content, which is where marks are often credited for the skills section. Assignments based on topics taught within the course tended to score higher marks.

Many candidates are still unable to demonstrate the necessary evaluation skills, which is a core element of this component. There are too many instances where evaluation is either lacking in detail or it is not present at all throughout the narrative. Many candidates are simply summing up their arguments at the end of their assignments but failing to offer or pass any form of judgement or evaluative comment on their argument.

The Resource Sheet is being used as a guide for the write-up, and centres are to be commended for ensuring that the word limit remains at 250. There were very few instances where the word count on the Resource Sheet exceeded the 250-word limit.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

There is one question paper, and candidates have to answer a total of five questions — two questions from their chosen World Religion, two questions from their chosen Morality and Belief section, and one question from their chosen Religious and Philosophical Questions section. Markers noted that candidates are demonstrating an abundance of knowledge and understanding throughout all questions, and in particular in the Religious and Philosophical Questions section. Analysis remains the stronger skill, as it was last year.

The questions that performed well were: Q19, Q20, Q23, Q24, Q25 & Q26.

Religious and Philosophical Questions section markers reported that they had seen an increase in performance from last year. The questions were very open and allowed candidates to demonstrate a wealth of knowledge and understanding, and allowed for detailed and accurate analysis of the debate. Evaluation was present, and there are many centres that have mastered the art of teaching evaluative language and applying judgement correctly, resulting in higher marks in this skill this year. However, overall this still remains the weakest element of essay writing.

Of all the Morality and Belief sections, questions 19 & 20, Religion and Medicine, were completed to the highest standard. This was due mainly to the fact that both questions directed candidates to one specific area of content in each case, while there appeared to be greater ambiguity in the other Morality and Belief sections.

Component 2: assignment

The RMPS assignment is written up under controlled conditions over one and a half hours using a Resource Sheet which carries a word limit of 250. The Resource Sheet was used well this year, with many candidates using it as a plan for their assignment alongside quotes and sources.

There were very few cases of resource sheets being over the 250-word limit.

The marking of the assignment remained the same as previous years and is done using a holistic approach and a marking grid. The breakdown of the marks remains the same: 12 marks for knowledge and understanding, 10 marks for analytical skills, and 8 marks for evaluative skills.

There was a slight improvement in performance from last year. The average mark for the assignment was 18/30.

Feedback from markers indicated that candidates performed better when:

- ◆ The question focused on a Moral Issue or an area from Religious and Philosophical Questions.
- ◆ The question led the candidate to produce a line of argument, eg To what extent...
- ◆ The structure was clear and maintained throughout.
- ◆ Candidates used a variety of sources, which were analysed in relation to their question, and/or used to support evaluative statements.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Feedback from markers and from general conversations surrounding the paper indicated that the questions appeared to be fair, straightforward and accessible for candidates. However, it wasn't until the initial marking stages that markers were able to see that candidates were struggling with particular questions. Questions 1 – 12 of the World Religion Section proved challenging, partly due to candidates failing to differentiate between beliefs and practices. The number of candidates doing Hinduism and Sikhism remains low, so it is difficult to reflect on whether these questions were as demanding as those for candidates who do Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

In the Morality and Belief section, Questions 13 – 18 and 21 & 22, some candidates experienced difficulty in breaking down the question and providing a relevant response. There did not appear to be issues with the candidates' knowledge and understanding in these sections, but rather their ability to understand what the question was asking of them. This could be avoided with greater emphasis on the teaching of exam techniques.

In the Religious and Philosophical Questions section, candidates again demonstrated clear knowledge and understanding and good analytical skills, but failed to evaluate adequately. Again, this skill requires greater focus in teaching.

Component 2: assignment

Candidates did not appear to struggle with the conditions of the assignment. The majority of assignments were complete, and resource sheets were included and in line with assessment conditions.

The area where candidates continue to struggle is in selecting an appropriate question, issue or topic. Those candidates who opted to focus on an issue or topic outwith their RMPS course content struggled to ensure that there was adequate focus on religious, moral or philosophical content. They also struggled to maintain a line of argument that allowed for adequate analysis and evaluation. Candidates are also struggling to provide enough content or sources when looking outwith the course for their topic. Many candidates still appear to be submitting a shared assignment for both RMPS and another Social Subject/English folio, without paying particular attention to the standards for the RMPS assignment task.

In terms of structure, many candidates are providing an appropriate question/issue which they introduce well and conclude at the end, but they fail to maintain a line of argument throughout. Instead, candidates include a lot of information that is not necessarily relevant to their topic/issue.

Evaluation continues to be the weakest element of the assignment. This is either attempted in the form of mini-conclusions with no real substance/reasons/justifications, or is included in the final paragraph as a sum-up of arguments already discussed. Teachers should be aware that the skill of evaluation must be taught, and that candidates must be provided with reasonable support to ensure that they are including evaluation in their assignment.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

- ◆ Centres must ensure that they are using the most up-to-date Course Assessment Specification.
- ◆ Centres must ensure that they are explicitly teaching analysis and evaluation skills, including appropriate skills phrases.
- ◆ Exam technique must be addressed, ie format of question paper, 6K/4S or 10K/5A/5E split, practise timed papers, breaking down the question and structuring/planning answers.
- ◆ Candidates must ensure that they are providing appropriate knowledge points (6 marks) before introducing the skill (4 marks) – candidates should be aware that failure to do so will result in marks being capped at 4. Likewise, where candidates fail to attempt to include skills, marks will be capped at 6.

Component 2: assignment

- ◆ Centres must provide **reasonable assistance** to candidates in terms of the topic or issue being selected. Candidates should be discouraged from selecting inappropriate questions or issues by requesting that they provide a minimum of five sources relating to their topic/issue before embarking on the research stage.
- ◆ Candidates should be discouraged from using the same question/issue for different Social Subjects assignments, and be provided with **reasonable assistance** in their choice of question/issue.
- ◆ Candidates should be provided with **reasonable assistance** in the form of Appendix 1 of the Course Assessment Task, Instructions for Candidates, and this should be referred to during interim progress meetings.
- ◆ Centres must ensure that candidates are confident in applying the skills of analysis and evaluation before embarking on their assignment.
- ◆ Centres should note that a Higher assignment does not necessarily meet the criteria for a National 5 assignment. Where a candidate moves from Higher to National 5, significant work will need to be done to ensure that their assignment meets the standards for National 5, including the Resource Sheet and write-up. Similarly, a candidate moving from National 5 to Higher will have to carry out a significant amount of work on their National 5 assignment if it is to be submitted at Higher level.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to utilise their Resource Sheet properly and to its full word limit, including paragraph plans and sources/quotations.

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	4383
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	3782
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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	25.8%	25.8%	976	61
B	22.4%	48.3%	849	52
C	22.0%	70.3%	833	43
D	10.3%	80.6%	391	38
No award	19.4%	-	733	-

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.