



## Course Report 2017

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| Subject | Religious Moral and Philosophical Studies |
| 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

## Summary of the course assessment

### Component 1: question paper

The question paper performed very well this year. Questions were sufficiently demanding to differentiate for grading purposes, while allowing all of the marks to be accessed. No concerns were raised formally, and informal feedback from both candidates and teachers was positive. The exam was felt to be fair, and to have a level of demand that was appropriate for SCQF Level 5. This impression was confirmed when we were able to set grade boundaries at the notional levels for the second consecutive year.

Most candidates attempted all the questions for their chosen options, and most were able to understand and complete the questions in the time available. There has been a decrease in the number of candidates attempting the whole paper, and this year we also had significantly fewer candidates confusing the Origins and Existence of God Sections.

The World Religions section produced the highest marks, while the Religious and Philosophical Questions section proved the most challenging. This was in part because of the move in the final section to three questions with marks allocations of 6, 6, and 8. The reduction in the number of questions in this section was necessitated by changes to expression of the mandatory content, but the subsequent revision of the Course Specification means that the Religious and Philosophical Questions section in 2018 will again closely mirror the others. Performance in the Morality and Belief section was very similar across the five options, showing a good level of parity.

Questions performed largely as intended, and where difficulties were encountered this was felt to be a result of misreading or not properly answering a question, rather than a problem with the prompt. The 8-mark question in the Morality and Belief section proved problematic — a number of candidates made little or no attempt to give a supported view. Instead, many simply presented Knowledge and Understanding of some views they had studied, and so didn't manage to answer the question. Sections 2 and 3 of this report include advice on reasons for this approach, and how to assist candidates in preparing to tackle this sort of question successfully in future papers.

There was an unforeseen ambiguity in the Relationships section (question 26, 8 marks). 'Different gender roles' was interpreted in different ways, with some writing about differences between the past and present, and some about distinct gender roles in the modern context. Either is a reasonable reading of the question, so both approaches were given full credit.

Origins (question 41, 8 marks) had the stimulus, 'Life' was created on purpose.' Some candidates homed in on the word 'purpose' and wrote about what the purpose of life or the universe might be, although this was not what the question was asking about. At time of writing it was felt that simply saying, 'Life was created,' would be problematic because in scientific discourse the scientific theories are often described as ways of explaining the 'creation' of the universe and life, without meaning to imply any kind of supernatural agency. For this reason, it was felt that the question should give a clear steer to the idea that life was

**meant** to be here. Having reviewed the question and responses it was felt that the issue was with the reading rather than the wording of the stimulus.

As in past diets, a number of markers felt they had encountered scripts written by candidates who should not have been entered at National 5 level. Assignment markers noted a similar trend.

## **Component 2: assignment**

The assignment task is unchanged, and it performed as expected, based on experience in the last three diets. Minor adjustments to the marking instructions were intended only to make it easier for markers to judge the evidence, and did not have any impact on the task, or the standards required. Marking criteria will continue to be refined considering feedback from teachers and markers to ensure consistency and accuracy in the application of the National Standard.

The assignment task prescribes six standards in total, but there is an open choice for the title of the report, and the issue identified for study. This means that the performance of the assignment element depends on a combination of these prescribed standards, **and** the issues proposed by candidates.

Standards A (comment on impact and significance) and E&F (presentation of a reasoned conclusion) have continued to achieve the highest marks, with A scoring especially well for those exploring moral questions. This means that A is not a differentiating element, and it presents more of a challenge to those looking at religious or philosophical questions. This element will be reviewed with a view to ensuring greater parity for those candidates opting for a religious or philosophical issue.

Standards B–D are assessed together, and relate to the gathering, application, analysis and explanation of information relevant to the issue. As this part requires application of more higher-order skills, it differentiates effectively. As in past diets, there was a wide range in marks achieved for this section, with a number of candidates achieving all of the available marks. Variation in the quality of work for this part was mainly due to the candidates' ability to demonstrate use of a good range of appropriate sources, the relevance of the information presented, and the quality of the explanations/analysis presented. The best reports consistently applied information in this section directly to the issue identified in the title.

Identification of an appropriate issue for study continues to be the most important factor in producing a successful assignment report. Many candidates proposed titles which enabled them to produce good or excellent reports on a range of controversial religious, moral or philosophical issues, with some achieving full marks. The majority of candidates continue to opt to study a moral question, with many looking at issues from the areas of Medicine, Justice and Conflict.

Where the task didn't function as we would have expected, it was often because of inappropriate titles that were not suitable for demonstrating achievement of the standards. This year we noticed a continuing trend in using exam questions as titles, and more often than not, this disadvantaged candidates. Exam questions are devised to prompt focused demonstration of specific knowledge or skills, and don't invite the range required by the

assignment task. For example, a question intended only to elicit analysis doesn't invite a conclusion, and this can cause problems for candidates in the write-up. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that candidates should avoid using exam questions and instead express their title in straightforward terms as a question, taking care to make the issue they are investigating clear.

It was also noted that a number of candidates were writing different titles on the Flyleaf and the report. It is important that these are the same so that candidate and marker are clear about the issue being explored.

Single word titles are not suitable because they express a topic rather than an issue, and usually lead to a report that is mainly descriptive, or more appropriate for Modern Studies or Sociology. They also tend to lack a sense of progress towards a conclusion.

There was more evidence this year of over-direction in a few cases, with groups of candidates producing reports with identical structure, content, analysis and evaluation points, and sources. The reliability of the assignment element for *all* candidates depends on rigorous application of the conditions for this element at centre level, including limits on the amount of teacher support, the requirement to tackle the write-up in one sitting, and with access to the resource sheet only.

At National 5 there is an expectation that a pack of assignments will contain a range of titles, with a variety of styles, reflecting the variety of candidates tackling the piece. These should provide good evidence of the candidates' ability to propose an issue, and research and report on it independently. While it is absolutely appropriate for teachers to monitor the progress of their learners and to offer guidance and advice, including suitability of a title or how to structure a report well, it is contrary to the conditions for the task for centres to set issues or to tell candidates what to write.

As in 2016, a significant minority of candidates scored very low marks. Reasons for this varied. In some cases the candidates did not seem to be familiar enough with the specific requirements of the RMPS task so, although they may have produced some good work, they didn't do enough to meet the prescribed standards. It was clear also that some were out of their depth and that they had been entered inappropriately for National 5 level and/or had little or no support. There is ongoing concern about large cohorts being entered for National 5 as part of Core Religious Education where they do not have sufficient class time to cover the course properly, with some ill-prepared for the assignment task, or not positively engaged with the work.

## **Section 2: Comments on candidate performance**

### **Areas in which candidates performed well**

#### **Component 1: question paper**

There was a wide range in performance in the question paper this year, with candidates performing especially well in the World Religions section, notably Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Candidates showed an excellent level of specialist knowledge in these areas, were able to apply sources effectively, and to explain links between beliefs and practices.

#### **Questions 1, 4, 7, 10, 13 & 16 (4 marks)**

Most candidates scored high marks for this question about human beings. The question was intended to be very open and to ease candidates into the exam. Because it was not limited to human nature, candidates were able to accumulate marks for writing about how human beings should live as well as what they are like. Arguably, the open nature of the prompt made this question a bit too straightforward, and as a result it didn't differentiate particularly well.

#### **Questions 3, 6, 9, 12, 15 & 18 (8 marks)**

Candidates performed particularly well in this question. The use of two talking heads to suggest an area of debate proved to be an effective stimulus, with most candidates offering an evaluation of both points of view as a route to giving their own view. Candidates seem to express a judgement more naturally in response to a hypothetical conversation, so the use of images like these is likely to continue to feature in National 5 exams. It was good to see that candidates had developed an ability to reflect thoughtfully on the impact of religious life on followers in the modern world — a key aim of the National 5 course.

In Morality and Belief, many candidates applied Utilitarianism effectively to their chosen moral area, with most showing a good awareness of its role as a consequentialist approach, which has the potential to offer different answers in different circumstances. Many also wrote well about the distinct approaches of Act and Rule Utilitarianism.

This year it was pleasing to note less confusion between the cosmological and teleological arguments in the Existence of God section, and the Origins of the Universe and life in Origins.

#### **Component 2: assignment**

As in past diets, candidates who started with a good title which was clearly an issue drawn from the areas of Religion, Morality or Philosophy, gave themselves an easier job, and did best in the assignment. Their titles were typically in the form of questions that had the potential to prompt a range of responses or viewpoints. This gave them lots to write about and to analyse, eg by comparing and contrasting points of view. It is not a requirement for

candidates to consider contrasting views, but doing so certainly helps with analysis and reaching conclusions, so 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.

Good reports were thoughtfully structured, and had a good balance of depth, detail and breadth. They also tended to be discursive rather than persuasive in style. Many candidates analysed and concluded on viewpoints as they went. This helped them to avoid producing a report that was overly descriptive or that failed to get properly into the issue, as well as allowing them to accumulate marks for conclusions in the course of the report. There was some very good analysis and explanation, and although not required by the task, evaluative points were often used skilfully to contribute to the journey towards a conclusion. In moral questions, the best candidates managed to stick to the moral dimension, and avoid getting side-tracked into more sociological aspects of their questions.

Candidates continue to score particularly well in part A, which requires them to explain the significance and/or impact of their chosen issue. While all the standards can be achieved in relation to a religious, moral or philosophical question, it remains the case that candidates studying a moral question tend to 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.

Case studies also provide 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.

A number of candidates this year evidenced their use of sources very effectively, for example, after reporting a viewpoint or argument they wrote, eg 'I found this information in ...' and then gave a web address or a reference to a book they had used. This is a straightforward way for the candidates to show that they have consulted a range of sources of information, and draws it clearly to the attention of the marker.

There were some superbly well-expressed conclusions, which were supported with thoughtful evidence and argument. Some candidates opted to offer mini-conclusions on the views and arguments they were exploring as they went. This proved a useful strategy, with most of their concluding marks already achieved before they offered their final conclusion.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Component 1: question paper**

Where candidates had difficulty with specific questions, this tended to be because they lacked confidence with the content, or because they didn't manage to focus the response on the requirements of the question.

### **Questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 14 & 17 (5 marks)**

Some candidates found it difficult to explain the **connection** between two beliefs, and simply defined the given beliefs. This question was therefore a good differentiator across options, with able candidates more likely to make the connection clear.

### **Questions 5, 11 and 14**

‘Judgement’ in questions on the Middle Eastern traditions caused difficulties for some candidates, with a number unsure about what the term meant. The concept is taken directly from the mandatory content, so it is appropriate to use it in the exam. To avoid similar issues in future, candidates need to be clear about what is meant by all the prescribed terms, as well as how they relate to each other.

### **Question 6 (a) and (b)**

Knowledge and Understanding about the gospels was felt to be rather thin, with many candidates writing about the Ten Commandments or general Christian principles, rather than showing specific knowledge about the teachings and example of Jesus, found in the gospels.

### **Question 12 (a) and (b)**

A number of candidates wrote about Zakat as an aspect of Islamic worship that would cause hardship, but this is not a valid point. Many candidates showed a misunderstanding about how it is calculated. As it is 2.5% of **surplus** wealth, the alms tax is intended not to cause hardship, and only needs to be paid by those who can afford it.

### **Morality & Belief — questions 22, 26, 30, 34 and 38 (8 marks)**

The approach taken by some candidates to these questions was problematic. The prompt asked them to give a judgement and support it with reasons, but it appeared many had been trained simply to describe some of the views they had studied, eg ‘Christians believe ...’, ‘Utilitarians believe...’, ‘Muslims believe...’ with no attempt on the part of the candidate to apply the arguments they presented or to offer any kind of conclusion. This meant they sometimes didn’t manage to demonstrate skills at all. This problem was noted mainly in the Morality section. Candidates seemed much more comfortable with presenting a reasoned judgement in the other sections.

### **Component 2: assignment**

Candidates set their own question, and some made things difficult for themselves if they opted for a title that was not truly a Religious, Moral or Philosophical issue, or where they had difficulty accessing information or viewpoints. It’s a good idea to ask them to make sure they have identified appropriate sources of information before embarking on the research stage, and where this proves too hard, it would be wise to steer them towards looking at a different question.

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 report or to arise naturally as candidates explore responses to the question. It is however possible to score well for this standard when looking at a religious or philosophical question, eg by looking at implications of different possible answers, and thinking about how the question links to and impacts on others.

A few candidates struggled to complete the report 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. Some also concluded by summarising viewpoints already presented, but didn't offer a judgement on the issue, which is required for the marks.

There is a continuing issue with candidates' ability to include clear evidence of use of a range of sources. Quoting a thinker or reporting a viewpoint is credited as Knowledge and Understanding and can be used effectively to make analytical points, and to support conclusions, but it can't be credited as evidence of use of a source of information if that source isn't clearly identified. This is because candidates could potentially write about lots of views and arguments, and offer a range of quotations using just one source. Markers are therefore only able to credit use of sources where they are clearly identified by the candidate in the body of the report. To support markers in assessing this requirement, the marking criteria in future will specify the need for evidence of use of a range of 'sources of information.' (Information will include viewpoints and relevant quotations).

Candidates who were relying on class notes tended to lose marks for this element. Regurgitation of notes does not serve as good evidence of a candidate's ability to research and report on an issue by themselves, nor is it particularly good evidence of use of sources. This constitutes the work of the teacher who created them, and selected the information to include. Some candidates also seem to have been under the impression that marks would be awarded for including sources on the resource sheet. It is important to remind candidates that the resource sheet is not marked, so they need to include their evidence clearly in the body of the report.

As in 2014–16, many candidates who scored well for A (Impact and Significance) and E/F (conclusion), struggled to gain many marks for gathering accurate, detailed information and using it to explain and analyse the issue. Consistent application of relevant information and argument is required for a high mark for this part.

Some candidates appear to have believed that a religious viewpoint is a requirement, and as a result a number of reports included thin, or poorly applied religious views that didn't quite fit the question. In considering which viewpoints to include, candidates should be most concerned to select examples that are clearly related to their issue. These can be the views of individuals, organisations, religions or philosophical schools. The most important thing is that they are saying something relevant and useful about the issue the candidate has set in the title.

**E&F (presentation of reasoned conclusions):** a few candidates didn't do themselves justice in this part because they ran out of time and, given that 30% of the total marks



available for the assignment are for concluding, this can impact significantly on the overall mark. It would be helpful if teachers could draw candidates' attention to the fact that markers will be looking to award marks for conclusions offered at any stage in the report, not just at the end. The key consideration should be that it contributes to an overall judgement about the issue they set for themselves. Simply offering a summary of views presented is not adequate — the conclusion needs to be on the **issue**, so candidates should aim to reach some kind of judgement (even if it is that they are unsure) and support it with clear reasons, arguments or evidence.

## **Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: question paper**

Centres should take time to familiarise themselves with the recently published Course Specification 2017–18 which outlines mandatory content for the revised National 5 RMPS course. Changes to expression of content are unlikely to impact significantly on what is taught in centres, but the provision of increased detail gives scope for a wider range of exam questions. The revised Specimen Question Paper and Marking Instructions will provide additional helpful guidance on what to expect from the new exam.

The 2018 exam will have an increased number of marks, and candidates will have more time to tackle questions. However, it will have a very similar feel to the current exam. Questions will range from 3–8 marks, with a continuing focus on application and demonstration of skills. As with the current model, candidates will not be required to distinguish 'types' of question. Instead they should simply take care to respond to the prompt given, and any reasonable response will be given credit. The three sections will continue to each contribute approximately one third of the total marks available for the question paper. It would be useful for centres to revisit their own assessment items to ensure that they fit with the revised arrangements.

In the World Religion section, content is no longer organised under the headings 'Belief' and 'Practice'. This is a helpful change, as some concepts are difficult to categorise, for example, the Dhamma in Buddhism can legitimately be written about as either. In future exams we will continue to ask about belief and practice, but content in relation to these will not be prescribed. The intention will be to allow candidates to reflect on and apply what they have learned about how religious followers understand the world, and what they do as a result, and any reasonable response to a question will be awarded marks. Candidates should be advised simply to read the question carefully and aim to answer it clearly. Centres should expect to continue to see the use of the singular, generic terms 'belief' and 'practice', as these enable candidates to choose to focus on one aspect of belief or practice (showing depth), **or** more than one (demonstrating breadth).

From August 2017, Utilitarianism and Religious Authority are no longer prescribed as moral perspectives. This means that candidates will not be asked to write about them as approaches, or to apply them specifically in future exams — however, candidates are still welcome to apply these in responses. In both the moral and philosophical issues sections,

candidates should study both religious and non-religious perspectives, and these should be selected because they give plenty of scope for discussion of key issues and development of relevant knowledge and skills.

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

Eight-mark questions will continue to feature in the National 5 exam. These are designed to allow candidates to demonstrate skills of analysis and evaluation by applying the knowledge they have gained in the course. Some of these questions will take the form of a stimulus followed by the instruction 'Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer'. It is important that candidates go beyond simply reporting a variety of views they have studied, as this only demonstrates Knowledge and Understanding. For example, an answer stating, 'Christians believe ... Utilitarians believe ... and Buddhists believe ...' fails to answer the question because it asked for a judgement. Candidates are therefore advised to tackle this sort of question by taking a position (which can be to agree, disagree, or be unsure). They should then build a case for this view. It's fine to adopt and apply some of the 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 this.

Writers will continue to make use of, eg 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 be aiming to show depth in their answer. Marks won't be awarded for ranging further in their answer.

With the removal of mandatory unit assessment at National 5 in session 2017–18, centres should think about how best to assess the suitability of candidates for National 5. A robust prelim exam that closely mirrors the final question paper remains a really useful means of assessing a candidate's ability to cope with the demands of the external assessment, and this can provide very useful evidence in the event of having to make an Exceptional Circumstances request. Where candidates are falling far short of the National 5 standard it is not appropriate or fair to enter them for the exam. Similarly, National 5 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.

## **Component 2: assignment**

Changes to the assignment task for 2017–18 are minor, and are intended to remove any duplication and to clarify existing requirements. Centres are advised to take time to revisit the task, and especially to familiarise themselves with the Marking Grid which is used by markers to assess the assignment. Centres should continue to share this with candidates, and to advise them to refer to it as they research and prepare to write their reports. The Standards and marks allocations are unchanged, but the assignment in 2018 will contribute 20% to the total mark (currently 25%).

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

While there is still a requirement for at least one viewpoint (though 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. There is no need to shoehorn a religious viewpoint into the report if it is not appropriate or helpful.

Centres should 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. Titles which ask questions which would not be seen as controversial tend to produce poorer reports because it is difficult for candidates to gain marks for skills of analysis and concluding.

Special care should be taken to avoid one-word titles, and questions that belong more to areas like psychology or sociology. Reworking a Modern Studies or History report is not recommended. Although good candidates can do so successfully, these reports often fail to meet the required standards.

It is helpful to ask whether the title is asking whether something is **true** (religiously or philosophically), or **morally acceptable**. If it is something which could be definitively answered by looking at hard data, it is unlikely to be appropriate. At the outset, cross-check the six standards and Marking Instructions against the proposed title to ensure that it will enable candidates to have a reasonable chance of accessing all the available marks.

Good reports also tend to be discursive in nature rather than persuasive, so candidates should be advised 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.

As centres become more confident with the task, it would be good to see more candidates ranging beyond areas prescribed in the course content. This helps them to undertake a genuinely personal piece of research, which is more fulfilling for them and which enables them to build and show off their knowledge and skills effectively. 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 reliability 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 flagged up as malpractice.

Candidates should be advised on how to use the resource sheet effectively. This year some made very good 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 is counted as one item.

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 Sue Pound's book, *Philosophical Issues*, I found out ...' or 'the British Humanist 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 in relation to this aspect are less likely to arise in the course of the report, 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.

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

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|------------------------------------|------|
| Number of resulted entries in 2016 | 2521 |
|------------------------------------|------|

|                                    |      |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Number of resulted entries in 2017 | 2624 |
|------------------------------------|------|

### 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                             | 31.1% | 31.1%  | 816                  | 56          |
| B                             | 18.2% | 49.3%  | 478                  | 48          |
| C                             | 18.4% | 67.7%  | 483                  | 40          |
| D                             | 8.0%  | 75.7%  | 210                  | 36          |
| No award                      | 24.3% | -      | 637                  | -           |

## 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.