



Course report 2019

Subject	Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies
Level	Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. 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

Question paper

The intent for the 2019 question paper was to continue to ensure parity across all sections to allow for a fair paper for all candidates. The paper was well received by candidates, centres and markers. The marking team noted that the questions were straightforward and accessible for all candidates.

The average mark for paper 1 was 32.8/60 and the average mark for paper 2 was 12.3/20.

As the grade boundary was set at notional, the A-C pass rate was slightly down from 2018. However, it is pleasing that the overall performance was in line with previous years.

Assignment

The assignment performance remained similar to last year. The breakdown of skills was as follows:

Knowledge and understanding	7.48/10
Analysis	6.33/10
Evaluation	4.82/10

Overall candidate performance remained stable but we take this opportunity to stress the importance of teaching candidates analytical and evaluative skills on a regular basis as an integrated part of learning and teaching. The introduction of the 20-mark essays in both world religion and morality allow more opportunities for centres to teach essay-writing skills and develop candidates' skills in these areas.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

It is clear that a number of centres are teaching essay structure as an integral part of their learning and teaching approaches. In both the 10-mark and 20-mark questions, structure is essential to enable candidates to access as many marks as possible. Candidates who had been taught using the layout and bullet points in each section of the course specification performed very well.

Although many candidates demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding (KU) of their taught sections, there were instances where candidates' responses were not relevant to the given question.

Paper 1 was challenging due to the extended 20-mark questions. However, many candidates answer these questions well, giving relevant KU while trying to analyse and evaluate their argument throughout.

Candidates should be commended for using quotations in their responses throughout both sections. However, centres should note that from 2019–2020 candidates will only receive marks for quotations that are specifically attributed to a person, perspective or text. For example, each of the following would be awarded a KU mark as each refers to the source of the quotation.

- ◆ Jews would use the teaching from the **Torah**, 'Thou shall not murder.'
- ◆ Jews would refer to one of the **10 commandments**, 'Thou shall not murder.'
- ◆ Jews would look at **Exodus** where it states, 'Thou shall not murder.'
- ◆ **Pope Francis** said, 'Abortion isn't a lesser evil, it's a crime.'

The following are examples of what will no longer be credited:

- ◆ Jews would say, 'Thou shall not murder.'
- ◆ Jews believe in the teaching, 'Thou shall not murder.'
- ◆ Religious people follow the teaching, 'Thou shall not murder.'
- ◆ A quote that backs this up is, 'Abortion isn't a lesser evil, it's a crime.'

Candidates performed well in paper 2. The origins section remained by far the most popular topic taught by centres and gives an accurate picture of how well centres prepare their candidates for this section. Candidates continued to display a wealth of KU of the topic, but did not necessarily present knowledge that was relevant to the question.

Assignment

Candidates continued to use the resource sheet well with many 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. As in previous years, the assignment was marked holistically

using a marking grid. The grid was amended to make it more accessible to candidates, centres and markers. Markers reported seeing less obscure questions from candidates than previous years, which helped candidates to access evaluation marks.

The breakdown of marks changed for the assignment as follows:

- ◆ 10 marks for knowledge and understanding
- ◆ 10 marks for analytical skills
- ◆ 10 marks for evaluative skills

There was no change to the average mark from last year.

Candidates seem to perform better when:

- ◆ the question they chose focused on a moral issue or an area from religious and philosophical questions
- ◆ the question they chose allowed them to produce a line of argument, for example 'To what extent...'
- ◆ they used a clear structure that was maintained throughout
- ◆ they used a variety of sources that could be analysed in relation to their question, and/or used to support evaluative statements

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Paper 1 – world religion; morality and belief

Performance varied within world religion, and within morality and belief.

The following comments relate to the world religion section of paper 1.

Buddhism

Many candidates did not respond to the question about the Five Precepts, perhaps indicating that they did not understand this concept. Many of those who attempted the question struggled to explain the purpose of the Five Precepts, showing they were uncomfortable with the question stem. They were unable to remain focused on the question and instead included irrelevant Buddhist content. A number of candidates struggled to correctly identify the Three Marks of Existence. They approached the question by making a brief statement about the Three Marks of Existence, then discussed a Buddhist belief they felt more comfortable with. In order to positively mark candidate responses, it was agreed at standardisation to award KU marks where candidates correctly described each of the Three Marks of Existence, for example 'anicca means impermanence'.

Christianity

A number of candidates misunderstood question 3 — 'Analyse the purpose of practising Christian action' — and focused on Christian practices such as worship, prayer, confession, Eucharist and Baptism rather than on social action. Of these practices, worship and prayer may have been relevant, but candidates mainly discussed them as individual practices and did not relate them to the question. Candidates appeared to read the question as 'Analyse

Christian practice' and so the average marks were 3 or 4 out of 10. Candidates answered question 4 significantly better than question 3, although evaluation skills continued to be weak. In order to positively mark candidate responses, it was agreed at standardisation to award KU marks where candidates correctly described beliefs about God, for example 'omnipotence means all-powerful'.

Islam

Candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the practice of submission, often within the context of the Five Pillars. However, many candidates struggled to analyse the purpose of submission beyond one or two identified purposes such as favourable judgement and afterlife. For question 8, most candidates could identify and discuss a number of beliefs about God, and could analyse to an extent. However, many candidates struggled to evaluate the significance of the beliefs identified. In order to positively mark candidate responses, it was agreed at standardisation to award KU marks where candidates correctly described beliefs about God, for example 'omnipotence means all-powerful'.

Judaism

Surprisingly, many candidates did not attempt the question on Rosh Hashanah. Of those who did, many struggled to accurately describe and explain Rosh Hashanah and concentrated on the 'days of awe' rather than the meaning and purpose of observing Rosh Hashanah. Candidates who attempted question 10 identified, explained and analysed many beliefs about God but did not evaluate the significance of the beliefs. In order to positively mark candidate responses, it was agreed at standardisation to award KU marks where candidates correctly described beliefs about God, for example 'omnipotence means all-powerful'.

Hinduism and Sikhism

Very few centres teach these topics. For both topics, candidates provided adequate KU in the 10-mark question but were limited in their attempts to analyse purpose. In the 20-mark question, responses again provided some detailed discussion on beliefs, but many candidates struggled to adequately analyse the significance of these beliefs.

The following comments relate to the morality and belief section of paper 1.

Morality and justice

Overall, candidates answered both questions well and did what they were asked to do. However, many candidates struggled to focus on custodial sentences and instead discussed fines and community service. Also, many candidates introduced non-religious viewpoints, although the question specifically asked for religious responses. No marks were awarded for discussion of non-custodial sentences or non-religious responses. In the 20-mark essay, many candidates focused on capital punishment rather than retribution as a purpose of punishment.

Morality and relationships

Candidates found the questions in this section very straightforward, and this was evident in their responses and the marks. Again, some candidates introduced non-religious viewpoints although the 10-mark question specifically asked for religious responses. In the 20-mark question some candidates confused forced marriage and arranged marriage and therefore lost a significant amount of marks due to irrelevant content.

Morality, environment and global issues

Candidates found the questions in this section very straightforward, and this was evident in their responses and the marks.

Morality, medicine and the human body

Candidates struggled to focus on consent in the 10-mark question, with many analysing religious responses to general issues associated with organ donation. As a result, candidates performed better in the 20-mark question. KU of uses of embryos was sound, with use of sources evident in many responses. Some candidates continued to struggle with analysis and evaluation skills, and their evaluation did not focus on the moral concerns of reproductive uses compared to the moral concerns of other uses. Candidates evaluated general ideas on the use of embryos rather than making a comparative value judgement as directed.

Morality and conflict

Candidates performed well in the 10-mark question, with a big improvement in KU and analysis. In the 20-mark question, candidates very often misidentified nuclear and other weapons as smart weapons. Candidates often did not provide KU points about the course-specific bullet point (smart weapons), instead going straight to analysis and evaluation.

Paper 2 – religious and philosophical questions

Markers continued to see a wealth of KU throughout the topics. Analysis was also evident across all topics, with evaluation continuing to be the weakest of the skills. Candidates continued to perform best in origins, and in suffering and evil.

There was very little difference in candidate performance from previous years. With 10 KU marks available in this section, candidates should go into the question paper with KU they have learned and should be able to score strong marks. However, while most of the responses contained a lot of KU, much of it was irrelevant and could not be credited, for example KU about the creation of the universe that was not tied into creation of life. The questions were deliberately broad to provide scope for candidates to engage in debate, but many were unable to demonstrate analytical or evaluation skills. We expected to see better results in this section as many candidates use their religious and philosophical questions topics for their assignment focus.

Assignment

Overall marks for the assignment remained similar to the previous year. Candidates continued to score highest in KU through using sources and relevant content on a topic they had selected and researched themselves.

Candidates continued to struggle with analysis and evaluation. Many candidates used analysis stems ('this means...'; 'this shows...') but followed up with learned KU. They also used evaluation stems ('this is strong because...'; 'this is weak because...') but did not follow up with an appropriate evaluation, instead simply paraphrasing the viewpoint they have just discussed. Many candidates were able to draw their assignments to a conclusion and make a judgement on their overall question/topic/issue, but many still were unable to deploy evaluative judgements or comments throughout their essay. Relevant, accurate and detailed evaluative comments should permeate the assignment to gain top marks.

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

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

World religion questions

Centres should:

- ◆ know, understand and limit content to the most recent course specification
- ◆ teach candidates using the language in the course specification, and not their own interpretation of concepts
- ◆ teach explicit essay-writing skills with an essential focus on question stems, how to address these and how to ensure candidates pick up available marks for SKU (10-mark questions = 6KU/4A; 20-marks questions = 10KU/5A/5E)
- ◆ teach under the beliefs and practices headings to avoid candidate confusion when responding to these questions
- ◆ be prepared to address the course-specific bullet point in the 20-mark question before going on to discuss other relevant content
- ◆ use the specimen and 2019 question paper to teach candidates how to break down what the question is asking them

Evaluation is not simply stating strengths and/or weaknesses — it must be a judgement in response to the question. Candidates performed well when they used the wording of the question in their evaluation.

Morality questions

Centres should:

- ◆ know, understand and limit content to the most recent course specification
- ◆ teach explicit essay-writing skills with an essential focus on question stems, how to address these and how to ensure candidates pick up available marks for SKU (10-mark questions = 6KU/4A; 20-marks questions = 10KU/5A/5E)
- ◆ teach under the headings and bullet points provided to avoid candidate confusion when responding to questions on either
- ◆ prepare candidates to write about religious and non-religious responses in the exam. This could be religious responses from a single world religion, or from more than one world religion; non-religious responses for a single non-religious perspective (for example Utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, humanism), or from more than one non-religious perspective
- ◆ be prepared to address the course-specific bullet point in the 20-mark question before going on to discuss other relevant content. Many candidates only briefly addressed this or did not address it at all, before answering their 'own' question.
- ◆ use the specimen and 2019 question paper to teach candidates how to break down what the question is asking them

Evaluation is not simply stating strengths and/or weaknesses – it must be a judgement in response to the question. Candidates do this best when they use the wording of the question in their evaluation.

Assignment

Centres should:

- ◆ provide reasonable guidance to candidates in terms of the topic or issue they select
- ◆ make candidates aware of the marking instructions, and the marks available in each skill section
- ◆ ensure candidates are aware of the importance of maintaining a clear focus on their chosen question throughout the assignment, and that they are confident in applying the skills of relevant analysis and supported evaluation before starting their assignment
- ◆ encourage candidates to use their resource sheet properly and to its full word limit, including paragraph plans and sources and/or quotations
- ◆ encourage candidates to have at least one source in each paragraph (quotation, specific reference to an organisation or thinker, statistic, case study). This will help them achieve more marks. For each source they should:
 - fully describe the source
 - analyse it (explain, link to other beliefs and/or perspectives)
 - evaluate it (pass judgement on its relative strengths weaknesses, validity or invalidity)

Centres must ensure that resource sheets, research sheets or processed information sheets are submitted for each candidate for the 2019-20 session. These sheets are not marked but must be submitted to SQA along with the candidate's assignment. A penalty of 20% of the candidate's overall mark for the assignment component will be applied in the case of non-submission. Further information can be found in the Coursework for External Assessment document and the course assessment task on the subject page of the SQA website.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	3658
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Number of resulted entries in 2019	3598
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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	28.8%	28.8%	1037	77
B	21.5%	50.3%	774	66
C	18.8%	69.1%	674	55
D	14.1%	83.2%	508	44
No award	16.8%	-	605	-

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 that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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 head of service and statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question 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 question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.