Course report 2025

Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies

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. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 3,492

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 3,647

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	1,039	28.5	28.5	77
B	732	20.1	48.6	66
C	731	20.0	68.6	55
D	549	15.1	83.7	44
No award	596	16.3	100	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ‘most’ means greater than or equal to 70%
- ‘many’ means 50% to 69%
- ‘some’ means 25% to 49%
- ‘a few’ means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the statistics and information page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question papers 1 and 2

Both question paper 1 and 2 performed as expected. The question papers were well-received, and markers did not report any issues.

Buddhism, Justice, and Origins consistently emerged as the most frequently selected optional topics, a factor taken into account when setting grade boundaries because of the high level of candidate participation. Where underperformance occurred, it was due to centres not providing clear structural guidance, particularly regarding adherence to the specified bullet points in the course specification.

A number of centres demonstrated excellent standards: all questions were clear, fully complied with the Higher RMPS course specification, and aligned with historical performance patterns. Furthermore, each question provided an appropriate level of challenge, ensuring fairness across the whole examination.

Assignment

In the assignment component of Higher RMPS, candidates performed strongly and met course expectations. Those candidates who practised with example exam questions and applied well-taught structures performed particularly well, showing the value of using classroom resources and established frameworks. While candidates across the cohort performed strongest in knowledge and understanding (KU) skills, candidates continued to struggle with analysis (A) and evaluation (E) skills. This highlights the crucial role of structured questioning in supporting strong performance within this component.

Questions must be deep enough to allow comprehensive research, rigorous analysis, and relevant evaluation. This means candidates should include diverse viewpoints, statistics, compelling arguments, and effective counter-arguments. However, their evaluation must stay precisely focused on the specific demands of the question. For instance, in response to a question structured as ‘To what extent

do you agree with…?', candidates must develop a coherent line of argument, systematically engaging with and assessing various perspectives and responses, to form a complete and well-supported answer that fully addresses their question.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question papers 1 and 2

Successful candidates (A- to C-level) showed a strong ability to interpret and produce well-argued, logically developed essays with clear, straightforward structures that demonstrated their understanding and met course demands. Previous course reports have stressed the importance of teaching candidates essay structure alongside prescribed course content, and the best-performing centres clearly prepared candidates for how to write an essays for both the 10- and 20-mark question in World Religion and Morality.

No section of question paper 1 performed noticeably better than other sections. Candidate achievement was instead strongly linked to the proactive engagement of centres. This includes thorough coverage of the full course specification, consistent and varied exam practice using past paper questions, and explicit instruction of how to write an effective essay using a clear structure.

While Buddhism and Justice remain the most popular sections, candidates also find them the most challenging. It would be misleading to suggest that other religions, such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, perform better; the evidence does not support this. As emphasised in previous reports, performance differences stem not from the accessibility of the religious content itself, but from how well centres deliver accurate and relevant course material aligned with the course specification.

Candidates' essays on the Existence of God, the Problem of Suffering and Evil, and Miracles demonstrated clearer structure. The content was concise, allowing candidates to demonstrate analysis and evaluation skills consistently throughout their essays and allowed them to access higher marks.

Candidate success depends on thorough preparation for specific question types and on equipping candidates with the analytical, evaluative and structural skills necessary to apply their content knowledge in well-argued, comprehensive responses for each question.

In question paper 2, a high number of centres continue to deliver the Origins section. Like the popular Buddhism and Justice sections, candidates consistently find this section challenging. In contrast, candidate performance is stronger in the sections on Existence of God, the Problem of Suffering, and Evil, and Miracles. This is not due to any inherent difference in content difficulty, but because knowledge and understanding in these sections are often presented in a more accessible and streamlined way. This simplified approach gives candidates a clearer and more accessible platform for more sophisticated analysis and evaluation, which in turn leads to higher candidate achievement.

Assignment

Centres are to be commended for the strong performance many candidates consistently demonstrated in their assignments. A key factor in this success was the clear and coherent structural approach applied, mirroring the demands of an exam-style essay. This demonstrates that centres put clear and effective processes in place, giving candidates a strong framework for their responses.

Centres benefit from using materials from our Understanding Standards website, as this ensures alignment with national expectations and assessment criteria.

Another key factor in successful outcomes was teachers or lecturers proactively seeking support from peers or directly from SQA, which strengthened their understanding of the assignment process and helped them refine the guidance they provided to candidates.

Examples of questions that consistently lead to successful outcomes for candidates:

- Evaluate religious (or non-religious) responses to moral issues arising from capital punishment/responses to crime/purposes of punishment.

- Evaluate religious (or non-religious) responses to moral issues arising from end of life.
- Evaluate religious (or non-religious) responses to moral issues arising from weapons of mass destruction.
- To what extent do you agree with religious (or non-religious) views on the origins of life (or the universe)?
- To what extent do you agree with religious (or non-religious) views on the existence of God?
- To what extent do you agree that God (or humans) is responsible for suffering and evil?

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1 and 2

A significant challenge across all sections of both question papers 1 and 2 was candidates' insufficient exposure to exam-style questions, especially those that differed from recent past papers. This lack of varied exposure made it more difficult for candidates to effectively deconstruct unseen question prompts and identify their specific demands.

Markers’ feedback highlighted two key issues: candidates often lacked understanding of the specific bullet point from the course specification addressed in the question, and many showed weakness in essay structure.

This was apparent in the Justice section, with the 20-mark question that focused on 'responses to crime'. Instead, many candidates wrote an essay about the purposes of punishment. While these concepts are related, candidates should have linked their discussion to a direct response to crime to achieve full marks. Candidates must be trained to quickly identify and address the specific demands of the question. For example, a question on 'responses to crime' requires direct focus on either a custodial or non-custodial sentence, or capital punishment — and this applies to all moral issues.

Candidates found the Origins section of question paper 2 challenging. They often included too much knowledge and understanding content in their essays, which, while thorough, sometimes made it difficult to focus on analysing specific areas within each topic. This affected candidates' ability to achieve full marks for analysis and evaluation.

Assignment

Candidates did not perform as well in assignments when they strayed from course content or failed to directly address the question. Their arguments often lacked coherence and focus because they did not apply a structured approach. Many candidates struggled to demonstrate strong analytical and evaluative skills, limiting their ability to achieve higher marks.

Examples of questions that lead to unsuccessful outcomes for candidates:

- Analyse and evaluate both religious and non-religious responses to moral issues arising from…
- Analyse non-religious and religious views on…
- Is abortion/capital punishment/euthanasia morally acceptable?
- Evaluate religious and non-religious responses to moral issues arising from…

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Centres are encouraged to thoroughly review course reports from 2022, 2023, and 2024 — in particular, the sections addressing structure, content, and alignment with the course specification — to understand what is necessary for their candidates to excel in Higher RMPS.

Question paper

To prepare candidates for future assessment, centres must do more than just replicate questions from 2024 or 2025 prelims and internal assessments. Centres should use the structure of past exam questions, but vary the bullet points or contexts that candidates are tested on. This approach will support candidates' adaptability and resilience, and ensure that they are prepared for the full range of potential questions, rather than narrowly focusing on previously-examined content.

Centres should use exam-style questions that closely align with the course specification to effectively prepare candidates for future exam questions.

While they demonstrate that topics are interconnected, candidates must also show evidence that they understand the distinct role of each individual bullet point.

Teachers and lecturers should instruct candidates to be concise and keep content to a minimum in all sections of question paper 2. Candidates should approach these responses as a structured debate, using factual content. To gain marks, candidates must use analysis and evaluation skills in line with the question, for example, 'I agree with this because…'.

Centres should analyse patterns across previous years' papers, collaborate through cross-marking and peer support, and seek direct guidance from SQA to provide candidates with the preparation needed for outstanding results.

Assignment

In order to fully prepare candidates for the assignment, the same advice applies from the 2024 course report:

- Centres should encourage candidates to select topics aligned with the course content, and ensure that they are familiar with the relevant material.
- Assignments based on exam-style questions tend to perform better, as these allow for a more structured response.
- It is important that teachers and lecturers teach candidates to develop a clear essay structure, including effective signposting of key issues, which helps maintain focus and ensures a coherent line of argument throughout.
- Centres should also emphasise the importance of balancing knowledge and skills development, guiding candidates to avoid overloading their essays with content while ensuring strong analytical and evaluative components are present.
- The effective use of the resource sheet should be encouraged to ensure candidates support their claims with additional sources. Candidates must clearly show their questions on either the resource sheet or their assignment paper.
- Centres can also suggest that candidates base their assignments on their 20-mark essay structure, while integrating a wider range of sources to strengthen their analysis and evaluation throughout.
- Looking at past assignments and exam questions will help candidates refine their approach and work with confidence and precision.
- Centres should ensure that assignment questions are clearly worded so candidates can confidently answer the question. Questions should be designed to encourage depth rather than complexity to give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to analyse and evaluate effectively. A well-framed question supports focused, structured responses and enables candidates to showcase the full range of their skills.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

Our main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and to maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, we aim to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, we hold a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of our Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. We can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy.