

Course report 2026

Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies, SCQF level 6

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they didn't perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 3,647

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 3,822

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	1,846	48.3	48.3	77
B	714	18.7	67.0	66
C	553	14.5	81.4	55
D	341	8.9	90.4	44
No award	368	9.6	100	Not applicable

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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](#).

How the course assessment performed

Question papers 1 and 2

The assessment performed better than anticipated, with a high proportion of candidates accessing the questions and demonstrating the required knowledge and skills. The questions provided appropriate opportunities for candidates to draw on content contained in the Higher Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) Course Specification, and all questions were valid and appropriately aligned with the published course requirements and guidance. Many candidates demonstrated very strong knowledge and understanding, selecting relevant and accurate course content and applying this appropriately to the questions asked. Stronger responses also demonstrated well-developed analysis, with candidates explaining the significance of points, making relevant connections and developing sustained lines of argument across their essays.

The structure of extended responses was well done. Many candidates approached essay questions using a clear and recognisable structure, which supported them in organising their knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation effectively. This represents a positive development, as candidates who demonstrated a secure understanding of how to structure an essay could sustain a relevant response and address the specific demands of the question. The explicit teaching of essay structure is an important element in preparing candidates for the demands of Higher RMPS.

Evaluation continues to be an area of greater challenge for some candidates. Although there was evidence that candidates understood where to incorporate evaluation in their responses, the quality and depth of evaluation varied considerably. In less successful responses, candidates asserted rather than justified evaluative comments, or they did not demonstrate the depth of reasoning required at Higher level. Stronger candidates could make supported judgements, consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of arguments by relating them back to the question, and use evidence to reach reasoned conclusions. Centres should continue to support candidates in understanding the distinction between making an evaluative statement and developing a substantiated evaluative judgement.

It is important to consider performance in the context of the relative uptake of the different optional areas of the course. In terms of uptake across the World Religion options, 'Buddhism' continues to have the largest entry, followed by 'Christianity'. As a result, overall patterns of candidate performance are influenced considerably by performance in these areas. Centres presenting candidates in these options should ensure that candidates have secure knowledge of the relevant course content and can apply this accurately within a clear and consistently taught essay structure. Continued emphasis on both the depth of required course content and the structure through which candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation will be important in supporting further improvement in these high-entry areas. It is encouraging to see increasing numbers of candidates being presented in 'Islam', 'Judaism' and 'Sikhism', broadening the range of World Religion options being undertaken across centres. 'Hinduism' continues to have a very small number of candidates, with only three centres presenting candidates in this area.

In terms of uptake across the Morality and Belief options, 'Morality and justice' continues to have an exceptionally high uptake and remains, by a considerable margin, the most presented option. No other area within Morality and Belief comes close to matching the number of centres presenting candidates for 'Morality and justice'. Numbers have remained steady across 'Morality and relationships', 'Morality, medicine and the human body' and 'Morality and conflict', although 'Morality, medicine and the human body' has experienced a slight increase in uptake over the last year. 'Morality, environment and global issues' continues to have a very small submission, with only one centre presenting candidates in this area. Given the substantial proportion of candidates undertaking 'Morality and justice', performance in this option has a considerable impact on the overall performance of the Morality and Belief section of Paper 1. When candidates are well prepared for the breadth and demands of the 'Morality and justice' course content, this can therefore have a significant positive impact on performance across the section.

The lower-entry areas of the course continue to perform well overall. Centres that present candidates within 'Islam', 'Judaism' and 'Sikhism', and within the 'Miracles', 'The existence of God' and 'The problem of suffering and evil' options, have demonstrated consistent success. Responses within these areas have, in general,

demonstrated a clear and consistently applied structure, with candidates showing confidence in selecting and applying relevant content directly from the course specification to the question being asked. There is clear evidence that candidates are well prepared in both the content required and the structure needed to demonstrate their knowledge and skills effectively. While the smaller number of candidates within these areas should be recognised when considering overall patterns of performance, the sustained quality of responses over successive years is encouraging and highlights the importance of ensuring that clear structure and secure knowledge of the course specification remain central to learning and teaching across all areas of the course.

You should provide candidates with regular opportunities to practise applying a clear and guided structure across different question types and course contexts. A secure structure provides candidates with an important framework through which they can demonstrate knowledge and understanding while developing the increasingly sophisticated analysis and evaluation required for success at Higher level.

Assignment

Overall, candidate performance in the Higher RMPS assignment continues to improve, with many candidates demonstrating increased confidence in meeting the demands of this component. A particularly positive feature has been the performance of candidates who have selected assignment topics that have a clear connection to areas of the Higher RMPS course content, or that reflect the style and demands of questions encountered in the question paper. This approach provides candidates with several benefits. Independent research enables candidates to broaden and deepen their knowledge and understanding of an area already relevant to their course of study, while the process of constructing, analysing and evaluating arguments provides valuable additional practice of the skills required in the question paper. Consequently, the assignment can support candidates not only in achieving well within this component, but also in developing the depth of knowledge, confidence and skills which may contribute positively to their performance in the related area of the question paper.

There are, however, exceptions to this general pattern. Some candidates can undertake highly successful assignments on topics that sit beyond the specific content of the Higher RMPS Course Specification. These candidates tend to demonstrate particularly strong literacy, research and critical-thinking skills and are often candidates performing at the upper end of the A grade range. They can manage the additional demands associated with researching unfamiliar or more specialised material while maintaining the required focus on analysis, evaluation and reasoned judgement. For most candidates, however, there is value in selecting an assignment topic that complements the content and skills being developed through the Higher course. Within the parameters of the published assignment guidance, we encourage you to support candidates in considering topics that allow them to deepen and extend their engagement with relevant course content. This can provide a coherent learning experience in which the assignment strengthens candidates' independent research skills while consolidating the knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation required for success across the course.

How candidates performed

Areas where candidates performed well

Question paper 1: World Religion

Candidates performed well in the 10-mark purpose question in the World Religion section. Many candidates presented relevant and accurate knowledge and understanding relating to the practice identified in the question. This provided a strong foundation from which they accessed the available analysis marks, even where this was limited to one or two developed analytical points.

You should continue to explicitly teach candidates the distinction between knowledge and understanding and analysis within a purpose question. Candidates should first establish accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding relating to the area being assessed and then develop this by explaining the purpose or rationale of the practice. The analytical element should move the response beyond simply stating another fact and instead address the 'why', for example, why a Buddhist, Christian or Jewish person engages in a particular practice and what they are seeking to achieve, develop or demonstrate through doing so. Where candidates made this transition from describing or explaining the practice to clearly addressing its purpose, they were much more successful in accessing the analysis marks available.

Candidate performance in the 20-mark World Religion question was positive, and it was clear that many candidates had a secure understanding of the content required. Most responses focused appropriately on the course specification points that follow directly from the 'Nature of human beings' bullet point, demonstrating that candidates identified and selected the most relevant material. Candidates also gained marks when they drew on other areas of the course specification and established a clear and relevant link to the nature of human beings. This approach, however, was uncommon, with most candidates appropriately concentrating their responses on the content most directly associated with this area of the course specification.

A further strength was the way in which many candidates integrated analysis and evaluation throughout their responses. In stronger essays, these skills flowed naturally from the knowledge and understanding presented rather than appearing as

isolated or formulaic additions. Many candidates demonstrated a clear and purposeful structure that enabled them to remain focused on the specific demands of the question and maintain a coherent line of argument throughout their response. This suggests that candidates understand both the organisation of the course specification and how relevant content should be selected and structured within a 20-mark response.

Question paper 1: Morality and Belief

Candidate responses within 'Morality and justice' were particularly encouraging this year. It is important that candidates and centres recognise that 'Morality and justice' encompasses more than capital punishment and that they must be prepared to respond to questions drawn from across the full range of content identified within the course specification. This year, there was strong evidence that candidates had been prepared for this breadth of content. Candidates selected relevant material and applied their knowledge and understanding directly to the question being asked, rather than attempting to reshape the question to accommodate a previously prepared response. This resulted in focused and relevant answers. You should continue to ensure that candidates are prepared to engage confidently with the full breadth of the Justice content, as this provides them with the flexibility required to respond effectively to the range of questions that may be presented.

Candidates were well prepared for the structure and demands of the Morality and Belief questions, and there was evidence of candidates' familiarity with the established question styles. It is important that centres remember that these styles of question will continue to form part of the assessment of Morality and Belief. You should give candidates regular opportunities to practise responding to questions such as 'Analyse religious or non-religious responses to moral issues arising from ...' (10 marks) and 'Evaluate religious and/or non-religious responses to moral issues arising from ...'. Familiarity with the wording and demands of these questions is essential, and candidates should encounter them regularly throughout learning, teaching and assessment rather than only during final preparation for the question paper.

Candidate performance in the 20-mark Morality and Belief question was positive, with candidates prepared both in terms of the structure required for an extended response

and the relevant and accurate course content they could use. As with other extended-response questions, candidates who approached the question using a clear and consistently taught structure could maintain their focus, select appropriate knowledge and understanding, and integrate analysis and evaluation throughout their response.

In marking of the 20-mark 'Morality, medicine and the human body' question, responses drawing upon the range of end-of-life issues contained within the course specification were accepted where they provided a valid response to the demands of the question. This ensured that the question did not disadvantage candidates.

Question paper 2: Religious and Philosophical Questions (RPQ)

'Origins' continues to account for a significant proportion of candidate numbers and remains, by a considerable margin, the most presented option in this section. Like the pattern evident within Morality and Belief with 'Morality and justice', no other RPQ option comes close to the number of centres presenting candidates for 'Origins'. It is encouraging, however, to see an increase in the number of candidates being presented for 'The problem of suffering and evil'. Numbers within 'The existence of God' have remained steady, while 'Miracles' continues to be undertaken by a smaller number of candidates. Given the considerable number of candidates undertaking 'Origins', performance within this option inevitably has a significant influence on overall performance within the RPQ section.

Assignment

Overall, candidates continue to demonstrate an increasingly strong understanding of the demands of this component, with many producing focused and well-developed responses that allow them to demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation.

As with the question paper, structure remains a key factor in successful performance. Candidates who approached the assignment with a clear and purposeful structure maintained focus on their chosen issue, organised their research effectively and developed a sustained line of argument. A secure structure also supported candidates in integrating knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation

throughout their response, rather than treating these as separate elements. You should place a strong emphasis on structure when preparing candidates for the assignment, ensuring that they understand how to use their research selectively and purposefully to address the specific demands of their chosen issue.

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper 1

When delivering the course, remember that all relevant areas of the course specification are available for assessment. You should not assume that there will be a predictable pattern or rotation in the style of questions presented from one year to the next. In previous years, centres may have identified patterns in the assessment, for example a question asking candidates to 'Analyse the purpose of...' in one year followed by 'Analyse the relationship between...' in another. While this may previously have provided some indication of the style of question that you could expect in a subsequent year, you should not use previous question papers in this way when preparing candidates for the 2027 examination and beyond.

You should ensure that candidates understand the relationship between individual areas of the course specification and use this understanding to construct focused responses supported by relevant knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation.

Ensure that candidates are prepared for the full range of question stems and can apply these confidently to the relevant points contained within the course specification. Within World Religion, candidates should be familiar with and regularly practise both 'Analyse the purpose of...' and 'Analyse the relationship between...'. Candidates should understand the different demands of these stems and select and apply relevant knowledge and understanding before developing the analysis required by the specific question.

The same principle applies to the 20-mark World Religion question. Candidates should be prepared to respond to questions requiring them to evaluate the 'significance', 'relevance' or 'impact' of an aspect of religious belief or practice. Ensure that learning, teaching and assessment provide candidates with regular opportunities to engage with all three styles and understand how to adapt their knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation accordingly.

For the Morality and Belief section, you should not use the religious or non-religious focus of the previous year's questions as an indication of what may be assessed in a

subsequent question paper. Prepare candidates to respond confidently to the full range of permitted question stems and content within their chosen Morality and Belief option. As a reminder, all 10-mark questions will begin with the stem 'Analyse religious responses to moral issues arising from...' or 'Analyse non-religious responses to moral issues arising from...'. Candidates should therefore be equally prepared to analyse either religious or non-religious responses and should have regular opportunities to practise both throughout the course.

Similarly, all 20-mark questions will begin with the stem 'Evaluate religious and/or non-religious responses to moral issues arising from...'. Candidates should be familiar with the demands of this question style and prepared to select and apply relevant knowledge and understanding before developing appropriate analysis and sustained evaluation. As highlighted elsewhere in this report, a clear structure remains particularly important in enabling candidates to address each element of these questions and maintain a focused line of argument.

Teach candidates clear definitions of what constitutes a religious and a non-religious viewpoint. When answering Morality and Belief questions, they must clearly identify the perspective from which the response is being presented. Candidates will not be awarded marks for simply stating, for example, 'a non-religious viewpoint would disagree with this because...' without identifying the basis of that viewpoint. They should instead demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding by identifying a specific and relevant perspective, for example, 'a utilitarian may argue...' or 'a humanist may believe...', before explaining and developing the response. The same principle applies to religious viewpoints: candidates should clearly identify the religious perspective, teaching or authority underpinning the response rather than relying on a generic statement such as 'a religious person would agree...'. You should ensure that candidates are confident in identifying and accurately applying the religious and non-religious viewpoints they have studied, as this provides the necessary foundation from which they can develop relevant analysis and evaluation.

A key requirement within Morality and Belief questions is that candidates clearly identify and describe the moral issue arising from the area being assessed. Without establishing the moral issue, candidates will limit their ability to access marks relating directly to the demands of the question. Centres should therefore encourage

candidates to make the moral issue explicit within their response rather than assuming that it is implied through the content presented. A simple and effective approach is to use a clear statement such as ‘One moral issue is...’, followed by an appropriate description of that issue. This provides a clear foundation from which candidates can then develop the relevant religious or non-religious response and subsequent analysis or evaluation.

You should consider the amount of knowledge and understanding candidates are being prepared to deploy within extended-response questions. There was evidence of some candidates presenting more content than was necessary to answer the question effectively. While secure and accurate knowledge and understanding is essential, excessive content can sometimes restrict candidates’ opportunities to demonstrate the skills of analysis and evaluation that are central to success in a 20-mark extended response. You should encourage candidates to select and deploy relevant knowledge and understanding purposefully, rather than attempting to reproduce everything they have learned about a particular area.

For example, in a question such as ‘Evaluate non-religious responses to moral issues arising from purposes of punishment’, opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and understanding can come from a range of areas contained within the question itself. Candidates may demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding through their understanding of the purposes of punishment, through identifying and describing the moral issues that arise, and through presenting relevant non-religious responses. This provides a sufficient knowledge base from which candidates can then develop the analysis and evaluation required by the question. Candidates do not need to provide extensive amounts of descriptive content before beginning to demonstrate these skills.

Be mindful of the balance between teaching sufficient course content and ensuring that candidates can develop and apply the skills required at Higher level.

Over-teaching content can result in candidates becoming focused on reproducing large quantities of learned material rather than selecting the most relevant knowledge and understanding and using it as a platform for analysis and evaluation. The strongest responses were not necessarily those containing the greatest volume of content, but those where candidates selected accurate and relevant knowledge and

understanding and used this effectively to develop a clear line of argument, sustained analysis and supported evaluative judgements. Learning, teaching and assessment should therefore continue to prioritise purposeful selection of content alongside regular practice in deploying the skills required by the question.

Structure remains crucial to candidate success in these questions. A particularly effective approach is to encourage candidates to work from the end of the question towards the beginning when determining what their response needs to contain. For example, when presented with 'Analyse religious responses to moral issues arising from divorce', candidates should begin by identifying the specific area of divorce they intend to address. From this, they should establish the moral issue that arises, present an appropriate and relevant religious response to that issue, and then develop this into analysis. This provides candidates with a clear progression: context or area → moral issue → religious or non-religious response → analysis. Using this approach helps candidates to address each element of the question explicitly and reduces the likelihood of presenting general religious or non-religious information that does not directly respond to the moral issue being considered.

Where candidates demonstrated this clear structure, responses were more focused and purposeful, and candidates could access the available marks. You should explicitly teach and reinforce the structure required for these questions and provide candidates with opportunities to apply it across the full range of Morality and Belief content. Candidates should be confident not only in their knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious responses, but also in identifying the moral issue arising from a particular context and then analysing or evaluating the response in relation to that issue. Regular exposure to these question styles should support candidates in developing the flexibility and confidence required to respond effectively, regardless of the area of course content assessed.

Question paper 2

In preparing candidates for question paper 2, you should use model answers to demonstrate the standard, structure and depth expected at Higher level. These help candidates recognise how to select relevant knowledge and understanding and develop it through effective analysis and evaluation. It is important that knowledge

and understanding remains within the parameters of the course specification. Candidates should not be overloaded with additional content that does not support them in addressing the specific demands of the question.

The key focus of question paper 2 should remain on the debate between viewpoints, responses and positions. Encourage candidates to move beyond simply presenting each side independently and instead analyse the relationship between them, identify areas of agreement and disagreement, and develop supported evaluative judgements. Regular practice using model responses and past paper questions, alongside explicit teaching of analysis and evaluation, should help candidates understand that knowledge and understanding provide the foundation for their response, but it is engaging with the debate and applying the required skills that enables them to access the full range of marks available.

You should remain mindful that the RPQ section is fundamentally focused on candidates' understanding of the debate between the different sides of an issue, including questions concerning the compatibility of different positions. Candidates need to move beyond presenting each side of the debate independently and demonstrate an understanding of how the positions relate to, challenge or potentially support one another. Learning and teaching should therefore provide candidates with regular opportunities to explore both sides of the debate and to consider the extent to which competing perspectives may or may not be compatible.

The range of potential questions within this section is relatively defined. Within 'The existence of God', 'The problem of suffering and evil' and 'Miracles', there are only three questions that can be asked, while 'Origins' contains five potential questions.

You should ensure that candidates are familiar with all the possible question areas relevant to their chosen option. Candidates should have opportunities to engage with and practise each of these question types throughout the course, rather than attempting to predict which area may appear in the question paper. In preparation for the 2027 examination, you should ensure that candidates understand the demands of each potential question and have experience of selecting relevant course content and applying an appropriate structure to each.

Assignment

Centres should continue the good practice already evident in preparing candidates for the Higher RMPS assignment. The clear and consistently taught structures used to support exam-style questions should also inform assignment preparation, as structure remains central to success. This should sit alongside supporting candidates to select an appropriate, open question that provides sufficient opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation.

Where appropriate, encourage candidates to select topics that complement areas of the course specification, allowing their independent research to deepen their understanding while also providing valuable practice of the skills required in the question papers. You should continue to support candidates in selecting relevant research, avoiding unnecessary content and using evidence purposefully to develop a clear line of argument.

Careful consideration should be given to the selection and wording of the assignment question. Support candidates, within the parameters of the assignment guidance, to select an appropriate, open question that provides sufficient scope to demonstrate the skills expected at Higher level. The question should allow candidates to explore different perspectives, develop a line of argument and, importantly, reach supported evaluative judgements. You should be cautious about candidates selecting questions that begin with 'Analyse', as this can unnecessarily restrict the scope of the assignment. Where the question itself specifically directs the candidate towards analysis, candidates may find it more difficult to demonstrate sustained evaluation, as the focus established by their chosen question is analytical rather than evaluative.