

Course report 2026

National 5 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies, SCQF level 5

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: 2,504

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 2,842

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

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	1,349	47.5	47.5	70
B	472	16.6	64.1	60
C	407	14.3	78.4	50
D	294	10.3	88.7	40
No award	320	11.3	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 paper

Feedback suggests that this year's question paper was on standard and in line with recent diets in terms of range and level of challenge.

The question paper functioned as intended, sampling similar knowledge and skills across the options in the three sections of the paper, to ensure parity. Candidates understood how to gain marks, and a few candidates achieved full marks for the question paper. The 8-mark questions continue to differentiate effectively, with most candidates achieving at least half of the available marks.

'Buddhism' was the most popular option in the World Religion section of the question paper, followed by 'Islam', then 'Christianity' and 'Judaism'. The option with the smallest number of candidates was 'Sikhism'. Candidates tackling 'Hinduism' questions achieved the highest average marks for the World Religion section.

Across the six options in the World Religion section, candidates who struggled with the (a) part of the second question also struggled with the (b) part, which was about impact. Conversely, candidates with a strong performance in part (a) tended to also provide a strong answer for part (b).

The 4-mark knowledge question leading into the 8-mark skills question performed best across the options. Those answering on how Buddhists might meditate found the question more challenging than those who were writing about worship.

'Morality and justice' was the most popular option in section 2, followed by 'Morality, medicine and the human body'. The highest scoring candidates in this section answered on 'Morality, environment and global issues', while those tackling 'Morality, medicine and the human body' did least well overall.

In the Religious and Philosophical Questions section, most candidates answered on 'The existence of God', and they achieved the highest average mark in this section, closely followed by 'The problem of suffering and evil'.

Assignment

The assignment task and the approach to marking are unchanged, with candidates setting their own questions. The assignment functioned as intended.

There was evidence of potential over-direction, for example centres steering candidates to write about a particular issue or providing candidates with sources of information instead of supporting them to locate it for themselves. In some cases, candidates chose challenging philosophical questions, which made it difficult for C level candidates to access marks.

How candidates performed

Areas where candidates performed well

Question paper

Candidates showed very good knowledge about key figures in the first question across the World Religion options. Answers on Jewish worship were also very strong.

In the Morality and Belief section, candidates wrote especially well about types of aid, the effects of poverty, and hospice care.

In Religious and Philosophical Questions, most candidates who answered on 'The existence of God' gave very good explanations of the cosmological and teleological arguments. Most candidates gave detailed answers to questions 43 and 47(a) (What might people believe about the nature of God?) and went beyond listing God's perceived attributes, to explaining what they meant.

Most candidates successfully tackled the 8-mark questions. They 'owned' their responses and presented detailed reasons for their personal view. Most took an 'unsure' position, which allowed them to offer arguments for both sides.

In answers to questions 19(b), 23(b), 27(b), 31(b), and 35(b), candidates who described the view of a non-religious individual or organisation did particularly well, for example Bill Gates in the 'Morality, environment and global issues' part.

Assignment

Most candidates chose appropriate issues and expressed these clearly in their titles, understanding what to do for the marks. Most structured their answers to demonstrate the six assessment standards, however some did not cover all the required elements, for example evidence of use of a range of sources of information, comments on significance and/or impact and a supported conclusion on the issue.

Titles in the form of a straightforward, controversial moral or philosophical question produced the best reports. Candidates explored contrasting views and arguments, and this made it easier for them to analyse and to offer well-supported personal

conclusions. It was pleasing to see that most candidates had a free choice of question for their report.

Most candidates explored a moral issue, and they tended to achieve the best marks, especially when writing about significance and impact. There were some very good reports on philosophical questions too, for example about the existence of God, origins and the problem of evil and suffering. Very few candidates wrote about a purely religious question.

In standard A, significance and impact scored particularly well, especially in reports that explored a moral question. Most candidates achieved 3 or 4 marks for this standard.

Many candidates offered concluding points on the views they had explored throughout their reports, as well as at the end, and this contributed helpfully to their mark for standards E and F.

Candidates showed awareness of contemporary relevance, for example the overturning of Roe v Wade in the US, the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, and the assisted dying bills in the Scottish Parliament and Westminster.

Many candidates effectively evidenced their use of a range of sources of information.

Areas where candidates did not perform well

Question paper

Some candidates went beyond the terms of the question, for example offering analysis where they were only asked for knowledge. An example of this is question 3(a), where some candidates wrote about the impact and purpose of Buddhist meditation, when the question was about how Buddhists practise it. Some used a structure for their points, for example point, evidence, explanation and link (PEEL). While useful in longer pieces of writing, this doesn't lend itself particularly well to questions in the National 5 exam, which usually focus on knowledge or skills, without overlap.

In the Morality and Belief section, some candidates did not apply utilitarianism as a non-religious view. Answers were repetitive and lacked depth.

A few candidates scored 0 marks for the second Morality question (19(b), 23(b), 27(b), 31(b) and 35(b)), because they wrote about a religious rather than a non-religious view.

In the 'Morality and relationships' part, some wrote about weddings rather than marriage.

In 'Morality, medicine and the human body', some candidates had difficulty writing about why believing in 'the sanctity of life' might raise moral issues. Some also struggled to describe what hospice care might involve. The lowest scoring 8-mark question in Morality and Belief was in the 'Morality and conflict' part, as some candidates did not know what was meant by pacifism. These three questions sampled content that is not in the Higher specification, and in all three cases the average mark was lower than for the other parts in the section. This may indicate that candidates were in a bilevel class, and the focus was on Higher content.

The Religious and Philosophical Questions section was the most challenging section of the paper, with candidates achieving a lower average mark than for the other two sections. Some candidates answering on 'The problem of suffering and evil' could not access marks because they did not know what was meant by determinism. Some overlap is inevitable in terms of what candidates can use to answer the questions in this section, for example questions 39(b) and 41(b) and questions 45(b) and 47(b), however they still must select and apply what they know to different prompts and demonstrate different skills. Question 42(b) was challenging for candidates answering on 'The existence of God'. While most explained why the teleological argument might be accepted, some did not tie their response to science. A few candidates could not access marks because they confused 'cosmological' and 'teleological'. This impacted the (a) and (b) parts of questions 42 and 44.

Some candidates are still offering straight knowledge of views they have studied in response to the 8-mark questions, for example 'Christians might say ..., Buddhists might say ... Humanists might say ...', meaning the answer does not include their

view, or the reasons for it. This approach disadvantages candidates as it does not answer the question.

Assignment

We were pleased to see fewer inappropriate titles this year, however a few were not truly religious, moral or philosophical issues, for example some candidates explored if a response was effective or successful rather than if it was moral. There were a few single word titles that did not make the issue clear, and a few exam style questions that were not appropriate for the task.

Some centres had directed whole cohorts to a particular issue, and some candidates were at a disadvantage, especially those at the C boundary, where they chose an issue where the question was especially challenging. For example, some explored if suffering and evil challenges God's existence, but the reports were more focused on the challenge to God's nature.

A few resource sheets had significantly more words than the permitted 200.

Some candidates gave very brief explanations of viewpoints, or attempted to report on too many, which limited their scope for demonstrating their ability to explain and analyse. Some gave one or two quotations followed by a rewording of what the quotations were saying. This did not add meaningful content and reduced the scope for breadth and depth in the presentation of views.

In reports on moral questions, use of case studies was inconsistent, with some candidates writing lengthy accounts of individual cases rather than focusing on or applying the aspect of the case that was particularly relevant to their report.

Some candidates concluded by summarising the views they had already presented, rather than offering a supported personal view on the issue they explored.

Some candidates continue to confuse quotations with sources of information.

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper

You should ensure that candidates are confident about all the subject specific vocabulary in the course specification for the parts they are studying. You can view this on the [National 5 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies subject page](#) on our website.

Most of the content between Higher and National 5 articulates well, but ensure that candidates entered for National 5 cover the specified National 5 content, as we use this to write questions.

Questions make it clear what candidates must do, and they should avoid going beyond what the question asks for, for example if asked to **describe** a belief or practice, they should not go on to analyse its impact or evaluate its importance.

Candidates should use the number of marks for a question as a guide to how much they should write. Marking example answers helps them to understand the level of detail they need. The maximum number of marks available for a knowledge and understanding question is 6, so this can also help them to revise efficiently.

In all sections, the 8-mark question typically includes a prompt followed by, 'How far do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.' There are no marks for related knowledge points, and candidates should not just present straight knowledge about views they have studied. Instead, they should state whether they agree, disagree or are unsure, and then present reasons for their view. They can use arguments they have studied but, in this question, they should present arguments as reasons for their personal opinion, rather than knowledge about views they have studied. Answers to these questions do not need to be two-sided, but some candidates may find it easier to make more points if they say they are unsure and offer reasons both for and against.

For the Morality and Belief section, you should prepare candidates to write about specific religious **and** non-religious views on the headings before the colon in the list of content. Remind them to make sure they are clear what the question asks for, and

to identify the view (usually one) they are describing. They should avoid general descriptions of 'religious' or 'non-religious' people.

You may need to request an exceptional circumstances review, for example if a candidate is ill or suffers a bereavement at the time of the exam. The examining team will determine a grade based on evidence gathered in your centre, so it's important that you enable your learners to generate examples of work, completed in controlled conditions, that cover all three sections of the exam. While a full-length prelim that mirrors the real exam is ideal, split prelims or unit assessments can all contribute to the review. If evidence for one section of the exam is missing entirely, it will impact the grade that we can award.

Assignment

Although you should not provide candidates with a question, you can help them to word it in a way that supports their research and makes the issue clear. It should take the form of a straightforward question, for example about if something is right or true. You should avoid exam-style questions and give your candidates a free choice of issue. Typically, we expect to see a range of titles in a pack.

You can give generic advice about the structure of the report, and recommend resources that might be appropriate, but you shouldn't directly provide candidates with information or quotations to use in their reports.

You should share the mark-related criteria with candidates and encourage them to use them to assess their own progress. We only award marks for the six standards stated in the assignment task, so candidates should check they have covered these adequately.

Candidates can use the resource sheet in any way they like, provided they stay within the word limit. You should remind them that we do not mark it, so if they want marks for something, for example use of a source of information, they must include it in their report. The resource sheet must be enclosed with the report, even if candidates decide not to use it. You should indicate on the blank sheet that they did not make use of it in the write-up. To avoid a marks penalty, you should also check

that candidates have not exceeded the word limit for the resource sheet before the write-up.

Points about significance and impact tend to arise quite naturally in reports on moral questions, but for candidates exploring a philosophical question, we advise writing a dedicated paragraph or section explaining the importance of their issue.

We can only award marks for using a range of sources of information if candidates tell us about where they got their information from in their report. We do not require quotations, but they can be helpful. Candidates should instead tell the marker the story of their research — what they found out, and where they found it. The coursework assessment task on the [National 5 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies subject page](#) gives examples of the kinds of sources candidates might use, as well as some examples of how to reference them in the report.

Candidates who explore a moral issue often struggle to apply moral stances like utilitarianism. Campaigning groups and individuals can offer clear moral viewpoints that are more accessible, because they tend to include more detail about their position and the reasons for it, so you should encourage candidates to explore some of these as they research.

You should remind candidates that concluding points need to be on the issue they set in their question, as simply summarising what they have already said will not gain marks.

The [Understanding Standards page for National 5 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies](#) includes a range of examples of assignment reports with commentaries. You can use these and direct candidates to them too.