Course report 2024

Advanced Higher Religious, Moral & 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 2024 appeals process.

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Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   212

Number of resulted entries in 2024:   253

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	145	Percentage	57.3	Cumulative percentage	57.3	Minimum mark required	98
B	Number of candidates	50	Percentage	19.8	Cumulative percentage	77.1	Minimum mark required	84
C	Number of candidates	36	Percentage	14.2	Cumulative percentage	91.3	Minimum mark required	70
D	Number of candidates	14	Percentage	5.5	Cumulative percentage	96.8	Minimum mark required	56
No award	Number of candidates	8	Percentage	3.2	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

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 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 paper

The essay questions performed as expected and the range of responses to the philosophy of religion 'intelligent design' question and medical ethics 'end of life care' were addressed during the standardisation procedures.

The number of candidates who chose to respond to the religious experience section decreased this session. The source questions (questions 3, 6 and 9) performed as expected.

Feedback from markers indicated that most candidates had been entered at the correct level.

Project–dissertation

The dissertation performed as expected. Candidates found evaluation the most challenging skill to demonstrate in the dissertation.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Essay questions

There was a clear indication that most candidates understood what the questions were asking of them, and questions were answered to a better overall standard compared to last year.

Section 2: part B — religious experience

Essays were answered well — many candidates demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding, and analysis was strong.

Section 2: part A — medical ethics

Candidates performed well when responding to the treatment and use of embryos question.

Project-dissertation

The standard of dissertations overall was much improved this year. Most candidates had selected better questions that they then attempted to answer and were able to access more marks. Many candidates had clear aims and had planned their dissertation as they used a structure with knowledge and understanding clearly referenced, then analysed and evaluated each point.

Candidates did well in philosophy of religion questions particularly if they had a clear structure throughout and used the wording of the question in their analysis and evaluation. Candidates performed well across philosophy of religion questions, for example many teleological questions were excellent. Cosmological arguments and the question of suffering and evil were also tackled to a very high standard.

Most candidates produced very well presented and researched arguments in their assignment across the religious experience section of the course. Candidates answered particularly well on psychological perspectives about religious experiences.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Essay questions

Section 1: Philosophy of religion — some candidates struggled with the concept of intelligent design and often referred mainly to Paley and Aquinas, as they were unfamiliar with intelligent design.

A few did not know what the Kalam argument for God is.

In Section 2: part A Religious experience: religious experience candidates needed to focus on the wording of the questions as some candidates were not discussing the 'centrality' and this had an impact on their evaluation and then their overall mark.

In Section 1: part B Medical ethics — end of life care – the course specification skills, knowledge and understanding bullet point refers to 'medical and social care'. Some candidates focused on assisted dying or euthanasia with little or no reference to 'end of life care', and so lost their focus on the given question.

Source questions

Philosophy of religion — some candidates did not refer to the given source in their analysis or evaluation answers.

Religious experience — some candidates were unsure about the term 'neuroscience' in the source and did not answer as effectively about the scientific responses to religious experience as they could have.

Overall, markers commented that they observed a significant improvement in candidate responses to the sources but there are still some candidates ignoring the source that they are supposed to be analysing and evaluating.

Project–dissertation

Medical ethics

Many candidates produced a high standard of dissertation but some candidates should focus on a more considered, balanced approach to the moral issues being discussed.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Essays
Centres and candidates need to be familiar with the course specification (particularly the bullet points listed in the Skills, knowledge and understanding section) as these are used for exam questions.

Candidates need to focus on and respond to the essay question that is in the exam paper rather than regurgitating a pre-prepared response to the topic. Candidates should refer to the given question throughout their essay.

Source questions
Candidates need to clearly label their answers a, b, c to ensure that they are maximising their potential marks for each question.

Candidates need to be mindful of their timing as some candidates write responses of a disproportionate length for the marks available, at times to the detriment of their essays.

Candidates should focus on the source that they are supposed to be analysing and evaluating.

Project-dissertation
Questions: Clear straightforward questions with one main element perform better than those with two or more parts. Some candidates are still developing their questions in a way that doesn't enable them to answer their own question. If candidates choose a closed question or an overly long question, they tend to confuse themselves and lose focus, or not achieve what they were initially trying to do. Candidates should remember to choose open questions avoiding phrasing like 'discuss' and questions that could be answered yes or no.

A few candidates are still choosing questions that are outwith the scope of RMPS (or are very loosely linked). Where candidates choose questions based on the course specification, they clearly benefit from this in the final exam. Candidates should remember that they are attempting to write an academic piece of work and although it is understandable that they have strong personal opinions, they should focus on a more considered, balanced approach to the moral issues being discussed.

Planning: It was clear that some candidates had rushed their work. Planning in advance allows the dissertation to develop to a better standard and gives candidates the opportunity to self-evaluate and adapt their question and aims if necessary.

Research: Candidates should avoid relying too heavily on old support notes and show evidence of independent research. Some candidates had poor or no referencing through the dissertation. A referencing system helps markers identify where independent research has been carried out by the candidate.

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Layout: Markers have commented that it would be helpful if candidates use 1.5 or double line spacing and leave clear margins. Clear paragraphing of each new point or section helps make the structure of the dissertation more explicit.

Wordcount: Candidates need to be mindful of the wordcount. If this was exceeded, candidates penalised themselves as they lost focus on their own question. Candidates who did not reach the suggested word count often did not go into sufficient depth and so could not access all the marks.

Evaluation: candidates need to focus on consistently linking their evaluation back to the question. There was more evidence of candidates attempting evaluation this year however, some candidates are making a judgement on their analytical points but not bringing it back to the actual wording of their question. Candidates who achieved high marks evaluated and then concluded at the end of each section.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, SQA aims 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, SQA holds 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 SQA's 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. SQA 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.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in March 2024 and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

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grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report.

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The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

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