



Course report 2024

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.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 3,889

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 3,492

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	1,421	Percentage	40.7	Cumulative percentage	40.7	Minimum mark required	77
B	Number of candidates	685	Percentage	19.6	Cumulative percentage	60.3	Minimum mark required	66
C	Number of candidates	530	Percentage	15.2	Cumulative percentage	75.5	Minimum mark required	55
D	Number of candidates	413	Percentage	11.8	Cumulative percentage	87.3	Minimum mark required	44
No award	Number of candidates	443	Percentage	12.7	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 question paper was well-received, and no issues were reported by markers.

A number of candidates generally performed well on each question, which demonstrates that the paper effectively adhered to the course specification and thoroughly covered the necessary topics. The use of similar question stems to the 2023 and 2022 papers provided continuity and consistency, enabling candidates to leverage the skills, knowledge, and understanding acquired during the course and showcase their proficiency across different sections.

Buddhism, Justice, and Origins remain the most popular topics.

Assignment

The assignment performed well, with candidates receiving an average score of 20 out of 30 marks. Nearly all candidates made a good attempt to complete the assignment to a high standard, carefully choosing questions that aligned with the topics expected in a higher-level question paper, particularly from the Morality or Religious, Philosophical, and Moral Questions sections.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper 1: world religion and morality and belief

Overall, candidates performed well across most sections in World Religion. It is clear that they were well prepared and possess substantial knowledge and understanding in each topic area. Despite this, many candidates still face challenges in effectively applying this knowledge and understanding and showcasing their skills in essay writing.

Candidates encountered the same challenges across all six world religions. For example, when tackling the purpose question, candidates often struggle to address the 'why' aspect of the purpose or the importance behind the practice and instead provide additional knowledge and understanding. This can be improved with a clearer structure, such as explicitly outlining the purpose and then explaining the reasoning behind it. Many candidates included more than six KU (Knowledge and Understanding) points due to the nature of this question. However, it is important to remember that while KU is crucial for structuring each essay, it must also effectively support the analytical points that follow.

Question 7: Analyse the purpose of the Five Pillars

Many candidates explained all Five Pillars for this question, which was unnecessary and often resulted in an average of between 15-20 KU marks for a 6-mark KU question. Focusing on just one or two of the pillars would have been sufficient to achieve the required KU and analysis marks effectively.

The 20-mark question consistently offers candidates a fair chance to demonstrate their knowledge and analyse the topic in various ways, maximising their potential marks. Despite clear prompts for evaluation within the question, many candidates struggled with this aspect. Without a proper essay structure, candidates often do not perform as well as they could.

With the exception of Buddhism, all other world religions were presented with a question focusing on the significance of beliefs about God. This should have been an excellent opportunity for all candidates, including those aiming for a C grade. However, many candidates struggled with structuring their responses and were unsure how to present their knowledge of basic beliefs about God. Frequently, the knowledge presented was convoluted and irrelevant. This challenge also applied to the Buddhism question where candidates threw every bit of knowledge they had about the Three Marks of Existence but, at times, lost focus throughout their essays and lost structure.

Question 10: Evaluate the significance of Jewish beliefs about God

Morality and Belief

The Morality and Belief questions require candidates to navigate multiple layers skilfully to achieve high marks, particularly in the 20-mark question. Centres that provided a clear and accessible structure for this question saw most of their candidates perform well. It is undeniable that this section is the most demanding, necessitating thorough preparation throughout the year.

A recurring issue is that candidates often provide excessive content without demonstrating sufficient skills development or adherence to a structured approach. This is particularly

evident in their descriptions of moral issues and their understanding of non-religious views, such as Humanism. Many candidates struggled to offer in-depth explanations of these perspectives, which is essential for gaining higher marks. Centres must emphasise the importance of both content mastery and structured, analytical and evaluative responses to ensure candidates can address the complexities of the morality and belief questions effectively.

Question paper 2: religious and philosophical questions

In question paper 2, candidates often included a substantial amount of content in their essays, which, while thorough, sometimes made it difficult to focus on analysing specific areas within each topic. Additionally, while evaluation is intended to involve a critical assessment of arguments and their merits, candidates frequently presented general 'strengths and weaknesses' without fully linking them to the question at hand. Many found it challenging to connect arguments to the overall question effectively.

Candidates occasionally relied on broad statements rather than delving into specific religious perspectives. Instead of exploring the beliefs and teachings of particular religious traditions, responses tended to generalise, using terms like 'religious views' without specifying the relevant tradition. Addressing these aspects with more specificity could enhance the depth of analysis and better engage with the complexities of both religious and non-religious perspectives. It appears that there are many different approaches to teaching the Big Bang Theory, the Theory of Evolution, the Teleological Argument, and the Cosmological Argument. Some centres present these concepts in a complex and extended manner, which can impede candidates' ability to earn knowledge marks effectively. Candidates should be able to generate, on average, 4 KU marks from each of these areas but this is not the case across all centres.

Assignment

Candidates demonstrated strong knowledge and understanding of their chosen topics. However, some candidates struggled with fully analysing and evaluating their material.

On average, performance was notably lower when candidates selected questions that deviated from the course specification, which highlights the importance of adhering to the prescribed topics for optimal results. The importance of selecting the right question for their assignment cannot be overstated. Candidates who choose topics outside the scope of their course content often face significant challenges compared to those who select questions closely aligned with exam-style questions. Those who stick to course-relevant topics are generally better positioned to succeed.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question papers

Centres are encouraged to thoroughly review both this year's and last year's course reports to gain a comprehensive understanding of what is necessary for their candidates to excel in Higher RMPS. It is important for centres to establish and teach a clear structure for both the 10-mark and 20-mark essays. This structure should align closely with the course content and skills. It is highly recommended that centres adopt the most simplistic approach to suit their cohort of young people and one that will benefit both their A-grade and C-grade candidates.

The question stems in the Morality and Belief section require a more demanding approach from candidates. Therefore, it is crucial for centres to use these specific question stems in assessments and prelims to ensure candidates are well-prepared for this style of questioning, as it will remain unchanged for the 2025 paper.

Effective signposting is crucial for candidates to achieve success in their essays, particularly in Morality essays. Clear signposting not only helps maintain focus on the question but also allows examiners to follow the candidate's line of argument more clearly. This precision in structuring responses ensures that marks can be allocated more accurately and fairly. Signposting is quite simply using key phrases, such as, 'One example of a modern armament is a chemical weapon ...', 'An implication of this moral issue is ...', 'A consequence of the Christian viewpoint is' ... 'I agree with the Humanist response because...'.

It is crucial for centres to support candidates to clearly identify the moral issue contained in the question (which will be linked to the Skills, knowledge and understanding section of the course specification). Many candidates are overlooking this step, despite it being explicitly mentioned in the question. Candidates will perform better when they signpost their moral issue, as demonstrated in the examples above. This approach not only highlights a clear structure but also directly addresses the question.

Centres should ensure they teach every aspect of the course specification as well as use the exact wording from each section in the course specification. It is essential to use the precise language found in the course specification consistently throughout the learning and teaching process. In the Buddhism part, many candidates were unfamiliar with the concept of the Sangha, leading to unanswered questions on this topic. In the Christianity part, there was some misunderstanding between Christian Action and Christian Community and whilst there may be an overlap, it is important that they are taught with a clear distinction. In the Justice part, we saw candidates write about capital punishment within the custodial sentences question. It needs to be made clear during learning and teaching that each bullet point in the course specification is separate and needs to have its own content attached to it. To address this, it is crucial that the bullet points in the Skills, knowledge and understanding section of the course specification are thoroughly taught and clearly explained, enabling candidates to effectively tackle both the 10-mark and 20-mark questions.

Teachers and lecturers should be aware that there needs to be improvement in how non-religious and religious viewpoints are being deployed in essays. It is important to highlight

that when Kantian ethics was utilised in the 20-mark essay, candidates generally demonstrated an ability to identify and apply various concepts of the theory effectively. In contrast, candidates often applied the same key concepts uniformly to both Humanism and Utilitarianism, leading to less nuanced responses, for example:

- ◆ 'Utilitarianism focuses on promoting the greatest good for the greatest amount of people'
- ◆ 'they look at making decisions where the good outweighs the bad'
- ◆ 'they aim to promote more happiness than suffering ...'

Candidates cannot be fully credited for their responses to the moral issue if they rely on the same non-religious principle throughout. Therefore, it is essential that they develop a deeper understanding of various principles beyond just the phrase 'the greatest good for the greatest number of people'.

Utilitarianism could be broken down into four key components and this style could be used to support candidates with their responses to the moral issues:

- ◆ **Greatest Happiness Principle:** Utilitarianism is founded on the principle that actions are morally right if they promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. This means that the value of an action is determined by how much pleasure or happiness it produces compared to the amount of pain or suffering it causes.
- ◆ **Consequentialism:** Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism, meaning that it judges the morality of an action based on its outcomes or consequences rather than the action itself.
- ◆ **Utility Calculation:** Utilitarianism involves calculating the overall utility (happiness or pleasure) produced by an action. This process often requires assessing various factors and potential outcomes to determine which action will maximise overall wellbeing.
- ◆ **Act vs. Rule Utilitarianism:** Act Utilitarianism focuses on evaluating the morality of each individual action based on whether it maximises overall happiness. In this approach, the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on its specific consequences in that particular situation. Rule Utilitarianism, on the other hand, assesses the morality of actions based on whether they conform to rules that, if universally followed, would lead to the greatest happiness. This approach emphasises adherence to rules that generally promote wellbeing, rather than evaluating each action in isolation.

Humanism could be broken down into four key components and this style could be used when supporting candidates with their responses to the moral issues:

- ◆ **Humanists strive to be ethical:** Humanism emphasises the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. It suggests that humans have intrinsic value and should be treated with respect, regardless of their background, beliefs, or circumstances.
- ◆ **Humanists strive to be rational:** Humanism advocates for using reason, critical thinking, and evidence-based approaches to understand the world and make decisions.
- ◆ **Ethical living without religion:** Humanism promotes ethical behaviour and moral values based on human experiences and reasoning rather than religious doctrines. It supports the idea that people can lead meaningful and moral lives through compassion, empathy, and social responsibility without adhering to religious beliefs.

- ◆ Humanists strive for fulfilment in their lives: Humanism encourages individuals to seek personal fulfilment and contribute positively to society. It highlights the importance of pursuing personal goals, happiness, and wellbeing while also working towards the greater good and improving the quality of life for others.

Kantian ethics could be broken down into four key components and this style could be used when supporting candidates with their responses to the moral issues:

- ◆ Categorical Imperative: The central concept in Kantian ethics is the Categorical Imperative, which is a rule for determining what actions are morally right. The Categorical Imperative applies universally and unconditionally. It commands individuals to act only according to maxims that they would want to become universal laws, applicable to everyone.
- ◆ Duty-based morality: Kantian ethics emphasises duty-based morality, where the moral value of an action is determined by whether it fulfils one's duty, rather than by its consequences. According to Kant, we have a moral obligation to follow ethical rules and principles simply because they are the right thing to do, not because of any potential outcomes.
- ◆ Respect for persons: A key principle of Kantian ethics is the idea that every person should be treated with respect and never merely as a means to an end.
- ◆ Moral law and rationality: According to Kant, moral laws are derived from rationality and must be followed by all rational beings. This means that ethical decisions should be guided by reason and adhere to universal moral laws, rather than being influenced by emotions or personal inclinations.

When addressing religious responses, candidates must avoid generalisations and provide specific details relevant to the religion being discussed. There has been progress with candidates moving away from vague phrases like 'religious people would say', and candidates are now specifying the religion they are examining, but their understanding still tends to be overly broad. For instance, stating 'Christians believe in forgiveness' could apply to other faiths, such as Judaism, where seeking atonement is a key concept leading up to Yom Kippur. To enhance the specificity of their analysis, candidates should refer to particular teachings and practices within the religion. For example, they should articulate that 'Christians would refer to the teachings of Jesus, who emphasised the importance of forgiveness', rather than making general statements.

Centres should avoid teaching an excessive amount of content for religious viewpoints. In some cases, candidates are attempting to incorporate two or three different religious perspectives into their essays, which complicates their responses and makes it more challenging to develop a clear, cohesive argument.

Many centres focus on using Christianity as their primary source of religious perspective, which is recognised as good practice. While there is a tendency to also incorporate the religion taught in the World Religion section, this approach can sometimes lead to difficulties. Candidates may struggle to articulate the content learned from the World Religion section and apply it effectively to moral issues. Candidates should make sure they continue to differentiate between 'all' Christians by using phrases like, 'some' or 'most' Christians and make this clear when applying to the moral issue.

Christianity could be broken down into four key components and this style could be used when supporting candidates with their responses to the moral issues:

- ◆ The Ten Commandments: These are a set of biblical principles relating to ethics and worship that play a fundamental role in Christianity. They include directives such as 'Thou shalt not kill', 'Thou shalt not steal', and 'Thou shalt not bear false witness', which provide a moral framework for Christians.
- ◆ The sanctity of life: Christianity holds that all human life is sacred because it is created in the image of God. This belief underpins many Christian ethical stances on issues such as conflict, euthanasia, and capital punishment. The sanctity of life emphasises the inherent value and dignity of every individual.
- ◆ The concept of Agape (unconditional love): Agape is a Greek word referring to unconditional love, which is central to Christian ethics. It involves selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional love, as exemplified by Jesus' love for humanity. This concept encourages Christians to act with kindness, compassion, and care for others.
- ◆ The teachings of Jesus: Central to Christian ethics are the teachings of Jesus — key moral teachings include the Golden Rule ('Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'), the call to love one's neighbour, and the emphasis on forgiveness and compassion.

Centres should prepare candidates using the specific skills, knowledge, and understanding outlined in the course specification, as deviations in terminology can impede candidates' ability to fully engage with the questions. Teachers and lecturers should strive to balance content delivery with the cultivation of analytical and evaluative skills. While a solid foundation of knowledge and understanding is important, teaching should also emphasise the development of critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation skills.

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. 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 will be applied in the case of non-submission. Further information can be found in the *Coursework for External Assessment* document and the coursework assessment task on the [Higher RMPS subject page](#) of SQA's website.

It is essential to focus on several key areas:

- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to select topics aligned with the course content, and ensure 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 candidates are taught 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.
- ◆ 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.

By implementing these strategies, centres can better equip candidates to excel in the assignment.

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

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](#).