



# **Course report 2024**

## **National 5 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: 2,395

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 2,493

## Statistical information: performance of candidates

### Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

|                 |                      |       |            |      |                       |      |                       |     |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------|------------|------|-----------------------|------|-----------------------|-----|
| <b>A</b>        | Number of candidates | 1,044 | Percentage | 41.9 | Cumulative percentage | 41.9 | Minimum mark required | 70  |
| <b>B</b>        | Number of candidates | 407   | Percentage | 16.3 | Cumulative percentage | 58.2 | Minimum mark required | 60  |
| <b>C</b>        | Number of candidates | 353   | Percentage | 14.2 | Cumulative percentage | 72.4 | Minimum mark required | 50  |
| <b>D</b>        | Number of candidates | 274   | Percentage | 11.0 | Cumulative percentage | 83.4 | Minimum mark required | 40  |
| <b>No award</b> | Number of candidates | 415   | Percentage | 16.6 | 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 performed as intended.

Marks across the World Religions were very similar. In Section 2: Morality and Belief, marks were not awarded, where some candidates did not appear to know some of the prescribed content, for example the meaning of sanctions in Part E: Morality and Conflict and a non-religious view on causes of crime. Similarly, in Section 3: Religious and Philosophical Questions there were two areas from the mandatory content that some candidates struggled to answer: interpretation of creation stories and how science understands the laws of nature. These were all valid questions as they were based on the content and wording of the mandatory content as expressed in the course specification.

In Section 1: World Religion most candidates undertook the Islam section; the next most popular was Buddhism. In Section 2: Morality and Belief, the most popular topic was Morality and Justice followed by Morality, Medicine and the Human Body. In Section 3: Religious and Philosophical Questions the most popular topic was The Existence of God followed by The Problem of Suffering and Evil.

Modifications that were in place due to COVID have now been removed. This has meant that there is less overlap in the Morality and Belief parts. This ensures a greater breadth of sampling content.

## Assignment

The assignment is assessed with reference to the six assessment standards described in the assignment task. These are unchanged from 2019 and continued to differentiate well with an average mark this year of 12.5. Performance in the assignment remains broadly in line with previous years.

Candidates propose their own assignment questions, ensuring a good degree of personalisation and choice, and this year most tackled the task as intended. However, there was evidence that some centres had directed candidates to particular topics, questions and resources. Most candidates explored a moral question, with religious questions explored least.

The choice of issue and wording of the question has a significant impact on candidates' ability to meet the assessment standards. Those who set themselves a title that required them simply to explore a range of views on a genuine issue tended to do best. Some titles did not ask a truly religious, moral or philosophical question, for example 'Does poverty lead to crime?' or 'The human impact of war,' or one-word titles like 'Abortion'. These titles made it difficult for candidates to meet all of the standards because they dealt with matters of fact rather than issues, or because it was not clear what they were trying to find out. Some candidates used exam-style questions, but these are not usually appropriate for an assignment title as they focus on either knowledge or skills whereas the assignment ranges across both.

In a few centres, all candidates answered on the same area of the course, and/or question and they seemed to depend heavily on notes from the teacher or lecturer or on areas that had already been taught. At National 5, candidates are required to undertake their research with a high degree of independence.

## **Section 2: comments on candidate performance**

### **Areas that candidates performed well in**

#### **Question paper**

Most candidates understood the questions they were being asked and how much they had to write to obtain the available marks for that question. Some candidates scored full marks in the question paper showing that candidates could access all the marks in the time available.

In the World Religion section, Part D: Islam achieved the highest marks. In the Morality and Belief section, candidates achieved the highest marks in Part C: Morality, Environment and Global Issues, however the number of candidates tackling this option was very small. In the Religious and Philosophical Questions section, candidates achieved the highest marks in Part C: The Problem of Suffering and Evil.

This year, candidates performed particularly well in questions asking them to show their understanding of religious beliefs, for example three root poisons, samsara and sin. Candidates also performed better in the 8-mark World Religion question than in the 8-mark questions in the other sections.

Candidates included a good level of detail in knowledge and understanding questions and in all five parts of the morality section. Many candidates wrote well about the impact of specific actions or beliefs, for example non-custodial sentences, and belief in the right to die, achieving the majority of the marks available for these questions.

#### **Assignment**

Issues that were genuinely controversial produced more interesting and successful reports. It was good to see that many candidates had been encouraged to pursue an issue that was of interest to them.

Those candidates who proposed a straightforward title, expressed simply as a question about religion, morality or philosophy, performed best in the task, for example, questions like 'Does suffering mean there can't be a good God?', 'Should Scotland legalise Assisted Dying?' or 'Is the Caste System relevant today?'

Standard A (significance and/or impact) scored particularly well, especially for those exploring moral questions. This is because views on moral issues are often framed around a discussion of potential consequences or case studies. Those candidates exploring a philosophical or religious question tended to do best when they include a dedicated paragraph or section explaining why their question matters.

The task requires at least one viewpoint, but those who explored a range of viewpoints gave themselves more to analyse and explain, for example by comparing and contrasting and commenting on strengths and weaknesses, and this helped them to score well for using information to address their issue.

Many candidates understood the need to show that they had used a range of sources of information, and this was done by including straightforward references to the websites, books, articles, interviews etc used in their research.

In moral questions, candidates who stuck to the moral dimension (for example by focusing on the impact of an action) and avoided straying into more historical or sociological aspects of their questions, achieved high marks and performed well.

Many candidates presented strong, well developed final conclusions. Where candidates evaluated the views and arguments they had presented throughout the report, they were able to achieve most of their marks for Standards E and F before presenting a final conclusion. In a few cases where candidates ran out of time, this ensured that they were still able to achieve marks for concluding.

## **Areas that candidates found demanding**

### **Question paper**

#### **Section 1: World Religion**

Question 1 in the Buddhism part was not done as well as the first question for the other world religions. Few candidates read the 'How' as 'Why' in this question, the same error was not seen in the other parts, suggesting that most understood the question, but were not confident in their knowledge about Buddhist meditation.

#### **Section 2: Morality and Belief**

Question 19(b) in Morality and Justice scored significantly less well than comparable questions for the other moral issues. Many candidates were unable to write about a non-religious view on the causes of crime despite this being part of the mandatory content.

Many candidates appeared not to understand what sanctions were and left questions 32(a) and 32(b) unanswered. There was a total of 9 marks available for these two questions, which represented about 33% of the marks available for the part. As sanctions is the only topic that is not also in the mandatory content at Higher level, some candidates may not have studied this because they were part of a Bi-level class or because they changed level.

#### **Section 3: Religious and Philosophical Questions**

In Origins, candidates should have studied 'literal and non-literal interpretations of creation stories'. When asked for different ways people 'might interpret creation stories' some appeared not to understand what was meant by the word 'interpret' despite its use in the course specification.

In the Miracles part, many candidates continue to struggle to explain what is understood by the laws of nature.

Candidates found question 37 in The Existence of God part and question 41(a) in The Problem of Suffering and Evil challenging. Answers often lacked development or were presented as lists which limited the number of marks that could be awarded.

Candidates on average found Question 36b in Origins more difficult than the equivalent question in the other parts, despite the wording and the nature of the task being virtually the same.

### **All sections**

In 8-mark questions, some candidates gave knowledge statements about individuals or groups that were for or against a particular issue without giving their own view as the question required. This does not answer the question and limits how available marks can be awarded.

### **Assignment**

Some candidates proposed questions that were not truly religious, moral or philosophical, and these made it harder for them to meet the required standards — especially in concluding, which is worth 6/20 marks. Conclusions need to be on a religious, moral or philosophical issue to be awarded the available marks.

There was an increase in the number of candidates who made little or no attempt to show that they had used a range of sources of information. Some included a list of sources on the Resource Sheet, but this is not assessed, so marks were not awarded if they were not included in the report. Some candidates confused using quotations with identifying sources of information. If they didn't say where they got the quotations from, they limited their ability to access all of the available marks because a range of quotations could all be taken from one source.

Some candidates wrote about viewpoints by offering a quotation and then summarising or re-wording without getting into any detail or depth or giving additional information. This limited the scope for achieving marks for analysis or explanation.

While case studies and background or historical information can be useful, some candidates struggled to deploy these effectively, focusing on telling a story at length or giving a list of facts rather than applying these to the issue in the question.

Some candidates scored poorly for Standards E and F (conclusion) because the conclusion was too brief, not on the issue, or absent. Some candidates offered a paragraph summarising the views they had described rather than giving a reasoned view on the issue they had set for themselves. This added nothing new to the report and didn't meet the requirement for these standards.

## Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

### Question paper

Centres should make sure they are aware of the detailed content in the course specification, especially where content differs from Higher. A recommendation is that candidates are given a copy of the course specification which is available on the [National 5 RMPS subject page](#) on SQA's website.

Centres should put a procedure in place on the morning of the examination to remind candidates of the topics they are expected to answer.

Assisted Dying is distinct from Euthanasia in the mandatory content, and although some of the moral issues for these areas of content overlap, it is important that candidates are also clear about the difference between the two — euthanasia involves ending another person's life, while assisted dying involves helping a person to end their own life.

Teachers and lecturers should remind candidates that they should avoid going beyond what the question is asking. For example, if they are asked to describe a viewpoint, they will not gain marks for evaluating it. The 8-mark questions always assess skills, so no marks are awarded for straight knowledge and understanding, however, if a candidate *uses* knowledge to back up an evaluative point, this will be credited.

If a question asks about impact, no marks are awarded for just giving knowledge. Marks would be given, for example if the candidate said how the belief upsets, changes, influences, shapes or concerns the person following the religion.

Candidates need to know a Religious and a Non-Religious viewpoint for the content *before* the colon in the Morality and Belief parts, for example in Morality and Justice the first bullet point is as follows: 'the purposes of punishment: retribution, deterrence, reformation, protection.'

The maximum number of marks allocated to knowledge and understanding questions is 6, so candidates should be prepared to go into enough detail to achieve these. Candidates can achieve marks in different ways, for example, they can make straightforward points for a mark each or developed points for up to a maximum of 4 marks each.

Eight-mark questions usually give a statement followed by 'How far do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.' Candidates can agree, disagree or be unsure. They should 'own' the response, because it asks directly for their view, for example by saying 'I disagree with the statement because ...' or 'Personally I am unsure about the statement because on the one hand ..., however on the other hand ...'. Candidates who state that they are unsure about an issue in an 8-mark question often find it easier to build up marks because they can develop both sides of the debate in their answer. However, it is possible to achieve full marks for an answer that fully agrees or disagrees, and many candidates do this very well, especially when they are writing about an issue which they feel strongly about.



Teachers and lecturers should remind candidates that the question paper will use the terms that are used in the course specification. Candidates need to be confident about what these terms mean in the context of the course.

## **Assignment**

Bi-level teaching presents a particular challenge as the standards, marks allocation and approach to marking are distinct from the assignment at Higher level. It is therefore important that centres make candidates aware of the distinct requirements of the task, specific to their entry level.

Candidates should propose the question they would like to explore. It should not be set by teachers; however, they should be given feedback on the suitability of their issue and the wording of their title before they start their research.

They should write their title in the form of a question that will generate a good debate. An appropriate question should ask if something is morally right or wrong, or if it is reasonable to believe something is true. A question for which there is (or could be) a definitive answer is not appropriate for the task.

Candidates should avoid issues that don't really divide people (even if they lead to strong feelings) as finding contrasting views will be difficult, and this will limit scope for analysing and explaining.

Candidates need to show that they have used a range of sources of information in their research. The report should refer clearly to these sources. Sources are not the same as quotations; they need to say what they are quoting, for example a web page, book, leaflet, individual. It's useful to ask candidates to identify a range of useful sources before starting the task, and if they find it difficult to do this, they may be wise to look at a different question.

The report works best as a discursive piece which explores a range of views and the reasoning behind them. This helps candidates to keep focused on the debate and to offer detailed conclusions.

Marks are only awarded for the six standards for the task, and the mark related criteria are included in the published coursework assessment task. Sharing these with candidates before they start their research will help them to check their progress against the requirements.

The assignment should be written up in one hour and in one sitting, and candidates should only have access to the resource sheet. How they use the resource sheet is up to them, however it must be included with the report, even if they don't write anything on it. Centres should also remind candidates that the word limit for the resource sheet at National 5 is 200 words. Resource sheets are not marked, so centres should remind candidates that they need to include anything they want marked in the report. A penalty is applied if the Resource Sheet is not submitted or if the candidate exceeds the word limit.

In a few centres, all candidates answered on the same area of the course, and/or question and they seemed to depend heavily on notes from the teacher or lecturer or on areas that

had already been taught. At National 5, candidates are required to undertake their research with a high degree of independence.

## 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](#).