



Course report 2023

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 in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 2,348

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 2,395

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------|------------|------|-----------------------|------|-----------------------|-----|
| A | Number of candidates | 1,075 | Percentage | 44.9 | Cumulative percentage | 44.9 | Minimum mark required | 56 |
| B | Number of candidates | 384 | Percentage | 16 | Cumulative percentage | 60.9 | Minimum mark required | 47 |
| C | Number of candidates | 373 | Percentage | 15.6 | Cumulative percentage | 76.5 | Minimum mark required | 38 |
| D | Number of candidates | 281 | Percentage | 11.7 | Cumulative percentage | 88.2 | Minimum mark required | 29 |
| No award | Number of candidates | 282 | Percentage | 11.8 | Cumulative percentage | 100 | Minimum mark required | N/A |

Please note that rounding has not been applied 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 more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as intended and the style, wording and level of challenge was in line with that of previous question papers.

Modifications to the course assessment meant that the question paper did not sample one area for each of the moral questions. Therefore there was increased scope for overlap in responses, however questions were devised to ensure that candidates were asked to select and apply the same content in different ways, for example by showing knowledge and understanding of, or commenting on, the impact or validity of views. This ensured breadth in the sampling of content and skills.

Assignment

The requirement to complete the assignment was removed for session 2022–23.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Most candidates understood what the questions were asking them to do, and how much they needed to write for the marks. Provided they knew the course content, they were able to apply it effectively to the prompts. Some candidates scored full marks, indicating that candidates could access all the available marks. Many candidates effectively gained marks by developing their points for between 2 and 4 marks. This allowed them to demonstrate both breadth and depth in their responses.

As in previous years, candidates achieved the highest marks in the Morality and Belief section of the question paper. In the World Religion section, candidates answering on Part D: Islam did a little better this year. In the Morality and Belief section, candidates achieved the highest marks in Part: C Morality, Environment and Global Issues. In the Religious, and Philosophical Questions section, candidates achieved the highest marks in Part B: The Existence of God, as in previous years.

Many candidates answered the 8-mark questions well, briefly stating their position and then making their case clearly using knowledge and analysis to support their view. However, markers noted that some candidates seemed to write pre-prepared answers to a different question, rather than responding to the prompt they were given. For example, where candidates were asked if living according to scriptures would make the world a better place, some wrote instead about whether it would be easy or difficult to do.

Some candidates missed marks in the 8-mark question because they simply gave knowledge of views they had studied. The question is intended to assess skills, and usually asks for an opinion supported with reasons, however some candidates failed to do this and applied an incorrect formula to the answer. Section 3 of this report includes specific advice on how to prepare candidates to tackle these questions successfully.

Questions 1, 18, 39, 44 and 58 — knowledge of key terms

Where candidates achieved low marks, it was often because they did not know the topic-specific vocabulary.

In Section 1, Part A: Buddhism, a significant number of candidates were unable to describe the Three Jewels and achieved no marks for the question. They either gave incorrect information or did not attempt an answer. Similarly, some candidates were not able to answer the question on Olam Ha-Ba in Part E: Judaism. In Section 2, Part D: Morality, Medicine and the Human Body, some candidates did not understand what was meant by 'autonomy'. In Part E: Morality and Conflict, some candidates did not know what was meant by 'diplomacy'. In Section 3, Part C: The Problem of Suffering and Evil, some candidates were unable to explain the view of determinists.

Question 12

In Section 1, Part C: Hinduism, some candidates missed marks because they wrote about the margas. The margas are paths to moksha, but they are not part of dharma. Instead, they

should have written about dharma as it relates to varna, ashrama or the universal dharma (sanatanadharma).

Question 16(a)

Most candidates defaulted to the Five Pillars in this question. While this is acceptable as a response, 'living according to the Qur'an' is distinct from the pillars in the course specification, so it would have been good to see Qur'anic teachings about wider aspects of Islamic life, for example justice, halal, modesty or relationships.

Questions 19 and 23

Candidates confused freewill with freedom. Some also argued that the gift of freewill showed that God wanted humans to decide for themselves what to do, rather than using it to choose to live according to His will.

Question 54

Some candidates struggled to explain what science might say about the arguments for the existence of God. Many instead offered what seemed to be a pre-prepared general evaluation of the arguments, sometimes with little or no reference to science.

Questions 50 and 55

Many candidates simply listed the 'Omnis' with their translation. Because giving the direct translations adds little to the information in the response, marks are capped unless they go on to show what the words mean. Candidates should therefore be encouraged to give more detailed points in this type of question. For example, 'People might believe God is omniscient (all knowing) which means that He knows everything, including everything we do and even think'.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Centres should ensure they are familiar with the course content in the course specification, especially areas where content differs from the Higher course specification, for example Three Jewels is not included in Higher but can be assessed at National 5.

Teachers and lecturers may find it helpful to share parts of the course specification with candidates, especially those that outline the content for the three parts studied. 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 as opposed to general use, for example 'judgement' as it is understood in the context of religions selected for study.

Centres should be aware that some key areas of mandatory content are distinct:

- ◆ The Big Bang is distinct content from Creation Stories, so if asked for a creation story, candidates will not be given marks for describing the Big Bang theory.
- ◆ Assisted Dying is distinct from Euthanasia 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.
- ◆ Living according to the Qur'an should go beyond the Five Pillars — the marking instructions for the 2023 question paper include some examples that centres may find useful.

The specimen question paper has been updated and along with the most recently published question papers, provides a valuable resource of questions. The general marking instructions explain the allocation of marks, and the specific marking instructions give some examples of points candidates might make, however these are not exhaustive, and centres are free to choose the viewpoints they would like to explore with their candidates. Teachers, lecturers and candidates can be assured that any response that is correct will gain marks.

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.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates are aware 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. These questions usually ask candidates to do two things: state their opinion on a given statement, and then support that opinion with reasons. This is all candidates need to do — they should not include related knowledge and understanding in their answer as they will not gain any marks for this.

The questions are intended to be unseen and to test candidates' ability to apply what they have learned in support of their own view rather than writing a memorised answer. Teachers and lecturers should give candidates opportunities to respond naturally to a range of statements about the course content as part of teaching and learning.

If a candidate answers without taking a view, this can result in a response that shows knowledge about other people's opinions, but does not make their own thinking clear, and this can limit their access to the available marks.

In their answers candidates should always:

- ◆ start with a statement that shows their position on the issue in the question. This could be to agree, disagree or to 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 ...'
- ◆ explain the reasons for their view by applying their knowledge about the debate to their answer. They can use knowledge and analysis as they make their case, including arguments they have studied, but they should deploy these as reasons to support the position they have taken. For example, 'I disagree that capital punishment is morally acceptable because there have been a number of miscarriages of justice where people have been executed even though they were innocent. This is concerning because a terrible injustice cannot be undone when the innocent person has been killed whereas if they are in jail they could be released'. In isolation this example appears to be knowledge and analysis, but here it is being used to support a view, so it would be awarded 2 marks

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 about which they feel strongly.

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.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).