

# Grade 6 Religious Education Test 2011 Report

## 1. Introduction

Catholic schools throughout South Africa were invited to take part in the second National Religious Education Test. 50 schools registered for the test; 45 returned test papers to the National Office for marking. 2383 learners wrote the test, and the average was 48,2%. We thank these schools for their participation, and those who returned feedback to us.

The test aims to encourage a better quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education in schools, to signal the importance of assessment in Religious Education, and to give participating schools an indication of their learners' state of religious knowledge. To this end, questions 1-40 were based on lessons 1-32 in the Grade 6 *Lifebound Teacher Handbook*; questions 41-50 were designed as general knowledge questions. For practical purposes, the test format was limited to multiple choice questions, which is, of course, only one possible assessment strategy. An innovation this year, made possible by the charge of a small fee per learner, was the introduction of an answer sheet that could be scanned.

The test and marking memorandum are now available at:  
[http://www.cie.org.za/news/entry/grade\\_6\\_and\\_grade\\_9\\_national\\_re\\_tests/](http://www.cie.org.za/news/entry/grade_6_and_grade_9_national_re_tests/)

## 2. Feedback

36 schools returned feedback forms. Of these, 28 were completed, a further 5 provided comments but the rating table was left out, and 3 were left blank. The strongest themes to emerge, together with some items we felt to be important, are presented below under the categories of 'affirmations', 'critiques', and 'suggestions'. Graphs showing the distribution of responses for each area covered by the rating table are provided in figures 1-3, where a rating of 1 is poor and 5 excellent.

### 2.1 AFFIRMATION

The comments – together with the completed rating scales – from respondents indicate a high level of satisfaction with the

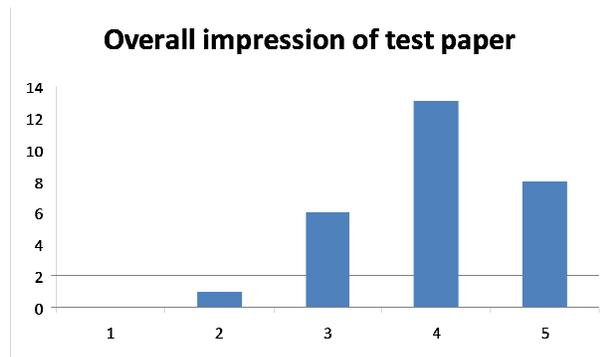


Figure 1

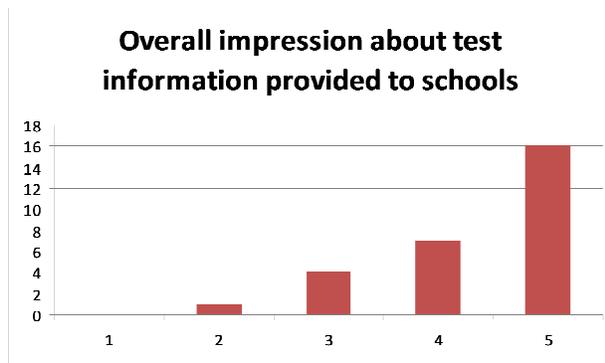


Figure 2

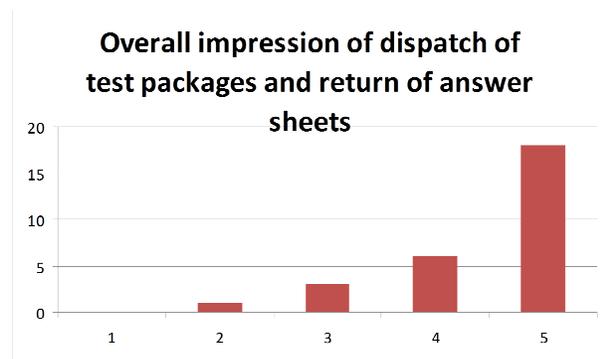


Figure 3

test. This extends across the logistical arrangements (the invitation to take part, registration procedure, information packs, and the dispatch and return of test papers), through to the layout of the paper and this year's introduction of an answer sheet that can be scanned, to the balance of the paper, the quality of the questions, and the language level of the paper. Some teachers highlighted one or more aspects of their satisfaction – a perception of improvement on last year's test with regard to the clarity of instructions, the straightforward style of questions, and the language level of the paper. This also included the coverage of the test – that the questions did justice to *Lifebound* lessons 1-32; a sense that Catholic content was well covered, together with an appreciation that religions other than Christianity received substantial coverage in the test.

Previous experience with the 2010 test also played a role. As one respondent noted: 'learners revised last year's paper'; 'learners felt comfortable when they noted the similarity of questions to last year's paper'; and 'Grade 6 educators felt very confident when they looked at the question paper.'

## 2.2 CRITIQUE

Seven respondents of those who completed evaluation forms left this block empty or indicated 'none'. However, some issues were mentioned – often by one or two teachers. These are noted below even though they did not find resonance with many respondents.

Two respondents felt that the general knowledge questions were difficult and expressed the desire that the whole paper be based on the designated *Lifebound* lessons. Another covered the lessons, but felt rushed. One offering a 'personal comment' spoke of the stress of preparing learners for this test, suggested it 'can affect the enjoyment and value of lessons for the pupils', and went on to query the emphasis the test puts on memory.

A contrast emerging in the responses concerns a few teachers who felt that the content of the test was too Catholic and a few teachers who felt that too many questions covered religions other than Christianity. Linked to this, was the issue of terminology, where two respondents felt that some of the vocabulary used would be tricky for Grade 6 learners, particularly those not brought up in the Catholic church, for example: 'penance', 'Nicene Creed', 'canonised'. In addition, questions 15 and 46 received comment and this is dealt with under an appendix below.

On the rating scale, the low level of satisfaction (2) reflected a sense that the test was too difficult for learners (1 response), that the information concerning the test was inadequate (1 response), and that a test package had arrived late at a school (1 response).

## 2.3 SUGGESTIONS

Most respondents were satisfied with the test and the logistical process of organising it; some expressed their appreciation and thanks for it; 6 respondents indicated 'none', or left this section out.

Some suggestions were related to issues listed under concerns. This included reducing the amount of lessons that the test should cover, posting packs to schools earlier, the question of whether writing the test in the fourth term was possible, and an expression of hope that a memorandum would be available.

## 3. A few thoughts in response

A comparison with the rating scale graphs in the Grade 6 Religious Education Test 2010 Report shows a significant improvement in terms of perceptions concerning the quality of the test paper and the information provided to schools. In this regard, in response to comments received for the 2010 test, we tried to ensure a greater clarity and simplicity in language and question style throughout the paper. This

also included avoiding framing questions in ways that learners might find confusing, and refraining from posing any questions with a negative formulation (e.g. 'Which item is *not*...').

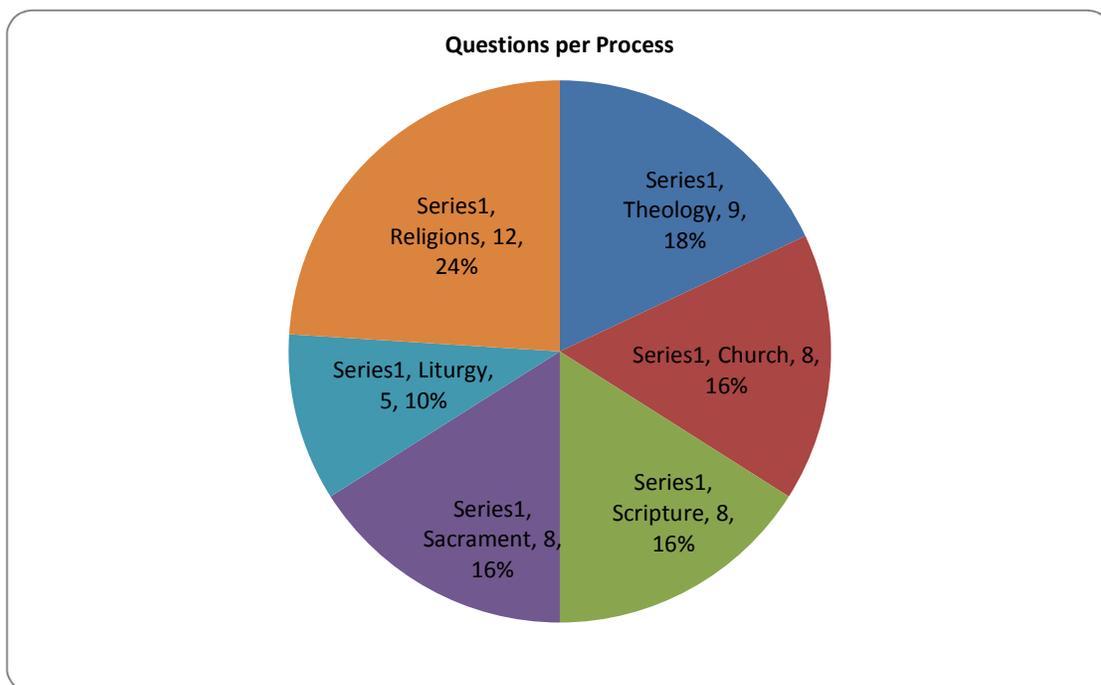


Figure 4

For those who would like to look more closely at the balance of the paper, please see the pie chart (Figure 4). This shows the percentage of questions in the paper in relation to the focus on religions and the Processes of Religious Education addressed in lessons 1-32 of the Grade 6 *Lifebound* materials. (The 10 general knowledge questions have also been allocated to appropriate processes.) It serves to show the nature of this learning programme and the particular focus on religions that is a special feature of this grade's work.

In addition, we include a graph showing the percentage score per question (Figure 5 below). The best answered questions were: 3 (87%), 14 (77%), 4 (76%), and 45 (75%). The worst answered questions were: 35 (15%), 46 (22%), 23 (24%), 6 (24%), and 49 (25%).

Queries were received for two questions. Here is a brief statement of the concern followed by a response:

**Question 15**

- A respondent suggested that this question could have two correct answers – i.e. (b) hope & (a) faith.
- The answer is (b). (a) can be ruled out by the wording of the question itself: 'trust in God's promises' refers to 'faith'; the question is what 'enables' us to do this. The other clue is in the word 'positive'.

**Question 46**

- A respondent felt that this question required 'detailed knowledge' of the bible.
- However, this question is only one of 10 general knowledge questions. It is based on the presumption that if learners have attended a Catholic school that offers regular RE they are likely to have come across the story of Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus.

If we might echo elements of the 2010 Grade 6 National Religious Education Test Report, we continue to acknowledge the limited nature of multiple choice testing, but it remains the only viable format we presently have. Likewise, with regard to the question of vocabulary, we invite you to consider the place of subject- or field- specific terminology in Religious Education.

In their feedback, a few teachers mentioned their own uncertainty with regard to answering some of the questions; others wish to help their learners to be better prepared for this form of assessment. To this end, please note that that both the 2010 and 2011 tests, together with their memorandums, are available on the CIE website.

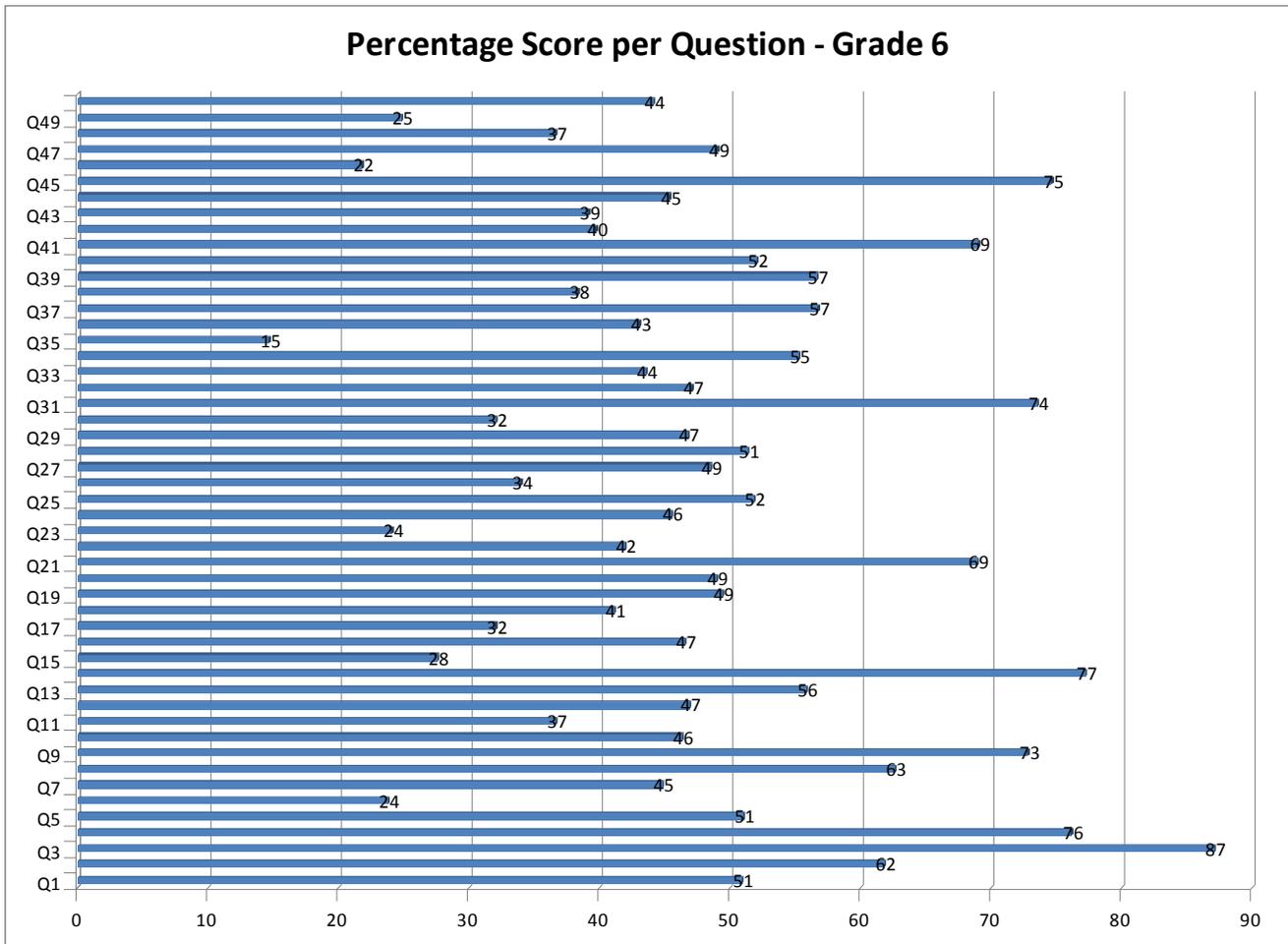


Figure 5

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