



National Qualifications Review Report

Geography

Subject Review: Geography

1 Subject summary

Summary of Courses

Intermediate 1 Geography
Intermediate 2 Geography
Higher Geography
Advanced Higher Geography

Recommendations

Recommendations which can be implemented this session (2001-2002)

- 1. Time allocation and distribution of marks between Paper 1 and Paper 2 of external assessment at Higher**
Allocate 1 hour 30 minutes to Paper 1, and 1 hour 15 minutes to Paper 2. Re-distribute marks to give 50 marks each to Paper 1 and Paper 2 (see section 2.4). This change will address feedback that candidates do not have sufficient time to complete Paper 1, and that the marks allocation does not give adequate recognition to their achievement
- 2. Misinterpretation of rubric in question papers at Intermediate 1 and 2**
Revise the rubric and re-design the layout of the question papers at Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2 to make it clearer to candidates which questions they should answer. This should prevent candidates from attempting to answer all questions (see section 2.5).
- 3. Penalties for going over word count at AH**
Develop a common approach to penalties for exceeding word counts across the Advanced Highers in the social subjects. This would include the Dissertations, the Geographical Study, and the Critical Evaluations (see section 2.4). The approach would be implemented as soon as is practicable for centres and SQA.

Recommendations which can be implemented for next session (starting August 2002)

- 4. Number and length of internal assessments at Higher**
Reduce the number and length of internal assessments at Higher. This would be done by devising a single holistic assessment for each of the core Units, and by assessing one application only in the *Applications* Unit, reducing assessment for the Unit from the current 2 hours 15 minutes to 45 minutes. This would cut the number of internal assessments for the Course from nine to three, and reduce the volume of assessment from 4 hours 30 minutes to 3 hours 15 minutes (see section 2.3).

Additionally, new NAB tests should be designed to support revised internal assessment arrangements at Higher so that these can be used to generate evidence for Estimates and Appeals.

Mid-long term recommendations

- 5. Relationship between Intermediate 2 and Higher**
Investigate ways to address the discontinuity between Intermediate 2 and Higher level. This would make it easier for candidates to progress from Intermediate 2 to Higher level and to change level if necessary (see section 2.1).

6. Assessment rationale at AH

Investigate the assessment rationale at Advanced Higher and its comparability with the other social subjects to determine whether it is appropriate that production of the *Geographical Study* and the two *Critical Evaluations* should contribute a maximum 80% of available external assessment marks, as well as the entire internal assessment of the three Units. [IMG1]Also, it would establish whether there is a clear rationale for why Geography should differ so radically from the other social subjects in deriving only 20% of marks from the question paper, compared with 64% in History and 67% in Modern Studies (see section 2.4).

7. Review the structure of Higher Geography

Review the structure of Higher Geography. The review will, among other things, give consideration to the study of more than one application; take into account decisions taken about the assessment arrangements in the other social subjects; and consider how best to ensure articulation between the Courses at Intermediate 2 and Higher. The proposal in recommendation number 4, about reducing the number and length of assessments at Higher level is seen as an interim measure. The measures being proposed are interim, subject to a wider review of assessment arrangements and course structure being carried out. Any revised assessment arrangements would still have to adhere to the agreed norm of 3 hours or less of internal unit assessment per course.

2 Course report

2.1 Course structure

Component Units

Int 1 Geography

- ◆ People and the Environment – Scotland/British Isles (40 hours)
- ◆ People and the Environment – Europe (40 hours)
- ◆ People and the Environment – Global Issues (40 hours)

Int 2 Geography

- ◆ People and the Environment – Scotland/British Isles (40 hours)
- ◆ People and the Environment – Europe (40 hours)
- ◆ People and the Environment – Global Issues (40 hours)

Higher Geography

- ◆ Geography: Physical Core (40 hours)
- ◆ Geography: Human Core (40 hours)
- ◆ Geography: Applications 40 hours)

Advanced Higher Geography

- ◆ Geographical Methods and Techniques (40 hours)
- ◆ Geographical Study (40 hours)
- ◆ Geographical Issues (40 hours)

Uptake in 2001 (figures in brackets are for 2000)

Intermediate 1	364 (182)
Intermediate 2	1361 (833)
Higher	8154 (7765)
Advanced Higher	319 (0); uptake for CSYS: 345 (469)

Do the Courses meet the design criteria (1-7)?

Yes

Issues and recommendations

Issue: relationship between Intermediate 2 and Higher

Although the same broad themes continue through the Courses at all levels, knowledge and skills become more detailed and increasingly sophisticated as candidates progress through the Courses. This is particularly apparent between Intermediate 2 and Higher levels. This disparity of content does not make progression between levels as easy as it could be. It also restricts opportunities for bi-level teaching and makes it difficult for candidates to change level.

Recommendation: relationship between Intermediate 2 and Higher

Investigate approaches to address the discontinuity between Intermediate 2 and Higher level. This would make it easier for candidates to progress from Intermediate 2 to Higher level and to change level if necessary.

2.2 Assessment rationale

Assessment rationale

The geography Courses aim to develop in candidates a detailed understanding of the ways in which physical and human geography affect the economic, social and political environment in the UK, in Europe and internationally. Candidates build up knowledge of geographical concepts, techniques and investigative methods, and learn how to apply them to interpret and evaluate geographical issues.

In both internal and external assessment, candidates are asked to apply their knowledge and skills to analyse, interpret and comment on (or evaluate at the higher levels) geographical issues. They use geographical methods and techniques to derive and produce statistical and graphical information to support their arguments.

Relationship between internal and external assessment

Internal and external assessment are closely linked in that the same Unit topics are assessed in both, but assessment is progressive. Although questions in the internal Unit assessments and questions in the external assessment can be similar to a degree, candidates are supported in internal assessment by being given more time to complete assessments and by the allocation of more marks to questions.

For external assessment, candidates are required to show that they have retained and consolidated a knowledge and understanding of the whole of the Course content, and that they can apply this knowledge and demonstrate the skills to match the Course Grade Descriptions. There is one paper at each level except Higher, which has two. At Advanced Higher, candidates submit, in addition, a *Geographical Study* and two *Critical Evaluations* — the process of their production will have been assessed during the internal assessment of the Units.

Estimates and appeals

In spite of the similarities between internal and external assessment, at Higher candidates' responses to NAB tests on their own cannot provide evidence of attainment against the Course Grade Descriptions. Course assessment is more than the sum of the individual Units. Additional evidence would need to be generated through the use of a summative assessment instrument, such as a prelim, which emulates, as far as possible, the standard, security and format of the national external instrument.

A high scoring performance in a NAB, covering content not assessed in the prelim, would lend weight to an Appeal for a Grade C award. Evidence produced from NABs alone (because of the lack of headroom for Grade A) will not be sufficiently compelling for Appeals for a grade A award.

Does the assessment approach meet assessment criterion 8?

Yes

Issues and recommendations

None

2.3 Internal assessment of Units

Description of the overall approach to internal assessment

At Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2, there are three end-of-Unit NAB tests of 45 minutes each, undertaken in controlled conditions. There is a cut-off score of 60% (12 out of 20). **Total time for internal assessment:** 2 hours 15 minutes.

At Higher, there are three assessment tasks for each Unit:

- ◆ The two Units *Geography: Physical Core* and *Geography: Human Core* are covered by one NAB which contains two tasks of 25 minutes for each Outcome 1 and one task of 25 minutes for each Outcome 2, totalling 1 hour 15 minutes per Unit. Centres have the option of assessing each task separately or of rolling the assessments up into a holistic assessment for each Unit. There are 10 marks for each piece of work, the cut-off score being 60 % (6 out of 10).
- ◆ In the third Unit, the NAB contains a separate assessment lasting 45 minutes for each Outcome, totalling 2 hours 15 minutes for the Unit. There are 20 marks for each piece of work, with the cut-off score being 60 % (12 out of 20).

Total time for internal assessment: 4 hours 45 minutes.

At Advanced Higher, the process of planning, researching, analysing, evaluating and producing the *Geographical Study* and two *Critical Evaluations* is internally assessed. There is no prescribed timing for internal assessment — evidence is produced throughout the delivery of the Units. Although the work is carried out integratively, separate checklists are used to assess the achievement of the Outcomes in each of the three Units. The evidence produced while undertaking the Units is externally assessed.

Total time for internal assessment: no prescribed time — concurrent with delivery of the Units.

Note on comparability with other Courses in the same broad subject area

Internal assessment in Geography is broadly comparable in terms of volume with the other social subjects except at Higher, where it takes approximately one hour 45 minutes longer than in History and one hour longer than in Modern Studies. At Intermediate 1 and 2 it is slightly shorter than the other two subjects are.

A summary of the internal assessment of the social subjects is given in Appendix 1.

Does the internal assessment of the Units meet assessment criterion 9?

No - see issues below.

Issues and recommendations

Issue: number and length of internal assessments at Higher

Although in each of two Units *Geography: Physical Core* and *Geography: Human Core*, it would be possible to combine the three assessments into a single assessment event lasting one hour 15 minutes, many centres are not able to adopt this approach because the timing exceeds their period length. This is also the case in the *Applications* Unit, where each of the three assessment tasks lasts 45 minutes. This means that for the majority of centres there are nine separate assessments for the three Units. The

organisational and administrative workloads associated with this, and the notional candidate effort and time required to prepare for them, is an issue, particularly where re-assessment is required. The amount of internal assessment at Higher has been the issue most frequently raised by practitioners in response to SQA's invitation to comment.

A number of practitioners have raised the link between internal assessment and generating evidence for Estimates and Appeals. They are very concerned that, despite the large amount of time spent on internal assessment, additional evidence has to be generated for Estimates and Appeals.

Recommendation: number and length of internal assessments at Higher

Reduce the number and length of internal assessments at Higher. This would be done by devising a single holistic assessment for each *Core* Unit and by assessing one application only in the *Applications* Unit (reducing assessment for the Unit from 2 hours 15 minutes to 45 minutes). This would cut the number of internal assessments for the Course from nine to three, and would reduce the volume of assessment from 4 hours 30 minutes to 3 hours 15 minutes (see section 2.3).

Additionally, new NAB tests should be designed so that they can be used to generate evidence for Estimates and Appeals.

Recommendation: review the structure of Higher Geography

Review the structure of Higher Geography. The review will, among other things, consider the study of more than one application; take into account decisions taken about the assessment arrangements in the other social subjects; and consider how best to ensure articulation between the courses at Intermediate 2 and Higher. The proposal in recommendation 4, about reducing the number and length of assessments at Higher level is seen as an interim measure, subject to a wider review of assessment arrangements and Course structure being carried out. Any revised assessment arrangements would still have to adhere to the agreed norm of three hours or less of internal Unit assessment per Course.

2.4 External assessment of the Course

Description of the overall approach to external assessment

Intermediate 1 is assessed by a Question Paper lasting one hour 15 minutes, with a maximum mark of 60. There are two alternative topics in each Unit. The Question Paper contains six questions, one relating to each topic area. The candidate must answer three.

Intermediate 2 is assessed by a Question Paper lasting one hour and 30 minutes, with a maximum mark of 60. The Question Paper contains six questions, one for each of the two alternative topics covered in each Unit. Candidates must answer three.

Higher is assessed by 2 question papers:

- ◆ Paper 1, lasting 1 hour 25 minutes, with a maximum mark of 40. This paper contains eight compulsory questions covering all Physical and Human Core topics.
- ◆ Paper 2, lasting 1 hour 20 minutes, with a maximum mark of 50. This paper is in two sections, each containing three questions (mainly extended response) worth 25 marks each. Candidates are required to answer one question from each section.

Advanced Higher has 3 components of external assessment:

- ◆ A question paper, lasting 2 hours, relating to *Geographical Methods and Techniques*
- ◆ An externally-assessed geographical study, relating to the content of the *Geographical Study* Unit, in the form of a 3000-word report with a maximum length of 25 sides of A4 paper (including maps, diagrams, tables and appendices). Candidates producing more than 26 sides are penalised by the loss of 25% of the mark awarded for this component of assessment.
- ◆ Two externally-assessed critical evaluations relating to the content of the *Geographical Issues* Unit. Each critical evaluation should be a maximum of 1500 words and should not exceed eight sides of A4

paper. Evaluations of nine sides or more are penalised by the loss of 25% of the marks available for this component.

The three components of external assessment are weighted 20:40:40.

Note on comparability with other Courses in the same broad subject area

The volume of external assessment in Geography is broadly comparable with Modern Studies. Both have a lower volume of external assessment than History (which uses of an extended essay in addition to a question paper at Int 2 and Higher).

National ratings indicate that Geography is roughly comparable in demand to other social subjects.

There is some evidence that it is easier to get an A in Geography (and Modern Studies) than in History. For example, in 2001, 15% of candidates achieved an A grade in History compared with 19 % and 21% in Geography and Modern Studies respectively. There has been considerable research into this, and the matter continues to be addressed within the SQA.

A summary of the external assessment of the social subjects is given in Appendix 1.

Does the external assessment of the Course meet assessment criterion 10?

No - see issues below.

Issues and recommendations

- Issue: Assessment rationale at Advanced Higher and its comparability with other social subjects**
Assessment at AH requires a 2-hour examination, a 3000-word report on the *Geographical Study* and two critical evaluations of 1500 words each. Although this initially looks like a large volume of assessment, the process of producing the report and the two critical evaluations comprises the evidence for the internal assessment of the three Units. There is inevitably an element of dual-purpose assessment. The work which has been produced during the internal assessment of the Units contributes a maximum of 80% of the marks available for external assessment, while only 20% of marks are derived from the Question Paper. In History 64% of available marks are allocated to the Question Paper, while in Modern Studies the allocation is even greater at 67%.

Recommendation: assessment rationale at Advanced Higher and its comparability with other social subjects

Investigate the assessment rationale at Advanced Higher and its comparability with the other social subjects. This would determine whether it is appropriate that products (ie the Geographical Study and the two Critical Evaluations), for which the process of production constitutes the entire internal assessment of all three AH Units, should contribute a maximum 80% of available external assessment marks. Also, it would establish whether there is a clear rationale for why Geography should differ so radically from the other social subjects in deriving only 20% of marks from the question paper, compared with 64% in History and 67% in Modern Studies.

- Issue: Penalties for going over word/page count at AH**
Currently, different penalties are applied in Geography, Modern Studies and History for going over the word/page count for the Geographical Study/Evaluations/ Dissertations. In Geography, candidates going over 25 sides of A4 lose 25% of the marks available. In History over-long dissertations may be penalised by up to 10% of total marks. In Modern Studies no penalties are applied for going over the word count.

Recommendation: Penalties for going over word/page count at AH

Develop and publish a common approach to applying penalties for exceeding word counts across the Advanced Highers in the social subjects. This would include the Dissertations, the Geographical Study and the Critical Evaluations.

3. **Issue: Time allocation and distribution of marks between Paper 1 and Paper 2 at Higher**
Currently, there is an unequal balance and weighting between Paper 1 and Paper 2 at Higher. Paper 1, worth 40 marks, covers the *Physical* and *Human Core* Units and Paper 2, worth 50 marks, covers the *Applications* Unit. There has been comment from practitioners that candidates do not have sufficient time to complete Paper 1 and that the mark allocation does not give adequate recognition to their achievement.

Recommendation: Time allocation and distribution of marks between Paper 1 and Paper 2 at Higher
Allocate 1 hour 30 minutes to Paper 1, and 1 hour 15 minutes to Paper 2. Re-distribute marks to give 50 marks each to Paper 1 and Paper 2.

2.5 Quality Assurance

Description of the overall approach to quality assurance

SQA's standard setting, vetting and marking procedures apply.

Do the quality assurance of the Courses meet criterion 11?

No - see issue below

Issues and recommendations

Issue: Misinterpretation of rubric in question papers at Intermediate 1 and 2

Candidates appear to have misinterpreted the rubric in the question papers and attempted to answer all questions rather than the number specified, thus reducing their overall performance in the papers.

Recommendation: Misinterpretation of rubric in question papers at Intermediate 1 and 2

Revise the rubric and re-design the layout of the question papers at Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2 to make it clearer to candidates which questions they should answer. This should prevent candidates from attempting to answer all questions.

2.6 Administration

Issues

None

3 Summary of review process and issues raised

Who	Mechanism	Issues
Subject specialists	Geography Assessment Panel met on 4/10/01	Feedback incorporated into recommendations.
	Scottish Association of Geography Teachers	Concern that the reduction of internal assessment would be seen as a watering down of the subject and the rigor of assessment.
	Informal discussion with Examining Team members	Issues raised in the report
	Comments from practitioners received by post and e-mail.	See separate analysis of comments received
	Implementation evidence	Some evidence from first two years of

		implementation that candidates who perhaps should have dropped from H to Int 2, continued at Higher, maybe because of difficulties in changing level between H and Int 2.
SQA co-ordinators	SQA SAMs and CRMs	No issues raised
Principal Assessor	Letter	Against changing status quo.
Senior Moderator	Letter	Does not endorse proposals. Concerns based on reliability of reduced internal assessment.
Units within SQA	Certification and Data Management	No issues raised
Candidates and parents	SPTC survey	No issues raised
Other surveys and reports	HMIE (August 2001)	Reported comment from students, 'too much assessment in Geography'. Some departments raised the poor interface and difficulties of bi-level teaching between Int 2 and Higher.

Appendix 1: Comparative information on the social subjects

1. External assessment

Course & level	Ext ass component 1	Ext ass component 2	Ext ass component 3
Int 1 History	QP – 1 hr 30 minutes, max mark 42, 100%		
Int 1 Modern St	QP – 1 hr 30 minutes, 100% - 60 marks max		
Int 1 Geography	QP – 1 hr 15 minutes, 100%, max mark 60		
Int 2 History	QP – 1 hr 45 minutes, 75%	Essay - 8hrs prep & 1hr under controlled conditions – 25%	
Int 2 Modern St	QP – 2 hrs, 100%, max mark 70		
Int 2 Geography	QP – 1 hr 30 minutes, 100%, max mark 60		
H History	QP – 2 hrs 45 minutes, 73%	Essay - 8hrs prep & 2 hrs under controlled conditions, 27%	
H Modern St	QP – 2hrs 45 minutes, 100%, max mark 80		
H Geography	QP 1 – 1 hr 25 minutes, max mark 40	QP 2 - 1 hr and 20 minutes, max mark 50	
AH History	QP- 3 hrs, 64%	Dissertation – approx 40hrs prep, 4000 words, 36%	
AH Modern St	QP- 3 hrs, 67%, max mark 90	Dissertation – approx 40hrs prep, 4000 words, 33%	
AH Geography	QP – 2hrs, 20%	Geo Study - 3000 word report, 40%	Critical evaluation – 2 @ 1,500 words each, 40%

2. Internal Unit Assessment

Course & level	Summary of Unit assessment
Int 1 History Modern Studies Geography	3 NAB tests of approx 1 hour each 3 NAB tests of approx 1 hour each 3 NAB tests of approx 45 minutes each
Int2 History Modern Studies Geography	3 NAB tests of approx 1 hour each 3 NAB tests of approx 1 hour each 3 NAB tests of approx 45 minutes each
Higher History Modern Studies Geography	2 NAB tests of approx 45 minutes & 1 NAB test of 1hr 30 minutes 2 NAB tests of approx 45 minutes & 1 NAB test of 2 hr 15 minutes (to be reduced to 1 hour as part of the review) 2 NAB tests of 75 minutes & 1 NAB test of 2hr 15 minutes
AH History Modern Studies Geography	1 NAB test of 2.5 hrs & ass of process of dissertation production 1 NAB test of 2 hrs & ass of process of dissertation production 3 NABs assess process of production of Geographical Study and Geography critical evaluations (no prescribed timings)