



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Geography
Level(s)	AH

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The improvement in overall standards noted last year was maintained, and was seen broadly in all three parts of the external assessment. In the folio, candidates' work was similar in standard to that seen in 2011.

The pattern noted in previous years, where studies were generally at a rather lower standard than the issues essay, continued in this year. However, there were a number of very good studies, indicating that some students could produce top quality work.

The overall standard in the written examination was similar to that in previous years. However, marks in Section C were slightly lower than in the previous diet.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In the examination, the calculation of the statistical test in question 3 was correct in the majority of cases. Question 4 was answered quite well. The geographical issues essay was generally done at least competently by the majority of candidates.

The range and type of themes investigated in the essay is good. In the geographical study more candidates made appropriate use of secondary data.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Candidates' skills in relation to the map interpretation question in Section A of the Question papers gives cause for concern. Some candidates answered the question in an essentially generic manner (ie based on what might be generally thought about the question) rather than by use of relevant and accurate evidence from the map extract. For example, in their choice of festival site, candidates assumed that it would be proper to construct major bridges or demolish buildings. The flexibility in the shape of plot allowed candidates to select a site that did not involve major engineering works.

The geographical study, which has more marks available, was often the weakest element in candidates' external assessment. Many studies have rather basic, simplistic study themes (research questions). Too many studies are thin in content. Data sets must be big enough to allow reasonable analysis. In too many studies analysis goes little beyond description, even when statistical tests are used. Some studies are very formulaic in approach and content. Some candidates had overlong and/or simplistic description of methods used in the study.

Though increased use of secondary data is to be welcomed, some candidates made poor use of such material in their study. Secondary as well as primary data must be brought into the analysis of study questions in a pertinent and direct manner

Notwithstanding the above comments there were a number of studies that attained close to full marks overall.

Though the standard of most Geographical Issues Essays was at least fair, many candidates had some of the following elements that detract from quality:

- ◆ Small, unclear or poorly reproduced diagrams
- ◆ Bibliographies with limited information on sources and support material.
- ◆ Formulaic essay structure; sub-headings do not help, though there is no penalty for their use. However a good **essay** will have a structure that is clear from text organisation and does not require sub-headings. The latter are more appropriate to a research report than an essay.
- ◆ Though most topics are sound, some essay topics were very dated. The issue should have contemporary dimensions.
- ◆ A small number of candidates are still losing 10% of the marks available for the study and/or essay by exceeding the prescribe page limit. A title page counts as page 1. **All** submitted pages should be numbered.
- ◆ Use of unacknowledged quotations is unacceptable.
- ◆ The critical commentary on viewpoints must focus on the whole content of the viewpoint and not just on methods of expression.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

In the written examination candidates must answer the question actually set. Amongst this year's candidates there was a small but significant group whose answers to question 5 were about vegetation and soil conditions, and thus were irrelevant to the question.

Essays should avoid a formulaic approach. Use of paragraph headings tends to make essays more formulaic. An essay should be a continuous piece of writing, which navigates the reader through the text by organisation and expression.

In the study candidates should be ambitious in their choice of topic, and collect primary and secondary data that will enable the full potential of their chosen topic to be addressed.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	818
------------------------------------	-----

Number of resulted entries in 2012	800
------------------------------------	-----

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	21.9%	21.9%	175	68
B	37.3%	59.1%	298	58
C	28.9%	88.0%	231	48
D	6.5%	94.5%	52	43
No award	5.5%	100.0%	44	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.