



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	Geography
Level	Intermediate 1 and 2

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

Overall performance at both Intermediate 1 and 2 showed a marked improvement on previous years and were both highly commendable. At Intermediate 2, a small number of candidates achieved full marks. The performance of candidates at Intermediate 1 was very encouraging.

There was an increase in the number of S4 candidates. Many of these candidates might have previously been presented at Credit level. There was a notable decrease in S5 candidates. At Intermediate 1 some centres are presenting candidates at the end of S3. It would appear that more centres have considered their presentation policy with the majority of candidates being presented at a suitable level.

At Intermediate 2 there has been a notable shift in the distribution curve towards the upper grades part of the graph. Similarly, at Intermediate 1, more candidates achieved higher grades than in previous years. In both papers candidates performed well in Questions 1 and 2 (Physical and Human Environments). The vast majority of centres opted to concentrate on Questions 6 and 7 (Development and Health and Environmental Hazards). Performance in questions 6 and 7 was notably better in both papers than in questions 3, 4 and 5.

Where performance was poorest in both papers it inevitably involved a clear lack of knowledge of the topic, a lack of detail in the answer or a misunderstanding of what was being asked in the question. The majority of candidates attempted all of the questions. This showed a significant improvement on previous years, especially at Intermediate 1.

Areas in which candidates performed well

At Intermediate 2, these included:

Question 1bii (formation of limestone features); 1ci (economic benefits and environmental problems in a chosen coastal area) ; Question 2c (improvements in shanty towns) ; Question 2e (Edge of town shopping developments); Question 6ai (relationship between average income and life expectancy) ; 6bii (measures taken to control a chosen disease) ; Question 7bii (importance of short term and long term aid) ; 7c (impact of a tropical storm).

At Intermediate 1, these included:

Question 1dii (Popularity of Malham with tourists) ; Question 2c (rural/urban migration) Question 2e (industrial location) ; Question 6b (factors affecting spread of malaria) ; Question 6c (methods of controlling chosen disease) ; Question 7a (impact of earthquake or volcanic eruption).

Areas which candidates found demanding

At Intermediate 2 these included:

Question 2b (infant mortality rate – many candidates were confused by the term ‘infant mortality’) ; Question 3a (climate as a cause of desertification – candidates lacked knowledge of the topic) ; Question 4cii (political problems caused by water control projects – lack of knowledge) ; Question 5ci (improving environmental quality) 5cii (success of these methods – a lack of topic knowledge in both cases) ; Question 6aii (Human Development Index – lack of knowledge of the term) Question 7a (distribution of tectonic activity – many described rather than explained).

At Intermediate 1 these included:

Question 1e (sheep farming in selected area) ; Question 2a (lack of knowledge of term ‘population density’) ;
Question 5bi and bii (differences in environmental quality/ improvement strategies – lack of topic knowledge)
Question 6a (physical/human factors affecting level of development) .

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres should continue to give due consideration to their presentation policy. Inappropriately presenting candidates for the higher level may well deprive them of the opportunity of gaining a higher grade at Intermediate 1. Many centres appear to have heeded this advice in this years’ examination and candidates have reaped the benefit.

Some candidates try to compensate for a lack of knowledge of the subject by using information given in question resources as a substitute for their own knowledge. Straight lifting of statements from diagrams without additional comment will inevitably result in the loss of marks. If the question does not specifically ask candidates to name an area/city they have studied, they will not lose marks if they do not give a specific example.

Both papers require candidates to be able to write extended answers to questions. The marks allocated give a guide as to the number of points which should be made in an answer. Preparation of candidates should include practice in this skill.

Intermediate 1
Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	688
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	782
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 60				
A	22.4%	22.4%	175	42
B	23.5%	45.9%	184	36
C	23.4%	69.3%	183	30
D	9.1%	78.4%	71	27
No award	21.6%	100.0%	169	-

Intermediate 2
Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	2893
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	2684
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 80				
A	43.1%	43.1%	1156	54
B	19.6%	62.7%	526	46
C	18.3%	80.9%	490	38
D	6.5%	87.4%	175	34
No award	12.6%	100.0%	337	-

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.