



**Geography  
Intermediate 1 and 2  
External Assessment Report 2008**

**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

Performance at Intermediate 2 was highly satisfactory. A few candidates managed to achieve very high marks this year.

The examination was consistent with previous years in terms of level of demand, course coverage, balance of marks in questions, and the range and nature of diagrams and other resources. There was an increase in the percentage of S4 candidates from centres. Many of these candidates might previously have been presented at Credit level and their performance may well have contributed to the overall high standard achieved at this level.

There remains quite a large tail on the distribution curve at Intermediate 2. This may consist of many candidates who might have been successful at Intermediate 1 had they been entered at this level. These borderline candidates who achieved a grade 7 at Intermediate 2 may well have obtained a higher grade eg 1 to 4 at Intermediate 1. Presentation policy remains an issue for many centres.

Markers noted in their reports that there was some improvement in the response to question 1 – Physical Environment topics – on previous years.

Most centres continue to teach Development and Health and Environmental Hazards in the Environmental Interactions section, despite evidence that many candidates, possibly with a background in Standard Grade Geography are familiar with the topics in Rural Land Degradation ie Deforestation and Desertification and tend to perform well in this particular Interaction area. It may also be related to the composition of classes in S5/6 with some candidates starting the Higher course but being eventually presented at Intermediate 2.

At Intermediate 1, performance was more disappointing. This may be due to a combination of factors. A number of candidates may be progressing to this level from a grade 5 or 6 at Foundation and may find the question paper challenging. It is equivalent in level of demand to General level and may therefore be difficult for them. In particular the longer written responses required seem to be a problem for a number of candidates.

There were also a fairly high number of centres presenting at Intermediate levels for the first time. Perhaps unfamiliarity with the course, the standards required and previous examinations may have affected candidate performance.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

At Intermediate 2 candidates performed particularly well in the following questions:

Q1a<sup>iii</sup> (description of course of river and its valley); Q1c (economic and environmental impact of chosen land use); Q2b<sup>ii</sup> (completion of scattergraph); Q3b<sup>i</sup> (explain causes of desertification); Q 6c (causes of either Malaria or Aids).

At Intermediate 1 these included;

Q2c (solutions to problems of traffic congestion in an EMDC city); Q2b (benefits and problems of increasing East European workers arriving in UK); Q3bi (completion of bar graph); Q6c (measures taken to control selected disease); Q7c (need for both short term and long term aid after a disaster)

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

At Intermediate 2 only one question caused major difficulty viz.

Q2bii ( candidates were asked to describe and explain the relationship between birth rates and life expectancy – many could describe the relationship but failed to provide a suitable explanation – perhaps not fully understanding the term ‘relationship’.

At Intermediate 1 candidates found the following question quite demanding;

Q1aii (formation of a sandspit – lack of knowledge of the topic); Q1biii (explanation of physical features of coastline attracting tourists – many ignored or misunderstood word ‘physical’); Q4b (explanation why damming a river would cause problems); Q6a (development indicators – candidates lacked knowledge of this topic).

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

The topics examined at both Intermediate 1 or 2 levels vary from year to year. Centres which try to predict certain questions may handicap candidates.

Candidates should be advised to avoid the following in their answers viz. straight lifts from resources, simple lists, bullet points, misreading instructions in the stem of the questions and repetition of points already made.

Intermediate 1 requires some extended writing in some answers. It is important that candidates practise writing these types of responses.

Some centres may wish to review their presentation policy at Intermediate 2. Borderline candidates at this level may be being denied the opportunity to achieve high grades at the lower level. Presentation at the higher level may be a leap too far for those candidates who lack the knowledge and the writing skills to be successful at Intermediate 2.

## Intermediate 1

### Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2007	659
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Number of resulted entries in 2008	688
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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	5.1%	5.1%	35	40
B	17.0%	22.1%	117	33
C	27.0%	49.1%	186	26
D	17.3%	66.4%	119	22
No award	33.6%	100.0%	231	-

## Intermediate 2

### Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2007	2,590
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Number of resulted entries in 2008	2,893
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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	32.6%	32.6%	943	52
B	21.6%	54.2%	625	44
C	21.6%	75.8%	625	36
D	8.2%	84.0%	236	32
No award	16.0%	100.0%	464	-

## 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.