



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Geography
Level	Higher

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 overall level of performance in this year's examination was good, with the vast majority of candidates obviously very well prepared for the examination. Last year's trend of fewer outstanding performances was repeated this year, although this was once again counter-balanced by fewer very poor performances. Clearly there are few candidates who have been presented for the Higher examination for whom Intermediate 2 would have been more appropriate.

These factors are reflected in the mean scores for both papers, which were almost identical to the scores for the 2009 examination:

- ◆ Paper 1: 58.1 (2009: 58.5)
- ◆ Paper 2: 59.0 (2009: 59.0)

The four-year trend of mean scores shows scores in Paper 1 to be decreasing very slowly whilst those for Paper 2 increase slowly.

Tables 1 and 2 below provide detailed information regarding question choices and scores in both papers. In Paper 1 it was pleasing to note a better balance in question choice than in previous years, with Questions 7 and 8 in particular moving towards equality. In Paper 2 the dominance of Questions 1 and 6 is even more evident, as is the slow, steady decline in Questions 2–4, and the virtual absence of responses to Question 5. Although this information is from a very small (but random) sample of scripts, it simply reinforces the information provided by markers in their reports.

This year the opportunity was taken to assess two topics which were introduced into the Arrangements in Paper 1 in February 2008: the impact of global warming and the human impact on the hydrological cycle. Further comments on responses to these questions are included below.

Also this year, candidates in Paper 2, Questions 1 and 6, were given the opportunity to *apply* their knowledge rather than simply *recall* it, by the inclusion of resource-based questions (Questions 3, 4 and 5 have always included such questions). This practice was last used in the 2006 examination, and the need to apply knowledge rather than recall it has been a theme in EA/PA Reports over a number of years.

Each year some Markers comment on candidates who appear to run out of time – usually in Paper 1 although sometimes in Paper 2. This year the number of Markers commenting on this was significant and included Markers of both papers. As a result, this issue was fully considered at the meeting to set the grade boundary marks.

Table 1: Paper 1: question choice and mean marks scored

Qu.	Topic	Mean mark	Percentage mark	Question choice as % (sample size: 201)
1 (a)	Atmosphere	5.00/10	50	
1 (b)		5.17/10	52	
2 (a)	Lithosphere	3.39/7	48	
2 (b)		6.30/9	70	
3 (a)	Population	5.09/10	51	
3 (b)		3.51/6	59	
4 (a)	Urban	5.51/6	92	
4 (b)		4.43/7	63	
4 (c)		3.20/7	46	
5 (a)	Hydrosphere	4.20/8	53	41
5 (b)		2.34/6	39	41
6 (a)	Biosphere	10.7/14	76	58
7 (a)	Rural	4.85/8	61	52
7 (b)		2.35/6	39	52
8 (i)	Industry	4.51/8	56	45
8 (ii)		4.14/6	69	45

Table 2: Paper 2: question choice and mean marks scored

Qu.	Mean mark	Percentage mark	Question choice as % (sample: 202)
1 (a)	13.63/20	68	69
1 (b)	5.22/10	52	69
1 (c)	5.77/10	58	69
1 (d)	4.83/10	48	69
2 (a)	4.77/8	60	14
2 (b)	11.47/16	72	14
2 (c)	6.67/10	67	14
2 (d)	12.03/16	75	14
3 (a)	9.5/16	59	14
3 (b)	6.03/10	60	14
3 (c)	15.83/24	66	14
4 (a)	3.11/8	39	4
4 (b)(i)	5.33/10	53	4
4 (b)(ii)	3.67/12	31	4
4 (c)	4.00/20	20	4
5	Insufficient responses for analysis		
6 (a)	7.78/12	65	97
6 (b)	6.19/12	52	97
6 (c)(i)	4.65/8	58	97
6 (c)(ii)	9.06/14	65	97
6 (c)(iii)	2.61/4	65	97

Areas in which candidates performed well

In nearly all of the areas of good performance there are still areas which can be improved, and the opportunity has been taken below in this section to highlight these.

Paper 1

Question 2 (b) produced very sound answers, with most candidates providing excellent explanations of corrie formation. Although once again this year too many responses simply included words such as 'plucking' and 'abrasion' without providing any detail on what these processes involve. In so doing candidates limit their opportunities to score marks.

Questions 4 (a) and 4 (b) were also very well done, with answers clearly demonstrating a very good knowledge of CBD and housing environments, along with well developed map analysis skills. However, once again a small but significant number of candidates failed to

provide accurate six-figure grid references. This is a fundamental map skill which should be achieved well before candidates reach Higher level.

Question 6 on plant succession on sand dunes was also exceptionally well done, and this reinforces the observation from the 2008 examination that this topic is now well taught and well understood. One aspect which might be further developed is the ability of candidates to focus more fully on *plant adaptations* to the various environments along the psammosere rather than on the *environments* themselves.

Candidates generally brought a good level of knowledge and understanding to their answers to Question 7 (a), on the use and impact of machinery in systems of commercial arable farming, and to Question 8 (ii) on the socio-economic impact of industrial decline. This is the first time in several years that any aspect of industrial geography has been relatively well done by candidates.

Paper 2

Question 1 (a), on coastal landscape formation, was very well done by a large number of candidates who could bring detailed knowledge and understanding of the erosion and deposition processes involved in such landscapes to their answers. A number of candidates however restricted their possible scores by writing only about erosion processes, when the question explicitly asked for erosion *and* deposition processes.

In Questions 2, 3 and 6, individual parts were well done. In Question 2 (d) a good knowledge of soil conservation processes was evident. In Question 3 (c) the benefits and adverse consequences of river basin management were clearly well understood (although some answers would benefit from a greater use of specific examples). In Question 6 (a) answers on development differences between developing countries were very sound (although the next section also highlights areas for improvement in answering this question), and in Question 6 (c)(i) and (ii) malaria eradication methods and their benefits were clearly thoroughly learned.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Whilst some of the areas which candidates found demanding include more challenging parts of the syllabus, others relate to material which should be much more accessible to candidates.

Paper 1

In Question 1 (a) there were two serious issues: firstly, few candidates were aware of greenhouse gases other than carbon dioxide and methane, and in addition sources of these gases were only vaguely understood. Secondly, a significant number of candidates confused global warming with ozone depletion, and went on to suggest that it was ozone depletion which caused global warming. This is not the case.

In Question 1 (b) the impact of global warming was assessed for the first time. Whilst answers were adequate, many were restricted to ice caps melting, sea levels rising, and

coastal areas being flooded. Some included habitat loss and the mention of polar bears, but few could bring any specific detailed knowledge to their responses.

Overall answers to this question were very disappointing: global warming is probably the greatest global environmental issue of the century, it has a very high profile across the news media, and it has been the subject of popular films. Candidates must be better able to respond more knowledgeably to issues such as this.

Another question which caused difficulty in Paper 1 was Question 3 (a). The biggest problem here was that a large number of candidates were unsure what the resource map illustrated, yet three words in the question stem should have made this clear: 'origin', 'UK' and 'immigrants'. These words were all also written above the resource.

A number thought that the map showed emigrants from the UK to the illustrated countries whilst others thought that it showed *total immigration* into these countries. This was compounded by the fact that few in their answers could say much more than that immigrants came to the UK for jobs and many had stereotypically negative views of immigrants to the UK, seemingly unaware of the important contribution of immigrants to the NHS for example.

In Question 4, whilst parts (a) and (b) were well done, part (c) was not. Few answers could offer convincing explanations of land use conflict on an urban fringe, with most simply saying that the farmers would not want to sell their land. Once again in a UK context (at least) urban expansion onto rural land is a key contemporary issue related to the process of urban change.

Another very disappointing response was to the question on meander formation, Question 5 (a). Whilst it is accepted that 5 (b) was a bit more challenging, 5 (a) should have been a very straightforward question, yet many answers were very thin – concentrating merely on river speed, erosion and deposition, without any reference to pools, riffles, helicoidal flow, or landscape features such as river beaches or river cliffs.

Question 7 (b) was the question in the paper, along with 5 (b), with the lowest mean score. Whilst it is accepted that this samples a small part of the Course, the structure of the question should have permitted candidates to score more highly with marks for 'description' and 'explanation' of 'two' of the stated changes.

Paper 2

In Question 1 there were two areas which caused some difficulty to candidates. In part (b), on socio-economic opportunities, it is essential that candidates can bring to their answers opportunities beyond tourism. This year, in a coastal context clearly tourist opportunities will dominate, but the landscape also provides industrial and agricultural opportunities and these should not be ignored.

In addition, in answering a question such as this, it is essential that the specific feature of landscape is linked clearly to the opportunity it provides, eg Poole Harbour (example) is a sheltered bay (landscape feature) which has become a ferry terminal and tourist resort (economic opportunities – which could then be further developed for additional credit).

In part (d), too many candidates dwelt on the environmental *conflict* itself rather than on the *solution*, and despite exhortations over many years very few responses included named examples: where are the park and ride schemes/bypasses/rebuilt footpaths and screened quarries?

Question 4 was not well done, with two areas causing particular concern. In part (a), too many responses dealt with changes in a particular city (usually Tokyo) over time rather than with the required changes in the *number and world distribution* of cities, and alarmingly in part (c) only a few answers were able to demonstrate a sound understanding of issues related to urban sprawl, a topic clearly noted in the Course Arrangements.

Despite a good overall performance in Question 6, there were three parts which candidates found more challenging. In part (a), a major cause for concern was the number of candidates who included developed countries such as the UK, USA and Japan in their answers. In the past, answers such as this were extremely rare, yet this year they were not uncommon. It is essential that candidates are made aware that this topic requires answers from *within the developing world*.

In addition there were still candidates who answered this question as if it said '*within a developing country*'. This seems to be a perennial problem, and setters try hard to eliminate it – this year the question had the word 'between' in bold, and to emphasise this the second sentence asked candidates to refer to 'named *countries*'.

This question can also be taught (and tackled) in two ways – either using two contrasting countries, or using a wide range of countries with a wide range of reasons for development differences. Candidates using the latter method tend to be more successful than those using the former.

The second area of difficulty came in part (b), which as indicated previously was a resource-based question which sought application of knowledge. Although responses on the whole were adequate, there were too many composed of generalisations and suppositions which made no use whatsoever of the table of information and the four resource maps. It is essential that in resource-based questions such as this, candidates base their answers on the data provided.

Another perennial problem cropped up in part (c)(ii), with a significant number of candidates including 'comments on effectiveness' in their answers. This was not required, and whilst it did not lead to a loss of marks it did tend to use up valuable time.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

The foregoing paragraphs have indicated in detail a range of ways in which centres can better prepare their candidates. These methods can be summarised under three broad headings.

The first of these is for centres to ensure candidates are equally knowledgeable about all of the topics included in the Arrangements document. This would ensure that topics such as global warming (Questions 1a and 1b), analysis of and reasons for contemporary migration

streams (Question 3a), and changes to commercial arable farming (Question 7b) would all be as successfully tackled as corrie formation, plant succession on sand dunes, and CBD and residential landscapes from maps.

The second is to ensure that candidates read the question. Each year many candidates waste time and/or lose marks by not reading the question. If centres were able to find the time, either in class or as part of homework assignments, to ensure that candidates completed a range of questions against the clock, it may go some way to solving the problem not only of reading the question but also of timing responses.

The third will be very apparent from previous comments, and that is to ensure that topic coverage is as up to date as possible. Geography must deal with contemporary issues of place and people, yet unfortunately many of the key textbooks which cover the Course are now quite seriously out of date, and some of the topics included in them were already dated.

This year's exam should act as a pointer to centres to ensure that their coverage is up to date and relevant to the early years of the 21st-century: global warming, *contemporary* migration flows, urban expansion, flooding, and *recent* agricultural change in all of the systems, were all covered this year in Paper 1.

In Paper 2, themes are broader but the same issue applies – be up to date. Much of the material on the Colorado River is based on videos from the late 1980s – what has changed? The issue of control of malaria is a live one, with US scientists producing what is apparently a malaria-resistant mosquito in July 2010! If Geography is to assist in the preparation of informed citizens, then it is essential that centres use the available technologies to ensure that their candidates are provided with up-to-date information, and that they are able to use this to make informed decisions.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	7225
Number of resulted entries in 2010	7385

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark — 200				
A	26.2%	26.2%	1935	138
B	23.1%	49.3%	1709	118
C	23.3%	72.7%	1722	99
D	10.0%	82.7%	740	89
No award	17.3%	100.0%	1279	—

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.