



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Geology
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 standard of candidate was very good this year.

Most candidates were able to access all questions and all had managed to complete the examination within the allocated time.

Section A

Most candidates performed well overall and this section of the paper performed as expected.

Question 1: Worked well as a starter question as almost all candidates passed it comfortably.

Question 2: The majority of candidates were able to access at least half the marks for this question.

Question 3 (d): Some candidates struggled to recall the correct name for the sedimentary rock and surprisingly fewer than expected were able to correctly name sedimentary structures.

Question 4: This question had been designed as a discriminator and most candidates found it challenging as had been expected.

Question 5: All candidates were able to plot the graph correctly but many had difficulty labelling it correctly.

Question 6: Only the more able candidates performed really well in this question which was as expected.

Question 7 and Question 8: Most candidates were able to access more than half the marks which again was expected.

Section B (Extended answers)

Question 9 to Question 11: No clear preference was evident for any particular essay. As previously mentioned, many candidates produced essays of exceptional quality and detail. Centres are reminded that bullet points are acceptable if this helps the candidate to focus on each point although there is still an expectation that candidates need to write in coherent sentences.

Section B is meant to represent a scientific reporting style. It has to be factual and, whenever possible, detailed.

Please continue to encourage candidates to use annotated diagrams.

Section C

Question 12 (photograph interpretation): Candidates performed well.

Question 13: (photograph interpretation): Candidates performed well.

Question 14: Generally this year's map interpretation was answered well although candidates of less ability found part (e) (cross section) quite challenging despite the fact that it was partially completed.

Question 16 (Three point problem): Traditionally this is part of the paper where many candidates have difficulty. This proved the case with candidates of less ability but a significant number of candidates were able to gain full marks here.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Most candidates performed best in section C which is probably indicative of thorough preparation on the part of their teachers and lecturers.

Section B (essay topics) showed a marked improvement on previous years. A significant number of candidates gained full marks or nearly full marks and demonstrated a very deep knowledge of the topics they chose to write about. Last year's change to the marking of these essays, namely allowing more marks for an exceptionally detailed response to one section of the essay appears to have encouraged candidates to write more detailed answers. Centres are reminded however, that candidates cannot gain more than 15 marks overall.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Section A, as expected, was the section which candidates found the most demanding. The introduction of more multiple-choice questions was designed to allow wider Course coverage. This did not make this section any easier than previous years.

Question 4 was expected to be one of the discriminating questions and this proved to be the case. Centres should expect that future papers will continue to have an emphasis on short response answers in this section.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres should continue to allow candidates to spend more time preparing and practising map interpretation and three point problems.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	56
Number of resulted entries in 2010	63

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark — 110				
A	47.6%	47.6%	30	77
B	22.2%	69.8%	14	66
C	12.7%	82.5%	8	55
D	6.3%	88.9%	4	49
No award	11.1%	100.0%	7	—

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.