



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Geography
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The general standard achieved by candidates in 2014 was slightly poorer than in 2013, failing to maintain the improvement noted in that year. The overall pattern of marks in the written examination (paper 1) was very similar to 2013.

Marks for the Folio (paper 2) again showed a difference in standard between the study and the essay, with performance in the latter generally better. The improvement in folio marks that had been noted in previous reports was not maintained this year. Many folios employed a rather formulaic approach, resulting in somewhat basic essays and studies. There were, however, a number of studies and essays that showed real flair, ability and were of a high standard.

The folio assessment criteria were identical to those that applied in 2013. The written paper in 2014 was very similar in demand to that in previous years, and no issues relating to the paper were raised by centres. However, reports from markers indicated that Question 1(b) parts (i) and (ii) did not function as intended. This was taken into consideration when setting the grade boundaries.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1: Written Examination

Most students made use of their atlas for answers to Section A and B. The first and last parts of question 3 were answered correctly by the majority of candidates. Question 4 was generally answered quite well

Paper 2: Geographical Folio

There was no area in which candidates performed particularly well compared with previous years. However, the decline in standards seen by markers was slight.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1: Written Examination

In Section A (Map interpretation) many answers tended to be formulaic, and did not answer the actual question set effectively. In question 1(a) many candidates chose poor locations that would require extensive access construction. Such choices did not gain full marks. A significant number of candidates did not follow the instructions in both question 1 and 2. Also, a significant number of candidates made little or no use of the supporting supplementary material.

Whilst most candidates completed the calculation in question 3(a) correctly, few had any clear grasp of the significance and utility of standard deviation and thus scored poorly in questions 3(b) – 3(d).

A significant number of answers to question 5 lacked clarity, and were thin in content.

Paper 2: Folio part 1: Geographical Study

As noted in 2013, some studies had data sets that were too limited for analysis of the standard required. Many studies contained graphics of a poor standard. This remained particularly noticeable in location maps.

Paper 2: Folio part 2: Geographical Issues Essay

Though this part of the folio was generally done well, there remain problems with poor quality bibliographies and citation. The reader must be able to identify fully both sources and quotes. There was a tendency to produce formulaic essays in candidates from some centres.

A number of folios were quite poorly presented, though the best were of the high standard seen in previous years.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Paper 1: Written examination

Some comments in the 2013 report remain pertinent:

Some candidates seemed under-prepared for the examination, particularly in Section A (map interpretation). Students should answer the Scenario Question (Section C) that is set, and not simply use preconceived ideas of what is asked.

Paper 2: Folio 1 (Geographical Study)

Again the comments in the 2013 report, noted in full below, remain pertinent.

Centres must take care that students do not plagiarise in any part of the folio.

Where group data collected by a group of students is used in a study, this must be clearly and explicitly reported by each student. Individual students using group data should undertake different research questions and data analyses. Some students based their studies on field centre programmes. These were often rather limited in the amount of data that was available for analysis. Some studies received rather more 'outside' support and help with text than is appropriate. The final version of the study must be the candidate's own work.

Lengthy descriptions (accompanied by images) of equipment and its use are unhelpful. Data and analyses should be presented succinctly. Appendices are rarely appropriate.

Paper 2: Folio 2 (Geographical Issues Essay)

A considerable number of essays used sources that lacked substance, or whose provenance was not properly identified.

A small number of topics were rather obscure, and others rather vague. Real, current and mainstream issues based on good quality sources provide the best essay themes.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	807
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	883
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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 100				
A	22.8%	22.8%	201	69
B	32.8%	55.6%	290	59
C	32.7%	88.3%	289	49
D	6.3%	94.7%	56	44
No award	5.3%	-	47	-

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.