



Course Report 2015

Subject	Geography
Level	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 and assessors 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.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

The Higher Geography question paper is marked out of 60 and consists of four sections. Physical Environments and Human Environments are both worth 15 marks, Global Issues, 20 marks and the Application of Geographical Skills is worth 10 marks.

There are no options within Sections 1 and 2; all questions are compulsory. The most common topics in Section C were Question 8 (Development & Health), (95% of candidates); Question 9 (Climate Change), (67% of candidates); and Question 7 (River Basin Management) (31% of candidates. Question 10 (Trade, Aid & Geopolitics) (2% of candidates) and Question 11 (Energy) (4% of candidates) were answered by fewest candidates.

The intention for New Higher Geography was to set a Course Assessment that was of a similar demand to the Course Assessment in previous years. However, post-examination analysis suggests that the 2015 Course Assessment as a whole was marginally more demanding than previous assessments. For this reason, an adjustment was made to the Grade Boundaries.

Component 2: Assignment

The Higher Geography Coursework Assignment is marked out of 30 and consists of a report written up under exam conditions and then externally marked. Candidates are able to have two A4 sides of processed information to assist them in their write-up. The processed information sheets are not marked but **must** be submitted along with the coursework report.

- ◆ In Section A, candidates are expected to demonstrate detailed knowledge, and/or an evaluation, of two research methods used in collecting information for their assignment. This section is marked out of six, according to the level of detail and the appropriateness of the research methods used. Up to four marks can be gained by describing any one research method.
- ◆ In Section B, which is marked out of four, candidates must use their findings and make reference to their processed information.
- ◆ In Section C, candidates are required to draw on knowledge and understanding of their topic or issue, and can be credited up to a maximum of 8 marks.
- ◆ In Section D, candidates are required to analyse their findings for up to a maximum of 6 marks.
- ◆ In Section E, candidates should reach an overall conclusion supported by their evidence and can be credited up to 2 marks.
- ◆ A further 4 marks can be awarded for Section F: communicating information where candidates are required to demonstrate their ability to use a structure and terminology appropriate to their topic or issue.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Many candidates scored consistently well in all four sections of the question paper, but the marking approach appeared to make some marks less accessible to candidates. This was taken into consideration in setting the Grade Boundaries to ensure that candidates were not disadvantaged.

There was a significant number of candidates who achieved lower marks; these candidates may have seen greater success if presented at National 5.

Generally the standard of written response was good, and many answers showed sound geographical knowledge backed up by reference to case studies where relevant. This reflects good teaching in subject departments.

Most candidates appeared to manage their time well and finished the question paper.

Component 2: Assignment

There were a significant number of strong assignments that reflected carefully planned and detailed research undertaken by candidates — both fieldwork topics and desk-based issues.

The quality of processed information which candidates took into the write-up with them clearly affected their ability to complete a good coursework report. Processed information sheets containing graphs, tables, annotated maps, photos, field sketches, and mind maps compiled from research results, were a great help to candidates in writing up their coursework report. Some candidates with less detailed processed information often found it harder to achieve good marks in the assignment, and a small minority of candidates did not submit processed information sheets, which made it difficult for markers to award marks for analysis.

A minority of candidates performed poorly in the coursework assignment. This was the result of a combination of factors such as vague aims, little understanding of group/centre based fieldwork, or writing very detailed notes on the processed information sheets which was then merely copied out, into sentences, during the write-up stage; marks cannot be awarded for direct copying from processed information sheets.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question papers

Question 1: Most candidates were able to describe the hydrograph in detail, with many using the appropriate terminology.

Question 2: Most candidates were well prepared for this question making good use of annotated diagrams to support detailed answers. The formation of the

stack was particularly well done.

- Question 3: Although, overall, this question was not one of the higher-scoring questions, a significant minority of candidates provided excellent developed explanations of atmospheric circulation.
- Question 5: This question was well attempted by almost all candidates. Many demonstrated a detailed understanding of the reasons behind different traffic management schemes and gave developed answers referring to their case studies.
- Question 6: Candidates who responded correctly to the command word 'evaluate', gave very detailed answers and subsequently scored very well in this question.
- Question 7 (a): Candidates who answered this question gave detailed, developed, explanatory points, about the site of a major dam.
- Question 8 (a): Candidates made good use of the data in the table to evidence the differing levels of development between the developing countries.
- Question 12: Candidates who made good use of all of the sources performed well in this new type of question. Those who scored most highly synthesised information from the different sources to make developed points supported by the evidence.

Component 2: Assignment

Many candidates had undertaken original fieldwork, either on their own or as part of a class field trip. This enabled them to collect plenty of original data which they were then able to process for inclusion in the two sheets of A4 to be taken into the write-up. As a result, they had a range of processed information which they could refer to, analyse and draw conclusions from. Candidates who added some evaluation of their gathering techniques performed well.

Candidates who completed an assignment on a topic in which they had a personal interest, generally displayed better background knowledge, and scored more highly in this section. Examples of high scoring coursework assignments containing this type of data included urban land use studies, coastal studies, river studies, and tourism surveys.

Some candidates who had undertaken research based on reports in books, journals and on the internet compiled good summaries in the form of mind maps or tables whilst also referencing the sources of their information onto their processed information sheets. A number of candidates had also taken raw data from these sources and processed it onto graphs and annotated maps, allowing them to extract and analyse data during the write-up stage. Similarly, many of these candidates were able to score well in the coursework report.

Examples of assignments that achieved good marks using this type of data included studies of the impact of different natural disasters such as tropical storms, and comparison of the impact and management of disease in different developing countries.

Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question papers

- Question 1: Whilst many candidates scored very well in this question, a number of candidates failed to respond to the command of the question and did not offer any explanation for the shape of the hydrograph.
- Question 3: A number of candidates did not attempt this question, despite it being a topic very familiar to Higher Geography.
- Question 6: A number of candidates were not able to evaluate housing management within their case study city, instead giving very detailed descriptions of strategies, which limited the number of marks that could be awarded. Candidates should be prepared to both explain and evaluate management strategies.
- Question 8 (b): This question was poorly answered by some candidates who only gave short descriptive points about a country but did not relate this back to the reasons for the country's level of development.
- Question 9 (a): Some candidates did not explain the reasons for climate change in this question; giving only a limited list of sources for greenhouse gases.
- Question 9 (b): Many candidates struggled to gain the full six marks here, as responses did not provide the detail required for Higher level.

Component 2: Assignment

A number of candidates scored poorly in the coursework assignment. Many of these candidates had limited or no evidence of processed information in their coursework report. It is important to note that candidates who did not make reference to information contained in their processed information sheets will not be able to access the marks for Section B (Use of and reference to processed information), or Section D (Analysis).

Some candidates wrote over six pages on gathering — this is only one fifth of the marks available — and therefore ran out of time to write detailed responses for the other sections. A small number of candidates lost marks because they simply copied significant chunks of information directly from their processed information sheets.

Candidates who completed a desk-based project should ensure they have processed information which they can then add a value to.

A small minority of candidates wrote out two pages of detailed mind maps and notes, and merely re-wrote these. This penalised them on two fronts — there was no processed

information to refer to, and no knowledge or analysis was displayed other than what was on the sheet.

This is clearly stated in the General Marking Instructions (available on the SQA website). It is expected that candidates will be able to give an element of added value to the information which they take into the write-up with them. Often this will be in the form of explanations, analysis, comparison to geographical models and concluding remarks where candidates are making use of their geographical knowledge to interpret, explain, and analyse their findings.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

It is essential that candidates read the questions carefully and that they understand and respond to command words. Many candidates still have difficulty in differentiating command words such as **explain** and **evaluate**. Answers that are generic or vague will not gain full marks. In many answers to '**explain**' questions, candidates showed good geographical knowledge by giving detailed descriptions, but did not go on to give an **explanation**, therefore losing out on available marks.

At Higher level, candidates should be able to use their geographical knowledge to write **developed** responses; centres should refer to the General and Specific Marking Instructions to ensure candidates are prepared to write in this style. For example, in Question 6 (management of housing problems in developing countries), those candidates who did not evaluate their strategies were limited to two out of the potential five marks. In Question 10 (Climate Change), many candidates wrote vague answers on the effects of climate change.

The detailed marking instructions published on the SQA website for the Specimen Question Paper and Exemplar Question Paper are useful guides to the level of detail that candidates are expected to give in their answers at Higher level. Centres should make full use of these.

Component 2: Assignment

As the Assignment is a new feature in the Course Assessment at this level, it is encouraging to see candidates perform to a high standard.

It helps candidates to carry out their research if they have a clearly stated aim or hypothesis; this then provides the focus for all sections of the Assignment. Candidates should ensure that they keep these aims/hypotheses in mind as they proceed through all stages of the Assignment. A clear aim also helps markers to appreciate, and award marks for, the full range of knowledge, understanding and analysis that a candidate has displayed during the write-up stage.

Studies that involve the collection of original field data allow candidates to create good tabular or graphical information which they can have with them and refer to during the writing of their coursework report. There is no advantage or disadvantage to a candidate in fieldwork being undertaken individually or as a group, although it should be noted that whilst

field data collected as part of a group is entirely acceptable, centres must ensure that the processing and preparation for the write-up are entirely the work of the candidate — only reasonable assistance should be given. Reasonable assistance does not allow sample answers, detailed feedback on drafts, or whole-class teaching on the write-up of the candidates' findings. There were a small number of centres who carried out group fieldwork and their candidates appeared to have been well-rehearsed in the write up stage. This goes against the conditions of assessment as stated on the SQA website, and could lead to a sanction or penalty being imposed on the candidate and/or centre.

Topics or issues that are based on secondary sources such as books, journals or the internet can (and did) form the basis of very good assignments. Again candidates should ensure they have a clear aim and that their two A4 sides for their write-up show some evidence of processing. This can be in the form of mind maps, annotated maps or tables, or using raw secondary data to draw their own graphs.

Candidates who take in A4 sides containing information they intend to copy out will not be credited for direct copying, and therefore will not be able to access the full range of marks; indeed candidates who did this, in the main, scored very few marks across the assignment. Also, candidates should be clear that only two A4-sized sides are permitted as processed information, and whilst there is no restriction on the amount of information candidates can put on these sheets, candidates must ensure that it is legible to markers, and importantly legible to themselves: a number of candidates read their own graphs and maps wrongly as the result of incorrect or reduced scales.

It was noted by markers that it was easier to refer to processed information where candidates had submitted this on two separate sheets (rather than back to back); it therefore follows that it may well be beneficial for candidates also, if they were able to access their own information in this way.

The marking instructions for the Higher Geography coursework assignment published on the SQA Secure website are a useful guide as to how marks are allocated in this part of the assessment.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	3866

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 90				
A	25.3%	25.3%	980	61
B	25.0%	50.3%	966	51
C	22.7%	73.0%	876	42
D	10.3%	83.3%	400	37
No award	16.7%	-	644	0

Overall the course assessment proved to be more difficult than intended. The grade boundaries were adjusted to take account of this.

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.