



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Geography
Level(s)	Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2

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

With the introduction of the new National Qualifications in Geography, the number of entries for the penultimate Intermediate 1 examination reduced from 909 to 308. The S4 cohort was halved, and the S5/6 cohort more than doubled.

There were no adverse comments from markers or centres regarding the examination itself, which maintained the same standards as in previous years. The cumulative A–C pass rate, however, fell from 68.4% to 37.3%, reflecting the significant shift away from more able 'first time' S3/S4 candidates to a S5/6 cohort with a predominantly Foundation level background.

Almost 10% of presentations were from new centres, a large number of which had between one and four Intermediate 1 candidates. No candidates achieved a Band 1, and 46% of candidates were given a No Award.

The Intermediate 2 examination fared better regarding presentation numbers, there was a 28% reduction from 3497 to 2542. There was a reduction of 11% in S3/4 candidates and a corresponding increase of 11% in S5/6 candidates.

As in previous years, the Intermediate 2 examination was generally well received with many positive comments from markers. Although the average mark was down slightly from 49 to 47, there was a similar spread across the grade range. Almost 30% of candidates achieved an A pass, and 72% achieved an A–C pass.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Intermediate 1

- ◆ Question 1(b) (matching grid references to river features)
- ◆ Question 1(e)(i) and (ii) (explaining the impact of tourists on the landscape and ways in which this impact may be reduced)
- ◆ Question 2 (a)(i) (interpretation of multiple line graph)
- ◆ Question 2(c) (i) (describing the advantages of street markets and shopping malls)
- ◆ Question 4(b) (complete multiple bar graph)
- ◆ Question 6(b)(c) (describing causes of heart disease and methods of disease control)
- ◆ Question 7(a) (causes of earthquakes)
- ◆ Question 7 (b) (describing the impact of a tropical storm)

Intermediate 2

- ◆ Question 1(b) (describing features of a river and its valley)
- ◆ Question 1(e) (explaining land use conflicts in coastal areas)
- ◆ Question 1(f) (describing ways of protecting coastal or upland environments)
- ◆ Question 2(d) explain the advantages and disadvantages of changes in agriculture in developing countries)

- ◆ Question 2(e) (explaining the advantages of a grid square on the map for industrial development)
- ◆ Question 3(b) (describing the environmental impact of deforestation)
- ◆ Question 4(a) (describing in detail processes within the hydrological cycle)
- ◆ Question 6(b) (describing the causes of disease and the consequences of the disease)
- ◆ Question 7(a)(i) and (ii) (describing the effects of a tropical storm and explaining the importance of aid agencies)

Areas which candidates found demanding

Intermediate 1

- ◆ Question 1(c) (explaining the formation of headlands and bays). Candidates were confusing this with cliff or waterfall formation, or just didn't have any knowledge at all.
- ◆ Question 1(d) (explaining why areas on the map were suitable for forestry). Many candidates had no idea what this question was about, despite forestry being a clearly stated land use in the Arrangements document.
- ◆ Question 2(d) (explain why industry is growing rapidly in countries such as India and China) Very little knowledge of this was demonstrated.
- ◆ Question 3(a)(i) (climate graph). Disappointingly poor graph interpretation skills were displayed.
- ◆ Question 7(a)(i) (describing the distribution of volcanoes). Generally poorly answered, and many candidates didn't seem to know what the term 'distribution' meant despite it being used on a regular basis in examination papers.

Intermediate 2

- ◆ Question 1(d) (describing the advantages and disadvantages of military land use for an area). A number of candidates misinterpreted this question and proceeded to focus on the advantages and disadvantages **of the area** for military land use, rather than describing the impact of the land use **on the area**.
- ◆ Question 2(c) (describing changes in city centres in the last 30 years). There was too much emphasis on transport changes, and many candidates were confusing CBD changes with post-industrial changes to the inner city zone.
- ◆ Question 3(a) (explaining the link between rapid population growth and increased desertification). While a number of candidates produced excellent answers achieving full marks, a substantial percentage answered this very poorly, showing little knowledge of the desertification process and its relationship with rapidly growing population in arid areas.
- ◆ Question 6(a)(i) (explaining advantages of combined development indicators). Many candidates struggled to understand what the question was asking.

- ◆ Question 6(a)(ii) (explaining differences in levels of development). Very few candidates answered this well, despite this topic being a key part of the Development and Health section in the arrangements document.
- ◆ Question 7(b) (describing methods of earthquake prediction and their effectiveness). While many candidates identified one or two methods, few successfully commented on effectiveness.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

The overall standard of candidates in Intermediate 1 showed a decline not only in overall numbers but also in ability, with many candidates clearly being presented at an inappropriate level.

The standard of candidates' scripts in Intermediate 2 was maintained, with the overall distribution of grades very similar to 2013. 78 candidates achieved 75/80 or better.

For several years the most common options in the 'Interactions' section have been Question 6 and Question 7. For Development and Health, centres must place equal emphasis on both parts. The evidence, however, is that while most candidates are comfortable answering questions on disease, many have limited knowledge and understanding of social and economic development.

There has been a trend over the last 2–3 years showing higher marks in human geography questions, and some candidates struggling to provide knowledge and understanding of physical processes, either for landscapes (particularly limestone and coastal erosion/deposition), or for natural hazards (causes of volcanoes /earthquakes and formation of a tropical storm). It must be emphasised that physical geography is a key part of the syllabus and must be given equal study time with human topics.

An issue raised in previous years was the lack of relevant case study information when answering some 5 and 6 mark questions, but I am pleased to report that there has been a general improvement regarding this, with more candidates at Intermediate 2 in particular referring to a specific case study.

Statistical information: update on Courses – Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2013	3561
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	2525
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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				
A	30.4%	30.4%	768	56
B	20.3%	50.7%	512	47
C	22.3%	73.0%	564	38
D	10.3%	83.3%	260	33
No award	16.7%	-	421	-

Statistical information: update on Courses – Intermediate 1

Number of resulted entries in 2013	909
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	307
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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	3.6%	3.6%	11	42
B	9.1%	12.7%	28	36
C	23.8%	36.5%	73	30
D	16.3%	52.8%	50	27
No award	47.2%	-	145	-

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.