



External Assessment Report 2013

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| Subject(s) | Geography |
| Level(s) | Advanced 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.

General comments

The general standard achieved by candidates in 2013 was similar to that in 2012, maintaining the improvement noted in that year. The overall pattern of marks in the written examination paper was very similar to 2012. The marks for the Folio 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 has been noted in previous reports was maintained this year.

Overall there was a small improvement in the performance of candidates compared with 2012.

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 three parts of question 3 were answered correctly by the majority of candidates.

Paper 2: Folio part 1: Geographical Study

An increasing proportion of candidates make effective and acknowledged use of appropriate secondary data, which complements primary data collected by the candidate.

Paper 2: Folio part 2: Geographical Issues Essay

A good number of candidates chose interesting, challenging and relevant themes for the essay. Almost all candidates made at least some explicit critical evaluation of sources, and most essays were contextualised succinctly and included relevant graphics that were referred to in the text.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1: Written Examination

- ◆ Section A (Map interpretation) revealed that, although most candidates could do basic map reading, a significant number of students were not able to **interpret** map data to AH standard. Some relied too much on generic statements rather than getting to the crux of the question asked.
- ◆ Some candidates made too much use of the atlas and too little of the OS map.
- ◆ Though there was some improvement in answers to question 3e) (interpretation of data), many candidates made a very limited attempt at this question, although there was a great deal of relevant information in the supplementary item and in the atlas.
- ◆ **All** candidates are required to answer question 5. As was clear from the text of the question and the isovel diagram, measurements had to be in two dimensions and not simply lateral across the river. Many candidates did not include a method of measuring water velocity below the surface. Few candidates answered part c) in an acceptable manner, ie referring to the specific data. Generic justifications were not suitable.

Paper 2: Folio part 1: Geographical Study

Some studies had data sets that were too limited for analysis of the standard required. Some studies used qualitative methods to analyse in-depth interviews. This is entirely appropriate for certain topics, but requires skill in application. Some studies contained graphics of a poor standard. This was particularly noticeable in many 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.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Paper 2: Written examination

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to use the mark allocation for sections of questions to help gauge the quality of answer required.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to answer the specific question asked and to avoid using generic reasons which may not apply to the question.
- ◆ It is worth reminding candidates that the examination has a mark allocation that is equivalent to the Geographical Issues Essay.

Paper 2: Folio 1 (Geographical Study)

- ◆ 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)

- ◆ Whilst initial contextualisation of the essay theme is essential, and most essays included this element in the introduction, a few essays were overlong in contextualising in comparison to treatment of the selected specific sources. Some essays are too long in general. Most of the best essays were not much longer than 2,500 words and were accompanied by good graphics and/or tables that were used in a relevant manner in the essay text.
- ◆ Although more centres are encouraging more effective critical commentary, many candidates rely too much on analysis of individual words and phrases, rather than a considered review of source content.

- ◆ Centres should avoid adding any covers and extra packaging to folio submissions.

Statistical information: update on Courses

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| Number of resulted entries in 2012 | 800 |
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| Number of resulted entries in 2013 | 807 |
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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 | 26.0% | 26.0% | 210 | 68 |
| B | 42.8% | 68.8% | 345 | 58 |
| C | 24.9% | 93.7% | 201 | 49 |
| D | 3.6% | 97.3% | 29 | 44 |
| No award | 2.7% | 100.0% | 22 | - |

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.