



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Geography
Level	Intermediate 1 and 2

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

There was a marginal decrease in candidate performance at Intermediate 2 with the overall percentage gaining grades A–C slightly down, and an increase in the percentage of No Awards. However, there was an increase in the number of candidates gaining an upper A grade.

There was a significant drop in the number of S3/S4 candidates and a corresponding increase in the number of S5/S6 candidates. The overall number of candidates continues to increase and was 3,243 this year.

At Intermediate 1, there was a slight improvement in the number of candidates gaining an A–C grade and a continuing increase in those candidates gaining an upper A pass.

There was a large decrease in the number of S3 candidates and an increase in the number of S4–6 candidates. The total number of entries this year rose from 771 to 807.

Areas in which candidates performed well

At Intermediate 2, candidates performed well in the following questions:

- ◆ Question 1 (b) (formation of headlands and bays)
- ◆ Question 1 (c) (ii) (attractions of coastal path)
- ◆ Question 1 (d) (i) and (ii) (economic and environmental impact of land use/methods to reduce impact)
- ◆ Question 2 (b) (population change in Scotland)
- ◆ Question 2 (c) (methods of encouraging public transport use)
- ◆ Question 3 (b) (i) and (ii) (effects of deforestation/ways to reduce deforestation)
- ◆ Question 4 (a) (hydrological cycle processes)
- ◆ Question 6 (b) (causes of AIDS or heart disease)
- ◆ Question 7 (c) (long- and short-term aid required after a tropical storm)

At Intermediate 1, candidates performed well in the following questions:

- ◆ Question 1 (a) (matching landscape types to specific areas)
- ◆ Question 1 (c) (matching grid references to coastal features)
- ◆ Question 1 (d) (explain why an area on the map attracts tourists)
- ◆ Question 2 (all parts) — Answered well by the majority of candidates.
- ◆ Question 4 (b) (i) (explain why countries need to build dams)
- ◆ Question 7 (b) (ii) (aid required after a tropical storm)

Areas which candidates found demanding

At Intermediate 2, candidates found the following questions demanding:

- ◆ Question 1 (c) (i) (correctly matching features to letters on a cross-section)
- ◆ Question 2 (e) (environmental improvements in industrial landscapes) — Many candidates did not read the question and instead described location factors.
- ◆ Question 4 (b) (river basin features which affect water storage)
- ◆ Question 4 (c) (environmental problems caused by water-control projects)
- ◆ Question 6 (a) (reasons for differences in development) — Many candidates did not read the question properly and simply repeated answers from Question 2 (a) which asked them to explain population density.
- ◆ Question 6 (c) (describe consequences of a disease for the population in an affected area) — Apart from 'illness' or 'death', few candidates were able to produce a developed answer.

At Intermediate 1, candidates found the following questions demanding:

- ◆ Question 1 (b) (explanation of ox-bow lake formation)
- ◆ Question 3 (a) (describe farming methods in the Brazilian rainforest or other forest studied) — Very few candidates mentioned shifting agriculture.
- ◆ Question 5 (all parts) — It is possible that many of the candidates who answered this question did so in error.
- ◆ Question 7 (a) (explain the distribution of volcanoes) — A large number of candidates simply described the location of volcanoes.

Overall, as in previous years, very few candidates attempted Question 5, although there was a slight increase in numbers attempting Question 4.

The most popular options were Questions 3, 6, and 7.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Centres should be aware that any of the topics from the Course Arrangements may be included in the exam. In particular, this is relevant to knowledge of all landscape features in Physical Environments and a range of diseases in Development and Health. A large number of Intermediate 1 candidates displayed little or no knowledge of ox-bow lake formation.

There were several cases of illegible writing this year. While every effort is made to mark these scripts accurately, some candidates were handicapped by writing that was extremely difficult to read. Centres should ensure that candidates such as these are identified at an early stage and given reader/scribe assistance where necessary.

In the Intermediate 2 exam, a number of candidates wrote far too much — for example, two A4 pages for a four-mark question! These candidates often filled a second (or even third) extra answer booklet. This is unnecessary and puts the individual candidate at risk of failing to complete the paper due to time constraints.

The overall standard of response was good with Markers commenting that fewer candidates were resorting to simple lists.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 1

Number of resulted entries in 2010	768
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	797
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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	26.0%	26.0%	207	42
B	23.7%	49.7%	189	36
C	23.8%	73.5%	190	30
D	7.7%	81.2%	61	27
No award	18.8%	100.0%	150	-

Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2010	3,193
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	3,250
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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 80				
A	35.3%	35.3%	1,147	54
B	20.0%	55.3%	649	46
C	20.9%	76.1%	678	38
D	7.0%	83.1%	227	34
No award	16.9%	100.0%	549	-

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.