



Course Report 2016

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 assessment. 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 documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question Paper

The Higher Geography question paper is marked out of 60 and has four sections: Physical Environments and Human Environments are both worth 15 marks; Global Issues is worth 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 commonly chosen topics in Section C were Question 6 (Development & Health, 94% of candidates), Question 7 (Climate Change, 69% of candidates), and Question 5 (River Basin Management (34% of candidates).

Question 8 (Trade, Aid & Geopolitics, 1% of candidates) and Question 9 (Energy, 2% of candidates) were answered by fewest candidates.

The intention for Higher Geography was to set a question paper that was of a similar demand to the Course Assessment in previous years. Post-examination analysis, however, suggests that the 2016 question paper 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, which is 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 six marks.
- ◆ In Section D, candidates are required to analyse their findings for up to a maximum of eight marks.
- ◆ In Section E, candidates should reach an overall conclusion supported by their evidence and can be credited up to two marks.
- ◆ A further four 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

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1: Many candidates showed a good understanding of the ITCZ and its impact on rainfall patterns across West Africa.

Question 3: Most candidates were well prepared for this question, with good use of case studies to support detailed answers. Those candidates who completed this question using semi-arid areas tended to perform better than those choosing rainforests.

Question 4b: Most candidates were able to give detailed developed points on the difficulties of collecting population data in developing countries; the best answers referred to specific countries and the problems they encounter.

Question 5a: Most candidates made good use of the data provided, linking it back to the question.

Question 6b: Candidates who were able to explain a wide range of Primary Health Care schemes scored well in this question. The use of specific, rather than generic, schemes allowed candidates to give developed answers on their effectiveness.

Question 10: Candidates who made full use of the sources scored well in this question; those who were able to synthesise information from different sources were able to make detailed and developed points in their answers.

Component 2: Assignment

Many candidates had collected numerical data (primary, secondary or both), and these assignments generally scored more highly in both the Processed Information and Analysis sections.

Candidates who had completed an assignment on a topic where they had a personal interest generally scored more highly, with clear evidence of background knowledge.

Those assignments where candidates opted to investigate comparisons or change were often of a higher quality. Urban studies looking at, for example, land-use change along a transect, or comparison of two urban zones, scored well, as did those comparing stages of a river, or infiltration/interception within different vegetation zones.

Those candidates who linked evidence from different sources on their Processed Information sheets tended to score more highly in both the Processed Information and Analysis sections. Those who had a clear section referring to background reading and/or geographical models also scored well in the Knowledge and Understanding Section.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1: While many candidates scored well, a number did not offer any comparison between the locations in West Africa, instead merely listing data for each separately.

Question 2: A number of candidates gave answers which did not go beyond the standard expected at National 5. A minority of candidates opted to discuss coastal land use conflict and management, or to discuss social and economic, rather than environmental, conflicts. Many answers were vague, with no real understanding of specific case study areas, and few offered real comment on the effectiveness of the management strategies, with many candidates offering only better/lower type comments on the initial conflict discussed in part (a).

Question 4(a): A majority of candidates did not offer any methods other than a census. Whilst it is entirely possible to gain full marks from only a census, many points were not developed enough to gain a mark.

Question 5(b): A minority of candidates did not respond to the key word 'environmental' in this question. Instead they discussed social and economic consequences of river basin management.

Question 7(b): Although some candidates were very well prepared for this question, others struggled to give answers of the standard required at Higher, and some answers were vague and repetitive. Candidates should ensure that all answers link back to the question — for example, many made points on transport policy, with no link to climate change.

Question 10: While many candidates scored well, there were a disappointing number of candidates who made little or no reference to the map at all.

Component 2: Assignment

The standard of coursework assignments was good overall, though there are some areas where a minority of candidates failed to score.

Many candidates wrote about three, four, or even five gathering techniques, but none in sufficient detail to gain full marks. Candidates can only be credited for two techniques — up to four marks for either; any additional, lower scoring, techniques will not gain any credit. Whilst candidates will not lose marks for discussing additional techniques, this may cost them valuable time. Some candidates also made repetitive comments when evaluating their gathering techniques.

A minority of candidates used very text-heavy processed information sheets, resulting in them lifting information, for which they cannot be credited. Others used numbers on bar graphs (on top of the bars themselves in addition to the scale), again resulting in lifts. It is clearly stated in the General Marking Instructions (available on the SQA website) that candidates will be expected to give an element of added value to the information on their Processed Information sheets. 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 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

It is essential that candidates read questions carefully, and that they understand and respond to both the command word and any other key words in the question. Answers which are generic and vague will not gain full marks, and answers which are not linked to the question will not gain marks.

Candidates are encouraged to use up-to-date case studies whenever possible. Centres should ensure case study material itself is recent and relevant to learners in the classroom today. Those candidates using older material, for example on barefoot doctors or river management, often gave vague, more generic answers.

At Higher level, candidates are expected to use their knowledge and skills to write developed responses. Guidance on what is required in a developed response can be found in the General and Specific Marking Instructions. To be awarded a mark, a candidate's answer must be relevant to the issue in the question (eg should focus on, for example, environmental conflicts), provide additional detail, exemplification, reasons or evidence, and respond to the demands of the command word.

The Detailed Marking Instructions published on the SQA website are a useful guide as to the level of detail that candidates are expected to give, and centres should make full use of these.

Component 2: Assignment

The standard of the assignment was again high.

Those studies with a wide range of data (both primary and/or secondary) allowed candidates to analyse their findings in more detail.

There is no advantage or disadvantage to a candidate in fieldwork being undertaken individually or as a group. It should be noted, however, that group-based fieldwork does not necessarily suit all candidates; there was evidence of candidates having undertaken fieldwork on topics that they did not entirely understand. Centres should note that all candidates should have a choice of topic.

Candidates should take care to ensure that only two sides of A4 are submitted as Processed Information sheets, and that these are legible. Some markers commented that the scanning and resizing of images and graphs by the candidate resulted in them being difficult to interpret; candidates must ensure that these are legible to both themselves and to markers.

Candidates are encouraged to use two separate sheets, rather than two sides of the same sheet, as this makes them easier for markers to refer to.

Candidates should also be aware that background knowledge included in the write-up stage must be pertinent to the topic being discussed for marks to be awarded.

A minority of candidates submitted very similar processed information sheets. 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, as detailed in 'General assessment information for Higher Geography' (http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/GAInfoHigherGeography.pdf) 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. In a small number of centres where group fieldwork was carried out, 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.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	3866
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	8157
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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	26.1%	26.1%	2133	59
B	25.2%	51.3%	2054	49
C	21.7%	73.1%	1772	40
D	10.0%	83.0%	813	35
No award	17.0%	-	1385	0

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.