



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Managing Environmental Resources
Level(s)	Intermediate 1

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

The paper was thought to be topical and to cover the work outlined in the National Course Specification document. It included environmental issues associated with a nature reserve, energy sources, the plight of the capercaillie, and an eco-building. Ecological studies were set in school grounds and a North Sea food web, and land use issues included a park and ride and sheep farm.

All of the questions were of a similar standard to previous years and the overall marks for the paper ranged from 8 to 71 out of 80. The majority of candidates coped well with the paper, and the quality of answers throughout the paper was high. Discriminating questions functioned properly and very few candidates did not complete the paper. These candidates might have achieved more success at a lower level. There was quite a variation in the standard of literacy of the candidates.

Questions which required specific factual information from the National Course Specification content are still proving to be the most difficult.

Candidates showed, in certain topical issues, a very positive attitude to and understanding of environmental issues. Data handling questions are still the most accessible to candidates.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates extracted information from a variety of sources and understood the different types of environment – Q1. This was a successful settling-in question, with most candidates scoring well. In Q 2(a) (i), the table was well presented. Candidates also performed well in the change of land use Q6 (a) (i) to (iv).

In Q7 (a)(iii), the products from a sheep farm, (iv) the location of the dipper, (b) extracting information from the table and (c)(i) describing the trend on a graph were well answered, as was extracting information from the passage – Q8 (a)(ii). The key in Q8 (g) was very well answered, with candidates scoring as highly in giving a similarity as in giving a difference.

Most candidates drew the correct conclusion from the information in Q8 (a)(i) and there were interesting but perhaps impractical suggestions to solve school litter problems – (c).

Areas which candidates found demanding

Candidates found it difficult to give named examples in some questions on the knowledge-based parts of the Course. Some also had difficulty with extended writing to describe how to use a piece of equipment.

Question 1 (b) (ii) (iii) (giving an example of a local organisation local piece of legislation) proved very demanding.

Question 2(b) (iii) (Give an advantage of using a nuclear energy source). Some candidates gave very vague answers such as 'cheap' or 'easy'.

Question 8(a) (iii): candidates found it demanding to explain how global warming could affect the number of dragonflies. Many could not name a national initiative – Q8 (d).

Question 9 (a) (v): candidates had difficulty in describing how to measure soil moisture.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

The most recent SQA Arrangements document for Managing Environmental Resources specifies areas of knowledge (and names examples) which the candidate should know for the external exam. However, the nature of the subject allows for many correct alternative examples. Correct alternatives are always awarded marks.

Candidates should know one example of an organisation at local, national and international levels.

Candidates should know one example of an initiative at local, national and international levels.

Candidates should know one example of a piece of legislation at local, national and international levels.

A table with three columns for the different levels and three rows for the three types — organisation, initiative and legislation — which gives nine boxes to be completed is perhaps a helpful way to summarise this information for candidates to learn.

If there is a named example in any part of the contents section in the subject specification, it can be asked about in the external examination.

It is obvious that most centres prepare their candidates very well in graph or chart completion. Please remember that graphs or charts should be completed in pencil. Lines in a pie chart must meet in the centre and should be drawn with a ruler. Bars in a bar chart must be of the same width, white space must not be seen between where the candidate has drawn the line and where it should be drawn, and all the appropriate information in the headings of the table should be presented on the axes. Bars need not be shaded in, as long as the key can be interpreted correctly. Candidates are strongly advised not to hurriedly shade in bars at the end of their answer as this can result in the loss of a mark when the shading goes above the appropriate line.

Practising questions from past papers is an excellent way to boost a candidate's grade. There are past papers with marking schemes available on SQA's website. These are extremely useful as they provide correct definitions and exemplification.

The space given after a question indicates what type of answer is expected. A short line indicates a one-word answer, whereas a longer line indicates that a longer answer is required. An explanation is usually given two lines.

Candidates should be advised to read the question carefully. If the question states 'from the diagram ...', the answer is expected to come from that diagram in the Question Paper and not from the candidate's Course work.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 1

Number of resulted entries in 2011	135
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	118
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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	22.9%	22.9%	27	56
B	19.5%	42.4%	23	48
C	28.8%	71.2%	34	40
D	6.8%	78.0%	8	36
No award	22.0%	100.0%	26	-

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.