



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Managing Environmental Resources
Level	Intermediate 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

Feedback indicates that the paper covered the National Course Specification in an interesting and up-to-date way. It included the use of alternative energy sources and energy consumption with associated pollution problems in different economies. Ecological studies were set in the context of a stream and a freshwater ecosystem. Biological principles were set in the context of an anaerobic digester. The local environment investigation question featured Fort William and Ben Nevis and questioned the effects of natural features on transport and industry. The local land use question featured a fish processing plant.

All questions were accessible to some candidates and were of a similar standard to previous years.

It was pleasing to see an increase in the number of presenting centres and in the number of candidates. All presenting centres should be congratulated on the support given to candidates in preparation for the external exam. Some candidates in S5 and S6, however, who performed poorly might have benefited from being presented at a lower level.

There was strong evidence of bi-level teaching, with Higher Managing Environmental Resources being taught and those not achieving the Units subsequently being presented for Intermediate 2.

Very few questions were not attempted and many were answered in a manner which demonstrated the candidates' interest in and enthusiasm for the environment.

Markers commented on the inaccurate and careless use of English by some candidates. Definitions in a scientific context must be clear and concise. Marks cannot be given for incorrect tabloid jargon. The misuse of a tense can result in a meaningless answer, for example in Question 2 (b)(ii), where a reason was required to back up a predicted trend.

In Section 2, Option B was the most popular choice, and candidates scored best in this option. Very few centres had candidates attempting Option C, which was the least well done.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Question 1 (a)(iii) and Question 5 (f): candidates could state personal contributions to ease environmental problems.

Questions 3 (a)(i), (ii) and (iii): there was evidence of a solid grounding in basic biological knowledge.

Question 5 (a)(ii): 'man-made resources' was another concept with which candidates had very few difficulties.

Question 6 (a)(i): extracting information proved very straightforward.

Question 7 (a)(iii): calculating a ratio, Question 8 (d)(ii): an addition calculation, and Question 8 (d)(i): completing a graph were all well answered.

Questions 8 (a)(i) and (e)(ii): the use of 4 and 6 grid references was well answered.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Candidates found it difficult to give named examples in some questions on the knowledge-based parts of the Course. Candidates also found those questions which required a prediction with a reason and giving an explanation to be demanding.

Question 2 (b)(ii): many candidates gave a prediction but did not back it up with an appropriate reason.

Question 4 (a)(iii): it proved to be more difficult to give an advantage than a disadvantage.

Questions 6 (a)(ii), b(i) and d: naming the naturalised species, one other endangered plant and one piece of legislation were all knowledge questions with which candidates had difficulty.

Question 8 (b)(i): some candidates did not seem to understand the term 'topographical'.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

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.

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.

Bars in a bar chart must be of the same width, and daylight must not be seen between where the candidate has drawn the line and where it should be drawn.

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.

Practice should be given in problem solving. Percentages, percentage increases and decreased should be calculated.

The space given after a question indicates which type of answer is expected. A short line indicates a one-word answer. A longer line indicates that a longer answer is required.

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

They must be prepared to answer every part of the question. 'Predict with a reason', for only one mark, indicates that the reason must back up the prediction; otherwise no mark will be awarded.

Past paper practice is an excellent method of boosting a candidate's grade. The questions using a map indicate the depth of study required in the local area. Extended writing practice is essential. There are past papers with marks schemes available on SQA's website. These are extremely useful in providing correct definitions and exemplification.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	105
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	132
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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	25.0%	25.0%	33	69
B	21.2%	46.2%	28	59
C	18.2%	64.4%	24	50
D	9.8%	74.2%	13	45
No award	25.8%	100.0%	34	-

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.