



**Principal Assessor Report 2007**

**Assessment Panel:**

**Geography**

**Qualification area**

**Subject(s) and Level(s)  
Included in this report**

**Geography Higher**

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

Overall the standard of response was slightly better than in 2006. This was reflected in an increase of about one mark in the mean score of both Paper 1 and Paper 2. The mean scores were 30.8 (Paper 1) and 28.4 (Paper 2).

The increase in scores may be partly due to the more accessible themes tested in Paper 1 and an improved performance in Paper 2 Question 6 in particular.

The general trend in Paper 2 where there is an increasing concentration on Questions 1 and 6 continues to give concern. It is hoped that the future increase in flexibility of choice in Paper 2 may lead to more holistic teaching of the course with a consequent improvement in the spread of topics. In Paper 1 strong performances in the Atmosphere, Hydrosphere and Lithosphere topics were noted – however as suggested below there are areas where improvements are required. The Population question (3) tested an area of the syllabus not previously tackled. Responses were generally sound although there was some overlap in answers to part (b) between parts (i) and (ii).

### Paper 1: Sample 725

Qu.	Topic	Mean mark	Question choice as %
1	Atmosphere	5.80 out of 9	
2	Hydrosphere	5.76 out of 9	
3	Population	4.88 out of 9	
4	Industry	3.62 out of 9	
5	Lithosphere	5.19 out of 7	83
6	Biosphere	4.75 out of 7	17
7	Rural	4.66 out of 7	68
8	Urban	4.10 out of 7	32

### Paper 2:

Qu.	Mean mark (Sample 725)	Question choice as % * (Sample : 793)
1	12.99	70
2	13.64	16
3	13.46	14
4	10.30	15
5	8.35**	0.99
6	14.02	84

\* Candidates must attempt one question from (Questions 1 – 3, and one from Questions 4 – 6)

\*\* Apart from one centre, all of the candidates in the sample were 'idiosyncratic'. i.e. all other Candidates in their centres tackled either Question 4 or Question 6.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

In Paper 1 the best answered questions were Questions 1 and 2. In Question 1 most candidates were able to name and identify the characteristics of two air masses. Several candidates however failed to be specific enough in their identifications of the source areas of these air masses restricting their answers to vague comments on ‘over the sea’ or ‘over the land’. In part (b) most were able to write detailed descriptions of, and provide good explanations for, the variations in rainfall. Question 2 was also very well done with part (a) in particular giving able candidates the opportunity to write at length. Occasionally answers to part (b) whilst being adequate were a bit superficial and some showed confusion – deposition being the main cause of ox-bow lake formation.

In Section B, Question 5 was by far the most popular choice and best answered question. Part (b) was generally very competently handled with the majority of candidates easily scoring the available marks. The most popular question in Section C was Question 7 and again it was done very well with the majority of candidates providing excellent accounts of Shifting Cultivation. One area of concern here is that several candidates in part (b) wrote about the *changes* to the system rather than the *impact* of the changes. It is essential that candidates read questions carefully and answer the question that is asked.

Paper 2 Question 1 (c), where candidates were required to describe and explain features of coastal erosion was generally very well done, although a number of candidates concentrated solely on erosional landforms and neglected to mention depositional ones with a consequent impact on their mark. It is also essential in questions such as this that candidates can demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of a range of erosional and depositional process and do not merely mention the names of the processes. In Question 3, part (d) was as usual, well done – with particularly good detail provided by candidates who had studied the Nile or Colorado. There is some concern though that resources for these two case study areas are becoming a bit dated and it is essential that centres try to update their courses to reflect the current rather than the 1980s situation. Question 4 part (b) on social and economic problems in cities in ELDCs provided good responses, although once again some convincing detail such as the names of parts of cities or specific projects require to be included. As always answers to question 6 (d) which concentrated on Malaria scored particularly well. However as suggested in the PA Report last year, there is a need to concentrate teaching on the more realistic and less idiosyncratic measures to combat this disease.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

Perhaps the most disappointing response in either paper was that to Paper 1 Question 4. Part (a) of this question asked for very straightforward information on the factors which led to industrial development in ‘any industrial concentration in the European Union’. This is a very specific part of the syllabus, it is in no way complex, yet few candidates could provide much in the way of specific detail about their chosen concentration – many who dealt with South Wales commented on extensive areas of flat land and neglected to mention the role of the valleys and the coastal towns of Swansea and Cardiff. If part (a) was poor, part (b) was even worse with a significant number of candidates writing about *location factors in general* rather than the *methods used to attract industry* to the area. Once again, candidates must read questions carefully and ensure that their case study material is known and understood. They must also be able to relate what they have been taught to the question asked !

Whilst Question 2 was the best answered Paper 1 question there is some concern at the number of candidates who seem to think that tributaries flow away from major rivers e.g. ‘The river cuts off to form Leigh Brook’ !!

The other area in Paper 1 which caused difficulties was Question 8(a) where few candidates even attempted to explain the location of the CBD of Worcester, and those few who did seemed to have little knowledge that the bridge or route-focus might be reasons for this.

In Paper 2 there were a number of areas which seemed to prove challenging, with the use of resources being a key difficulty. In Question 1 (a) candidates were referred to two maps and asked to describe and explain the location of Britain's National Parks. This should have been a straightforward question – yet many candidates could not even use the map to describe the location of the parks and explanations were very superficial. Many answers focussed on proximity to motorways and urban concentrations without making any attempt to link these factors to the location of the parks. In part (b) (ii) too many candidates wrote at length about the *negative effects* created by an influx of tourists but failed to answer the question which was about the *ways these negative impacts could be tackled* ! Once again it is essential that candidates read the questions and answer the question which is asked rather than the one they expect!

The issue of use of resources was once again an issue in Question 3(a). This is a commonly used question style in this part of the paper yet answers to this question were very weak with few candidates being able to provide anything beyond the most superficial of descriptions and almost nothing in the way of explanation.

In Question 4 there were two areas of significant difficulty. The first was part (a) where a large number of candidates seemed to completely ignore the resource and the question and wrote answers on *population* change rather than differences in *urban growth rates* between EMDCs and ELDCs. The second was in part (c) where few could develop answers on the causes of rural-urban fringe problems and the effectiveness of strategies to deal with them. Once again this is a key area of the syllabus and one which has been examined on a number of previous occasions.

In Question 6, part (b) was not tackled effectively by a large number of candidates who restricted their answers to the countries in the resource and discussed only literacy. By failing to discuss 'ELDCs they had studied' they failed to score as well as they might. Once again this is an important area of the syllabus and it too is an area which has been frequently tested in previous years.

### **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

Unhappily much of the advice this year reiterates that offered in previous years and indeed advice which is in all probability already being offered to candidates. The solution to at least some of the issues mentioned here might be that centres try as far as possible to give their candidates more practice in answering past-paper questions against the clock and that the Understanding Standards web-site is used to ensure that such responses are marked appropriately.

In particular the attention of candidates should be drawn to the specific focus of questions. For example in Paper 2 Question 1(c) the answer sought *solutions* and an *evaluation thereof* for the negative effects of tourism – *not the negative effects* themselves. In Question 6 (d) the answer required a *description and explanation* of malaria control strategies *not an evaluation* of them. It is in the slight nuances in questions that marks are lost and/or time wasted and it is these fine distinctions between questions that ought to be brought to the attention of candidates.

Each year reference is made to the need to encourage candidates to read questions carefully – not merely to scan them for the general context of the question. This is once again apposite and relates to the comments made above.

Similarly markers make reference each year to the paucity of real case-study information. For example, if an area such as the Lake District has been studied as part of Rural Land Resources it must be possible for candidates to (at least) refer by name to one lake, one mountain, one settlement, one by-pass road and one park-and-ride scheme! Too often responses are bland and non-specific: references being made in any national park to solving the litter problem by placing more litter bins, when in actual fact national parks such as the Yorkshire Dales are actually removing them!

Markers also frequently commented on the lack of detailed information on processes when dealing with landscape formation. At Higher level there is a need to be able to describe and explain the processes of (for example) plucking, abrasion or hydraulic action and not merely to note them.

This year, as has been indicated, the use or rather misuse of resources caused many candidates problems. Centres must ensure that where candidates are directed in questions to resources, that they examine these resources and use them appropriately to answer the question asked.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2006	7,019
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Number of resulted entries in 2007	7,292
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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	23.7	23.7	1,729	72
B	22.3	46.0	1,628	61
C	25.7	71.8	1,876	50
D	11.2	83.0	819	44
No award	17.0	100.0	1,240	-

### General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.