

## Principal Assessor Report 2003

**Assessment Panel:**

Geography

**Qualification area:**

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

Geography Intermediate 1 and 2

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## Statistical information: update

<b>Number of entries in 2002</b>	<b>1:</b>	<b>2:</b>
<b>Pre appeal</b>	319	1503

<b>Number of entries in 2003</b>	<b>1:</b>	<b>2:</b>
<b>Pre appeal</b>	313	1482

### General comments re entry numbers

Entry numbers for each level appear to be slightly down on 2002 figures viz. -6 and -21 respectively for Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2.

## Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

A copy of the grade boundaries for each level is attached to this report.

### 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 syllabuses evolve and change

### Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The grade boundaries for both Intermediate 1 and 2 were very close to the A-priori percentages. The pass mark of 42 for a grade A pass for both 1 and 2 represented 70% of the marks available.

The pass mark of 29 for a C pass for both levels 1 and 2 represented 48.3% of the marks available respectively. At grade C the pass mark reflected the main elements of the discussion at the pass mark meeting which included reference to the complexity of the presentation background of the candidates, the efforts made to ensure that the standard of the examinations had not significantly changed from previous years, the quality of the marking and the overall performance of the candidates.

The upper A grade pass mark of 47 at level 1 and 50 and level 2 reflected the slightly weaker performance of candidates at the outer limits of the marks range. Some of the reasons for this are referred to in the next section of this report.

National Courses 2003

**Intermediate 1**

Subject No: **X042**

Subject Name: **Geography**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Band</b>	<b>Minimum Mark</b>
A	1	<b>47</b>
A	2	<b>42</b>
B	3	<b>39</b>
B	4	<b>35</b>
C	5	<b>32</b>
C	6	<b>29</b>
Compensatory	7	<b>26</b>
No Award	8	<b>22</b>
No Award	9	<b>0</b>

National Courses 2003

**Intermediate 2**

Subject No: **X042**

Subject Name: **Geography**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Band</b>	<b>Minimum Mark</b>
A	1	<b>50</b>
A	2	<b>42</b>
B	3	<b>39</b>
B	4	<b>35</b>
C	5	<b>32</b>
C	6	<b>29</b>
Compensatory	7	<b>26</b>
No Award	8	<b>22</b>
No Award	9	<b>0</b>

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

Performance at both levels and particularly at Intermediate 2 was highly satisfactory. Overall assessment of performance is made difficult by the complex nature of the candidates who have been presented at both levels. This complex background undoubtedly greatly influenced the performance and was an important reference point in the discussions to determine the pass marks.

At Intermediate 1 the majority of candidates would probably consist of those who had achieved a Foundation pass in Geography in the 2002 diet. However, the number may have also included candidates from other social subjects who had achieved up to grade 3 and who for various reasons had elected to take Intermediate 2 Geography in S5. Similarly Intermediate 2 candidates would have consisted largely of those who had obtained up to a grade 3 award in Geography Standard Grade plus others who may well have achieved up to Grade 1 in other Standard Grade subjects. In addition there may also have been candidates who were intended to be presented at Intermediate 1 level but had performed so well that they were moved up to Intermediate 2 in terms of presentation level and who perhaps were borderline between the two levels. There may also have been a core of pupils who had begun the session in a Higher class but eventually were presented at Intermediate 2. Finally, both levels may also have included candidates from centres which had decided to by-pass Standard Grade Geography and were presented directly at one or other of the Intermediate levels.

The impact of this complex presentation group may help explain the distribution of awards whereby at Intermediate 1 and 2 there were both fairly large 'tails' and very few candidates achieving very high marks which would have resulted in upper A awards. Many candidates who might have achieved an upper A at Intermediate 2 may well have been given the opportunity to sit Higher Grade Geography.

The overall perception from markers and examiners was that performance had improved between 2003 and 2002.

Greater familiarity with the course content, increased confidence in deciding presentation levels and better preparation of candidates using a series of past paper questions from 2000 onwards may have assisted centres in their teaching and preparation of candidates, thus leading to a general improvement in performance. In the production of the papers, great efforts were made by the setting team to give the clearest possible instructions to candidates so as to avoid the chance of them answering more than the prescribed number of questions. Markers noted in their reports that there were many fewer candidates at both levels attempting more than the requisite three questions.

Candidates performed very well in the Ordnance Survey Map based questions (Questions 1 and 2) and made very good use of resource material provided within questions. Questions based on the production of diagrams/graphs from statistical data were exceptionally well answered. The most popular and best answered questions appeared to be Questions 1, 4 and 6.

Responses to those questions which required more detailed, extended written responses varied in quality, particularly in Intermediate 2. One feature of a large number of answers noted by markers was the trend to write answers in 'bullet point' format. This was often inappropriate and caused candidates to forfeit marks perhaps unnecessarily. Centres might be wise to consider advising candidates to avoid this practice.

It would appear that centres had made more accurate decisions on presentation levels this year compared to previous years, although given the background of candidates outlined earlier, the decision on final presentation levels is not an easy one for centres

## Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

At Intermediate 2 the following questions and topics were well answered:

- 1(b) Explanation of formation of surface and underground upland limestone features
- 1(d) Measures used to protect the countryside
- 2(a) I — Matching features to grid references
- 3(b) (ii) Measures to reduce atmospheric pollution
- 4(b) Population pyramid
- 4(d) Reduction of traffic congestion
- 5(a) Economic/social indicators
- 5(e) Trends in deaths in developing countries
- 6(a) Volcanic eruptions/earthquakes, causes
- 6(d) (I) Floods in UK

At Intermediate 1 questions included:

- 1(b) Matching upland limestone features
- 1(d) Completion of pie chart
- 2(b) Corrie formation
- 2(c) (ii) OS map evidence for popularity of area for tourism
- 3(b) I — Traffic flow in Athens
- 3(b) (ii) Completion of bar graph
- 4(b) Distribution of European cities
- 4(c) (iii) Theme park location
- 5(a)/(b) Definition of less developed countries
- 5(c) Causes of disease
- 5(d) I — Disease control measures
- 6(a)/(b) Features of droughts
- 6(c) (I)/(ii) Intensity of earthquakes

## Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

At Intermediate 2 these included:

- 1(e) (ii) Suitability of map area for various land uses
- 2(a) (iii) Advantages/Disadvantages of Broadford for tourism (many answered adv/disadv of tourism for Broadford)
- 2(b) Formation of volcanic sill/plug
- 3(c) (i) Impact of tourism on physical environment (many did not refer to physical environment)
- 4(c) Effects of migration on European country
- 5(b) Differences in calorie intake (many referred to only human factors)
- 6(c) Description/explanation of tropical storms (basic lack of knowledge of the topic)

At Intermediate 1 the questions included:

- 1(c) (ii) Land use conflicts
- 2(d) Prevention of coastal erosion
- 3(a) Naming two given sea areas
- 3(c) Industrial pollution in major rivers
- 4(a) (ii) Problems of decreasing population
- 5(b) (i) Access to safe water
- 6(b) (i) Causes of tropical storms
- 6(b) (ii) Reducing impact of weather hazards
- 6(d) (ii) Effects of earthquakes/volcanic eruption on selected area (area chosen often inappropriate)

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

Centres should continue to encourage candidates to make good use of resource material provided in questions.

Candidates often fail to read properly instruction in the stem of questions and, despite providing good answers, these are often irrelevant to the question asked. This results in a loss of marks. The use of past papers in revision might help to eradicate this problem.

Candidates should ensure that when required, they refer to appropriate case studies eg some candidates referred to Mt. St. Helens and proceeded to discuss events in a developing country.

Candidates should avoid using bullet points or 'listing' in answers especially where the question requires a detailed, extended written answer.