

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

Geography

Qualification area

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

Geography: Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	7,398
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	7,417
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

Entry numbers are very similar to those of 2004.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 100	-	-	-	-
A	25.5	25.5	1,888	72
B	24.1	49.5	1,787	61
C	23.1	72.7	1,717	51
D	9.2	81.9	682	46
No award	18.1	100.0	1,343	-

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.

Comments on any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

The 2005 Paper 1 was significantly different from that of 2004, in that question choice was provided (6 questions from 8). This was designed to ease the pressure of time on candidates, and to allow them to display greater understanding in larger mark questions.

Candidates responded positively to these changes – the mean score was increased by 2. The grade boundaries for A and B are identical to those of 2004. That for the C award is increased by 1 mark to take account of the changes described above. However, the improved candidate performance meant a significant increase in the pass rate and in the percentage of A awards (2.3% and 1.2% respectively).

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The candidate performance was superior at all levels to that of 2004.

The mean score in Paper 1 increased from 30.2 to 30.9, while that in Paper 2 increased from 28.1 to 29.0. The improvement at the 30th percentile was even greater, suggesting that the middle range candidates gained most from the changed structure.

The number of very weak candidates continues to decrease. Less than 5 per cent of candidates scored less than 35.

Appendices 1 and 2 show the mean scores for the individual questions from a sample of scripts.

Appendices 3 and 4 show the pattern of question choice in the two papers, also from a sample of scripts.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Appendix 1 shows that the best answered question in Paper 1 was question 1. Most candidates were able to provide evidence of glacial erosion in the O.S. map area, and were able to explain processes. Answers describing corrie formation were particularly good.

Answers to questions 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 were generally good, but not consistently so. In question 2(b), candidates showed good knowledge of sand dune succession, though some carelessly lost marks by misreading location C. Question 3(a) tested understanding of the age pyramid of an E.L.D.C., and most candidates answered competently. Both parts of question 5 were reasonably well answered. In questions 6(a), 7(a) and 8(b) candidates generally made good use of the resources provided.

Markers commented on the very small number of candidates who violated the rubric, and centres are to be commended on preparing their candidates for the new structure.

Appendix 2 shows that questions 2 and 3 were the most satisfactorily answered in Paper 2, but here, and in other questions, there were variations amongst the parts of the questions. Most candidates scored well in question 2(a), and, as in previous years, showed a comprehensive knowledge of methods of soil conservation. The satisfactory mean score for question 3 is largely due to the impressive knowledge of a particular water control project required in part (c).

Elsewhere, there were high quality answers in question 1(c), where candidates in some centres had clearly benefited from fieldwork in limestone areas. In question 4, most candidates made reasonable, if sometimes superficial, attempts at parts (b) and (c). Markers commented on the high quality of answers to question 6(b), where strategies for controlling malaria were listed in detail (though sometimes with a degree of confusion).

Question 5 was attempted by candidates from a small number of centres, but the impression was that responses were good.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

The most disappointing mean score in Paper 1 was in question 4. In question 4(a) few candidates made a clear distinction between site and situation and, even though answers were overwhelmingly about either Glasgow or Edinburgh, detail was sadly lacking. In part (b), lots of candidates failed to identify the 'inner city' with any degree of precision. Many included references to the C.B.D., others gave examples from the urban fringe.

In the questions with better overall means scores, there were areas of weakness. Climax vegetation was poorly explained – too many candidates attempted to answer within the confines of a sand dune environment. Very few candidates recognised AIDS as the key factor in the changing age pyramid of Botswana, but credit was given for other plausible explanations. The interpretations of the 2025 structure were often very feeble. It is hard to see how 'increased life expectancy' and 'better health care' could be extracted from the pyramid.

In question 5(a), some candidates merely listed the factors without explaining how they contributed to temperature change. In question 6(b), many candidates simply described what happens at a meander, rather than explaining how it was formed. In question 8(a), the weaker part of most answers, many failed to focus on physical factors. In question 1(b), the only acceptable description of a waterfall was that in a hanging valley.

In Paper 2, markers commented, not for the first time, on the failure of many candidates to make full use of the resources provided, and to give detailed, located examples.

In question 1(a), a minority of candidates seemed to misunderstand the statistics in the table, matching the visitor days to the year of designation and offering the weather that year as an explanation! Question 1(b) was a challenging change of slant, and not all candidates noted the difference. Answers would, as usual, have been enhanced by more place names. Many candidates mention park and ride schemes in the Lake District, but none were able to give a specific location.

In question 3(a), many candidates made poor use of the maps of Ghana.

In question 4(a), answers should ideally have referred to cities in an E.M.D.C. and in an E.L.D.C., but many did not do so. A further weakness was that some candidates focused solely on birth rate issues and ignored migration.

The low mean score in question 6 was due to weaknesses in part (a). Candidates lost marks through a lack of precision in the description of the indicators. In a (ii), answers were frequently very weak. Some candidates had obviously been expecting the 'between countries' question. Many candidates missed, or chose to ignore, the word 'variations' and wrote an account of the general development of a country. In the case of some centres, it was far from obvious which countries the candidates had studied – one packet of 10 scripts yielded 9 countries, plus Africa!

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Candidates should be encouraged to read questions thoroughly. Marks were lost in various questions, especially Paper 1 - Question 4 and Paper 2 - Question 6, because key words were missed/ignored.

Candidates should be encouraged to make full use of resources provided. More marks could have been gained, e.g. in Paper 1 - Question 3, Paper 2 - Question 1, Paper 2 - Question 3, if candidates had shown greater skill in this area.

Candidates should be encouraged to give named locations to give authenticity to their answers. This applies especially, but not exclusively, to Paper 2 - Question 1 and Paper 2 - Question 4.

Since age pyramids in African countries are increasingly likely to show the impact of AIDS as time passes, it is important that candidates are made aware of this.

Centres studying 'Development and Health' should ensure that their candidates have adequate knowledge of a few contrasting countries for the 'between countries' question, and a reasonably detailed knowledge of one country for the 'within' question.

APPENDIX 1:
Mean Marks for Questions in Paper 1 (expressed as Percentage)

Question Number	Subject	Percentage
1	Lithosphere	72
2	Biosphere	57
3	Population	65
4	Urban	43
5	Atmosphere	66
6	Hydrosphere	66
7	Rural	66
8	Industrial	64

Sample of 300 Scripts

APPENDIX 2:
Mean Marks for Questions in Paper 2 (out of 25)

Question Number	Mean Mark
1	13.93
2	15.71
3	14.01
4	13.27
5	*
6	13.27

Sample of 360 Scripts
*too few responses

APPENDIX 3:
Question Choice in Optional Sections of Paper 1 (Percentages)

Question Number	Percentage
5	56
6	44
7	66
8	34

Sample of 300 Scripts

**APPENDIX 4:
Question Choice in Paper 2**

Question Number	Percentage
1	30.6
2	12.4
3	7.0
4	11.1
5	0.2
6	38.7

Sample of 1500 Scripts