



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Geography
Level	Higher

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

In 2011 there was an improved performance overall with the vast majority of candidates well prepared for the examination. There were some outstanding candidates and very few very poor performances. There remains, however, a small minority of candidates who would be better presented at Intermediate 2.

There is a noticeable and very encouraging increase in the number of candidates using relevant, specific, named examples within their answers. There also appears to be fewer candidates choosing the wrong area than in the past, ie 'developed' rather than 'developing' countries.

These factors are reflected in the mean score for both papers being higher than in the previous two years. The mean score for Paper 2 was slightly lower than Paper 1 for the first time since 2008. Tables 1 and 2 provide more detailed information regarding question choices and scores in both papers.

In Paper 1, Section C, far more candidates opted for Question 5 than Question 6, and those choosing Question 5 scored more highly. In the Human section, there was again an imbalance as far more candidates opted for Question 8, which also scored more highly (see Table 1).

In Paper 2, the dominance of Questions 1 and 6 is even more evident, as is the continuing decline of Questions 2 and 4. No centres preparing candidates for Question 5 were evident in the samples available (see Table 2).

This year the move to ensure that candidates are examined on the ability to apply their knowledge and skills to resource-based questions was continued in Paper 2 with the inclusion of resource-based questions throughout the paper. Many candidates responded well to these questions.

As in previous years, some Markers commented on the number of candidates who appear to run out of time in both Paper 1 and Paper 2; although it was also noted by some that this seemed less of a problem than in previous years. All of these factors were taken into consideration at the meeting to set the grade boundary marks.

Table 1: Paper 1: Question choice and mean marks scored

Question	Topic	Mean mark	Percentage mark	Question choice as % (sample size 250)
1a	Atmosphere	4.30/6	72%	
1b		7.51/12	63%	
2a	Biosphere	2.16/5	43%	
2b		8.50/13	65%	
3i	Rural	5.99/8	75%	
3ii		6.30/10	63%	
4a	Industry	7.68/10	77%	
4b		2.56/8	32%	
5a	Lithosphere	5.34/6	89%	67
5b		5.87/8	73%	67
6a	Hydrosphere	4.43/7	63%	33
6b		3.88/7	55%	33
7a	Urban	3.55/6	59%	24
7b		4.65/8	58%	24
8a	Population	2.53/5	51%	76
8b		6.51/9	72%	76

Table 2: Paper 2: Question choice and mean marks scored

Question	Mean mark	Percentage mark	Question choice as % (sample size 250)
1a	12.68/18	70%	71
1b	6.42/10	64%	71
1c	3.94/6	66%	71
1di	5.61/10	56%	71
1dii	3.08/6	51%	71
2a	7.07/12	59%	12
2b	5.31/8	66%	12
2c	6.59/16	41%	12
2d	9.62/14	69%	12
3a	6.64/12	55%	20
3b	6.12/10	61%	20
3ci	10.68/16	67%	20
3cii	7.30/12	61%	20
4a	5.74/10	57%	14
4b	5.38/10	54%	14
4c	4.00/10	40%	14
4di	6.35/12	53%	14
4dii	3.79/8	47%	14
5	No Question 5 responses in sample		
6ai	5.40/10	54%	84
6aii	5.16/10	52%	84
6b	12.87/18	71%	84
6c	5.90/12	49%	84

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Question 1 (a) saw most candidates well prepared and answers were generally detailed and specific.

Question 2 (b) assessed candidate understanding of sand dune succession and provided some excellent answers with many candidates scoring full marks. This was, however, a question in which there was a marked difference in performance between centres.

Question 3 in the main was well done, particularly part (i), with those candidates opting for intensive peasant farming providing the better answers about landscape.

Question 5 produced some very good answers, demonstrating good map reading skills and the processes involved in the formation of coastal features. There were, however, a small minority of candidates unable to provide accurate six-figure grid references.

Question 8 (b) was well attempted, although it was the last question in the paper, most candidates made a very good attempt with relevant named examples (although there were a frustrating number of references to the country of Africa!).

Paper 2

Question 1 (a) on the formation of glacial landscapes was well answered by most candidates who brought a detailed knowledge and understanding of the processes involved in the formation of such landscapes. Question 1 (b) on social and economic opportunities was also well answered, although candidates could score higher marks by opening up their answers to include land uses other than tourism and recreation. Rural upland schools notably provide stronger, more detailed answers in this question.

Question 3 (c) also provided strong answers on the benefits of water control schemes, with candidates providing specific information on their case study areas and some particularly good answers about the management of the Colorado.

Following the trend of recent years in Question 6 (b) answers on malaria were strong with named examples included in the majority of candidate responses.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

In Question 1 (b), many candidates failed to describe variations across West Africa shown in the graphs, opting instead to describe each separately. There were also a surprisingly high number of candidates who failed to mention the ITCZ at all, and many of those who did, then failed to explain the movement of the ITCZ and link it to the thermal equator. Many candidates also failed to use the full range of data in the resources.

Q 4 (b), as always, was very poorly done — many candidates offered vague generalised answers (little beyond grants, loans, etc) with little reference to specific measures used in

their case study areas. This is especially frustrating as the issue has been highlighted for a number of years in External Assessment Reports.

In Question 6 (a), many candidates simply described the global hydrological cycle rather than referring specifically to the drainage basin, therefore although there is considerable overlap between these two areas, many answers contained irrelevant information. In Question 6 (b) many candidates failed to describe the river levels, opting instead to describe precipitation figures, with little attempt to explain river levels.

The majority of candidates opting for Question 7 showed a weak understanding of the terms 'site' and 'situation', and in part (b), many candidates gave answers which did not demonstrate detailed knowledge of recent change in their case study city.

Paper 2

In Question 1 (d), some candidates were unable to offer detailed solutions for one conflict, and a similar number of candidates missed the reference to 'environmental conflict' and included references to social and economic problems.

In Question 4 (a), some candidates described the site of specific cities rather than distribution patterns shown on the map.

Despite a good overall standard in Question 6, there were parts which candidates found more challenging. In part (a)(i), many candidates lifted data straight from the table rather than describing what the data told them about the country, and in (ii) many candidates attempted to describe Kenya, despite it clearly not being their case study area.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Many centres are clearly making use of the resources available to them on SQA's website and the many revision guides available from a range of sources. This is to be commended, although centres are reminded that the wording and emphasis of questions changes from year to year and candidates must ensure they are prepared for all eventualities.

One of the main improvements noted by many Markers this year was the use of named examples by candidates, particularly in Paper 2. A significant number of marks are available to candidates for reference to places, schemes and solutions within their case study areas and topics, and those candidates who prepare for this, reap the rewards.

Despite an improvement in last year's responses, this year once again sees a decline in answers to the Industry question. Candidates must ensure that they are well prepared for this topic and can offer specific, named examples from *within* their case study. This advice also applies to the Urban question where candidates describe general changes to CBD or inner city areas rather than their case study. One point to note is that some answers are now referring to change which could only loosely be described as 'recent'. Whilst the Arrangements refer to, and allow discussion of, change *post-1950*, centres should be encouraged to ensure their teaching is contemporary and relevant to the world today. Those candidates discussing more recent change, in the main, give a higher quality of answer.

Centres should also note the inclusion of resource-based questions in *all* questions in Paper 2 this year. Whilst this type of question has been routinely asked in Questions 3–5 for a number of years, it has more recently been used in other questions. These questions allow the candidate to apply their skills of analysis in addition to their knowledge, and centres should ensure that time is given to the development of these skills, no matter which topics are chosen in Paper 2.

On a final note, there is still work to be done in ensuring that candidates read and interpret questions carefully. Although the number is decreasing, there is still a minority of candidates who mix-up developed/developing world cities, or misread 'between' for 'within' — for example in Question 6 (a) (ii).

Overall, the higher quality of responses this year, reflected in the mean scores, is very encouraging and one which shows that teachers around the country are ensuring a high standard of teaching and learning.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	7,385
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	7,778
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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 200				
A	32.6%	32.6%	2,533	140
B	23.8%	56.4%	1,851	120
C	21.7%	78.1%	1,690	100
D	7.6%	85.7%	590	90
No award	14.3%	100.0%	1,114	-

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.