



**Ashbrook**  
RESEARCH & CONSULTANCY

**FINAL REPORT  
ADVANCED HIGHER GEOGRAPHY RESEARCH  
February 2013**

**PREPARED FOR: The Scottish Qualifications Authority**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Teacher Review: Structured Interviews**

Structured telephone interviews were undertaken with 50 teachers of Advanced Higher Geography.

- 48% of Teachers believe that pupils perceive Advanced Higher Geography to be more difficult than other Social Subjects; while 46% felt that pupils did not perceive it to be more difficult. 56% believe that Advanced Higher Geography is actually more difficult than other Social Subjects.
- 48% of teachers believe that the Advanced Higher Geography course is over assessed compared to other courses.
- 56% of teachers feel that the balance between skills and knowledge is appropriate for a Geography qualification at this level; while 40% do not.
- 66% of teachers believe that the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper is appropriate, with 56% believing this ratio is very appropriate.
- 48% of teachers believe that the weighting of the Question Paper should be increased, although 42% believe that it should not.
- 52% of teachers have concerns regarding duplication in the Course and Unit Assessment; whereas 48% do not, with those who did have such concerns principally referring to the number of NABs.
- 52% of teachers believe that the Folio element of the course could not be reduced, whilst 26% believe that it could.
- While 98% of teachers believe the Critical Essay is a valuable part of the course, 82% believe it to be very valuable.
- 82% of teachers feel that the Critical Essay should be assessed through the Folio.
- All 50 teachers interviewed believe that the Geographical Study is a valuable part of the course; while 90% stated that it is very valuable.

- All 50 teachers interviewed believe that the Geographical Study should be assessed through the Folio.
- 96% of teachers feel that the statistics element of the qualification is relevant to Advanced Higher Geography; while 56% felt it is very relevant.
- 98% of teachers believe the challenge presented by statistics questions that have appeared in past questions to be appropriate; with 44% believing it to be very appropriate.
- All 50 teachers interviewed believe the mapping skills element of the Question Paper is appropriate.

### **Teacher Review: Depth Interviews With High Presenting Centres**

6 teachers from High Presenting Centres participated in telephone depth interviews.

- A number of the teachers interviewed in high presenting centres that pupils do not believe that Advanced Higher Geography is more difficult than Advanced Highers in other Social Subjects.
- All of the teachers interviewed in high presenting centres thought that Advanced Higher Geography is a challenging course but that the level of challenge is reasonable for an Advanced Higher.
- All of the teachers interviewed in high presenting centres were largely positive about the assessment of the Advanced Higher Geography course and, in particular, felt that the assessment methods and approach were appropriate. In addition, there was a number felt that the course is not over assessed.
- Despite these positive outcomes, however, there were some concerns about the marking of the Advanced Higher Geography course which resulted in pupils achieving fewer A Grades than would be expected.
- One teacher felt that the marking of the Folio, led teachers in high presenting centres being unsure of the standards required to achieve an A Grade in the Geographical Study and Critical Essay.

- The majority of teachers interviewed in high presenting centres were satisfied with the balance between skills and knowledge for a Geography qualification of this level. Despite this, some of teachers felt that there could be more knowledge content.
- The majority of the teachers were satisfied with the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper. In fact, should the 70:30 ratio change some teachers felt it may be difficult for their school to deliver the Advanced Higher Geography course. Despite this, however, many teachers stated that they would not be unhappy were the ratio to change to 60:40.
- Several of teachers believed that the 70% allocated to the Folio was too great.
- The 6 teachers interviewed had mixed views regarding the weighting of the Question Paper.
- Virtually all of the teachers believed that the Critical Essay was a valuable element of the course.
- All 6 of the teachers believed that the Geographical Study was a valuable element of the Advanced Higher Geography course. In addition, they all believed that the Geographical Study should continue to be assessed through the Folio.
- Most of the 6 teachers felt that the statistics element of the Advanced Higher Geography course represented an appropriate and reasonable challenge for a qualification of this level, and that pupil's benefit from the statistical techniques they learn during the course.
- However, some teachers commented that pupils occasionally struggle with the statistics element of the Advanced Higher Geography course.
- The map interpretation element of the Question Paper is seen as a critical and fundamental skill, which is appropriate to Advanced Higher Geography. Indeed, several of the 6 teachers felt that the map interpretation element of the Question Paper could be increased.

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### **HE Faculty Staff Review**

6 Higher Education Faculty Staff were interviewed by telephone for this review.

- All of the HE faculty staff interviewed that they were satisfied with the general principles and elements of the assessment of the Advanced Higher Geography course and did not feel that the course is over assessed.
- Some of the HE staff feel it is important that Advanced Higher Geography retains written examinations.
- The HE faculty staff interviewed felt the balance within the Course being skills, rather than knowledge, is appropriate.
- Some of the HE staff thought that an increase in the knowledge content of the course would have implications for teachers and departments, which could result in fewer students taking Advanced Higher Geography.
- Most of the HE faculty staff interviewed felt that the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper was appropriate. However, some of those interviewed felt that the course would be manageable should the weighting be changed to 60:40.

### **Candidate Review**

159 candidates, currently studying Advanced Higher Geography, participated in an online survey which was targeted at all 818 candidates currently studying the subject.

- 56% of candidates felt that Advanced Higher Geography was not perceived to be more difficult by pupils than other Social Subjects.
- Whereas 46% of those who felt that Advanced Higher Geography is perceived to be more difficult than other Social Subjects, went on to state they thought this is not actually the case.
- When candidates made comments on the assessment of Advanced Higher Geography, most were positive, e.g. the assessment of the course is fair and appropriate for an Advanced Higher.

- 62% of candidates do not believe that the Advanced Higher Geography course is over assessed compared to other courses.
- 12% of candidates felt there were issues regarding potential duplication in the Course and Unit Assessment; these relate particularly to the fieldwork techniques and statistics questions in the Question Paper.
- 71% of candidates believe that the balance between skills and knowledge is appropriate for a Geography qualification at this level.
- 80% of candidates believe that the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper was appropriate, with 37% of the candidates feeling it to be very appropriate.
- 47% of candidates thought that the Folio element of the course could be reduced and 47% thought it could not. Those who thought that this could be the case most commonly commented that this could be achieved by the reduction of either the Geographical Study or the Critical Essay.
- 96% of candidates felt the map interpretation element of the Question Paper is appropriate, with 53% specifically believing the map interpretation question in the Question Paper is very appropriate.
- 78% candidates believed the statistics element of the Question Paper is appropriate, with 56% specifically believing the statistics question is very appropriate.

### **SAGT Review**

The SAGT provided a senior member of the Association for this Review; however the other members were not polled for their opinions, therefore the senior member's views are personal and individual.

- The senior member of SAGT did not feel that the perception of Advanced Higher Geography is more difficult than Advanced Highers in other Social Subjects. However, the senior member of SAGT felt that some might perceive the assessment of Advanced Higher Geography to be stricter than other Advanced Higher subjects.



- The senior member of SAGT did not believe that the Advanced Higher Geography course is over assessed.
- The senior member of SAGT felt that the balance between skills and knowledge was appropriate, if the course was viewed progressively from school to university; however if students did not pursue the subject beyond Advanced Higher she felt it was heavy on skills.
- The senior member of SAGT, consulting the SAGT committee and stated that it was their view that the 70:30 balance between the Folio and the Question Paper was appropriate. She commented that some schools may not be able to offer Advanced Higher Geography were this ratio to change due to lack of teaching resources.
- Although the senior member of SAGT believed the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper was appropriate, she commented that a change to 60:40 would be manageable and she felt departments would cope with any implications that this may have for increased teaching content.
- The senior SAGT member commented that there is the potential for duplication within the Course and Unit Assessments – in her opinion this is not a significant problem; particularly in relation to the fieldwork techniques and statistics questions.
- The senior member of SAGT believed that the Critical Essay is immensely valuable to pupils and felt the Critical Essay was assessed in the correct place.
- The senior member of SAGT did not want to see the Geographical Study element of Advanced Higher Geography changed, including its assessment through the Folio.
- The senior member felt that the statistics and map interpretation elements of the Advanced Higher Geography course represent an appropriate challenge for pupils.

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This report details findings to emerge from research undertaken on behalf of the Scottish Qualifications Authority pertaining to Advanced Higher Geography.

The first stage of the research was designed to develop the knowledge and understanding of the Ashbrook Project Team – and, in particular, Dr David Brooks – of current issues pertaining to the review of Advanced Higher Geography. This took the form of discussions with the Advanced Higher Geography Team and QDT.

The second – and principal – element of the research incorporated:

- 50 structured telephone interviews with teachers of Advanced Higher Geography
- Telephone depth interviews with 6 individuals within high presenting centres
- Telephone depth interviews with 6 HE faculty staff
- An online survey targeted at all 818 learners currently studying for Advanced Higher Geography, in response to which, 159 completed questionnaires were received (representing a response rate of 19.4%)
- A depth interview with a senior member of the Scottish Association of Geography teachers

Section 2.0 to 6.0 inclusive outline the key findings to emerge from each of the research activities noted above, whilst Section 7.0 provides a series of conclusions that can be drawn from the study.

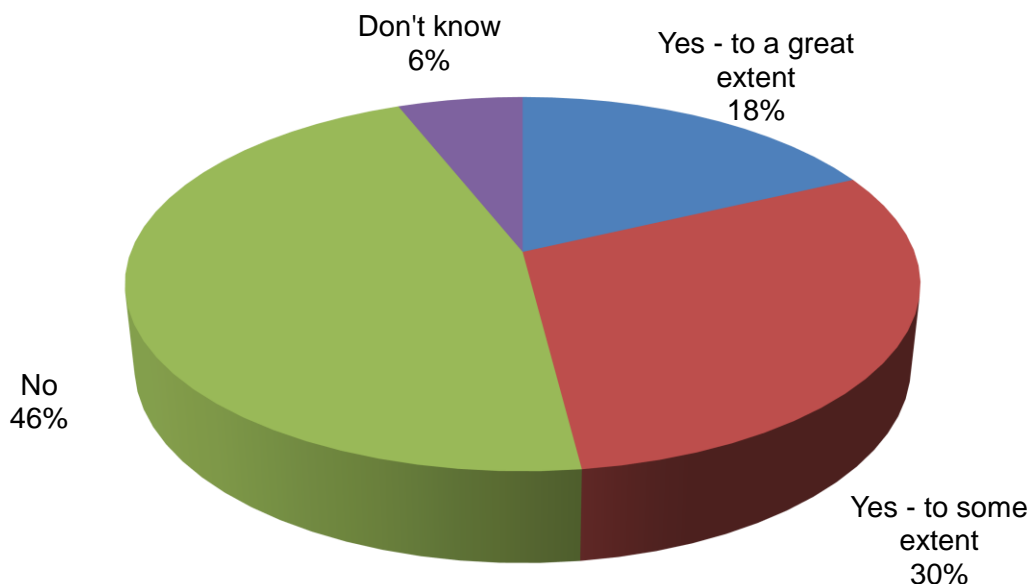
## 2.0 TEACHER REVIEW: STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In considering the outcomes of this section of the report, it should be borne in mind that the 50 teachers interviewed were mainly from low presenting centres.

### 2.1 Difficulty of Advanced Higher Geography

“Do you believe that Advanced Higher Geography is perceived to be more difficult by pupils than other Social Subjects?”

**Figure 1: Is Advanced Higher Geography Perceived To Be More Difficult By Pupils Than Other Social Subjects?**



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 1 indicates that teachers were evenly split in terms of believing that pupils perceive Advanced Higher Geography to be more difficult (48%) or not more difficult (46%) than other Social Subjects, and that amongst those who believed the former, they are more likely to believe that this is *to some extent* (30%) rather than *to a great extent* (18%).

When respondents believing that Advanced Higher Geography is perceived to be more difficult by pupils than other Social Subjects were asked – on an unprompted basis – why they believed this was the case, the principal reason was:

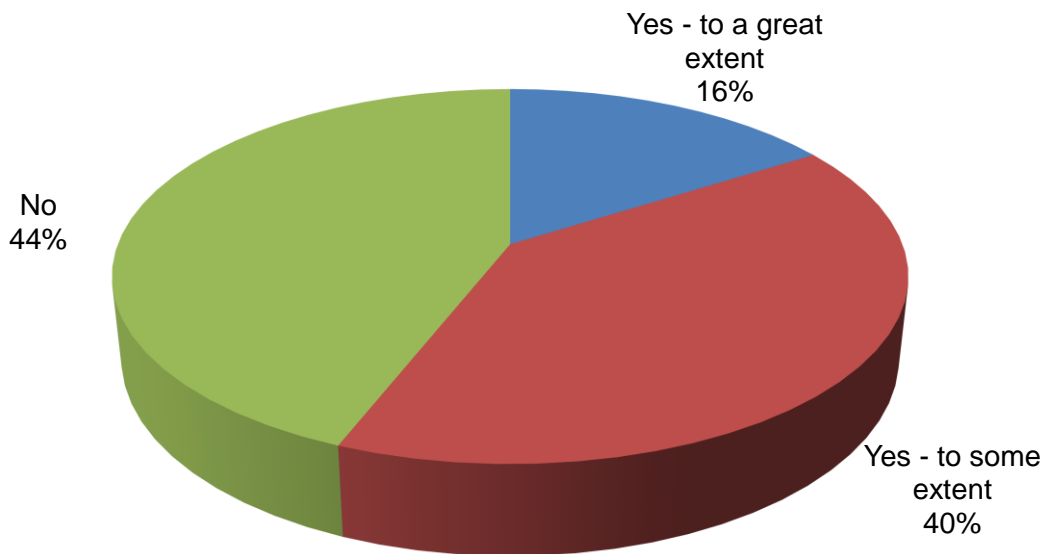
- The amount of independent working and study required

And, thereafter:

- Perceived difficulties in achieving an A Grade
- The perceived challenge of the Folio, including have two Folio submissions
- The amount of time perceived as being required for the Geographical Study
- The perceived balance between skills and knowledge within the course
- The statistical element of the course

*“Do you believe that Advanced Higher Geography is actually more difficult than other Social Subjects?”*

**Figure 2: Is Advanced Higher Geography Actually More Difficult Than Other Social Subjects?**



**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 2 it can be seen that a slight majority of respondents (56%) believed that Advanced Higher Geography is actually more difficult than other Social Subjects, with this more likely to be to some extent (40%) than to a great extent (16%).

When these respondents were then asked why they believed Advanced Higher Geography to be actually more difficult than other Social Subjects, the principal factors to emerge were:

- The amount of independent study and working required – including time management
- The course being far more skills based than other Social Subjects
- The lack of taught content within the course

Thereafter, a core of respondents here also made unprompted reference to other factors i.e. in comparison to other Social Subjects, Advanced Higher Geography:

- Requires pupils to use their initiative to a greater extent
- Is more challenging in relation to, for example, critical thinking skills
- Is more difficult to achieve an A Grades in assessment advice
- Requires higher level of English skills expected

## **2.2 Assessment of Advanced Higher Geography**

When respondents were asked to provide their views on the assessment of Advanced Higher Geography, the majority of responses were positive in nature, particularly in terms of:

- The amount of assessment, which was considered to be required and valuable
- The assessment methods and approaches being appropriate to a qualification at this level/of this nature

However, a notable proportion of responses here were negative in nature with concerns about:

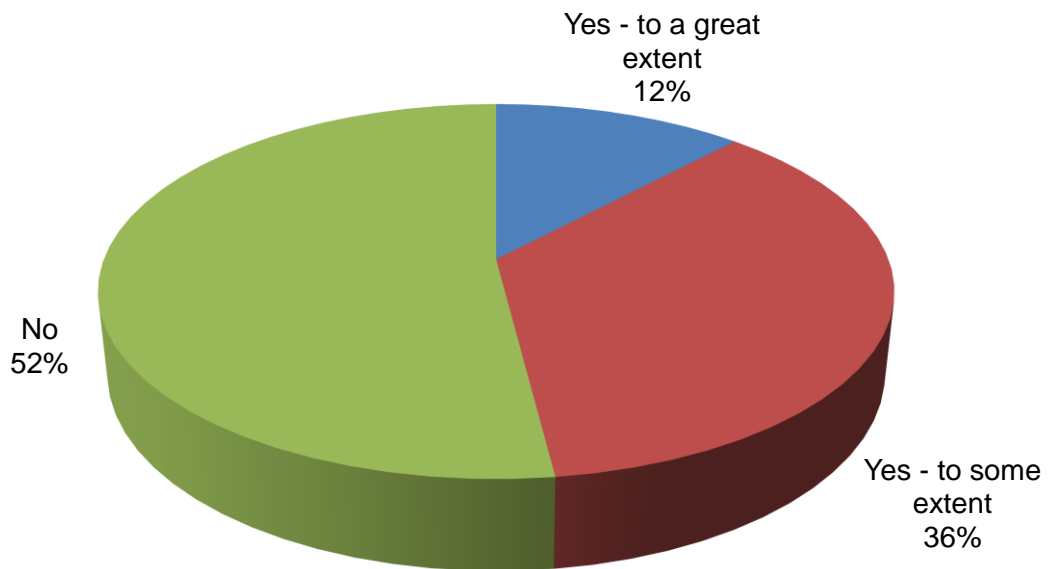
- The number of NABs in the course, which was considered too high
- Possible over assessment of the course
- Possible duplication in assessment, particularly in terms of course and unit elements
- There being too much assessment in the Folio
- Consistency, clarity and transparency of external marking

Indeed, as noted in Figure 3 below, almost half of respondents (48%) believed that the Advanced Higher Geography course is over assessed compared to

other courses – with this primarily being *to some extent* (36%) rather than *to a great extent* (12%).

“Do you believe that the Advanced Higher Geography course is over assessed compared to other courses?”

**Figure 3: Is Advanced Higher Geography Over Assessed Compared To Other Courses?**

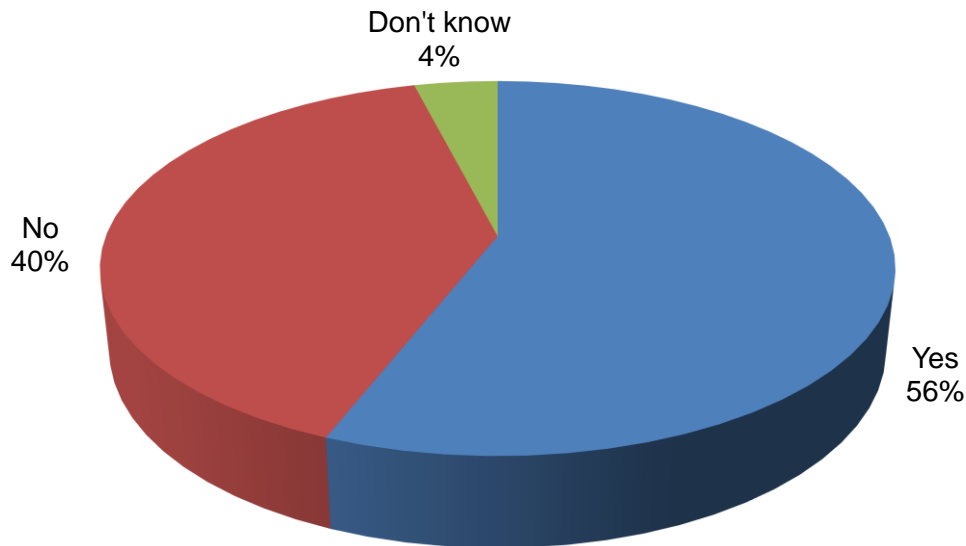


**Base: All Respondents**

### 2.3 Appropriateness of Balance Between Skills & Knowledge

*“Do you think the balance between skills and knowledge is appropriate for a Geography qualification at this level?”*

**Figure 4: Is Balance Between Skills & Knowledge Appropriate for A Geography Qualification At This Level?**



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 4 indicates that 56% respondents believed that the balance between skills and knowledge is appropriate for a Geography qualification at this level, 40% did not believe this to be the case, with all of these respondents making subsequent reference to a desire for either an increased amount of taught content and/or a decrease in the Folio, and a number making reference to pupils struggling with independent study and, in particular, meeting deadlines.

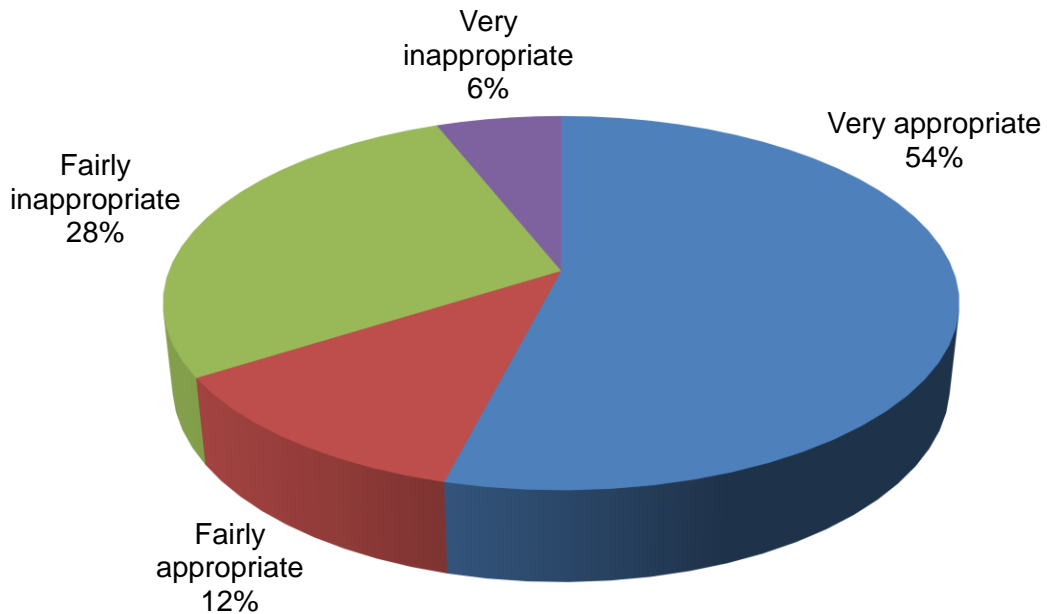
In addition, specific references were made here to:

- Making the Course Assessment more testing
- Advanced Higher Geography being very different to Higher Geography
- Pupils struggling to cope with deadlines
- A need for Advanced Higher Geography to build on what is learned in Higher Geography

**2.4 Appropriateness of the 70:30 Ratio for the Folio & Question Paper**

*“How appropriate do you believe the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper to be?”*

**Figure 5: Appropriateness of the 70:30 Ratio For The Folio & Question Paper?**



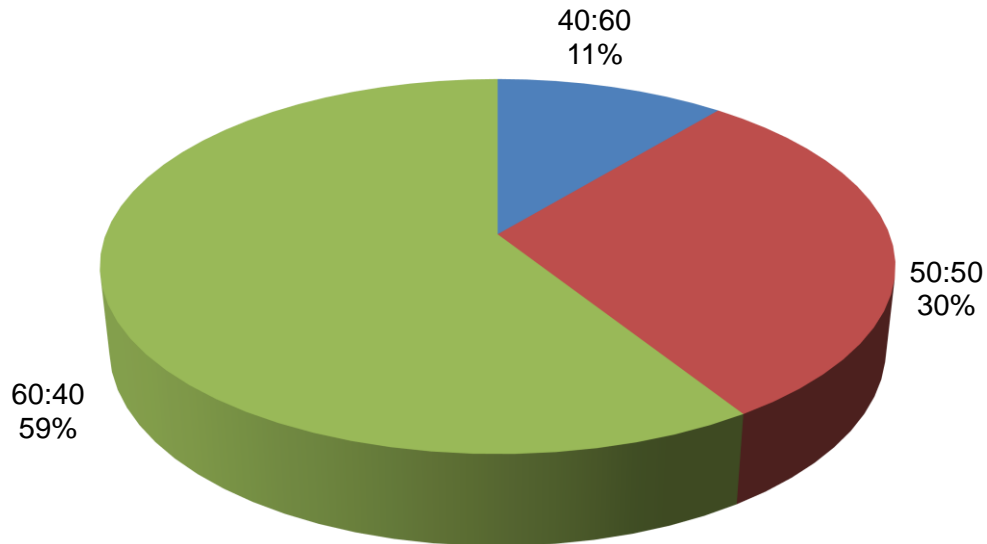
**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 5 indicates that 66% believed that the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper is appropriate, with 54% specifically believing this ratio to be very appropriate.



*“What do you think the balance should be between the Folio and the Question Paper – for example, 60:40, 50:50 or 40:60?”*

**Figure 6: Desired Revised Balance Between Folio & Question Paper**



**Base: Very/Fairly Inappropriate in Figure 5**

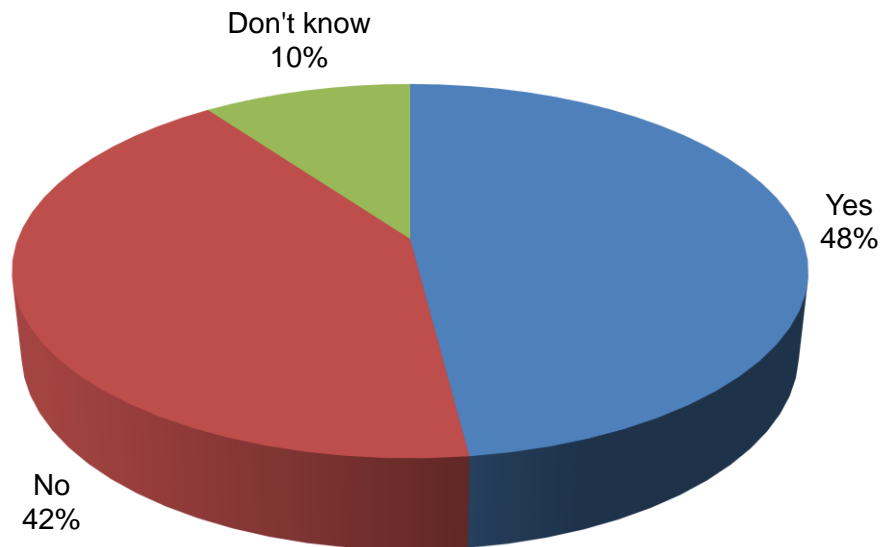
Amongst those previously stating that they felt the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper was inappropriate (33%), 20% (or 11 teachers) believed that a 60:40 ratio should be introduced, with a 10% (or 6 teachers) making reference to a 50:50 ratio, and 1 in 10 (11%) (or 3 teachers) to a 40:60 ratio.

When these respondents were then asked – an unprompted basis – how this balance could be achieved, the principal responses provided related to:

- the introduction of more questions into the Question Paper – for example, in relation to fieldwork techniques or map interpretation
- the introduction of a Regional Geographical Topic into the Question Paper
- a possible reduction in the percentage for the Geographical Study in the Folio
- possibly moving the Critical Essay to the Question Paper

*“Should the weighting of the Question Paper be increased?”*

**Figure 7: Should Weighting of Question Paper Be Increased?**



**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 7 it can be seen that 48% of respondents believed that the weighting of the Question Paper should be increased, although a similar proportion (42%) believed that this should not be the case.

When respondents believing that the weighting of the Question Paper should be increased were asked why they believed this to be the case, the principal responses focused around this being:

- Fairer for pupils
- 30% being too low a weighting for a written examination

Thereafter, a core of respondents made unprompted reference here to a belief that an increased weighting of the Question Paper might:

- Provide a more rounded assessment of pupils
- Allow pupils more time to prepare and revise for the written exam
- Be better suited to those who struggle with non-exam based work

When these were then asked – if the weighting of the Question Paper were to be increased – what additional elements could be included within it, the principal responses focused around:

- the introduction of a knowledge based question building on a topic studied at Higher
- the introduction of more in-depth mapping questions, including for example, incorporating a fieldwork question into the mapping question
- possibly making part of the optional elements of the Question Paper compulsory
- the introduction of a geographical essay or case study based on current issues

In addition, a core of respondents included other ideas, for example:

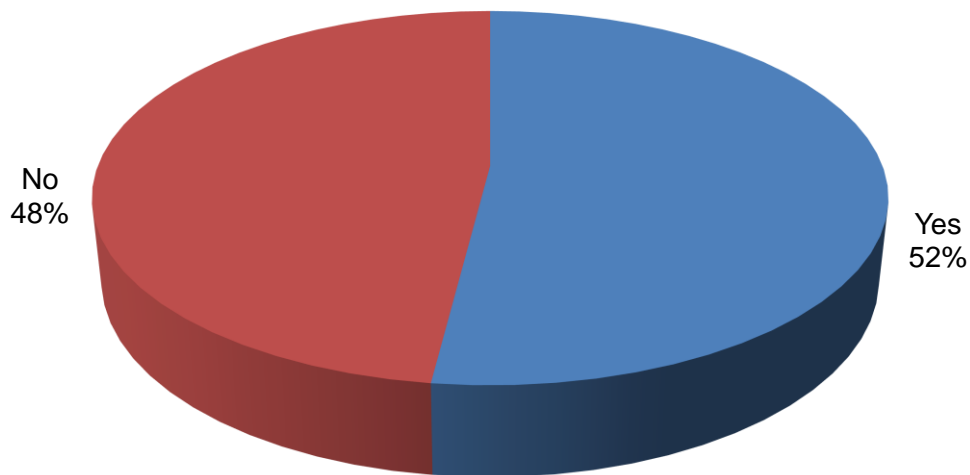
- the introduction of a fieldwork theory question into the Question Paper
- Perhaps incorporating no additional elements, but examining existing elements in greater depth

20 respondents commented that adding additional elements to the Question Paper would increase the amount of contact and teaching time required (which would be difficult given the resources available in schools), a further third felt this would have no impact.

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*“Do you have any concerns regarding potential duplication in the Course and Unit Assessment and, in particular, in relation to the fieldwork techniques and statistics questions in the Question Paper?”*

**Figure 8: Concerns Regarding Potential Duplication in Course & Unit Assessments**



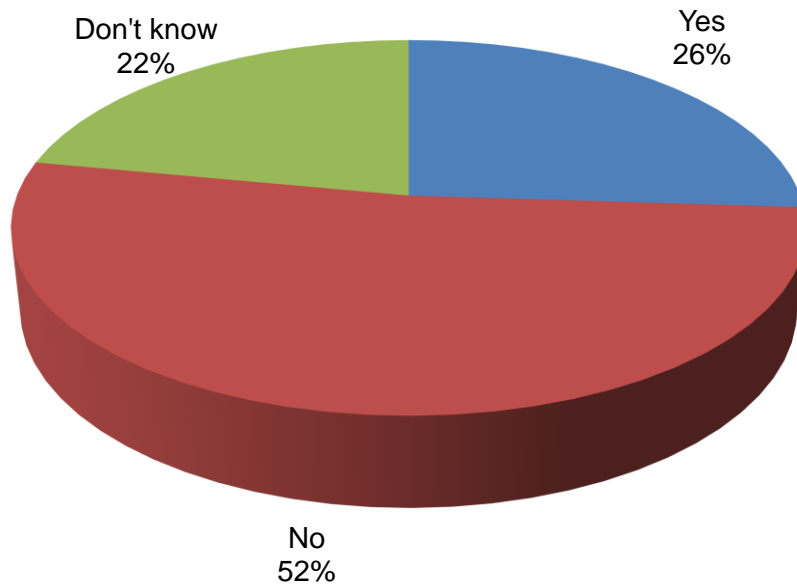
**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 8 it can be seen that respondents were almost equally split in terms of having or not having concerns regarding duplication in the Course and Unit Assessment and, in particular, in relation to the fieldwork techniques and statistics questions in the Question Paper.

When respondents who did have concerns (52%) were questioned, the principal response focused around the number of NABs and a feeling that they are too vague, time consuming or onerous.

*“Do you believe that the Folio element of the course could be reduced?”*

**Figure 9: Could Folio Element of Course Be Reduced?**



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 9 indicates that half of respondents (52%) believed that the Folio element of the course could not be reduced. In contrast, 26% felt that it could be. The 13 teachers who felt that the Folio could be reduced suggested the removal of the Critical Essay from the Folio, a possible reduction of Folio weighting or possibly reducing the size of the Geographical Study.

When respondents believing that the Folio element of the course could be reduced were then asked what the advantages of reducing the Folio element of the course might be, the principal responses focused around:

- a reduction in the amount of time and work pupils would require to devote to the study
- An easier facilitation of time management for the Folio

It was also thought that there would be greater teacher input and a better focus on the remaining Folio work

When these 13 respondents were then asked what they felt the disadvantages of reducing the Folio element of the course, the principal responses focused around:

- Taking away or reducing skills which are essential for pupils going to University
- Curtailing independent learning

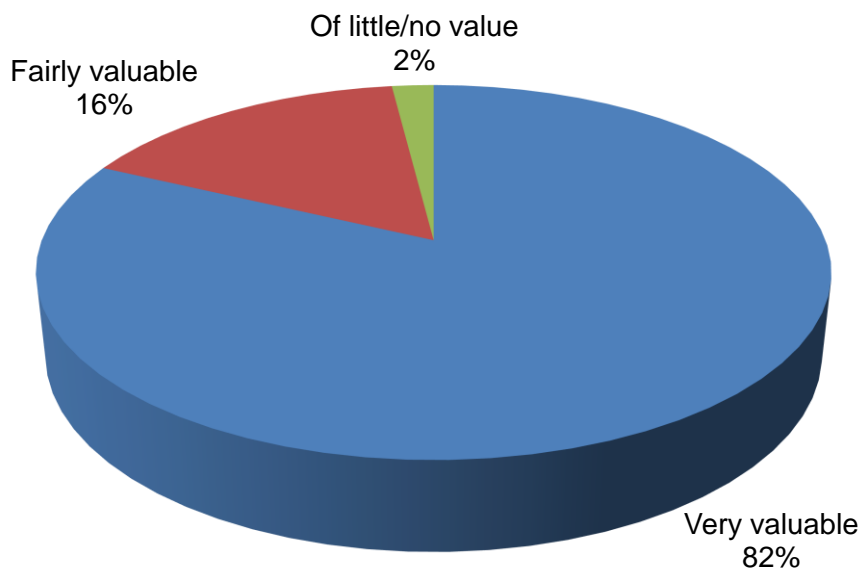
In addition, a number of respondents also commented that they were uncertain as to what would be removed from the Folio and a reduction in the Folio could disadvantage pupils who find written examinations more challenging.

Finally, when the 13 respondents here were asked – if elements of Folio were to be removed, where they should be located, most felt they should be located in the Question Paper rather than the Unit Assessment. However, it should be noted that around a third of the 13 respondents were unsure where removed elements should be located.

## 2.5 The Critical Essay

*“How valuable a part of the course do you believe the Critical Essay to be?”*

**Figure 10: Value of Critical Essay To Course**

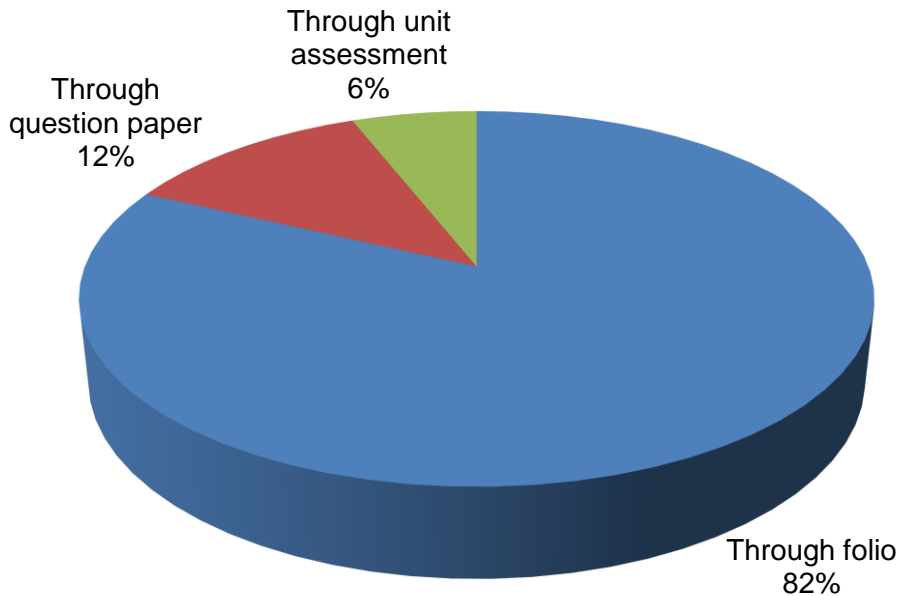


**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 10 it can be seen that virtually all respondents (98%) believed the Critical Essay to be a valuable part of the course, with 82% specifically believing it to be a very valuable part of the course.

*“Do you believe the Critical Essay should be assessed...?”*

**Figure 11: Assessment of Critical Essay**



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 11 indicates that most respondents (82%) believed that the Critical Essay should be assessed through the Folio, with only 6 teachers believing that it should be assessed through the Question Paper 12%. 3 teachers felt it could be assessed through the Unit Assessment.

For the 82% who believed that the Critical Essay should be assessed through the Folio, this was because it:

- Allows pupils to develop and apply research, analysis, interpretation and critical thinking skills
- Prepares pupils for University

Thereafter, a core of respondents also made unprompted reference here to the assessment of the Critical Essay through the Folio commenting that it:

- Represents an appropriate and valuable challenge for able pupils
- It demonstrates the ability of pupils to work independently
- It allows greater depth to the analysis of the Critical Essay
- It allows pupils to develop their writing skills
- It is less intimidating than it could be in a final written exam

As a consequence of most respondents believing that the Critical Essay should be assessed through the Folio, very few identified any advantages of moving it, with the principal responses here focusing around allowing more time for the Geographical Study and facilitating time management amongst pupils.

Of the 9 respondents who felt the Critical Essay should be assessed outside the Folio – the principal disadvantages of moving the assessment were seen to be:

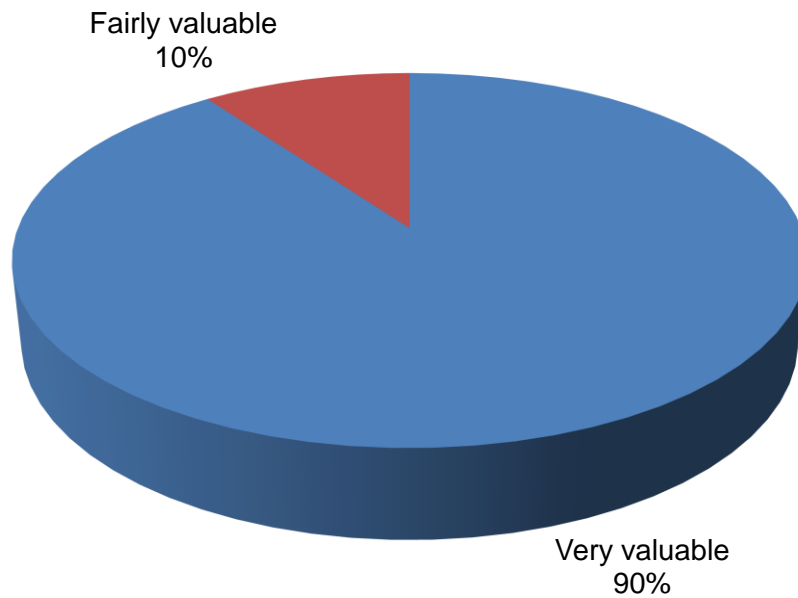
- Reducing research and evaluation skills amongst pupils
- Preparing pupils less well for University
- Reducing the breadth of knowledge covered in the Critical Essay



**2.6 The Geographical Study**

*“How valuable a part of the course do you believe the Geographical Study to be?”*

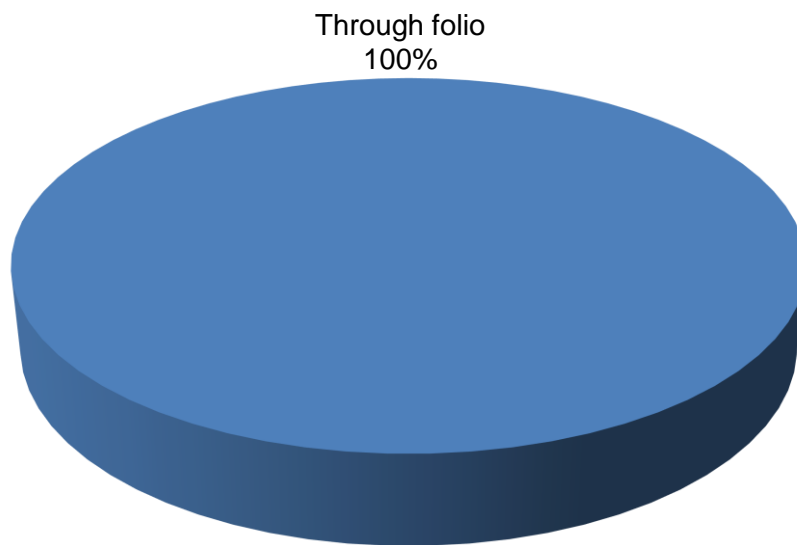
**Figure 12: Value of Geographical Study To Course**



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 12 indicates that all respondents believed that the Geographical Study is a valuable part of the course, with 45 teachers (90%) specifically believing that it was a very valuable part of the course.

**Figure 13: Assessment of Geographical Study**



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 13 indicates that all respondents believed that the Geographical Study should be assessed through the Folio, with this principally being a function of a belief that this allows pupils to:

- Develop and apply a range of key skills, including research, critical thinking, analysis and interpretation skills
- Become independent learners and, in particular, to control and manage their own learning

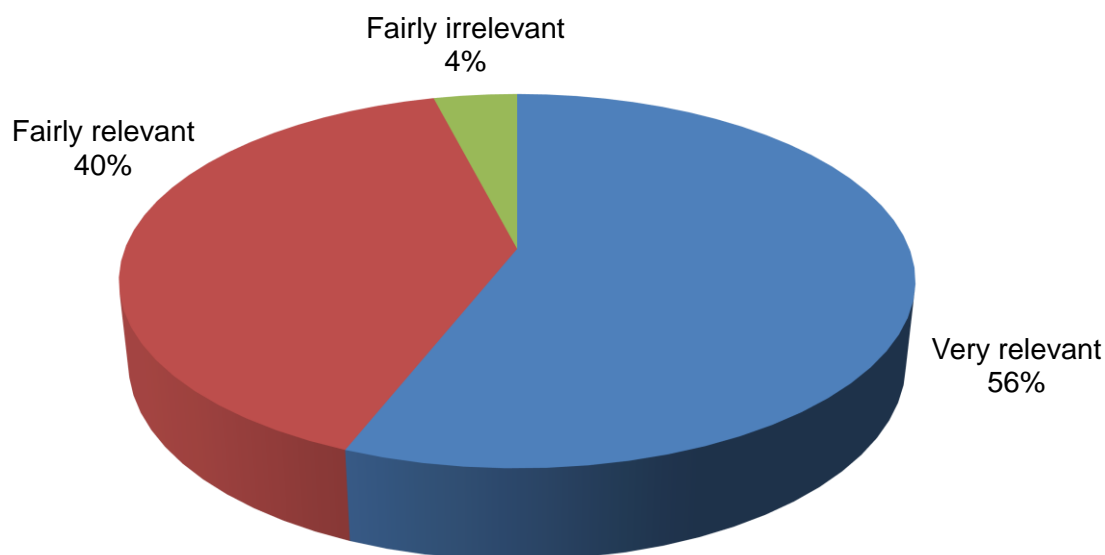
In addition, a core of respondents made unprompted reference here to other factors, including the assessment of the Geographical Study through the Folio which is thought to:

- Prepare pupils well for University
- Give pupils ownership of their learning
- Allow pupils to study areas that they are interested in
- Represent an appropriate challenge for pupils – with reference being made here to stretching pupils
- Be harder to examine in a written examination
- Be more appropriate due to the amount of time spent on it

**2.7 The Statistics Element of the Qualification**

*“How would you rate the relevance of statistics to a Geography qualification at this level?”*

**Figure 14: Relevance of Statistics to a Geography Qualification at This Level**

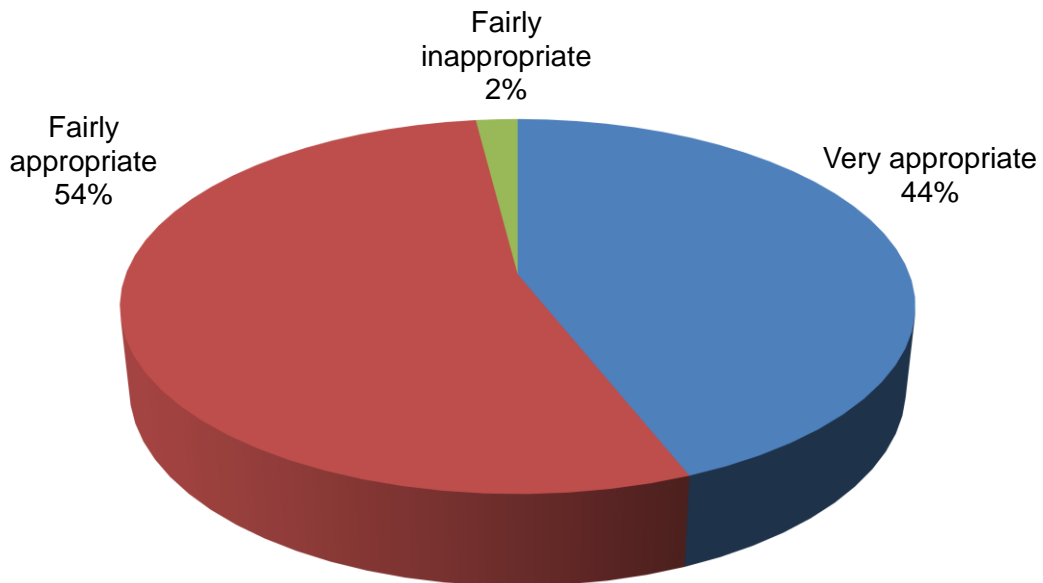


**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 14 it can be seen that 48 teachers (96%) believed the statistics element of the qualification to be relevant to a Geography qualification at this level, with 56% specifically believing it to be very relevant.

*“How would you rate the appropriateness of the challenge presented by such questions that have appeared in past questions?”*

**Figure 15: Appropriateness of Challenge Presented By Statistics Questions That Have Appeared In Past Questions**



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 15 indicates that virtually all respondents (98%) believed the challenge presented by statistics questions that have appeared in past questions to be appropriate, with 22 teachers (44%) believing this challenge to be very appropriate.

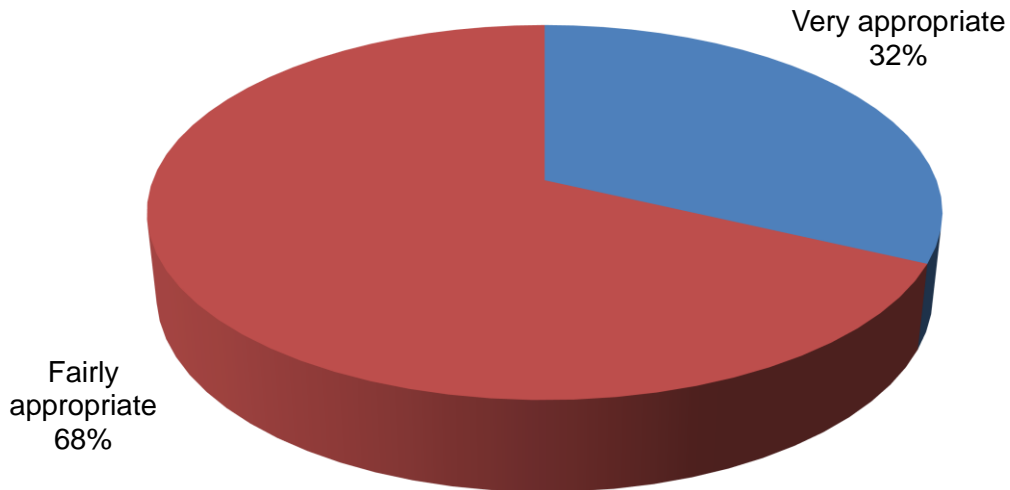
Two suggestions emerged when respondents were asked how, if at all, the statistics element of the Question Paper could be changed, these were:

- Reduce the weighting of the statistics element
- Make the statistics element more geographical

**2.8 The Map Interpretation Element of the Question Paper**

*“How appropriate do you believe the mapping skills element of the Question Paper to be?”*

**Figure 16: Appropriateness of Mapping Skills Element of Question Paper**



**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 16 it can be seen that all respondents believed the mapping skills element of the Question Paper to be appropriate, with this element of the Question Paper more likely to be seen as being fairly appropriate (68%) rather than very appropriate (32%).

However, when respondents were asked how, if at all, the mapping skills element of the Question Paper could change, most responses commented on:

- The consistency in the marking
- A need for more map interpretation rather than map reading
- A need for more resources to be provided by SQA for the map interpretation question, for example maps and tracing overlays

Thereafter, some respondents made unprompted reference here to other changes to the map interpretation question and the Question Paper generally, suggesting:

- That clearer guidance could be provided, on what is required to achieve a grade A
- More questions relating to GPS
- Changes to Question 2, which respondents referred to as being too difficult, very traditional and lacking in practical assessment
- A need for more robust and stronger mapping questions
- Greater emphasis on planning, including town planning
- Making optional questions compulsory within this Section of the Question Paper

### **3.0 TEACHER REVIEW: DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH HIGH PRESENTING CENTRES**

6 teachers from High Presenting Centres participated in telephone depth interviews.

#### **3.1 Difficulty of Advanced Higher Geography**

There was a strong consensus amongst the teachers interviewed in high presenting centres that pupils do not believe Advanced Higher Geography to be more difficult than Advanced Highers in other Social Subjects, teachers commented that they had received little or no feedback to suggest this from pupils.

In addition, most of the teachers interviewed in high presenting centres did not believe that they or other teachers perceive Advanced Higher Geography to be more difficult than Advanced Highers in other Social Subjects.

All of the teachers interviewed in high presenting centres believed that Advanced Higher Geography was a challenging course, but that its level of challenge was reasonable for an Advanced Higher.

Advanced Higher Geography is a challenging course due to:

- The level of independent learning skills required of pupils (as a function of the Folio element of the qualification) and, in particular, that these are skills with which many pupils are unfamiliar
- The amount and complexity of statistics within the qualification, including the need for their interpretation, with which it was felt many pupils – particularly those with limited numeracy skills – struggle
- The actual amount of time and effort required to be devoted to the completion of the Folio.
- The breadth of fieldwork techniques in which pupils are required to acquire skills

A further observation here was the extent to which some teachers in high presenting centres believed that many of the challenges experienced by pupils

are found towards the end of the course as deadlines for the Folio are close to the examination date.

One teacher in a high presenting centre commented pupils and teachers in other Social Subjects believe that Advanced Higher Geography is easier than their subject, due to the 30% weighting of the Question Paper.

### **3.2 Assessment of Advanced Higher Geography**

The teachers interviewed in high presenting centres were mainly positive about the assessment of the Advanced Higher Geography course and felt they are appropriate and that the course is not over assessed.

There were concerns about the marking of the Advanced Higher Geography course, with some teachers feeling that it is marked more strictly than other Social Subjects.

Two teachers in high presenting centres believe that pupils do less well in the Question Paper because it constitutes 30% of the overall marks, and they focus too much on the Folio which has greater weighting.

Some teachers in high presenting centres commented that there were uncertainties as to the requirements to achieve an A Grade in the Folio.

One teacher commented on the duplication of having a Critical Essay in both the NAB and the Geographical Study. However, some teachers viewed the Critical Essay in the NAB as a useful learning tool and preparation for the Critical Essay in the Geographical Study.

### **3.3 Balance Between Skills & Knowledge in Advanced Higher Geography**

The majority of the teachers interviewed in high presenting centres felt the balance between skills and knowledge for a Geography qualification of this level is appropriate. Although one teacher felt that students were limited in their use of prior learning of Geography at Standard Grade and Higher.

It was felt that this balance had two advantages:



- That it develops skills for University and employment, including for example, skills in terms of independent working, organisational skills and research/investigation skills. Indeed, a number of teachers stated that they had received feedback from former Advanced Higher Geography pupils as to the value of the qualification to them at University.
- That the Higher Geography course is largely knowledge based and, accordingly, in order to produce balanced geographers, it is necessary for Advanced Higher Geography to have proportionally higher skills content.

A number of teachers in high presenting centres felt that the knowledge aspects of the Course could be increased. This argument was based upon a belief that some pupils are disappointed with the lack of knowledge based content within the course.

Some teachers felt that there was a need to develop upon elements of human and physical Geography that had been learned at Higher..

#### **3.4 The 70:30 Ratio For The Folio & Question Paper**

A majority of the teachers were satisfied with the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper. In particular, respondents again made reference here to:

- This ratio promoting and facilitating the development of skills amongst pupils which will be required at University and the workplace
- The need for Advanced Higher Geography to produced geographers with an appropriate balance of skills and knowledge

In addition, some teachers in high presenting centres here argued that – were the 70:30 ratio to change – then it may be difficult for them to justify delivering Advanced Higher Geography within their school, on the basis of the small number of pupils who study for this qualification.

Teachers in high presenting centres who stated their satisfaction with the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper commented that they would not be unhappy were it to change to 60:40. Some of these teachers felt that this could be achieved while maintaining the content and adjusting the ratio of the course.

In particular, teachers suggested that the Folio element of the qualification could be reduced through:

- Alteration of the time allocated to the Geographical Study
- Changing the weighting of the Geographical Study
- Altering the Critical Essay

Thereafter, some teachers suggested that the Question Paper element of the course could be increased by:

- The introduction of a Regional Geography Topic
- Making the map interpretation element of the Question Paper more substantial.
- The introduction of designated questions for the Geographical Study

A number of teachers felt that the Critical Essay could have a greater geographical focus.

A number of teachers commented that they did not want the Folio element of the course changed by a reduction in the fieldwork element of the Geographical Study.

### **Advantages of Reducing the Folio**

Amongst those teachers advocating a reduction in the Folio, the advantages of doing so focussed on:

- Allowing the knowledge based element of the course to be increased and, in particular, enhancing the opportunity for pupils to build on knowledge elements from Higher
- Reduced pressure on pupils associated with the amount of time and effort that has to be allocated to the Geographical Study

### **Disadvantages of Reducing the Folio**

The disadvantages of reducing the Folio were suggested as:

- the erosion of skills that pupils gain from the Folio.

- An increase in the knowledge based element of the course resulting in a requirement for increased teaching load

There were mixed views amongst teachers in high presenting centres in respect of increasing the weighting of the Question Paper.

A number of teachers suggested that the weighting of the Question Paper should not be changed because:

- There was concern that by increasing the weighting of the Question Paper, there would be a reduction in the extent to which pupils could develop skills
- The possible increase in teaching load that would be associated with increasing the weighting of the Question Paper may lead to difficulties for schools attempting to deliver the course

In contrast, a number of teachers suggested that the weighting of the Question Paper could be increased by:

- An increase in the map interpretation element of the Question Paper
- The possible introducing of a Regional Geographical Topic
- Introducing further knowledge which builds on studies at Higher level

Two of the teachers interviewed were in favour of an increase in the weighting applied to the Question Paper, but not if this was achieved by increasing the workload associated with the Question Paper and, in particular, the teaching load for schools.

### **3.5 The Critical Essay**

Virtually all of the teachers believed that the Critical Essay was a valuable element of the course. However, there were far more mixed views in respect of whether or not it should continue to be assessed through the Folio and, in particular, in this regard there was relatively even split between the teachers interviewed. Amongst those who believed it should be moved to the Question Paper, there was a belief that this would:

- Ensure a greater geographical focus for the Critical Essay within the Question Paper
- Build on the knowledge base of pupils gained at Higher
- Possibly decrease pressure on pupils around examination time.

However, for those who felt that the Critical Essay should not be moved to the Question Paper, it was felt that the movement could:

- Negatively impact on the skills developed by pupils
- Potentially decrease the quality of the Critical Essay, on the basis that the time it takes allows pupils time to develop evaluative skills.

In particular, it was felt that both of these disadvantages focused around a belief that the Critical Essay incorporates a need for pupils to develop skills in relation to identifying information sources, collecting information, analysing information and, thereafter, interpreting it and, as such, these skills would be greatly reduced were the assessment of the Critical Essay to be moved to the Question Paper.

It should be noted, however, that a number of teachers in high presenting centres also argued that the Critical Essay should not be assessed through the NAB, on the basis that this was a *duplication of effort* and that Critical Essays within the NAB can *often be of poor quality*. A number of teachers felt that the Critical Essay in the NAB provided a useful learning tool and practice mechanism for pupils in preparation for the Critical Essay to be undertaken as part of the Folio.

### **3.6 The Geographical Study**

All 6 of the teachers in high presenting centres believed that the Geographical Study was a valuable element of the Advanced Higher Geography course.

In addition, all 6 of the teachers believed that the Geographical Study should continue to be assessed through the Folio as there was no advantage of moving it. Assessing the Geographical Study outside the Folio would probably:

- Be restrictive

- Decrease the value associated with undertaking a study over a period of time
- Reduce the ability of pupils to develop critical skills

Some teachers felt it wasn't practical to consider moving the assessment from the Folio, even if its extent and nature was changed.

### **3.7 The Statistics Element of the Qualification**

The majority of teachers interviewed in high presenting centres felt that the statistics element of the Advanced Higher Geography course represented a notable, but appropriate and reasonable challenge for a qualification at this level.

It was felt that the challenge represented by such questions that have appeared in past Question Papers was generally reasonable and appropriate and that pupils benefit from learning to apply statistical techniques during the course of Advanced Higher Geography. [ A few teachers stated that former Advanced Higher Geography pupils who had studied Geography and other subjects at University felt the statistical techniques they had learned during Advanced Higher Geography had been of great value to them.

Several of the 6 teachers interviewed believed that the number of statistical techniques studied could be reduced, which would allow the remaining techniques to be studied and applied in greater depth.

Many teachers commented that sometimes pupils struggle with the statistics element of the Advanced Higher Geography course, particularly those who have more limited numeracy skills.

One of the teachers interviewed from the high presenting centres believed that the statistics elements of Advanced Higher Geography should be significantly reduced from the course on the basis that it is of no value to pupils and might have a significant impact on pupil confidence, thus affecting their work on the rest of the course.

### **3.8 The Map Interpretation Element of the Question Paper**

The map interpretation element of the Question Paper was seen as being a critical and fundamental skill and one which was appropriate to Advanced Higher Geography, as map interpretation is one of the core elements of Geography.

Many of the teachers felt that the map interpretation element of the Question Paper could be increased as it:

- Prepares pupils for their study of Geography at University
- Helps the pupils to develop their problem solving skills

In addition, several teachers felt that the map interpretation within Advanced Higher Geography added considerable value to that undertaken earlier in school, on the basis of its more holistic approach for example, choice of a location, justification of that choice and interpretation of the chosen location from social, economic and physical perspectives.

A few teachers in high presenting centres expressed uncertainty regarding their understanding of what SQA examiners required in responses to map interpretation questions, these teachers felt that the guidance within marking schemes is unclear.

#### **4.0 HE FACULTY STAFF REVIEW**

6 members of HE Faculty staff were interviewed in depth by telephone for the review.

#### **4.1 Assessment of Advanced Higher Geography**

Most of the HE faculty staff interviewed agreed that they were satisfied with the general principles and elements of the assessment of the Advanced Higher Geography course and, in particular, there was a strong consensus that the course is not over assessed.

These views were based on a number of factors, including:

- That the assessment approach within Advanced Higher Geography reflects the mix of assessment styles and methods which are used at University
- That the assessment approach prepares pupils well for University
- That Universities are increasingly using continuous assessment rather than written examinations

Many of the HE faculty staff interviewed stated that it was important that Advanced Higher Geography continues to retain written examinations on the basis that:

- Universities still have written examinations (although to a lesser extent than in the past)
- That the Folio is not always a comprehensive indicator of a student's ability
- That it is appropriate for Advanced Higher pupils to experience the pressure of assessments

In the context of the outcomes noted above, it should be stressed that one of the six respondents commented that there should be a change in the assessment approach to encourage more problem based learning and critical thinking skills amongst pupils.

A number of faculty staff who were initially contacted and were teaching Geography at first year level stated that they did not have a detailed

knowledge and understanding of Advanced Higher Geography, and admitted to having a limited knowledge and understanding of the course and its assessment.

#### 4.2 **Appropriateness of the Balance Between Skills & Knowledge for a Geography Qualification at Advanced Higher**

The HE faculty staff interviewed felt the balance within the Advanced Higher Geography course being in favour of skills rather than knowledge was appropriate, due to:

- in general, this balance prepares pupils better for University, due to the range of skills developed in the Geographical Study and Critical Essay
- Advanced Higher Geography pupils entering first year Geography having more developed skills than others, including those with only Higher Geography, particularly in terms of map interpretation skills, statistics skills and problem solving skills
- That pupils with Advanced Higher Geography tended to progress farther than those without this qualification
- The increasing drive within education to emphasise factors such as learning for life and individual student skills, which the balance between skills and knowledge in the Advanced Higher Geography course reflects

One respondent stated that retaining the balance between skills and knowledge in Advanced Higher Geography is only desirable and achievable if the qualifications at National 4 and National 4 and the new Higher retain their knowledge based elements.

A number of those interviewed recognised that increasing the knowledge based elements – and, therefore, taught elements – of the course would have implications for teachers which may result in a reduced number of Advanced Higher Geography candidates which – in turn – would not be good for Geography departments in Universities.

Finally, in the context of the outcomes detailed above, it should be noted that:



- One Geography lecturer believed that there was a requirement to increase the knowledge based element of the qualification in order to better reflect current issues within Geography such as globalisation
- Another lecturer stated his belief that the statistics element of the course was dated and that there was a need for more qualitative analytical techniques to be included within it

#### **4.3 Appropriateness of the 70:30 Ratio for the Folio & Question Paper**

The HE faculty staff mainly felt that the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper was appropriate. This was due to:

- A belief that the types of activities undertaken under the Folio could not be undertaken nearly as effectively within an exam situation
- The extent to which Folio activities prepare students for University in terms of the types of skills developed
- That many Universities are moving away from a teach and test approach to assessment and learning and, in particular, are moving away from unseen papers as an assessment approach
- That the two distinct elements of the Folio (i.e. the Geographical Study and Critical Essay) are two very different and distinct skillsets, both of which are extremely valuable to learners
- That the statistical work undertaken in the Geographical Study is notably different from that undertaken in the Question Paper and, as such, represents two different and distinct challenges for learners

It should be noted, however, that a number of those interviewed stated that they would not be overly concerned if the Question Paper was to be increased to 40% on the basis of:

- Reducing the Geographical Study element of the research to allow a greater number of questions to be asked in the Question Paper, including for example, a greater emphasis on physical geography
- A belief that increasing the proportion allocated to the Question Paper, as a result of increasing the taught element of the course, would improve the literacy skills of those moving into University

A number of HE lecturers raised concerns about the extent to which the outputs of the Folio were uniquely those of the candidate i.e. concerns about the extent to which teachers may contribute to the content or presentation of outcomes.

The HE faculty staff interviewed mainly felt that there continues to be a need to have a written examination element within the course on the basis that:

- This represents a valuable test of learner understanding and knowledge
- Learners may have strengths and weaknesses in different assessment approaches

One Geography lecturer believed that – whilst the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper should be retained – the balance within the Folio should be even more in favour of the Geographical Study, on the basis of his belief that this represents a better test of a learners abilities and contributes more to them developing skills that will be of value to them at University.

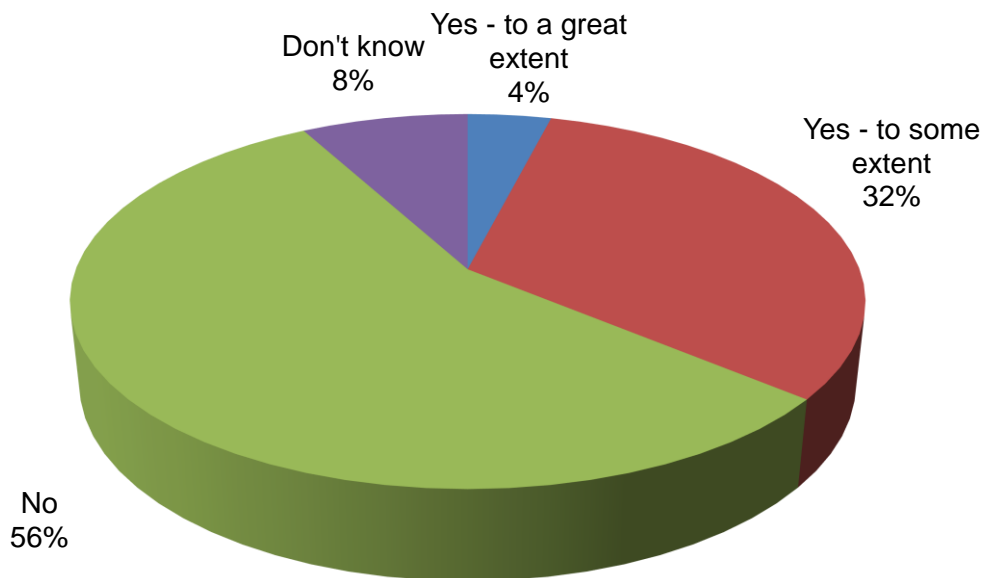
## 5.0 CANDIDATE REVIEW

159 candidates, currently studying Advanced Higher Geography, participated in an online survey which was targeted at all 818 candidates currently studying the subject.

### 5.1 Difficulty of Advanced Higher Geography

*“Do you believe that Advanced Higher Geography is perceived to be more difficult by pupils than other Social Subjects?”*

**Figure 17: Is Advanced Higher Geography Perceived To Be More Difficult Than Other Social Subjects?**



**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 17 it can be seen that 56% of candidates stated their belief that Advanced Higher Geography was not perceived to be more difficult by pupils than other Social Subjects, whilst 36% believed that this is the case – primarily to some extent (32%) rather than to a great extent (4%).

When those believing that Advanced Higher Geography was perceived as being more difficult than other social subjects were asked, on an unprompted basis, why they thought this, the main comments were:

- The amount of time and effort required for the Geographical Study

- The amount of independent working and learning that is required, with which some pupils may believe they would struggle

Thereafter, secondary comments were made here of:

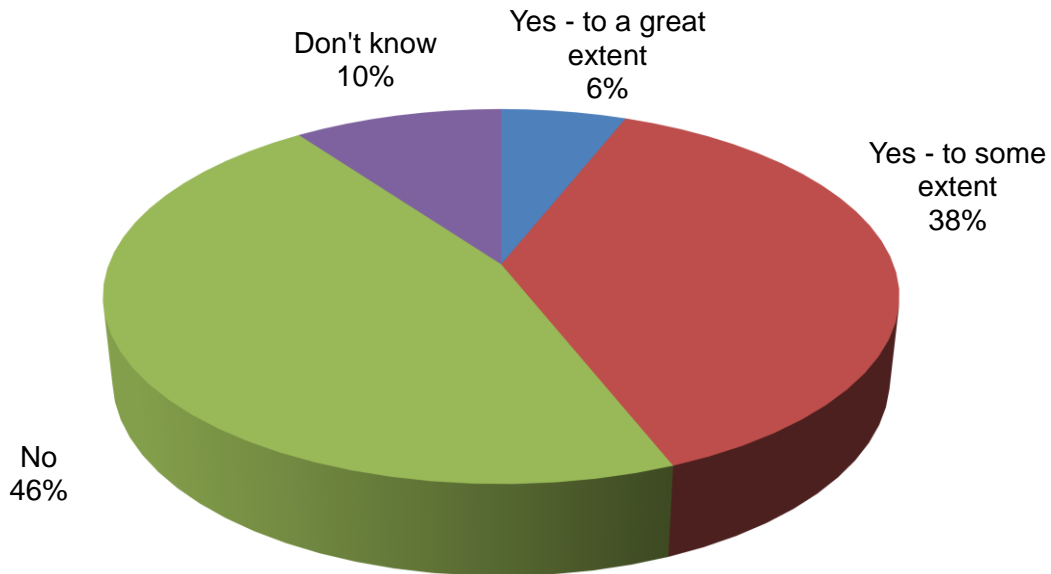
- A perceived lack of taught content within the course
- A belief that it was marked more strictly and therefore harder to get top grades than in other Social Subjects.
- The perception that the statistics elements within the course were more difficult (particularly if they do not have Higher Mathematics)
- The number of essays incorporated in the course

Finally, more specific comments were made about other factors here, including:

- The amount of writing in the final exam
- The amount of work that pupils have to do at home
- The number deadlines within the course
- The lack of links to previous knowledge based elements in Higher Geography
- The feeling that the Critical Essay focusses on skills in English language rather than Geography

“Do you believe that Advanced Higher Geography is actually more difficult than other Social Subjects?”

**Figure 18: Is Advanced Higher Geography Actually More Difficult Than Other Social Subjects?**



**Base: 'Yes' in Figure 17**

Figure 18 shows that 44% actually believe that Advanced Higher Geography is more difficult than other Social Subjects; while 46% do not think this is the case. The reasons for considering Advanced Higher Geography to be more difficult included:

- The scale of the Geographical Study, including the amount of field studies required
- The amount of independent working required compared to other Social Subjects
- The statistics element of the Advanced Higher Geography course – which was considered to be of significant difficulty for those with no Maths Higher
- The variety of skills that have to be demonstrated at a high level

Thereafter, secondary mention was made here of a range of further factors, including:

- Lack of guidance and support from staff who, it was recognised themselves, often lack guidance in relation to standards and criteria for success

- The lack of taught content and the amount of independent learning being totally different from Higher Geography
- That there are two elements to the Folio.

Finally, more specific mention was made of a number of other factors here, including:

- The large amount of course work required
- The need for the pupils to be self-motivating
- Having to complete more work in the student's own time than is the case for other Social Subjects

## **5.2 Assessment of Advanced Higher Geography**

When candidates were asked, on an unprompted basis, what their views were on the assessment of Advanced Higher Geography, the majority of comments were positive, on the basis that the assessment of the course is seen as fair and appropriate for an Advanced Higher.

Other positive outcomes of course assessment were noted, including:

- A belief that the assessment approach prepares pupils well for University i.e. prepares them for the types of assessment approaches that will be used in University
- A belief that the 30% weighting of the Question Paper reduces examination pressure

In addition, more specific positive comments were made here with reference to assessment, including:

- NABs being a good preparation for the Question Paper
- The opportunity to develop skills, for example statistics and map interpretation techniques during the Folio can be used in the Question Paper

In contrast to the positive outcomes noted above, there were a number of negative comments made in respect of assessment of Advanced Higher Geography, with by far the most prominent concern being the degree of

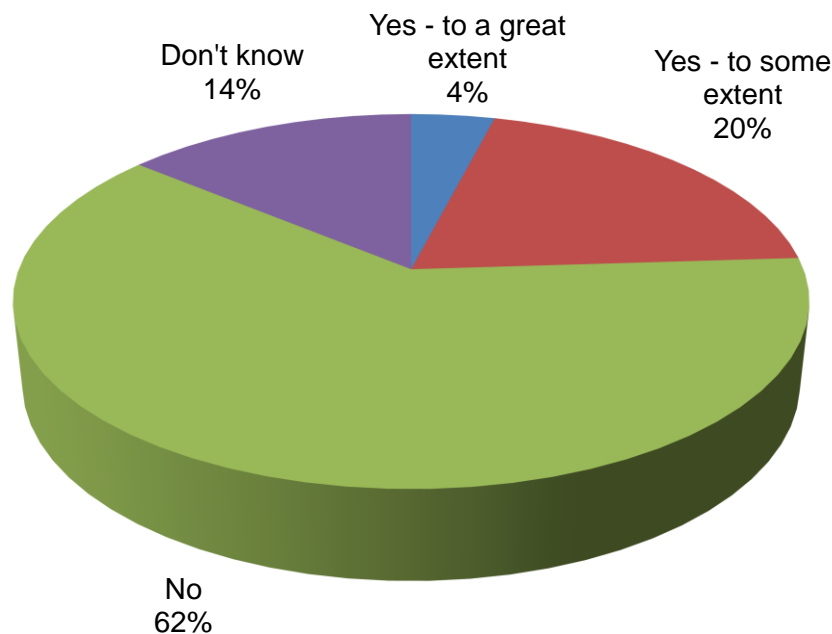
emphasis on assessment of the Folio. 36% of the candidates stated they would prefer the Question Paper to have a greater weighting within the Course..

Thereafter, the negative comments were made regarding:

- There being too much non Geography assessment e.g. relating to statistics and English
- That the assessment approach is very different from the Higher and, therefore, can be difficult for some pupils to manage
- Elements of duplication in assessment in the NABs and Folio
- Concerns about inconsistencies in assessment in terms of external marking,
- Some elements of the NABs do not link well to those in the Question Paper

*“Do you believe that the Advanced Higher Geography course is over assessed compared to other courses?”*

**Figure 19: Is Advanced Higher Geography Over Assessed Compared To Other Courses?**



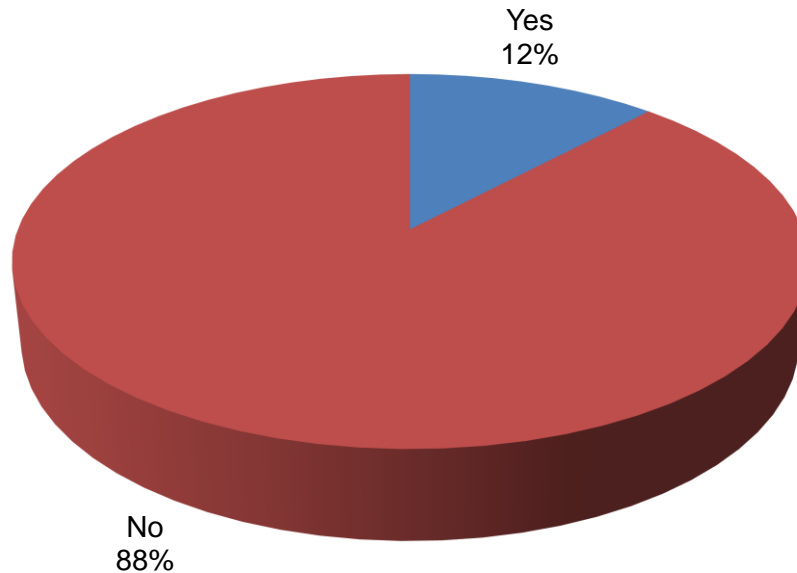
**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 19 indicates that 62% of candidates stated that the Advanced Higher Geography course is not over assessed compared to other courses, whilst 24% believed that this was the case – primarily to some extent (20%) than to a great extent (4%).

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*“Do you have any concerns regarding the potential duplication in the Course & Unit Assessment and, in particular, in relation to the fieldwork techniques and statistics questions in the Question Paper?”*

**Figure 20: Concerns Re Potential Duplication In Course & Unit Assessment?**



**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 20 it can be seen that 12 % of candidates stated that they had concerns regarding potential duplication in the Course & Unit Assessment and, in particular, in relation to the fieldwork techniques and statistics question in the Question Paper.

Amongst those who did have concerns regarding potential duplication, most believed that the statistics element is best suited for assessment within the Folio and around a quarter, felt the fieldwork skills element of the assessment should be removed from the Question Paper.

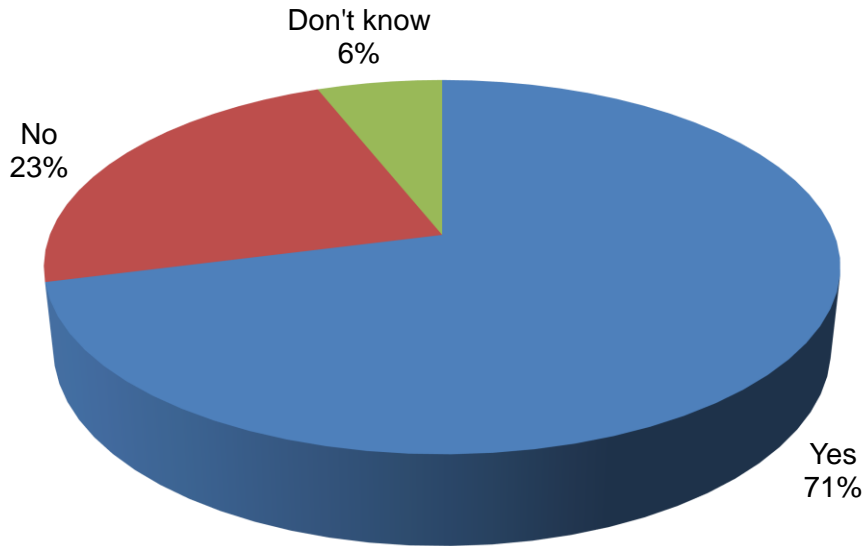
In addition, 12 % of candidates felt that duplication takes time which could be better spent developing and consolidating pupils' geographical knowledge.



**5.3 Balance Between Skills & Knowledge In Advanced Higher Geography**

*“Do you think the balance between skills and knowledge is appropriate for a Geography qualification at this level?”*

**Figure 21: Is The Balance Between Skills & Knowledge Appropriate For A Geography Qualification At This Level?**



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 21 indicates that 71% of candidates believed that the balance between skills and knowledge is appropriate for a Geography qualification at this level, whilst 23% believed that this was not the case.

Indeed, it is of interest to note that – amongst those 23% who do not feel that the balance between skills and knowledge is appropriate for a Geography qualification at this level; most wanted more knowledge based content and questions to be incorporated into the course. In particular, specific reference was made here to:

- Removing one of the two elements of the Folio
- Building on knowledge learned during Higher Geography

A number of other suggestions were also made for increased knowledge based content and questions, including for example:

- Greater taught input regarding current geographical issues

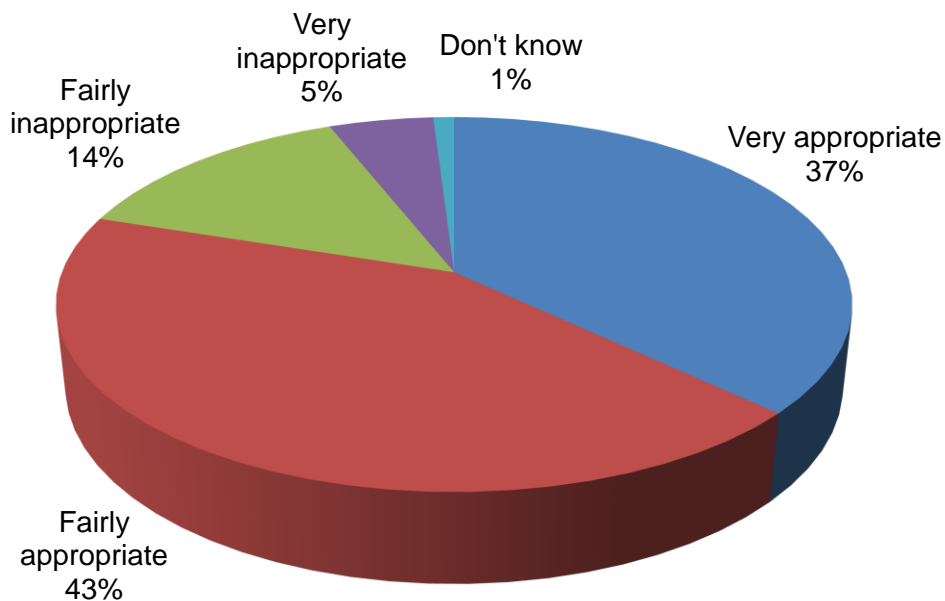
- Introducing a Regional Geography Topic to the course relating to, for example, globalisation and developing countries
- Spending more time learning about 'real' Geography instead of, for example, statistics

However, although a number of respondents here expressed a desire for a greater knowledge base within the course, a number of those taking part in this element of the research process expressed their desire for there to be a decrease in the statistics element of the course and, in particular, those who made reference to spending more time learning 'real' Geography.

#### 5.4 The 70:30 Ratio for the Folio & Question Paper

*"How appropriate do you believe the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper to be?"*

**Figure 22: Appropriateness of the 70:30 Ratio For The Folio & Question Paper?**



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 22 indicates that 80% of the candidates believed that the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper was appropriate, with 37% specifically believing this ratio to be very appropriate.

Whereas, from Figure 22 it can be seen that 19% of candidates believed the ratio for the Folio and Question Paper to be inappropriate, amongst whom,

60% expressed a desire for there to be a 50:50 ratio and 35% for there to be a 60:40 ratio.

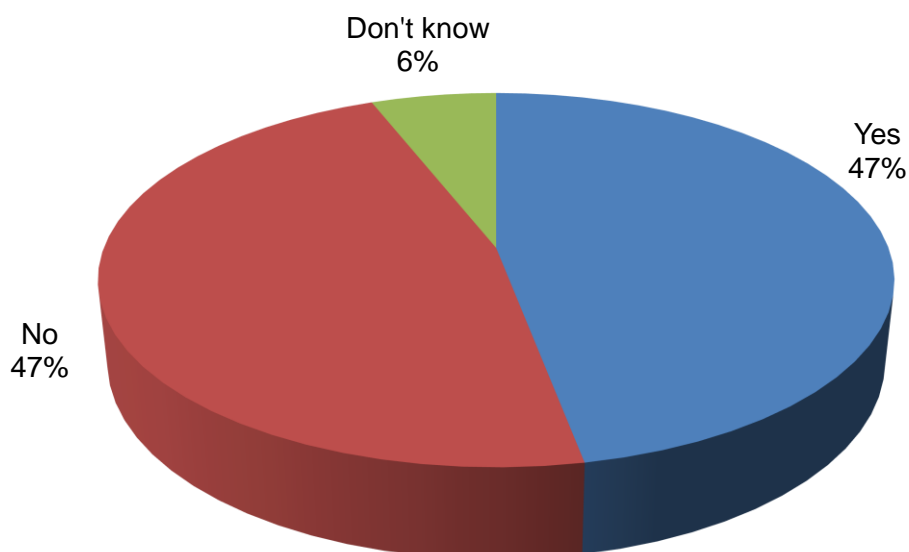
When these respondents were asked how this balance could be achieved, the single greatest desire was for the reduction (and, in most cases, removal) of the Geographical Study or the Critical Essay from the Folio, on the basis that this would allow for greater knowledge based elements to be taught in the course relating to, for example:

- Building on what is learned at Higher Geography
- Applying geographical theory to case studies
- Introducing new elements of knowledge based learning not previously studied at Higher or Standard Grade
- Increasing the map interpretation element of the Question Paper

In particular, it was felt that introducing additional knowledge content in the form suggested above would allow a greater number of questions to be incorporated into the Question Paper and, thereby, would allow its weighting to be more in line with that allocated to the Folio.

*“Do you believe that the Folio element of the course could be reduced?”*

**Figure 23: Could Folio Element Of The Course Be Reduced?**



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 23 indicates that candidates were equally split in terms of believing that the Folio element of the course could be reduced (i.e. 47% believing that it could be reduced and 47% believing that it could not be reduced).

When the 47% who felt that the Folio element of the course could be reduced were asked – on an unprompted basis – how this might be achieved, 40% thought that this could be through either reducing the Geographical Study, while 22% thought the Critical Essay could be reduced.

In addition, a core of respondents here made reference to decreasing the scope of the Geographical Study – for example, by taking out or reducing the statistics element of this Study.

When the 47% of respondents who believed that the Folio element of the course could be reduced were then asked what the advantages of doing so may be; the most significant response related to allowing a greater level of knowledge based learning to be undertaken by learners.

In addition, a range of secondary responses were provided here pertaining to:

- A reduction in the Folio allowing greater focus on questions in the Question Paper which, it was believed, could result in better grades
- Removing one element of the Folio allowing greater focus on the remaining element and, thereby, producing better results and, potentially higher grades
- That reducing the Folio would also reduce the pressure on pupils to perform in the Folio on the basis of its 70% weighting

In addition, a number of more specific advantages were also cited for reducing the Folio element of the course, including:

- Reducing dropout rates
- Making the course more attractive to those studying at Higher
- Allowing pupils to better develop their map interpretation and statistical skills through taught learning activities
- Allowing pupils to develop on areas of knowledge they had studied at Higher

- This being better suited to those pupils who perform better in examination conditions
- A belief that pupils value written examination results more than Folio based assessments
- Removing elements of duplication and repetition in assessment
- That an increased knowledge based element of the course would represent a greater academic challenge for pupils
- That reducing the Folio would mean pupils having to undertake less work at home
- That this would reduce the extent to which pupils may be assisted by parents or teachers in the preparation of Folio outputs
- That this would provide a set of learners who were better balanced in terms of their skills and knowledge

When the 47% of respondents who believed that the Folio element of the course should be reduced were then asked what the disadvantages of doing so might be; the principal responses focused around:

- Removing or reducing skills that are learned during the Folio which would be of value in preparing students for their first year at University
- Increased pressure at exam time

Thereafter, secondary disadvantages were noted in respect of:

- Concerns about the Folio no longer being of Advanced Higher standard and, the overall standard of the qualification subsequently being lowered
- Concerns that there is the potential for people to achieve lower grades, particularly those who feel less comfortable in exam situations and those who may reduce their effort in the Folio coinciding with a reduction in its importance

A number of further more specific disadvantages were noted, namely:

- The need to replace removed elements of the Folio with taught activities being linked to concerns about there not being sufficient teaching availability to allow this to happen

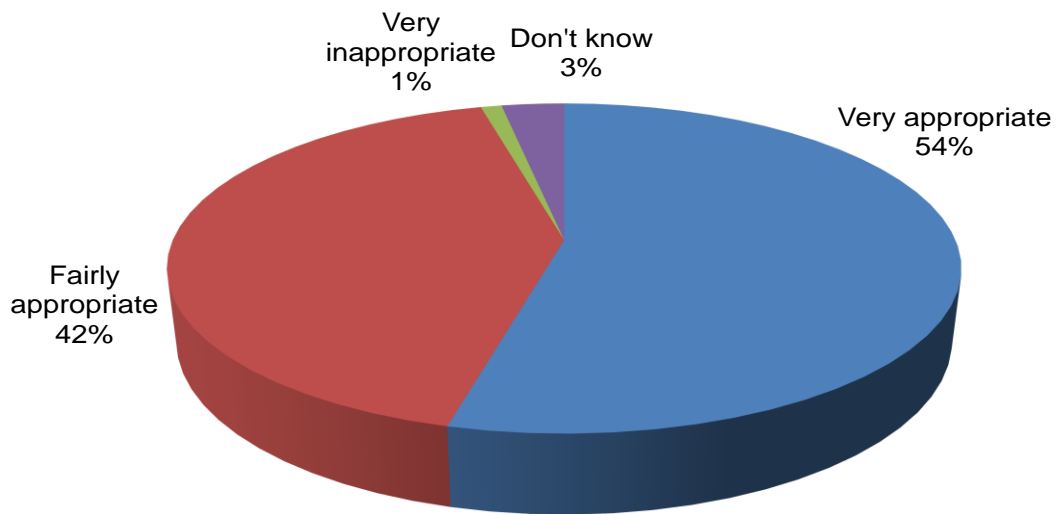
- A concern that this may discourage take up i.e. amongst those who were attracted by independent learning styles and skills developed during Advanced Higher Geography
- A concern about the loss of focus on key geographical techniques that are learned during the Folio and, in particular, in the Geographical Study

Finally, when respondents were asked, on an unprompted basis, in the event that elements of the Folio were to be removed, where they could be located; the respondents were almost equally split between the Question Paper or Unit Assessment.

### 5.5 Appropriateness of the Map Interpretation Element of the Question Paper

*“How appropriate do you believe the map interpretation element of the Question Paper to be?”*

**Figure 24: Appropriateness of Mapping Skills Element of Question Paper**



**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 24 it can be seen that 96% of the candidates believed the map interpretation element of the Question Paper to be appropriate, with 53% specifically believing this element of the Question Paper to be very appropriate.

1% of the candidates felt the map interpretation element of the Question Paper to be inappropriate.

The outputs noted above are reflected in the fact that when the 47% of respondents who felt the Question Paper to be appropriate were asked, on an unprompted basis, how the mapping skills element of the Question Paper could change, the principal response was a desire for more questions of this nature to be introduced. However, it should be noted that a few respondents believed that this element of the Question Paper could be reduced, on the basis of their belief that map interpretation would not be valuable to their future learning and career aspirations.

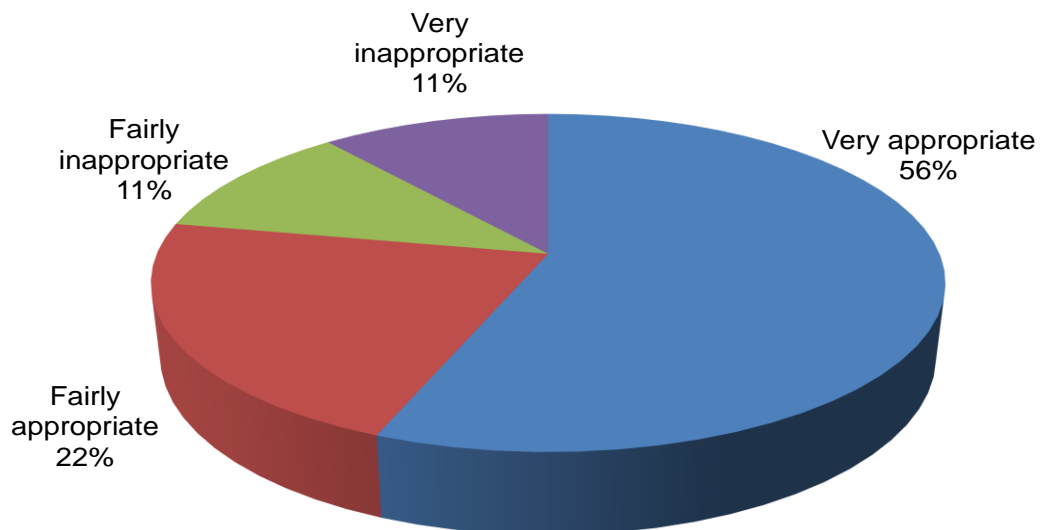
It should also be noted that a number of specific observations were made here, including:

- A belief that mapping technologies could be included and would improve map interpretation
- A belief that mapping questions could be set in foreign countries
- A belief that more time could be allocated to questions in order to facilitate a full and more detailed analysis of an area

## 5.6 Appropriateness of the Statistics Element of the Question Paper

*“How appropriate do you believe the statistics element of the Question Paper to be?”*

**Figure 25: Appropriateness of Statistics Element of Question Paper**



**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 25 it can be seen that 78% of candidates believed the statistics element of the Question Paper to be fairly appropriate, while 56% believed this element of the Question Paper to be very appropriate.

Amongst the 22% who do not feel the statistics element of the Question Paper is appropriate, the principal changes which they would desire in relation to this element of the Question Paper related to:

- Removing the statistics element of the Question Paper entirely
- Reducing the number of statistical techniques covered in the Question Paper
- Placing a greater emphasis on interpretation of statistics rather than on calculation of statistics



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## **6.0 SAGT REVIEW**

In considering the outcomes in this section of the report, it should be stressed that the senior member of the Scottish Association of Geography Teachers (SAGT) interviewed was speaking from her own perspective as a senior member of the organisation and, accordingly, the views she expressed were not necessarily those of the Association per se.

### **6.1 Difficulty of Advanced Higher Geography**

The senior member of SAGT did not believe that Advanced Higher Geography is perceived to be more difficult than Advanced Highers in other Social Subjects. In particular, it was her view that candidates in Advanced Higher Geography are not asked to undertake work that is harder than that which is undertaken in relation to other Advanced Higher subjects, including for example, the Sciences, in terms of producing investigations and the content of what they are learning.

However, she felt that there may be a perception that the assessment of Advanced Higher Geography is stricter, on the basis that fewer candidates tend to gain A Grades than in other Advanced Higher subjects.

### **6.2 Assessment of Advanced Higher Geography**

The senior member of SAGT did not believe that the Advanced Higher Geography course is over assessed. She commented that the number of NABs within Advanced Higher Geography is the same as in other subjects at the same level. She felt that the Advanced Higher Geography Question Paper is less onerous than other subjects due to the 30% assessment weighting which it is allocated.

The senior member believes that the benchmark has been set too high in recent years for students trying to achieve A grades, although exemplars have been provided for what would be required to gain an A1 Grade.

### **6.3 Balance Between Skills & Knowledge in Advanced Higher Geography**

The senior member of SAGT stated that the appropriateness of the balance in the Advanced Higher Geography qualification between skills and knowledge would depend on the purpose that Advanced Higher was serving.

If it is a progression from Higher Geography, but no further, then it is her view that it was heavy on skills. However, if Advanced Higher Geography was viewed in terms of progression from school to University, then it is her view that the balance between skills and knowledge within the qualification was correct.

The senior member from SAGT felt that employers would be more interested in the skills and attributes of those they employ. The skills learned in Advanced Higher Geography which includes research skills, critical thinking skills and presentation skills are crucial to future employment.

### **6.4 The Appropriateness of the 70:30 Ratio for the Folio & Question Paper**

The senior member of SAGT stated that it was the view of the SAGT committee that the 70:30 balance between the Folio and the Question Paper was appropriate, and more specifically, that it allows schools to deliver Advanced Higher Geography and, in particular, were the ratio to be reversed, this would require a greater amount of content which would be associated with more teaching time and, accordingly, would deter some schools from delivering the course to a small cohort.

The senior member of SAGT stated that some committee members felt that if the 70:30 balance were to change; their schools would not be able to offer Advanced Higher Geography due to a lack of teaching resources. The 70:30 ratio allowed the delivery of the subject during relatively few periods in a week and that support, advice and guidance could be provided flexibly around timetabled lessons.

The senior member of SAGT felt that a small change to the ratio, e.g.60:40 would not cause too many difficulties, as Geography teachers would manage any implications this may have for increased teaching content due to their commitment to teaching their subject.

The senior SAGT member commented that while there is the potential for duplication within the Course and Unit Assessments, this was not a significant issue.

She went on to state that across all subjects and at all levels, there are elements that are assessed in Unit Assessments and also in the Course Assessment.

When asked to consider what additional elements could be included within an increased Question Paper with higher assessment weighting, the senior member felt that the Critical Essay could be assessed in the Unit Assessment with greater sophistication. She also commented that there may be potential to add to the Question Paper through developing on content learned in the existing Higher course.

#### **6.5 The Critical Essay**

The senior member of SAGT believed that the Critical Essay was valuable to pupils for the skills which they may use in later life. In particular, the member thought the Advanced Higher Geography Critical Essay incorporates a need for pupils to have high level evaluation skills which she felt were increasingly important to young people at University and in the workplace.

The senior member of SAGT felt the Critical Essay was assessed appropriately in the Folio and Unit Assessment. With the Critical Essay within the Folio being developed and produced over a period of time and the Critical Essay in the Unit Assessment assessing pupils under controlled conditions.

#### **6.6 The Geographical Study**

The senior member of SAGT stated that the Geographical Study element of Advanced Higher Geography should not be changed and felt its assessment in the Folio to be appropriate.

It was her view that the Geographical Study needs to be assessed through the Folio, on the basis of its length and the processes involved within it.

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**6.7 The Statistics Element of the Qualification**

It was the view of the senior member of SAGT that the statistics element of the Advanced Higher Geography course represents an appropriate challenge for pupils. In particular, she felt that it was not unreasonably difficult for pupils, including those who do not have Higher Maths. Accordingly, this was an element of the Question Paper which she would not like to see change.

The senior member of SAGT commented that statistics are useful for pupils going on to Higher and Further Education – including those who will not be studying Geography. In addition, she stated that no more than a third of the question in the course evaluation is actually a mechanical maths test, with the rest depending on pupils' ability to use their geographical knowledge to understand and interpret statistical results.

**6.8 The Map Interpretation Element of the Question Paper**

The senior member from SAGT believed that the map interpretation element of the Question Paper was appropriate and valuable to pupils. Accordingly, the senior member of SAGT felt that the map interpretation element of the Question Paper did not require much change.

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## **7.0 CONCLUSIONS**

The study has produced a range of findings, some of which are consistent across many or all of the audiences participating in the research, and some of which exhibit degrees of variance between these audiences.

However, it would seem apparent that there is a general consensus that the assessment of Advanced Higher Geography – in terms of its general principles, approaches and methods – is appropriate and satisfactory and, in particular that the subject is not over assessed.

In addition, there is a general consensus in relation to the following outputs of the study, namely that:

- The balance in favour of skills rather than knowledge within the qualification is appropriate and satisfactory
- The 70:30 ratio between the Folio and Question Paper is appropriate and satisfactory
- The Geographical Study and Critical Essay are both valuable and important elements of the qualification per se and important and valuable elements of the Folio, and that both provide pupils with important skills to be used in further learning and in the workplace
- The statistics element of the qualification is both important and valuable and, in particular – again – provide pupils with important skills to be used in further learning and in the workplace
- The map interpretation element of the Question Paper is both important and valuable

In addition to the above, there is a consensus that Advanced Higher Geography is not generally considered or perceived to be more difficult than Advanced Highers in other Social Subjects, although some teachers and pupils do believe this to be the case. There is also a general consensus that – although Advanced Higher Geography is challenging as a qualification – it is an appropriate challenge for those who work towards it. .

In particular, there is the potential to reduce the 70:30 ratio for the Folio and Question Paper to a 60:40 ratio.

- Did not impact adversely on teaching resources within schools and, in particular those that would have a limited number of candidates working towards Advanced Higher Geography
- Did not adversely affect the range of skills developed by pupils during the Folio which, it would seem clear, are of value to them in University and beyond

Teachers participating in the Study voiced concerns over:

- the marking of Advanced Higher Geography and, more specifically, about the extent to which the qualification is marked more strictly than other Advanced Higher Social Subjects.
- the marking of the qualification, particularly the need for greater guidance in the Folio and to facilitate the number of A Grade passes..

Two further concerns include:

- evidence to suggest that some candidates may struggle with the statistics elements of the qualification
- concern regarding duplication in the Course and Unit Assessment, although this does not appear to be an issue of great significance

Accordingly, the Advanced Higher Geography qualification is one which has, overall, emerged positively from the research process and, as such – whilst there is always the potential for improvements to be made significant change is not required.