



Course report 2019

Subject	Geography
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper, on the whole, performed as expected. Feedback from centres and markers indicated that it was positively received and was a fair and accessible assessment in terms of level of demand and course coverage, with the result that there was a good overall distribution of marks. Candidates mostly understood what was required, and were able to complete the three required questions within the allocated time.

Post-examination analysis indicated that candidates responded well to parts of questions 1 and 3; in particular questions 1(a)(iii), 1(b), 3(a) and 3(d).

With regard to question 1(a)(ii), where a maximum of 5 marks (for either advantages or disadvantages) was available, evidence indicated that the marking instruction did not perform as anticipated. The grade boundary for 'C' was therefore lowered by 1 mark to take account of this.

Candidate responses to questions 3(c) and 3(d) performed as expected, when both components were analysed together. However, analysis of the individual components showed that responses to part (d) were significantly better than responses to part (c). This was often as a result of candidates not selecting relevant information carefully with regard to the requirements of the individual question part, and subsequently including information in part (c) that was more relevant to part (d). This was marked holistically to enable candidates to gain credit for providing correct information.

Of note however, was the significantly higher than anticipated number of candidates that either did not attempt question 2, or only attempted part (b). Of further note was the very significant number of candidates who did attempt part (a), but misread the question with the result being that they scored either low or, in a significant number of instances, zero marks. Evidence indicates that this is a valid question and it is likely that similar questions will feature in the question paper in future, in line with the information in the recently published Advanced Higher Geography course specification.

Project–folio

The project–folio is made up of two components:

- ◆ Section A — geographical study
- ◆ Section B — geographical issue

Both of these components performed as expected. The project–folio remains an accessible assessment component of the Advanced Higher Geography course, resulting in a good distribution of marks across all the grades.

Feedback from markers continues to be both positive and constructive, with many reporting that candidate performance, in general, was good and well structured, with the majority of candidates passing the project–folio assessment.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Question 1: Map interpretation

Question 1(a)(iii) and 1(b) were the two best answered questions, with a significant number of candidates scoring full marks for (a)(iii). For part (b), there was a good distribution of land use choice by candidates and a significant number of candidates achieved 5/6 marks.

Question 3: Data handling

Question 3(a) generated strong candidate responses, with detailed answers illustrating a sound knowledge and understanding of polar graph interpretation.

Project–folio

Section A: Geographical study

Markers noted continued improvement across almost all of the general marking principles (GMP), in particular GMP C (Evaluate the research techniques and the reliability of data). It was encouraging to read studies where candidates were going beyond the formulaic evaluation process and considering the reliability/validity of data in addition to well thought-out 'next steps'.

In relation to the study, markers commented positively on the 'new and unique techniques in fieldwork, using new technology' and that it was 'great to see new and creative processing techniques'.

Section B: Geographical issue

All the GMPs for this section of the folio showed improvement, in particular GMP A (Justify the choice) and GMP B (Undertake wider reading.....). The latter was particularly encouraging in terms of the choice and quality of source material that candidates were using, but also the range and depth of reading that was evident. This resulted in a significant increase in the number of candidates gaining full marks for this GMP.

As in previous years, markers commented on the interesting and current issues. However, it is also worth noting that a small number of issues required to be reviewed in terms of their geographical relevance.

Candidates who referenced a wide range of literature in the folio assessment scored well.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 1(a)(ii) as explained in 'Section 1: comments on the assessment'.

Question 2(a), as previously mentioned, was clearly misinterpreted by a number of candidates. Also of note was the significantly higher number of candidates than expected who did not attempt this part. This indicated a poor or lack of working knowledge and understanding of a flow-line diagram and its geographical application and purpose.

In question 2(b), some candidates discussed processing techniques rather than gathering techniques. Where suitable techniques were discussed, candidates gave generic facts about techniques which often did not refer to how they could contribute to planning and prioritising the next stage of Liverpool's transport regeneration programme.

Question 3(c), as explained in 'Section 1'.

Project-folio

Given that there was improved performance across all the folio GMPs, as detailed in the previous section of the report, there were no evident sections of the folio that candidates found significantly demanding.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

In relation to the comments outlined in previous reports:

- ◆ The management of appropriate length and/or detail of responses, relative to the number of marks available, was much improved, with markers reporting no issues relating to time management of the question paper.
- ◆ The lack of annotated sketches and/or diagrams to aid discussion of data techniques remains disappointing. It was anticipated that candidates might consider using a sketch of Supplementary item C, diagram 2, to illustrate their response.
- ◆ There is a continued improvement in appropriate Atlas use.

It would be beneficial for candidates to have more practice in exam technique to help them appreciate and recognise differences in the wording of the questions (for example suitability, impact). This will avoid confusion, overlap and repetition of information between the questions.

Reading a question in its entirety before attempting an answer is good practice.

More use of grid references and map evidence would be beneficial to candidates, as in a significant number of responses to question 1, markers reported that there was limited use.

The accuracy of drawing a site to scale needs to be absolutely precise.

The use of text box information to contextualise answers is being increasingly recognised, however, this needs to be selected carefully and only where appropriate.

As mentioned in section 1, centres and candidates should be aware of the skills and the required knowledge and understanding which are being assessed in the 'Gathering and processing techniques' section of the question paper.

Project-folio

As already mentioned, markers' feedback in relation to the study commented favourably on the inclusion of new technology and innovative techniques, often used with evidence of skill and insightfulness to generate data.

Some candidates submitted their folios as a bound booklet. Marking is holistic and a booklet makes it difficult for markers to cross-refer, therefore separate pages are much preferred.

Bibliographies are still causing concern and often appear as an afterthought. A bibliography should be a work-in-progress throughout the entire project-folio process and should be reflected within the issue and study through citations and footnotes or endnotes. An issue or study without a bibliography is inevitably self-penalising. Bibliographies should be correctly formatted (not just a list of websites), and include the date the article was written rather than the date when the candidate viewed the article.

Group fieldwork continues to present a slight issue in that it often reduces the opportunity for candidates to develop their own ideas and skills, with the result that some candidates are producing studies that are too similar.

In terms of prioritisation of sources for the geographical issue, candidates should clearly identify their main sources of information.

Candidates should include page numbers for both folio pieces. Candidate should not include a contents page, or pages of appendices.

Overall, the quality of candidate folio work was good, with a variety of topics being chosen, for the geographical issue in particular. The majority of topics were relevant and up to date, providing various viewpoints.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	803
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Number of resulted entries in 2019	708
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	26.3%	26.3%	186	105
B	33.3%	59.6%	236	88
C	25.8%	85.5%	183	72
D	8.3%	93.8%	59	64
No award	6.2%	-	44	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.