Course report 2019

Subject	Geography
Level	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 1: Physical and Human Environments

This question paper largely performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team and local authorities indicated that it was comprehensive in terms of coverage. It was positively received as fair and accessible for candidates.

The majority of candidates understood what was required, and completed the question paper in the time available. However, due to the marks allocated and the command words used, some questions were more demanding than expected. The grade boundaries were adjusted to take these questions into account.

Question paper 2: Global Issues and Geographical Skills

In this question paper, the most commonly-chosen questions were question 2 (Development and Health), question 3 (Climate Change), and question 1 (River Basin Management).

This question paper performed in line with expectations and was positively received as fair and accessible for candidates. Very few candidates answered all options and the vast majority were able to complete the question paper in the time allocated.

Assignment

Feedback from the marking team suggested that the assignment was fair and accessible.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Physical and Human Environments

Question 1:   Almost all candidates were well prepared for this question. Candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of the processes of glacial erosion.

Question 2:   Some candidates demonstrated an excellent understanding of coastal depositional processes.

Question 3:   While this is a topic that many find more challenging, many candidates were able to give strong descriptions of oceanic circulation.

Question 4:   Many candidates used the resource well; descriptions were, in the main, specific and detailed.

Question 5:   Most candidates were able to give detailed answers for this question, again with a sound knowledge of erosional processes.

Question 7:   Most candidates were able to describe a range of impacts of an ageing population. Very few candidates misread the pyramid as a growing youthful population.

Question 8:   Most candidates were able to describe methods beyond a census, with many including sampling, civil registration and data from other government agencies.

Question 9:   Those candidates who wrote about semi-arid areas, in general, provided stronger answers than those opting for a rainforest area.

Question 10:   Many candidates were able to give detailed answers specific to their case study areas. This applied to both glaciated and coastal areas.

Question 11:   Many candidates gave detailed answers, specific to their case study.

Question paper 2: Global Issues and Geographical Skills

Question 1(a): Those candidates who made full and detailed use of the sources, and were able to synthesise this information, scored well in this question.

Question 2(a): Although this is the first year that this aspect has been sampled, most candidates gave detailed answers.

Question 2(b): The number of responses referring to up-to-date strategies for tackling malaria was positive. There was also a noticeable number of candidates choosing to discuss cholera as their water-related disease.

Question 3(a): Many candidates gave varied and detailed answers on the physical causes of climate change.

Question 4(a): Most candidates gave detailed descriptive points and were able to offer relevant reasons for the change in energy consumption.

Question 5:   Candidates demonstrated an improved performance in this question on previous years, with more referencing both the OS map and other sources in the question.

Assignment

The standard of coursework assignments remained good overall, with many markers commenting on the improvement. Far fewer candidates referred to more than two gathering techniques than in previous years.

Those who had a clear section referring to background reading and/or geographical models, scored well in the 'Knowledge and Understanding' section.

Many candidates had collected numerical data (primary, secondary or both), and these assignments generally scored more highly in both the 'Processed Information' and 'Analysis' sections. Those candidates who processed their information well (as opposed to including raw data) were able to score more highly in the 'Referring to processed information' section. Those candidates who benefited most from the change in marks allocation were those with detailed processed information. Detailed processed information also allows candidates to access more analysis marks.

As in previous years, candidates who had completed an assignment on a topic where they had a personal interest generally scored more highly, with clear evidence of background knowledge.

A number of markers noted that those assignments where candidates opted to investigate a comparison or change were often of a higher quality. Urban studies looking at, for example, land-use change along a transect, or comparing stages of a river, were often of a higher quality.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Physical and Human Environments

Question 2:   Some candidates were unable to provide any explanation beyond the processes. Very few candidates gave a named example in their answer.

Question 3:   Many candidates struggled to give explanations for oceanic circulation in this question.

Question 4:   Some candidates described the rainfall graph rather than the discharge. Some candidates did not apply their knowledge to the graph in the question, instead listing all possible (and therefore at times contradictory) factors which can affect river level. All of these cannot apply to one graph.

Question 6:   In this question, some candidates described rather than explained soil-forming processes. Those candidates who chose to use a diagram in this question were also more likely to give descriptive answers.

Question 7:   Some candidates described the changes in the pyramids rather than the consequences of these changes.

Question 8:   Some candidates explained the problems of taking a census in this question.

Question 9:   Answers which referred to rainforest areas were in the main poorer than those referring to semi-arid areas. Candidates should take care to ensure their answers refer to land degradation.

Question 10: Some candidates went on to explain (and evaluate) management strategies which was not required in this question.

Question 11:   The majority of candidates struggled with this question. While most could describe strategies, there was little offered by way of explanation. There were also many answers providing very historical information with little relevance to developed world cities today.

Question paper 2: Global Issues and Geographical Skills

Question 1(b): Some candidates struggled to give specific information on the negative impacts of their river management project.

Question 2(b): Many candidates went on to comment on the effectiveness of management strategies which was not required in this question.

Question 3(a): Some candidates explained human factors contributing to climate change rather than physical factors.

Question 3(b): Some candidates could offer little beyond stating a reversal of human causes of climate change, rather than focusing on specific strategies to manage it. Candidates should also ensure that their answers link back to the question. For example, many candidates made points on transport and recycling policies or charging for plastic bags, but did not link these to the management of climate change. This year also saw an increasing number of candidates go on to discuss the issue of plastic waste in general. While this can be related to climate change in terms of plastic production, very few candidates made this link.

Question 4(b): Candidates should ensure that their answer links back to the question that is, 'meeting the energy demand of a country'.

Assignment

While it was noted that many candidates have increased and improved the quality of their processed information sheets, some issues with these remain.

A minority of candidates had processed information sheets which were text-heavy. It should be noted that this is not processed information, just information, and therefore it is difficult for candidates to gain marks for interpreting it. It is clearly stated in the general marking instructions (available on SQA's website) that candidates will be expected to give an element of added value to the information on their processed information sheets.

Markers commented on a minority of candidates submitting processed information sheets of a poor quality; often poorly-photocopied diagrams, graphs with no headings or labels, or graphs with the wrong (or no) scale. These are very difficult for markers to read, therefore by default must be very difficult for candidates to read and often resulted in candidates misreading information.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1: Physical and Human Environments

Centres are reminded to familiarise themselves with the changes to the course specification and the associated changes to the method of marking. Very few candidates benefited from the marks now available for named examples in questions 1, 2, 9, 10, 11 and 12.

Candidates should ensure that they read carefully the command word(s) in the question and that all points they make respond to these.

Centres should ensure that when candidates are presented with resources such as graphs that they can make full use of these resources by reading accurately from them.

Centres should ensure that all case studies are up to date and relevant. It should be noted that historic issues such as installing toilets and running water in homes is no longer a relevant strategy for urban management in a developed world city. Case studies should be based on more recent urban developments.

Question paper 2: Global Issues and Geographical Skills

Candidates should ensure that they link all points in their answer back to the key point in the question. While this was perhaps most noticeable in the Climate Change section, it undoubtedly applies to all questions.

Centres should ensure that when candidates are presented with resources such as graphs, they can make full use of these resources by reading accurately from them.

Centres and candidates should be reminded that there are marks available for named examples in many areas of the course, and candidates will be rewarded for specific case study information.

Candidates are reminded that in question 5 in the Geographical Skills section, marks are available for accurate and appropriate map evidence.

Assignment

The standard of assignments was, like previous years, high — a continually improving picture.

Those studies with a range of detailed processed information allowed candidates to both describe and analyse their findings in more detail than those with limited data on their processed information sheets.

Candidates should be sensitive and avoid broad stereotyping when making generalisations on more deprived areas, when they do not have the evidence to back these up. There is no advantage or disadvantage to a candidate in fieldwork being undertaken individually or as a group.

It must be noted however, that **only** the fieldwork stage should be completed as a group. All other aspects of the assignment should be undertaken independently, resulting in those candidates who have collected data as part of a group having individual write-ups.

It should also be noted that group-based fieldwork does not necessarily suit all candidates. There is again evidence of candidates having undertaken fieldwork on topics that they did not entirely understand. Centres should note that all candidates should have a choice of topic.

It should be noted that candidates are not required to justify their choice of processing techniques in the write-up stage of the assignment and that marks are not awarded for this. Candidates should also be aware that background knowledge included in the write-up stage must be pertinent to the topic being discussed for marks to be awarded.

Candidates are expected to use the processed information sheet to generate the evidence under controlled conditions, and they must submit it with their evidence. The processed information sheet is not assessed formally. However it is important that teachers and lecturers ensure that candidates understand how to produce, use and submit processed information sheets which are reviewed during the marking process.

Centres must ensure that resource sheets, research sheets or processed information sheets are submitted for each candidate for the 2019-20 session. These sheets are not marked but must be submitted to SQA along with the candidate's assignment. A penalty of 20% of the candidate's overall mark for the assignment component will be applied in the case of non-submission. Further information can be found in the Coursework for External Assessment document and the course assessment task on the subject page of the SQA website.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	7329

Number of resulted entries in 2019	6867

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	27.4%	27.4%	1884	74
B	24.0%	51.5%	1651	61
C	24.2%	75.7%	1660	48
D	15.3%	90.9%	1049	35
No award	9.1%	-	623	-

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.