Course report 2019

Subject	Geography
Level	National 5

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

Generally, candidates performed well across both components of the course assessment. However, feedback from markers highlighted some very poor responses indicating that some candidates may have been presented at the wrong level.

Question paper

The majority of candidates answered the upland glaciation/coasts question while a minority answered the rivers/limestone landscapes option. Candidates' responses to the question about the formation of a sea stack were of a slightly better standard than responses to the formation of a stalactite.

In section 3, where candidates must opt to answer two out of six 'Global Issues' questions, it was again good to see that very few candidates attempted three or more questions. The most frequently-answered 'Global Issues' options were Health, Climate change and Environmental hazards. Less frequently-answered were the options on Natural regions, Tourism, and Trade and globalisation. The Climate change option has grown significantly in popularity over recent years.

Discriminator questions such as question 10 (urban change) and question 13 (population pyramids) performed well, with only the more able candidates achieving higher marks on these.

Overall, this course component was more demanding than expected and therefore the C grade boundary was lowered.

Assignment

Overall the assignment performed very much as expected, with a marginal increase in the average candidate score compared with 2018.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

There was a wide range in terms of the quality of overall responses to the question paper. Generally, candidate answers were good, but there was still a significant number of poorer responses.

Candidates demonstrated good map skills in the following questions:

♦ question 4 (attractions for visitors of the area shown on the map extract)
♦ question 10 (evidence of methods used to control traffic congestion)

In these responses, it was clear that most candidates were able to read the map well, make good use of the key to identify any symbols they didn't know, and to use 4/6 figure grid references appropriately.

In the 'Physical Environments' section, candidates responded well to the inclusion of two landscapes in questions 1 and 2. Candidates showed a good understanding of coastal processes in question 1(b) (formation of a sea stack) .They also coped very well with question 5 where they were asked to draw a synoptic symbol, reflecting good knowledge of weather symbols. There were also many good responses to question 7 where candidates had to explain land use conflicts. Many markers noted that candidates had clearly learned a case study area well and were able to make full use of their knowledge in this question.

In the 'Human Environments' section, candidates coped particularly well with question 11 (shanty town improvements) and question 12 (changes in developed world agriculture). Many candidates showed detailed knowledge of a case study example of a shanty town as well as the impact of recent changes in developed world agriculture. This reflects very good teaching of these topics in centres.

In question 13 (population pyramids) there were lots of very good detailed and explanatory answers, although some candidates did not fully explain the reasons for the differences shown, therefore losing marks. This was a discriminator question where it tended to be the more able candidates who were able to access all of the marks.

Candidates did particularly well on the skills parts within the 'Global Issues' questions and also on question 14(b) (management of climate change) and question 19(b) (management of developed world diseases). In the latter question, it was clear that many candidates had an excellent knowledge of heart disease in particular, and were able to use this to explain the different management methods.

Assignment

Candidates continued to perform well in the assignment and mostly produced work of a high standard in the write-up. There was a wide range in the quality of processed information submitted, but it was evident that many pupils worked very hard to prepare information about their findings and to display it in a clear and effective way.

Candidates used an excellent variety of graphs, charts, annotated photographs or field sketches, colour-coded or labelled land use maps, as well as mind maps to display their results.

Mostly, candidates appeared to be well aware of the need to add value to their processed information sheets, and that simply copying data or transferring statements from their data sheets into their write-up would not gain marks, unless accompanied by further explanation and detail.

In section A most candidates gave clear and detailed descriptions of two research methods used to gather data. Consequently, they achieved good marks in this section.

In section B candidates gave straightforward descriptions of their findings and were able to supplement this with good explanations, making appropriate links between different elements of their data. By demonstrating their sound geographical knowledge and understanding in relation to their chosen assignment topic, many candidates also achieved good marks in this section.

Many centres had once again clearly enabled their pupils to undertake some human or physical fieldwork, allowing data to be gathered first hand. Examples of research undertaken in this way included topics such as comparison of two different urban environments or shopping areas; river studies, looking either at the differences between rivers, or between one river and a model river profile; coastal studies including the effect of longshore drift on deposition; and vegetation studies looking at either plant succession on coasts or altitudinal variation in plant species. Some candidates chose to do a study examining the reasons behind the relative popularity of two different country parks or tourist centres.

Examples of research undertaken from secondary sources included comparisons of the effects of two different natural disasters and comparisons of population data from two different countries, as well as studies of the reasons for differing levels of development in selected developing world countries.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Some questions at National 5 are intended to be more demanding than others to allow discrimination between A and C level candidates. Most of these questions are worth 5 or 6 marks, with weaker candidates generally finding it more difficult to access all of the marks through an extended explanatory answer. Question 13 (population), mentioned above, was one such example.

Other questions in the 2019 question paper which proved to be more demanding included question 2(b) (formation of a stalactite), where responses often lacked clear explanations of processes such as carbonation or solution. In question 6 (synoptic chart), many candidates lost marks because they did not relate the conditions shown in the synoptic chart to the forecast given in the question. Instead, their responses focused on the general changes expected with the passage of a depression, rather than linking their response to the forecast.

There were lots of good answers to question 9 (redevelopment of an old industrial site), however some candidates lost marks through not giving relevant map evidence or simply by not giving enough explanatory detail.

In the 'Global Issues' section candidates must give plenty of detail in the knowledge questions in order to be able to access all of the 6 available marks. In the 2019 paper, candidates seemed unprepared for question 16(b) (formation of a tropical storm), with many being able to give only the most basic explanations. This topic, however, is in the course specification which states that candidates should have knowledge and understanding of:

♦ the main features of earthquakes, volcanoes and tropical storms
♦ causes of each hazard

Candidates should be able to explain how a tropical storm is formed. Candidates who answered this question did particularly well in part (a), therefore, the average overall mark for Environmental hazards was comparable with other 'Global Issues' questions.

Assignment

The vast majority of candidates submitted good or adequate processed information, enabling them to potentially access all of the marks for the assignment. A small proportion of candidates submitted very weak processed information, sometimes on only one sheet. Without reference to appropriate accompanying processed information, candidates are not able to access all of the available marks for the assignment, specifically for description, but potentially also for explanation and conclusions.

Sometimes processed information sheets can contain too much written information which candidates are then tempted to copy over into their write-up. Unless they provide further explanation or add value to this in some other way, such as by identifying a trend from their processed data, candidates should be aware that they will not be able to gain any marks for this. It is worth noting that processed information sheets do not have to be very detailed or elaborate, as long as they show clear evidence of the candidate's findings, which the candidate can then go on to explain.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

This was the second year of the revised National 5 Geography question paper, which was extended from 60 to 80 marks for the first time in 2017–18, with a proportionately increased time allocation. There is more opportunity within the new style of question paper to test a greater proportion of the course specification each year, but centres should be aware that it is not possible to test all course content each year. Therefore, looking at the content of past SQA question papers alone is not sufficient to ensure complete course coverage. It is also essential for teachers and lecturers to carefully study the course specification.

In the 2019 paper, question 8 asked candidates to make use of field sketches in conjunction with an Ordnance Survey map. This was the first time that this particular skill has appeared at National 5 level. It is, however, listed as one of the map skills included in the mandatory content as detailed in the course specification.

It was once again evident from many of the responses that there is much good teaching which takes place in centres, particularly of case studies, for example on land use conflicts, urban change, developed world farming and the management of disease in developed world countries. It is clear that this helps candidates to write detailed answers, to demonstrate their in-depth geographical knowledge and therefore to be able to access all of the marks in 5 or 6 mark discriminator questions, and to achieve a higher overall mark in the question paper. It is vital that candidates know the difference between 'explain' and 'describe' questions, as there are still a significant number who confuse these two command words. Sometimes candidates lose marks because they describe rather than explain. Similarly, candidates may sometimes lose valuable time through giving explanations which are not required in 'describe' questions.

Frequent reference to past paper questions will help candidates to become more familiar with these questions, and centres are encouraged to make full use of the comprehensive National 5 Geography marking instructions, which SQA publishes each year. Exemplification of answers shown in the marking instructions will help candidates to better understand the level of detail they may be expected to give in order to succeed at this level.

It is important for centres to reinforce to candidates the importance of clear handwriting as, if a marker cannot read what a candidate has written, they may not receive all of the marks they deserve.

Assignment

It is helpful if candidates provide the title of their assignment clearly at the start of their write-up — this can take the form of an aim or a research question. There is also a space for this on the National 5 assignment flyleaf which should be completed by the candidate.

It is important that the data shown on the two sheets of processed information is clearly displayed and that it is original. Each candidate is expected to produce their own sheets, individually, prior to the write-up and therefore multiple candidates should not have photocopies of the same processed information. It is acceptable for candidates to gather

data together in small groups while doing fieldwork but, once back in the classroom, candidates should present their data individually and not together as a group.

Marks are awarded for adding value to the information shown on their processed information sheets, such as by identifying a trend or by highlighting the links between different data sets and offering relevant explanations. Simple graphs, illustrations and mind maps are examples of straightforward data which may constitute good processed information. It may therefore be best for candidates to have a straightforward and clear outline of their findings on the processed information sheets, which will enable them to then add further detail, explanations, summaries and concluding remarks about their chosen topic.

Detailed knowledge and understanding of their research topic is often reflected in the write-up and allows candidates to gain marks for explanatory and concluding remarks. Only 3 of the 14 marks in section B are available for the description of research findings, and so candidates must be able to show their understanding by offering explanations of what they have found, in order to access all of the marks available.

The quality of candidates' research often becomes apparent in their responses, both in section A and section B of the assignment, and will therefore affect their overall mark. It is essential that, as stipulated by SQA, write-ups should be completed strictly under controlled conditions, within one hour, and that candidates should only have one opportunity to do so.

There should be no opportunity for candidates to receive detailed feedback on drafts of assignment write-ups, including marking of drafts. This would be classed as going beyond reasonable assistance. The only information which candidates should have access to during the write-up, is their two A4 sheets of processed information which should be submitted along with their assignment reports. The marking instructions for the National 5 Geography assignment assessment task, published on SQA's website, are a useful guide as to how marks are allocated in this part of the assessment, and centres should make full use of these to prepare candidates.

Candidates are expected to use their processed information sheets to generate the evidence under controlled conditions, and they must submit them with their evidence. The processed information sheets are not assessed formally. However, it is important that teachers and lecturers ensure that candidates know how to use and submit their processed information sheets, which are reviewed and referred to during the marking process. In session 2019-20, 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	9795

Number of resulted entries in 2019	9793

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	29.0%	29.0%	2836	70
B	23.1%	52.1%	2267	59
C	19.7%	71.8%	1926	49
D	15.6%	87.3%	1523	38
No award	12.7%	-	1241	-

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.