



Course Report 2018

Subject	Geography
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1 — question paper

The question paper performed as expected. Feedback indicates that it was very positively received by centres and markers, and that it was felt to be a fair and accessible assessment for all candidates in terms of the level of demand and course coverage. As a result there was a good distribution of marks across all the questions.

Post examination analysis indicated that candidates responded particularly well to the map interpretation question (Question 1). Questions 2(a) and (b) were also well answered, as was Question 3(a)(i).

Components of questions worth 5 or 6 marks, which have previously been well answered by a minority, showed an improvement, with good evidence of text box information being read, understood and incorporated appropriately into answers.

Of note, however, was the higher than expected number of candidates who did not attempt Question 1(c). Evidence from markers suggested that this may have been caused by poor time management relating to candidates taking longer to complete Question 1(a), given the specific requirement of this component question. It is likely that this mostly affected C and D grade candidates, with the result that this was considered carefully when setting the grade boundaries. An adjustment of 2 marks was made for each of these boundaries.

Component 2 — 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. Candidate evidence indicated that the national standard continued to be achieved. This remains an accessible assessment component of the Advanced Higher course assessment for all candidates, resulting in a good distribution of marks across all the grades, however this year there were a greater number of high-scoring folios.

The range of topics for the folio, and, in particular section B, continues to broaden to reflect geographical currency and relevance.

Feedback from markers continues to be both positive and constructive, with many reporting that candidates are showing improved preparation for folio completion combined with a clearer understanding of the individual requirements of the folio.

The application of the word count penalty continues to diminish and this is related to a clearer understanding of the appropriate use of text boxes, as explained in previous communication.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1 — question paper

Question 1 — map interpretation

Overall, this was answered well. In part (a), evidence indicates that the skill related to drawing an appropriate route to scale, with justification of choice, was well attempted. Many candidates achieved full marks for this part of the question.

It was encouraging to see most candidates following the instruction to successfully annotate the overlay in part (b), although guidance on the differentiation between a label and annotation would benefit Advanced Higher candidates.

Question 2 — gathering and processing techniques

Parts (a) and (b) were particularly well answered, with good evidence from candidates that they had used the text box information and the map extract to consider the requirements of the question, and that they had also understood the wider context of the question.

Question 3 — geographical data handling

Part (a)(i) generated detailed answers about the effectiveness of choropleth maps, in relation to the context of the question.

Component 2 — project–folio

Section A — geographical study

There was improved performance across all the general marking principles, and in particular F (Analyse all the information that has been gathered and processed to identify and explain relationships).

It was encouraging to see evidence of improvement across all the general marking principles, for example, evidence of an appropriate standard of processing techniques.

Many markers reported that candidates seemed much clearer as to the requirements of the study.

Section B — geographical issue

There was improved performance, of equal rating, across all the general marking principles.

As highlighted within the content of this particular section of the 2017 course report, well thought out and relevant justification, greater use of current and quality sources, and less formulaic evaluation, were all explicitly illustrated.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1 — question paper

Time management may have been an issue with Question 1, resulting in a higher than expected number of candidates not attempting Question 1(c). However, it was also evident that candidates' understanding of different land uses was often interpreted exclusively as the different tourist activities that were evident.

Question 3(b) unexpectedly and disappointingly, generated answers that were often inappropriate in terms of the choice and suitability of technique, in relation to the given data. Candidates also often appeared unclear as to what defines a graphical technique.

A higher than expected number of candidates did not attempt Question 3(c). This was an appropriate question, that assessed data analysis skills requiring scrutiny of tables and a newspaper extract contained within Supplementary Item D.

Some markers commented on candidates perhaps being unaware of Diagram 1 (newspaper extract) being on a separate and overleaf page from tables 1 and 2. It would have been challenging to achieve 4 or 5 marks for this question, without some reference to the extract.

Additionally, time management could have been a possible explanation.

Component 2 — project–folio

Given that there was improved performance across all the general marking principles of the folio, as detailed in the previous section of the report, there were no particular areas of the folio that candidates found especially or exclusively demanding.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1 — question paper

In relation to the comments outlined in the 2017 report, there were no concerns with the appropriate placing of the tracing overlay this year. Also, candidates' awareness of the relevance and significance of information contained within text boxes and supplementary items was evident, resulting in answers that correctly related to the context of the question, and were therefore appropriate and informative.

Providing advice to candidates on equating the length and detail of their answers to the number of marks available would be beneficial. This would help candidates manage their time in order to complete the question paper successfully. For example, candidate responses to Question 1(a)(iii) often contained significantly more information than was required for the 4 marks available.

In terms of graphical techniques, a good approach to consider would be to encourage candidates to provide annotated sketches to aid discussion.

Component 2 — project–folio

In relation to the comments outlined in the 2017 report, an improved inclusion of quality maps, using software such as Digimaps, was noted. It is expected that with the continued development and improved access to appropriate and available software, this will continue.

The inclusion of extensive bibliographies, but with no explicit evidence of the wider reading in the study or issue, is still evident. Also still in evidence are bibliographies that are poorly laid out.

It is helpful if folio pieces are printed single-sided. Using an appropriate and consistent spacing and font, and including page numbers are also helpful.

There is no need for the binding of folio pieces. In fact, this causes unnecessary inconvenience to markers. Best practice is to staple or paper clip the folio pieces and package them in the SQA folder along with the Flysheet. Candidates are required to read and sign the Flysheet; this includes their stated word counts.

Candidates should be encouraged to consider photographs, with valid labels or annotations, as a valuable and simple processing technique.

Candidates' evaluation of sources for the issue should focus less on the evaluation of word choice.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	779
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	803
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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	27.1%	27.1%	218	105
B	35.2%	62.4%	283	89
C	26.9%	89.3%	216	73
D	5.5%	94.8%	44	65
No award	5.2%	-	42	-

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 which allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary).

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

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 Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from exam 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 exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.