



## Course Report 2017 – External Assessment

Subject	Geography
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. It 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.

# Section 1: Comments on the assessment

## Summary of the course assessment

### Component 1: question paper

Generally, this component performed as expected. However, post-examination analysis found parts of Question 3 to be more demanding than intended; this was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries.

Marker reports indicated that candidates were well prepared for the exam and able to provide answers for all questions. There was evidence of an improved understanding of the standard of response required at Advanced Higher level, particularly in relation to questions worth 5 and 6 marks. Overall, it was agreed that this was a fair and accessible question paper in terms of level of demand and course coverage.

### Components 2: project – folio

The Project-Folio is made up of two components:

- ◆ Section A – Geographical Study
- ◆ Section B – Geographical Issue

These components performed as expected. This was supported by candidate evidence that indicated the national standard was being achieved. There was a good distribution of marks across all the grades, with a significant number of exemplary pieces of Folio work.

The range of topics being selected by candidates for the Issue continues to broaden and diversify whilst reflecting currency and geographical relevance. There was a fairly even split between human and physical topics for the Study.

Feedback from markers was very positive. Many reported that candidates seemed better prepared than last year and had a clearer understanding of the requirements of the Folio.

The word count has not been of particular concern this year, with very few penalties being applied. Where a penalty was applied this tended to be because of the inappropriate use of text boxes, containing excessive amounts of text.

Post-examination analysis indicated that component E of the Issue and component G of the Study were more demanding than intended. It was evident that candidates were finding it difficult to write a conclusion that went beyond their analysis and/or showed insight. Often candidates were repeating what they had written previously. Alternatively some had clearly run out of words and therefore the conclusions were short and limited. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries.

## Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

### Areas in which candidates performed well

#### Component 1: question paper

##### Question 1 Map interpretation

Overall, there was an improvement in the quality of answers this year. They were less formulaic and there was evidence of more appropriate use of the atlas and the whole map extract. However, information from these sources needs to be detailed, precise and exemplified. Lists of tourist attractions, for example, in answer to (d) was not appropriate.

Q1 (a) (ii): In general, this was answered well with good specific map reference and even though the choice of site was not ideal, candidates managed to justify their choice comprehensively. A significant number of candidates chose to annotate their overlays and often they did so very successfully.

Q1 (b): Where candidates fully understood the term 'sustainability' this was answered very well, with candidates providing a range of suggestions.

##### Question 2 Gathering and processing techniques

Candidates were able to score well in this question if they provided detailed answers that considered the context of the question. The majority of candidates had a sound, in-depth knowledge and understanding of questionnaires.

##### Question 3 Data Handling

Q3 (b) (i): Many candidates commented on proportional symbols and were able to provide a full account on their appropriate use in the context of the question.

Q3 (d): Some very good use of the atlas in terms of population growth and increased water usage for farming and industry etc.

#### Component 2: project: folio

##### Geographical Study (Section A)

**A Justify the choice of a complex geographical topic to research:** Great improvement with some excellent, well thought-out justification in terms of relevance and purpose, complemented by wider reading. Many candidates were awarded full marks.

**B Plan and carry out detailed research, which could include fieldwork:** By and large this section was completed to standard, and there was better use of secondary sources of information, where appropriate. However, candidates should ensure that they explicitly reference their background reading. The lack of maps, and of a good quality, was noted in this section.

**C Evaluate the research techniques and the reliability of data gathered:** Great improvement on last year with the great majority of candidates including relevant evaluative comments, and with a less formulaic approach.

**E Use a wide range of appropriate techniques to process the gathered information:** The techniques used were usually appropriate and increasingly innovative and well presented. However, there still remains a concern with repetitiveness of techniques and their simplicity. At Advanced Higher level, standard techniques should illustrate a clear 'step up' from Higher.

### **Geographical Issue (Section B)**

**A Justify the choice of a current geographical issue to critically evaluate:** Great improvement with some excellent, well thought-out justification in terms of relevance and purpose, complemented by wider reading. Many candidates were awarded full marks.

**B Undertake wider background reading from a wide range of sources relating to the geographical issue:** The quality and range of sources continues to improve, with evidence of more academic choices.

**D Critically evaluate each of the viewpoints:** This continues to be less formulaic and repetitive in approach with increasing inclusion of more perceptive comments, backed up by wider reading.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Component 1: question paper**

Two areas of concern relating to Map Interpretation that were highlighted in last year's course were again noted by markers. These were:

- ◆ Incorrect placing of tracing overlay. Some candidates ignored the grid co-ordinates and simply placed the overlay anywhere on the map. This was not as a result of the printing error on the overlay.
- ◆ Not using the key to provide accurate information to support answers.

Q1(a)(i): Choice of site that met the requirements of 'the brief'. Candidates often did not choose areas with forestry, varying and appropriate gradient, and/or suitable car parking provision. Alternatively, there was a road running through the site or there was a complete lack of access to the proposed site.

Q1(c): As candidates did not read the question carefully, the negative impacts referred to in answers were sometimes related to the environment rather than local people.

### **Question 2 Gathering and processing techniques**

Q2(b): The vast majority of answers referred to bar graphs and pie charts, which was disappointing, and often the explanation of their use was very generic, with little specific reference to the context of the question. Very few answers considered statistical or map-related techniques.

### Question 3 Data handling

Q3(a) (i) and (ii): There was an overall poor working knowledge and understanding of standard deviation and its geographical application and purpose. Also, candidates often confused the command word 'analyse' with 'explain', resulting in repetition of information in (b)(ii).

### Component 2: project: folio

#### Geographical Study (Section A)

**D Demonstrate a detailed knowledge and understanding of the topic being studied from wider reading:** This was often not used to its full benefit, for example, to support findings/analysis.

**G Reach reasoned conclusion(s) supported by a wide range of evidence:** Few candidates were able to achieve full marks for this section, for various possible reasons, outlined at the beginning of the report.

#### Geographical Issue (Section B)

**E Reach reasoned conclusion(s) supported by a wide range of evidence:** Few candidates were able to achieve full marks for this section, for various possible reasons, outlined at the beginning of the report.

## Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

### Component 1: question paper

The general comments outlined in the 2016 course report should be referred to and used in conjunction with the following additional comments to advise /prepare future candidates:

- ◆ Accurate use of the tracing overlay for question 1 needs to be highlighted. This is particularly important when the only guidelines on the overlay are the grid co-ordinates. Also, appropriate use of the overlay — only features that enhance the candidate's response should be included.
- ◆ Clear understanding of the command words. Questions requiring analysis, for example, should be practised. Also, careful reading of questions in general. For example, Q1(c) asked candidates to discuss the negative impacts **on local people**.
- ◆ Avoidance of generic answers that do not relate to the context and/or specificity of the question. Candidates should be encouraged to include detail and named examples, where appropriate, to enable developed, informative answers.

### Component 2: project: folio

- ◆ Access to map software is very worthy of consideration, to give candidates access to good quality maps that can be annotated and enhanced.

- ◆ River studies/Bradshaw model still tend to be formulaic with insufficient sites and only basic data gathering techniques.
- ◆ The use of maps/images to 'contextualise'/enhance folio pieces remains disappointing.
- ◆ Often extensive bibliographies included but with no explicit evidence of the wider reading in the Study/Issue. Candidates should make it clear in the bibliography their prioritised sources for the Issue.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to get their Folio pieces proofread.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to reflect on their 'next steps' with regard to the evaluation of their data gathering techniques.
- ◆ It is helpful if Folio pieces are printed in colour where appropriate/possible.
- ◆ It is helpful if folios are printed single-sided.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to include pages numbers.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	900
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	779
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### Statistical information: Performance of candidates

#### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	23.1%	23.1%	180	101
B	38.0%	61.1%	296	84
C	28.5%	89.6%	222	68
D	5.1%	94.7%	40	60
No award	5.3%	-	41	-

## General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will 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.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings 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.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ 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.