



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Geography
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The overall pattern of marks in the question paper was somewhat better than in 2014. The demand upon candidates in 2015 was the same as in previous years. Most candidates made at least fair attempts at all three examination questions in 2015.

As in all recent years, the marks for the Folio again showed a difference in standard between the study and the essay, with performance in the latter generally better. There was an improvement in Folio marks this year. The Geographical Issues essays were generally well written, using interesting and contemporary topics.

Overall there was an improvement in the performance of candidates compared with 2014. The Folio assessment criteria were identical to those that applied in 2014, and the 2015 question paper was very similar in demand to that in previous years. No issues relating to the paper were raised by centres or markers.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Question paper

Most students made fair attempts at the map interpretation question. The first three parts of Question 3 were answered correctly by the majority of candidates. The first three parts of question 4 was generally answered competently.

Geographical Folio

Candidates performed well compared with previous years. There was a perceptible improvement in standards in 2015.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Question paper

In Section A (Map interpretation) there continues to be a tendency to formulaic answers resulting in a list of items of evidence. In many cases there was repetition, and evidence was not well related to the specific question. A significant number of candidates did not follow the instructions correctly in both question 1 and 2.

Whilst most candidates completed the calculation in question 3 correctly, many did not use the calculation **and** the data set to give the required commentary on results.

Folio part A: Geographical Study

Many folios continued to employ rather formulaic approaches, resulting in somewhat basic and workmanlike essays and studies. This was particularly the case for river studies, some soil studies and urban studies of shopping patterns.

Some studies did not acknowledge group data collection properly. In some cases studies were based largely on data collected during a field course. In both of these instances candidates are not demonstrating individual skills well. Group data collection is acceptable, but must be clearly acknowledged. Individual studies using group collected data should investigate different questions.

There were, however, a number of studies and essays that showed real flair, ability and were of a high standard, dealing with a number of different topics

As noted in previous reports, some studies had data sets that were too limited for analysis of the standard required, although there were fewer this year. More studies used secondary data in a sound way. This is welcome.

Many studies contained graphics of a poor standard. This continues to be particularly noticeable in location maps.

Folio part B: Geographical Issues Essay

Though this part of the folio was generally done well, there remain problems with poor quality bibliographies and citation. The reader must be able to identify both sources and quotes fully. There was a tendency to produce formulaic essays in candidates from some centres.

Overall a number of folios were quite poorly presented, though the best were of the high standard seen in previous years.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Question paper

A number of comments in previous reports remain pertinent. Students should ensure that they answer the question that is set, as is clearly explained in the question wording. Students need to be able to answer all parts of GMT questions. Presently many students appear to have a poor grasp of the geographical significance of the GMTs involved in questions 3 and 4. This lack of understanding sometimes appears in GMTs used in the Geographical Study element of the folio.

Folio part A (Geographical Study)

The comments in the 2013 and 2014 reports are still pertinent. In particular:

- ◆ Centres must take care that students do not plagiarise in any part of the folio.
- ◆ Where group data collected by a group of students is used in a study, this must be clearly and explicitly reported by each student. Individual students using group data should undertake different research questions and data analyses. Some students based their studies on field centre programmes. These were often rather limited in the amount of data that was available for analysis. Some studies received rather more 'outside'

support and help with text than is appropriate. The final version of the study must be the candidate's own work.

- ◆ Lengthy descriptions (accompanied by images) of equipment and its use are unhelpful. Data and analyses should be presented succinctly. Appendices are rarely appropriate.

Folio part B (Geographical Issues Essay)

Generally this was the element in the folio in which candidates performed best. A good number of essays that were well written and presented, and dealt with interesting and appropriate issues were seen.

Care needs to be taken in the production of both text references and the full bibliography.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	883
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	914
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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 -100				
A	23.0%	23.0%	210	70
B	22.7%	61.2%	349	60
C	30.6%	91.8%	280	50
D	4.0%	95.8%	37	45
No award	4.2%	-	38	-

The assessment functioned as intended. Therefore grade boundaries were set at notional difficulty. The 2014 adjustment was no longer required.

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.