



## Course Report 2017 – External Assessment

Subject	Geography
Level	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

The Higher Geography question paper is marked out of 60 and consists of four sections. Physical Environments and Human Environments are both worth 15 marks, Global Issues, 20 marks, and the Application of Geographical Skills is worth 10 marks. The paper incorporates a mixture of short response and extended response type questions.

There are no options in Sections 1 and 2; all questions are compulsory.

The most commonly-chosen topics in section C were question 8 (Development & Health), (95% of candidates), question 9 (Climate Change), (70% of candidates), and question 7 (River Basin Management (32% of candidates).

Question 10 (Trade, Aid & Geopolitics) (1% of candidates) and question 11 (Energy) (3% of candidates) were answered by fewest candidates.

Feedback from the marking team suggested that the question paper was fair, accessible and sampled course content appropriately. Post-examination analysis indicated that the question paper was more demanding than intended due to the marks available. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries and will be considered during the upcoming review of Higher Geography.

### Component 2: assignment

The Higher Geography coursework assignment is marked out of 30 and consists of a report written up under exam conditions and then externally marked. Candidates are able to have two A4 sides of processed information to assist them in their write-up. The processed information sheets are not marked but **must** be submitted along with the coursework report.

In section A, candidates are expected to demonstrate detailed knowledge, and/or an evaluation, of two research methods used in collecting information for their assignment. This section is marked out of six, according to the level of detail and the appropriateness of the research methods used. Up to four marks can be gained by describing any one research method.

In section B, which is marked out of four, candidates must use their findings and make reference to their processed information.

In section C, candidates are required to draw on knowledge and understanding of their topic or issue, and can be credited up to a maximum of six marks.

In section D, candidates are required to analyse their findings for up to a maximum of eight marks.

In section E, candidates should reach an overall conclusion supported by their evidence, and can be credited up to two marks.

A further four marks can be awarded for section F: communicating information, where candidates are required to demonstrate their ability to use a structure and terminology appropriate to their topic or issue.

This assignment performed as expected. The 2017 Grade Boundaries have been set accordingly.

## **Section 2: Comments on candidate performance**

### **Areas in which candidates performed well**

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

Question 1: Many candidates showed a good understanding of the formation of a feature of glacial erosion.

Question 2: Most candidates were able to give detailed explanations for the reasons for latitudinal variations in energy.

Question 4: Most candidates were able to give detailed developed points on the reasons for migration flows and the impacts of these movements. Most candidates used up-to-date and relevant case studies in their answers.

Question 5: Many candidates were able to give detailed answers, although again those answering on the Sahel region gave stronger responses. There are an increasing number of responses on semi-arid areas other than the Sahel.

Question 6: Many candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of the effectiveness of traffic management strategies in their chosen city.

Question 7a: Candidates showed a good understanding of the physical factors to be considered when choosing the site for a dam and associated reservoir.

Question 8: Candidates demonstrated a detailed understanding of the strategies used to manage a water-related disease.

Question 9a: Candidates demonstrated an improved performance in this question on previous years with developed and detailed points explained.

Question 11a: Most candidates were able to give relevant and detailed explanations for the changes shown on the graph.

Question 12: Candidates who made full use of the sources scored well in this question; those who could synthesise information from different sources were able to make detailed and developed points in their answers.

## **Component 2: assignment**

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.

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.

Those assignments where candidates opted to investigate comparisons or change were often of a higher quality. Urban studies looking, for example, at land-use change across a city, or the comparison of two contrasting urban zones, scored well, as did those comparing stages of a river, or vegetation change across a sand dune.

Those candidates who linked evidence from different sources on their Processed Information sheets tended to score more highly in both the Processed Information and Analysis sections.

Those candidates who were able to offer explanations for their findings, specific to their own case studies, also scored more highly in the analysis section. Those who had a clear section referring to background reading and/or geographical models also scored well in the Knowledge and Understanding Section.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

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

Question 1: A number of candidates did not attempt to explain the formation of a feature of glacial deposition, with others able to offer only a simply description.

Question 2: A number of candidates appeared unprepared for this question, with markers commenting that many had not attempted it.

Question 5: Answers referring to a rainforest were, in the main, poorer than those candidates who chose a semi-arid area.

Question 6: Many candidates, whilst able to explain traffic management, were not able to offer any evaluation beyond statements such as 'this reduces congestion'.

Question 7(b): A number of candidates did not respond to the key word 'adverse' in the question, instead answering about both positive and adverse consequences. In addition, some answers were vague and did not refer to a specific river management project.

Question 9(b): Some candidates were not able to offer any evaluation of the success of strategies to manage climate change. In addition, candidates should ensure that all answers

link back to the question — for example, many candidates made points on the transport policy or charging for plastic bags, but did not link it to climate change.

Question 10: Whilst many candidates scored well, there were again a disappointing number of candidates who made little or no reference to the map at all.

### **Component 2: assignment**

The overall standard of coursework assignments was good and an improvement on 2016. However, there are some areas where a minority of candidates failed to score.

Many candidates still choose to write about three, four, or even five gathering techniques, although they did not provide the sufficient level of detail required to gain full marks.

Candidates can only be credited for two techniques, up to four marks for either, and any further lower-scoring techniques will not gain any credit. Whilst candidates will not lose marks for discussing extra techniques, this will cost them valuable time, meaning they may not achieve higher scores in other sections. Some candidates also made repetitive comments when evaluating their gathering techniques. Candidates who use only secondary sources generally score lower marks in this section.

A small minority of candidates continue to use very text-heavy processed information sheets, resulting in them lifting information for which they cannot be credited. A small number only had a list of web-sites on their Processed Information sheets. It is clearly stated in the General Marking Instructions (available on the SQA website) that candidates will be expected to give an element of added value to the information which they take into the write-up with them. Often this will be in the form of explanations, analysis, comparison to geographical models and concluding remarks where candidates are making use of their geographical knowledge to interpret, explain, and analyse their findings.

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

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

It is essential that candidates read questions carefully and that they understand and respond to both the command word, and any other key words in the question. Answers that are generic and vague will not gain full marks, and answers that are not linked to the question will not gain marks.

Candidates are encouraged to use up-to-date case studies whenever possible. Centres should ensure case study material itself is recent and relevant to learners in the classroom today. Those candidates using older material — for example on the ‘dust bowl’, or historic migration flows — often gave vague, more generic answers.

At Higher level, candidates are expected to use their knowledge and skills to write developed responses. Guidance on what is required in a developed response can be found in the General and Specific Marking Instructions. To be awarded a mark, a candidate’s answer

must be relevant to the issue in the question (eg should focus on environmental conflicts), provide additional detail, exemplification (eg refer to specific and relevant case study information), reasons or evidence, and respond to the demands of the command word.

The use of relevant, up-to-date and engaging case studies will help candidates to fulfil the demand of writing a developed response. The detailed marking instructions published on the SQA website are a useful guide as to the level of detail which candidates are expected to give and centres should make full use of these.

## **Component 2: assignment**

The standard of the assignment was again high — and an improving picture.

Those studies with a wide range of data (primary and/or secondary) allowed candidates to analyse their findings in more detail.

There is no advantage or disadvantage to a candidate in fieldwork being undertaken individually or as a group. It should be noted that only the fieldwork should be completed as a group. All other aspects of the assignment should be undertaken independently. It should also be noted that group fieldwork does not necessarily suit all candidates; there was again evidence of candidates having undertaken fieldwork on topics that they did not entirely understand. All candidates should have a choice of topic.

Candidates are encouraged to use two separate sheets rather than back-to-back; markers commented that this makes them easier to refer to — and therefore should also make it easier for candidates to refer to during the write-up stage.

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.

A minority of candidates submitted very similar processed information sheets. Whilst field data collected as part of a group is entirely acceptable, centres must ensure that the processing and preparation for the write-up are entirely the work of the candidate — only reasonable assistance, as detailed in 'Guidance on conditions of Assessment for Coursework' ([http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/Guidance\\_on\\_conditions\\_of\\_assessment\\_for\\_coursework.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/Guidance_on_conditions_of_assessment_for_coursework.pdf)) should be given.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	8157
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	7945
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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	27.8%	27.8%	2207	62
B	23.4%	51.2%	1863	52
C	24.4%	75.6%	1938	42
D	7.9%	83.6%	631	37
No award	16.4%	-	1306	-

## 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.