



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Geography
Level(s)	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

In 2015 there was a slight increase in overall performance; there were, again, some outstanding candidates. There were very few candidates who were ill-prepared, or had been presented at the incorrect level, which is very pleasing.

These factors are reflected in the increased mean score for both papers this year, although the increase in Paper 1 was more pronounced. The mean score for Paper 2 was again slightly lower than for Paper 1.

In Paper 1, Question 6: Biosphere was more popular than Question 5: Atmosphere; and significantly more candidates opted for Question 7: Rural, than Question 8: Industry. In Paper 2 the dominance of Questions 1 and 6 is ever more evident, as is the slow, steady decline in Questions 2 – 4 and the absence of responses to Question 5, other than those candidates who appeared to choose the wrong question.

Tables 1 and 2 below provide detailed information regarding question choices and scores in both papers. Although this information has been taken from a very small (but random) sample of scripts, it reinforces the information provided by markers in their reports.

Markers noted the majority of candidates were well prepared, with good knowledge of case studies, and only a few candidates chose the wrong context, ie developed rather than developing countries, or choosing to answer all questions.

All of these factors were taken into consideration at the meeting to set the grade boundary marks.

Table 1: Paper 1: Question Choice and Mean Marks scored

Question	Topic	Mean mark	Percentage mark	Question choice as % (Sample size : 222)
1(a)	Lithosphere	6.86/10	69	
(b)		5.87/8	73	
2(a)	Hydrosphere	4.35/6	72	
(b)		5.32	44	
3(a)	Population	5.83/8	73	
(b)		6.81/10	68	
4(a)	Urban	5.37/8	67	
(b)		6.65	66	
5(a)	Atmosphere	2.93/6	49	35
5(b)		4.48/8	56	35
6(a)	Biosphere	5.75/8	72	63

(b)		2.62/6	44	63
7(a)	Rural	5.28/7	75	70
(b)		4.21/7	60	70
8(i)	Industry	6.53/9	73	29
(ii)		2.66/5	34	29

Table 2: Paper 2: Question choice and mean marks scored

Question	Mean mark	Percentage mark	Question choice as % (sample size 206)
1a	14.35/20	72	95
1b	5.7/8	71	95
1ci	6.34/11	58	95
1cii	6.15/11	56	95
2	None in sample		
3a	6.3/12	53	5
3b	4.2/8	52	5
3c	13.9/24	58	5
4	None in sample		
5	None in sample		
6a	6.32/12	53	100
6b	5.98/10	60	100
6ci	4.88/8	61	100
6cii	8.97/14	64	100
6ciii	3.97/6	66	100

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Question 1: Most candidates scored well in (a), with those able to give accurate grid references and map evidence achieving the highest marks. The answers for (b) were also of a high quality, with those candidates who were able to correctly explain coastal erosion processes scoring very well.

Question 2(a): Most candidates were able to score well in this question, with a number able to gain full marks from a well annotated diagram.

Question 3: Candidates were able to give a range of problems of an aging population and a good range of explanations for the difficulties of collecting census information in a developing country.

Question 4: In this question, most candidates were able to access all marks for descriptive points across both parts of the question.

Question 6(a): The majority of candidates were able to draw detailed annotated diagrams for the podzol soil.

Question 7 (a): This question was answered well, with those candidates able to display knowledge of a case study area able to give more explanatory points.

Question 8(a): Although this was a less popular choice, the mapwork element to this question was well answered, with good use of grid references and map evidence.

Paper 2

Question 1a: As in paper 1, answers referring to erosional features were excellent, with developed explanations of processes and very good use of annotated diagrams.

Question 2a: As in previous years, the best answers in this section came from candidates who made good use of the resources available within the question.

Question 3c: This section provided strong answers on the benefits of water-management schemes, with candidates providing specific information on their case study areas. There were some particularly good answers about the management of the Colorado.

Question 4c: Although a less popular question, this question elicited some very good responses on the issues of shanty towns.

Question 6(b): A number of markers commented on centres choosing to focus on up-to-date, detailed primary health care strategies.

Question 6c: A popular choice, there was again a good range of responses on the management of water-related diseases, with those on malaria generally of a high standard.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Question 2(b): Whilst most candidates were able to give a good explanation for an upper course river feature, the standard of answers for a lower course feature was disappointing. Very few candidates scored full marks in this part of the question, and many candidates did not even attempt it.

Question 5(a): A number of candidates did not appear to be prepared for this question; a significant minority could name ocean currents but could not offer any description or explanation of the pattern of those currents.

Question 6b: A number of candidates appeared not to be able to tackle this question, offering little beyond limited descriptive points and being unable to explain the formation of a gley soil.

Paper 2

Question 1(a): A minority of candidates chose to explain the formation of a limestone landscape for this question, so were not able to access many of the marks available.

Question 1(b): Markers noted that a number of candidates did not relate their chosen land use to the landscape as required by the question.

Question 3(d): A number of candidates struggled to gain more than two marks for this question.

Question 6(a): Markers commented that some candidates explained differences between countries rather than explaining the differences in development **within** a country.

Question 6(c) (ii): A number of candidates discussed the effectiveness of strategies to manage a disease, which was not required by the question. Whilst they are not penalised for this, they may have wasted time in doing so.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Candidates should take time to read questions carefully. Care should be taken over command words — where candidates are asked to describe and explain, they must ensure they do both for maximum credit. They should also take care over words such as ‘social’, ‘economic’ and ‘environmental’. Conversely, they should not respond beyond the command, for example by evaluating when this is not required.

Candidates should make use of all of the resources available to them in the question paper — particularly in Paper 2. By referring to graphs, maps and tables, and then analysing this data, answers are more detailed and can gain more credit.

Centres and candidates should be aware that there a significant number of marks available to candidates for reference to places, schemes and solutions **within** their case study areas and topics, particularly in Paper 2.

Centres should ensure case study material itself is recent and relevant to learners in the classroom today. As stated in previous years, although the arrangements documents refer to post-1950 urban and rural change, the teaching of geography should refer to the most recent changes to ensure learning is pertinent today. Markers commented that a greater proportion of candidates this year, referred to more recent change; those candidates who do so, almost always give a better quality of answer and as such, score higher marks.

Many markers commented on the high standards of candidate responses again this year, reflecting the high standard of teaching and learning in centres around the country.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	8496
Number of resulted entries in 2015	4368

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 200				
A	32.7%	32.7%	1430	142
B	22.7%	55.4%	990	121
C	20.7%	76.1%	904	101
D	7.2%	83.3%	315	91
No award	16.7%	-	729	-

Overall the course assessment proved to be easier than intended. For this reason the boundaries were increased by 2 marks at Grade A and by 1 mark at Grade C. 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.