



## Course Report 2017 – External Assessment

Subject	Geography
Level	National 5
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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 National 5 Geography question paper is marked out of 60 and consists of three sections, each worth 20 marks. These are Physical Environments, Human Environments and Global Issues.

In section A (Physical Environments) there is a choice where candidates opt for either question 1 (glaciation) or question 2 (limestone). This year, 69% of candidates answered the upland glaciation questions, while 31% answered the limestone landscapes option. This was very similar to 2016. Candidates' responses to the question about the formation of limestone features (limestone pavement) were of a similar standard to candidates' responses to features of upland glaciation (U-shaped valley).

In section C (Global Issues), where candidates must opt to answer two out of six questions, a very small number attempted to answer three or more questions. In such cases, markers were instructed to mark all responses but to credit only the two highest-scoring answers.

The most popular topics in section C were question 14 (Development & Health) (58% of candidates) and question 11 (Environmental Hazards) (56%). Next in terms of popularity were question 9 (Climate Change) (46%) and question 10 (Human Impact on Natural Environments) (25%). Question 13 (Tourism) (13%) and question 12 (Trade & Globalisation) (3%) remained the least popular topics.

Post-examination analysis indicated that this course component performed as intended for more able candidates. However, some questions were more demanding than intended for less able candidates. This was taken into account at the Awarding meeting and the grade boundaries were set accordingly.

### Component 2: assignment

The National 5 Geography Coursework Assignment is marked out of 20 and consists of a report written up under exam conditions which is externally marked. Candidates are able to prepare, in advance, two A4 sheets of processed information to assist them during their write-up.

In Section A, candidates are expected to describe two research methods used in collecting information for their assignment. This section is marked out of 6, and up to 4 marks can be gained by describing any one research method.

In Section B, candidates must describe and explain their findings with reference to their processed information, and make any concluding remarks about their topic or issue. Of the 14 marks available in this section, up to 3 marks can be awarded for description. Some good

candidates, however, were able to gain all 14 marks by making valid explanatory or concluding points.

Overall this course component performed as expected.

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

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

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

The overall quality of candidate responses this year was good. Generally, candidates scored well on identifying and explaining the formation of physical landscapes. Candidate responses were equally good on glaciated landscapes and limestone uplands, reflecting effective teaching of both topics by centres.

Candidates continued to show good knowledge of map skills, coping well with the identification of contour patterns in question 1(a) and also the identification of urban land use zones in question 5. In question 6, most candidates were able to make good points about the suitability of the area identified for housing development by accurate interpretation of the information on the Ordnance Survey map extract.

Questions worth 5 or 6 marks allow candidates to give more extended responses and to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Good responses were particularly evident in question 8 and 11(b), where answers included good detail of shanty town improvements (Q8) and of the effects of tropical storms (Q11(b)). Candidates showed good knowledge of the case studies they had studied in class, such as Dharavi in Mumbai or Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro (Q8) and also Typhoon Haiyan or Hurricane Katrina (Q11(b)). This enabled many candidates to score highly on these two questions in particular.

#### **Component 2: assignment**

The performance of candidates in the assignment this year was very similar to the standard achieved in 2016. This reflects the good standard achieved by candidates in the write-up, even though there was one less mark available for description of findings than last session.

The quality of processed information was highly variable, but it was evident that many candidates had worked very hard to prepare information about their findings and to display it in a clear and effective way. Candidates used a variety of graphs, charts, annotated photos or field sketches and colour-coded land-use maps, as well as mind maps, to display their results.

The majority of candidates appear to be well aware of the need to add value to their processed information sheets and that simply copying data or transferring statements from

their data sheets into their write-up will not gain marks, unless accompanied by further explanation and detail.

In section A, most candidates effectively described two research methods used to gather data, so achieved good marks in this section.

In section B, candidates gave clear descriptions of their findings and were able to back this up with good explanations which made links between different elements of the data on their processed information sheets, demonstrating their sound geographical knowledge and understanding. This enabled many candidates to achieve good marks in this section too.

It was again clear that many centres had facilitated good opportunities for their pupils to undertake a limited range of fieldwork, allowing data to be gathered first hand. Examples of research undertaken in this way included topics such as comparison of two different urban land-use zones or shopping centres; river studies looking either at the differences between rivers, or between one river and a model river profile; weather studies which examined micro-climate or how observed local weather conditions were affected by atmospheric pressure; tourism studies examining the characteristics of a particular tourist centre or comparing the popularity of different country parks. Examples of research undertaken from secondary sources included comparisons of the effects of two natural disasters, and the reasons for differing levels of development in selected developing world countries.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

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

Some candidates found questions which required an explanation, rather than simple description, more demanding. For example, in question 1 (c) and question 2 (c) most candidates correctly identified land uses in either glaciated upland or limestone areas but did not go on to adequately explain why these land uses were suitable for their chosen landscape type.

In question 3, many candidate responses did not include sufficient explanation as to how the given weather conditions at Bathgate were related to the winter anticyclone shown on the synoptic chart.

In question 7 a large number of candidates were not able to offer suitable explanations for global variations in population density.

In the Global Issues section, many candidates found question 9 (b) challenging, where they were expected to explain strategies which will help to minimise future climate change. Candidates were able to suggest solutions to this issue but did not go on to adequately explain how these solutions would help to minimise climate change in the future.

In the two Global Issues questions where candidates were expected to describe global distributions, more able candidates were able to accurately pick out and name locations on the map affected by tropical storms in questions 11 (a), or by changing death rates from

malaria in questions 14 (a). If answers do not include accurately-named countries or areas it is difficult for candidates to score well on this type of question.

In question 7, accurate knowledge of places on the world map helped candidates to identify specific locations and enabled them to access more marks, so long as they were able to offer valid explanations. If candidates do not have a basic global geographical knowledge, it is more difficult for them to score well on this type of question.

### **Component 2: assignment**

The vast majority of candidates submitted good or adequate processed information, enabling them to potentially access all the marks for the assignment. A small proportion of candidates submitted very weak processed information or none at all. Without reference to appropriate accompanying processed information, candidates are not able to access all of the marks for the assignment, specifically for description but potentially also for explanation and conclusions.

Some processed information sheets contained too much written information which candidates then copied into their write-up. Unless they provided further explanation or added value to this in some other way, such as by identifying a trend from their processed data, candidates were not able to gain any marks for this copied information.

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

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

Although there was only one Ordnance Survey map extract in the 2017 exam, this will not always be the case, so candidates should continue to be well prepared for the full range of map skills which is identified in the mandatory content.

Centres should ensure that candidates fully understand what is expected of them in questions beginning with the command word **explain**. Command words are usually highlighted within questions to make them as clear as possible for candidates. So long as their responses to explain type questions contain clear reasons and explanations, candidates will be able to access all the marks available.

There continue to be many very good answers to questions where case studies are relevant. This includes responses about urban change in the developing and developed world, management of environmental issues in natural regions, natural hazards, and disease in the developing world. Again this is a reflection of good teaching in centres, and it is clear that this helps candidates to access all the marks in this type of question and a good overall mark in the exam.

Finally, a good general geographical knowledge of place will help candidates to correctly identify distributions shown on graphics in the question paper. Where candidates can give

some geographical names of places indicated on a distribution map for example, they will be more likely to be able to achieve good marks on this type of question. The comprehensive marking instructions published on the SQA website are a useful guide to the level of detail which candidates are expected to give in their answers, and centres are encouraged to make full use of these.

From 2018, the National 5 Geography question paper will have a total of 80 marks. With the additional marks in the question paper being allocated to the physical and human environments sections, there will be more opportunity to sample a wider range of map skills. This is a skill in which candidates have traditionally performed well, reflecting good teaching in centres.

## **Component 2: assignment**

It is important that candidates state the aim of their assignment clearly at the start of the write-up.

It is important that the data shown on the two sheets of processed information is clearly displayed. Each candidate is expected to produce their own processed information sheets prior to the write-up. Therefore, each candidate's processed information should be original.

It is also important that the processed information sheets do not contain too much written information, as candidates cannot gain marks for simply copying this into their write-up. Marks are awarded for adding value to the information shown on their data sheets, such as by identifying a trend or by making clear links between different data sets and offering relevant explanations. Simple graphs, illustrations and mind-maps are examples of straightforward data which may constitute good processed information.

Detailed knowledge and understanding of their research topic is often reflected in the write-up and allows candidates to gain credit for explanatory and concluding remarks.

Only three of the fourteen marks in section B are available for description, so it is vital that candidates show their understanding by offering explanations of what they have found, to access all the marks.

The quality of candidates' research often becomes apparent in their responses, both in section A and section B of the assignment, and will therefore affect their overall mark.

It is essential that, as stipulated in the SQA guidelines, write-ups be completed strictly under exam conditions, within one hour, and that candidates should only have one opportunity to do so. There should be no opportunity for candidates to complete redrafts. The only information which candidates should have access to during the write-up is their two sheets of processed information, which should be submitted along with their responses.

The marking instructions for the National 5 Geography coursework assignment, published on the SQA website, are a useful guide as to how marks are allocated in this part of the assessment, and centres should make full use of these to help prepare candidates.

Finally, as in the question paper, the legibility of candidates' handwriting can be problematic at times, so candidates should be encouraged to ensure that their writing, both in the assignment and in their answers to the question paper, is as clear as they can make it. If a candidate's writing is particularly difficult to read, that makes it very hard to award all of the marks which that candidate might be due.

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	11018
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	10757
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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	34.9%	34.9%	3753	55
B	20.0%	54.9%	2152	46
C	19.7%	74.6%	2123	37
D	8.7%	83.3%	931	32
No award	16.7%	-	1798	-

## 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.