Course Report 2015

Subject	Geography
Level	National 5

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 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the 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: Physical Environments, Human Environments and Global Issues.

In section A (Physical Environments) there is a choice where candidates opt for either Question 1 (coasts) or Question 2 (rivers). There were significantly more answers about coasts (67% of candidates) than about rivers (33% of candidates). Candidates had to choose from a list of topics to describe features of coastal or river erosion. The most popular choices were for the formation of a stack and the formation of a waterfall. It was pleasing to note that almost no candidates attempted both questions.

In Section C (Global Issues) where candidates are required to choose two of six possible questions, a very small number attempted more than two with a handful of candidates attempting all of them. This was significantly less than in 2014. In cases where candidates have attempted more than two questions in Section C, markers are instructed to mark all responses but to credit only the two highest scoring answers.

The most popular topics in Section C were Question 11 (Environmental Hazards) (67% of candidates) and Question 14 (Health) (57% of candidates). Next in terms of popularity were Question 9 (Climate Change) (33% of candidates) and Question 10 (Human Impact on Natural Environments) (29% of candidates), while Question 13 (Tourism) (11% of candidates) and Question 12 (Trade & Globalisation) (4% of candidates) were the least popular topics.

Component 2: Assignment

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

The processed information sheets are not marked but must be submitted along with the coursework report. Candidates who do not submit their processed information sheets are not able to access all of the marks for the assignment.

It is important that candidates clearly state the aim of their research at the start of the 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 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 candidates must both describe and explain their findings with reference to their processed information, and also make any concluding remarks about their topic or issue. In this section marks are awarded for description and explanation as well as for valid conclusions. Of the 14 marks available, up to 7 marks are awarded for a candidate's description of their findings (reduced to a maximum of 4 if no processed information is included).

The remaining marks are awarded for explanation and conclusions. A good candidate may, however, be able to gain all 14 marks for making valid explanatory points. It is important that candidates expand on the information shown on their processed information sheets and do not simply copy from them.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Candidate responses this year were generally good, with many candidates showing sound geographical knowledge and referring to details from case studies about which they had learned. There were very few candidates who did not complete the paper within the allocated time of 1 hour 45 minutes, and also very few who attempted to answer all of the questions in section C where candidates are required to answer two of the six Global Issues questions.

Many candidates showed good knowledge of physical environments in their responses, for example in the first two questions about coastal and river landscapes. More responses were about coasts than about rivers.

Candidates did exceptionally well in handling two Ordnance Survey map extracts, with very few candidates confusing them. The quality of answers on questions requiring map skills was varied, with some candidates giving detailed explanations clearly related to map evidence, although there was a significant minority who gave inaccurate grid references or who described, instead of explaining, the suitability of the map area for selected land uses.

Many candidates were able to show their good depth of geographical knowledge in some of the six-mark questions, for example on birth rates and shanty towns, reflecting the fact that they were well prepared by centres.

Component 2: Assignment

The standard of coursework reports showed a marked improvement compared with 2014. Generally the quality of processed information was very good and this allowed candidates to perform better in both section A and section B of their write-up.

It was clear that many centres had facilitated opportunities for pupils to undertake fieldwork or research, allowing them to generate original data which they were then able to interpret in the assignment. The majority of candidates gave good accounts of the methods that they used to gather data, and went on to describe and explain their findings in sufficient detail to be able to gain plenty of marks.

There were fewer candidates who scored very low marks this year. This may be because centres are more familiar with the requirements for the assignment and the need for candidates to avoid direct copying from their processed information sheets.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Candidates showed good knowledge of physical landscapes, with the majority scoring well in either Question 1 (coasts) or Question 2 (rivers). Many were able to produce accurately annotated diagrams which helped them to score highly on Question 1 (b) and Question 2 (b).

Land use conflicts (Questions 4) was a topic on which most candidates wrote good answers, particularly where conflicts between land uses such as tourism and farming or industry were chosen.

Urban geography is a topic for which candidates appear to be very well prepared by centres, and so the overall performance on Question 6 (a) (features of the CBD) and Question 8 (improvements in shanty towns) was commendable. In particular, candidates showed good case study knowledge in Question 8, and were able to quote specific examples from developing world cities which they had studied.

These six-mark questions give candidates the opportunity to show the extent of their knowledge and many were able to do so, for example in Question 7 (reasons for falling birth rates in developed world countries), Question 11 (b) (reducing the impact of earthquakes) and Question 14 (b) (health).

Answers referring to malaria in Question 14 (b) showed an impressive depth of knowledge from candidates, and a significant minority also answered particularly well about cholera. Very few chose to write about pneumonia or kwashiorkor in their response to this question.

Component 2: Assignment

It was apparent that many centres chose to limit the choice of research topics which candidates could undertake. This may be due to the logistics of organising suitable opportunities for fieldwork as well as the need to provide appropriate field equipment. Candidates from these centres were able to produce very good assignments. Examples of research topics undertaken in this way included urban studies, such as the comparison of two different urban land use zones; river studies looking either at the differences between rivers, or between different sections of the same river; weather studies which examined micro-climate or how observed weather conditions were affected by atmospheric pressure; comparative studies looking at different shopping areas or at the characteristics and popularity of different country parks for example.

Many candidates who undertook research from secondary sources were also able to achieve good marks in their assignment. Examples of topics based on research from secondary sources included comparative studies examining the impact of natural disasters

on two different areas, or the impact of human activity on different areas of the global environment.

Many processed information sheets showed evidence of very good research. Candidates displayed this in the form of graphs, charts, annotated photos or field sketches, and colour-coded land-use maps as well as mind maps.

It is clear that candidates are mostly aware of the need to add value to their processed information sheets and that simply copying data or transferring statements from their data sheets will not gain marks. By careful use of their pre-prepared data or information, candidates were able to get prompts to help them show their knowledge and understanding of the research which they had undertaken.

Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Many candidates found question 5 (weather) difficult. This topic, about factors affecting average temperatures, has not previously featured in a question paper. Weather questions may refer to the effect of factors such as altitude, latitude, aspect and distance from the sea on local weather conditions, to knowledge of air masses affecting the UK or to the weather associated with anticyclones and depressions. Synoptic charts may be used in weather questions.

Some candidates are still confusing the command words 'describe' and 'explain', with answers often containing descriptions rather than explanations. This resulted in some candidates losing marks, for example, in Question 6 (b) (reasons for land uses in the rural-urban fringe) and Question 9 (b) (climate change), where they had written descriptive rather than explanatory answers.

In Question 13 (b) (eco-tourism) many candidates appeared to be unsure of what is meant by eco-tourism and could not give clear evidence of a case study about this topic.

Overall there were fewer areas of weakness than in 2014, and more candidates appeared to have been presented at the correct level. However, the quality of handwriting continues to be an issue, with the legibility of some responses causing concern, because this may be losing candidates marks if a marker cannot read what has been written by a candidate.

Component 2: Assignment

The vast majority of candidates submitted good or adequate processed information, enabling them to potentially access all of the marks for the assignment. There was only a small proportion of candidates who submitted very weak or no processed information.

However, some candidates were still simply describing their main findings, whilst making little attempt to explain or evaluate them. This meant they were not able to access the marks

awarded for explanation and conclusions, therefore limiting themselves to a maximum of 7 out of 14 of the available marks in section B.

Candidates who have very detailed processed information need to be aware that they will not gain marks for simply copying this into their write-up. It may therefore be best to have a straightforward outline of their findings on the processed information sheets, allowing candidates to then add further detail, explanations, summaries and concluding remarks in the write-up to show geographical knowledge and understanding of their chosen topic.

It is also important that candidates complete their write-up within the one hour time allocation, and that it is done under exam conditions.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

The Course Assessment Specification (CAS) indicates topics on which questions are likely to be based. In each year's question paper it is not possible to ask questions on every aspect of every topic, but it is important that centres cover everything indicated in the CAS to ensure candidates are able to fully access the question paper.

In 2015, questions on map skills were included in both the Physical Environments and in the Human Environments sections, but this will not necessarily be the case in all future National 5 question papers. Map Skills questions may appear in either, or both, of these sections.

It is essential that candidates read the questions carefully and that they cover all parts of the question in their answers. For example, in Question 7 (Population), candidates could only gain marks by referring to strategies relevant to developed-world countries such as Scotland, as stated in the question, and could not gain credit for references to developing world countries.

In questions where candidates are asked to describe in detail from a resource on the question paper, responses are expected to contain specific numeric or geographical information that shows that they have carefully studied, understood and correctly interpreted the resource for that question. Answers that are generic or vague will not gain full marks.

In many answers to 'explain' questions, candidates showed good geographical knowledge by giving detailed descriptions, but didn't go on to give an explanation, therefore losing out on available marks. For example in Question 10 (b) some answers described oil leaks in the tundra but didn't explain how these would affect people or the environment.

The detailed 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 should make full use of these.

Component 2: Assignment

It was clear that overall candidate performance in the assignment was better this session than in 2014. This reflects good support and preparation from centres in facilitating opportunities for pupils to undertake fieldwork and research, giving more candidates the potential of being able to achieve high marks in this part of the course.

The quality and nature of the data on the processed information sheets is important in determining a candidate's chances of being able to do well in the write-up. Clearly-presented data that is not overly elaborate is perfectly adequate for candidates to be able to achieve good marks in the assignment. The processed information should only be on two A4 sides, and must be submitted along with the write-up. 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 marks for explanatory and concluding remarks.

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. Write-ups should be completed under controlled conditions within one hour, and candidates should only have one opportunity to do this.

The marking instructions for the N5 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 in helping to prepare their candidates.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	9647

Number of resulted entries in 2015	11573

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 80				
A	37.1%	37.1%	4298	58
B	22.7%	59.8%	2626	49
C	20.2%	80.0%	2335	40
D	8.7%	88.7%	1011	35
No award	11.3%	-	1303	-

The question paper and the assignment did not adequately discriminate between more able candidates. The grade boundaries were adjusted to take account of this.