



Course Report 2018

Subject	Geography
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

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 is worth 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.

In section 3, the most commonly-chosen questions were question 8 (Development and Health), question 9 (Climate Change), and question 7 (River Basin Management). No candidates answered question 10 (Trade, Aid and Geopolitics), and very few answered question 11 (Energy).

Component 2: assignment

The Higher Geography coursework assignment is marked out of 30 and consists of a report written up under controlled 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 they used when collecting information for their assignment. This section is marked out of 6, according to the level of detail and the appropriateness of the research methods used. Candidates can gain up to 4 marks by describing any one research method.

In section B, which is marked out of 4, 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 gain up to a maximum of 6 marks.

In section D, candidates are required to analyse their findings to gain up to a maximum of 8 marks.

In section E, candidates should reach an overall conclusion supported by their evidence and can gain up to 2 marks. Candidates can gain a further 4 marks for section F: communicating information, where they are required to demonstrate their ability to use a structure and terminology appropriate to their topic or issue.

Feedback from the marking team suggests that the question paper and assignment were fair, accessible and performed as intended. The 2018 grade boundaries have been set accordingly.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Question 2: many candidates showed a good understanding of the formation of features of both coastal erosion and deposition. Many candidates used diagrams to their advantage in this question and it should be noted that candidates can achieve full marks for a well-annotated series of diagrams.

Question 3: most candidates were able to give detailed explanations for the formation of a brown earth soil.

Question 4: many candidates were able to give detailed and developed points on the strategies to improve housing in a developed world city, with some candidates displaying an excellent knowledge of case study specific approaches.

Question 5: most candidates were able to give detailed explanations of the difficulties of taking a census in developing world countries. A minority of candidates were able to extend their answers to data collection beyond a census.

Question 6: many candidates were able to give detailed answers, although like previous years, those answering on the Sahel region gave stronger responses.

Question 7(b): candidates showed a good understanding of their case study and could discuss a range of benefits of water control projects.

Question 8(a): most candidates were able to give explanations for variations in development between developing countries.

Question 8(b): an increasing number of candidates were able to discuss innovative and up-to-date case study detail in this question.

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

Question 11(a): 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

Most candidates had collected a range of 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 temporal or spatial changes or which were comparative in nature, were often of a higher quality. Physical assignments which compared, for example, two contrasting vegetation or slope transects, or urban studies which compared land use zones in a settlement, scored well.

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 study, 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: some candidates appeared unprepared for this question, with a number of candidates not attempting it.

Question 4: many candidates, while able to describe strategies used to improve housing, were able to offer little by way of evaluation beyond cost. Centres should ensure that all candidates can discuss their chosen city rather than only offer generic approaches.

Question 5: while this question was answered well, it should be noted that candidates could include issues with data collection beyond a census, for example discussing problems with civil registration.

Question 6: a number of candidates did not link their management strategies back to land degradation. Answers referring to a rainforest were, in the main, poorer than those candidates who chose a semi-arid area. In addition, a number of candidates wrote evaluative answers in this question, which was not required.

Question 7(a): many candidates seemed unprepared for this question and gave rather vague answers. It may be helpful for candidates to focus on the specific water control management project they have studied, to help answer this type of question.

Question 8(a): some candidates chose to suggest reasons for development *within* a developing country in this question. It should be noted that this is not in the course assessment specification.

A number of candidates also referred to South Korea however, South Korea was ranked 18th in the world in the HDI in 2016 and therefore is not a suitable case study within the developing world.

Question 9(a): while some candidates displayed excellent case study knowledge, others offered very general basic impacts of climate change. Candidates should ensure their impacts are both detailed and in context.

Question 9(b): some candidates could offer little beyond stating a reversal of human causes of climate change, rather than focusing on specific strategies to manage it. Candidates should also ensure that their answers link back to the question. For example, many candidates made points on transport and recycling policies or charging for plastic bags, but did not link these to management of climate change.

Question 11(b): a minority of candidates chose to discuss a renewable energy source. Candidates should ensure their answer links back to the question: '...that is meeting the energy demand of a country'.

Question 12: while many candidates scored well, there were again a number of candidates who made little or no reference to the map at all. Centres should ensure that candidates are able to use and give four- and six-figure grid references, use scale and direction, and interpret contour patterns. It should also be noted that this question asks candidates to apply their geographical skills to a range of information about an area. They are expected to synthesise this information to make judgements; this is not a question which can be rote learned in advance.

Component 2: assignment

The overall standard of coursework assignments was good and a slight improvement on 2017. However, there are some areas where a minority of candidates failed to score.

Although decreasing in number, some candidates still chose to write about three or four gathering techniques however, did not provide a sufficient level of detail required to gain full marks. Candidates can gain marks for only two techniques, up to 4 marks for either, and any further lower-scoring techniques will not gain any marks. While 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 and should be reminded that the marking instructions specify two techniques rather than two websites.

Candidates should take care with processed information sheets. A minority of candidates continue to use very text heavy processed information sheets, resulting in them lifting information for which they cannot gain marks.

A few candidates had only a list of websites on their processed information sheets. It is clearly stated in the general marking instructions available on SQA's 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. 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.

Without a range of processed information, candidates will find it difficult to access these marks.

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. It was noted as encouraging by markers that few candidates this year chose, for example, the wrong soil type or city.

Candidates are encouraged to use up-to-date, engaging and relevant case studies whenever possible. Centres should ensure case study material itself is recent and relevant to learners in the classroom today. Answers which are generic and/or vague will not gain full marks.

Candidates should ensure that they refer back to the key point in the question in their answer, linking their response to the fundamental idea.

An increasing number of candidates are answering questions in a different order to the question paper. While there is nothing wrong with this, a noticeable number of these candidates missed out questions, perhaps due to moving back and forward within the question paper. Centres should encourage candidates to make sure they have answered the required number of questions, and all parts of each question.

At Higher level, candidates are expected to use their knowledge and skills to write detailed and developed responses. Examples of such points can be found in the detailed marking instructions.

In summary, a candidate's answer must be relevant to the issue in the question (for example, should focus on climate change), provide additional detail, exemplification (for example, refer to specific and relevant case study information), reasons or evidence, and must respond to the demands of the command word used.

Component 2: assignment

The standard of assignments was, like previous years, high — a continually improving picture.

Those studies with a wide range of data (both primary and/or secondary) allowed candidates to both describe and analyse their findings in more detail than those with limited data on their processed information sheets.

Candidates should be sensitive and avoid broad stereotyping when accounting for socio-economic and cultural differences in comparing development or standard of living.

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 stage should be completed as a group. All other aspects of the assignment should be undertaken independently. It should also be noted that group-based fieldwork does not necessarily suit all candidates; there was again evidence of candidates having undertaken fieldwork on

topics that they did not entirely understand. Centres should note that all candidates should have a choice of topic.

It should be noted that candidates are not required to justify their choice of processing techniques in the write-up stage of the assignment and marks are not awarded for this.

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. It should be noted that while field data collected as part of a group is 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 the [‘Guidance on conditions of assessment for coursework’](#) should be given.

Candidates are expected to use the processed information sheet to generate the evidence under controlled conditions, and they **must** submit it with their evidence. The processed information sheet is not assessed formally. However it is important that teachers/lecturers ensure that candidates know how to use and submit processed information sheets which are reviewed during the marking process.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	7945
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	7329
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	27.1%	27.1%	1989	62
B	22.8%	49.9%	1669	52
C	23.5%	73.4%	1725	42
D	8.7%	82.1%	634	37
No award	17.9%	-	1312	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which allows 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.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.