



Course Report 2018

Subject	Geography
Level	National 5

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 National 5 Geography question paper is marked out of 80 and consists of three sections. The first two sections, Physical Environments and Human Environments each have questions totalling 30 marks, while the third section, Global Issues, has questions totalling 20 marks.

In section 1 (Physical Environments) candidates have a choice and can opt for either Question 1 (coasts) or Question 2 (rivers). Candidates' responses to the question about the formation of river features (meanders) were of a slightly better standard than candidates' responses to coastal features (sand spits). This is a change from the previous two years where answers about limestone landscapes achieved slightly lower scores than those about upland glaciated landscapes.

In section 3, where candidates must opt to answer two out of six 'global issues' questions, it was positive to see that very few candidates attempted three or more questions. In cases where candidates attempted more than two questions in section 3, markers were instructed to mark all responses but to award marks for only the two highest scoring answers.

The most popular topics in section 3 were Question 18 (development and health) and Question 15 (environmental hazards). Next in terms of popularity were Question 13 (climate change) and Question 14 (natural regions), while Question 17 (tourism) and Question 16 (trade and globalisation) remained the least popular topics.

Overall, the question paper performed as expected. Discriminator questions such as Question 5 (land use conflicts) and Question 10 (urban change) performed well, with only the more able candidates achieving higher marks.

Component 2: assignment

The National 5 Geography assignment assessment task is marked out of 20 and consists of a report written up by candidates under controlled conditions, and externally marked by SQA. Candidates are expected 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 to SQA along with the assignment report. Candidates who do not submit their processed information sheets are not able to access all of the available marks for the assignment.

Overall the assignment performed very much as expected, with the average candidate score being very close to that of 2017.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

The overall quality of candidate responses in 2018 was good, although there were also significant numbers of candidates who struggled with many of the questions and who may have been presented at the wrong level.

Candidates demonstrated good map skills in the following questions:

- ◆ Questions 1(a) and 2(a) (identification of physical landscapes features — coasts and rivers)
- ◆ Question 3 (cross-section)
- ◆ Question 4 (land use suitability)
- ◆ Question 9(a) (identifying and explaining land use zones)

Candidates were able to use grid references and interpret both maps very well. It was good to see that candidates responded very well to Question 8 (measuring distance) since this was the first time that a question of this nature has been asked at National 5 level. All of this reflects good teaching of map skills in centres across the country.

Questions worth 5 or 6 marks allowed candidates to give more extended-responses and to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Good responses were particularly evident in Question 4 and Question 15(b) where answers included good map evidence for the suitability of different land use types (Question 4), and the strategies used to prepare for and reduce the effects of a volcanic eruption (Question 15(b)). Candidates showed good knowledge of case studies which they had learned in class, such as Glasgow's inner city (Question 10) and methods used to manage the impact of the 1980 Mount St. Helens eruption (Question 15(b)). This enabled many candidates to gain high marks for these questions.

In other areas of the question paper, Question 11 (agricultural change in developing world countries) was particularly well answered, as were nearly all of the skills questions in section 3 (Global Issues), where candidates were asked to describe distribution patterns on a world map or changes shown on a graph.

Component 2: assignment

Candidates performed well in the assignment and produced work of a good standard in the write-up. There was a wide range in the quality of processed information submitted, but it was evident that many pupils had worked very hard to prepare information about their findings and to display it in a clear and effective way. Candidates used a good variety of graphs, charts, annotated photographs or field sketches, and colour-coded land use maps as well as mind maps to display their results.

Candidates mostly appeared 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 would not gain marks, unless accompanied by further explanation and detail.

In section A, most candidates were able to effectively describe two research methods used to gather data, with the result that they 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 their data, demonstrating their sound geographical knowledge and understanding. In this way, many candidates also achieved good marks in this section.

It was 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 different natural disasters, comparisons of population data from two different countries, as well as examining the reasons for differing levels of development in selected developing world countries.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

There were a few areas in the question paper where candidates found it more difficult to achieve high marks. In Questions 1(b) and 2(b) where candidates were asked to explain the formation of sand spits or meanders respectively, answers were generally less well explained than responses to similar questions in 2017 on U-shaped valleys and limestone pavements. The answers which scored most highly on these questions gave detailed explanations of the processes involved. Candidates who included clear diagram(s) with explanatory labels as part of their answers, were more likely to gain high marks for these questions. Candidate responses to Question 5 were often insufficiently detailed and in particular, lacked enough, or sometimes any, explanation of the solutions to land use conflicts. There were, however, a smaller number of excellent responses to this question where candidates had explained the solutions very effectively and as a result, achieved high marks.

Candidates fared better on Question 6 (factors affecting average temperatures in the UK) than on the last occasion (in 2015) when a similar question appeared, but there were still many candidates who wrote mainly about air masses instead of explaining the effects of factors such as latitude, altitude, aspect or distance from the sea. Some candidates found Question 10 (inner city change) challenging and wrote mainly descriptive answers or identified changes in the wrong land use zone, such as the CBD in their responses. This was certainly a discriminator question, with fewer candidates able to achieve full marks although, as stated above, there were some very good responses which quoted case studies from Scottish inner cities such as Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee or Aberdeen.

In section 3 (Global Issues), candidates are expected to show their knowledge of their two selected global issues and offer detailed explanations and/or give examples from case studies. Candidates sometimes failed to gain marks due to lack of sufficiently detailed explanations or lack of in-depth case study knowledge.

However, these questions worked effectively as discriminator questions, differentiating between A and C candidates for example, with many A candidates providing detailed responses.

Some candidates appeared unprepared for Question 14(b) (natural regions), with a number of candidates not attempting it. By contrast, many candidates responded well to the question and were able to access all of the marks available.

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. A small proportion of candidates submitted very weak processed information, sometimes on only one sheet. Without reference to appropriate accompanying processed information, candidates were not able to access all of the available marks for the assignment, specifically for description but potentially also for explanation and conclusions.

Sometimes processed information sheets can contain too much written information which candidates are then tempted to copy over into their write-up. Unless they provide further explanation or add value to this in some other way, such as by identifying a trend from their processed data, candidates should be aware that they will not be able to gain any marks for this.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

The National 5 Geography question paper was revised from session 2017–18, with candidates sitting the 'new' question paper for the first time this year. The paper has been increased in length to compensate for the removal of unit assessments, and is now worth a total of 80 marks. This enables a wider range of topics to be covered within the question paper, but it is not possible to cover the entire course content, as outlined in the course specification, each year. It is therefore essential that centres refer to this document when preparing their candidates for the National 5 question paper, as all of the questions are drawn from the topics identified within it. Referring to past papers is helpful for candidates, but close reference to the course specification should be made by centres in order to ensure sufficient coverage of all topics.

Candidates responded well to Question 8 (measuring distance) even though this topic had not appeared in previous question papers. It is however listed as one of the map skills included in the mandatory content as detailed in the course specification. With the increased length of the Physical and Human Environments sections, it will be much more likely that map skills will be tested in both of these sections, and therefore it will become more common to have a question paper with two map extracts.

It was evident from many of the responses to this year's question paper that there is much good teaching which takes place in centres, particularly of case studies, for example on land use conflicts, urban change, developing world farming, natural hazards and the effects of disease in developing world countries. It is clear that this helps candidates to write detailed answers, to demonstrate their in-depth geographical knowledge and therefore to be able to access all of the marks in 5 or 6 mark discriminator questions and to achieve a higher overall mark in the question paper.

Some candidates seemed unprepared for Question 14(b) (natural regions). The content for this question is covered by the following statement from the course specification:

'tundra and equatorial tropical forest climates and their ecosystems'

Centres can find support for this content in some of the textbooks which are currently available and also in the online BBC Bitesize resources designed to support National 5 Geography.

It is helpful for candidates to know clearly the differences between 'explain' and 'describe' questions, as there are still a significant number who confuse these two command words. Frequent reference to past paper questions will help candidates to become more familiar with these questions and centres are encouraged to make full use of the comprehensive National 5 Geography marking instructions which SQA publishes each year. Exemplification of answers shown in the marking instructions will help candidates to better understand the level of detail which they may be expected to give in order to succeed at this level.

Component 2: assignment

It is helpful if 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 and that it is original. Each candidate is expected to produce their **own** sheets, individually, prior to the write-up and therefore multiple candidates should not have photocopies of the same processed information. The processed information sheets should 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 processed information sheets, such as by identifying a trend or by highlighting the 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. It may therefore be best for candidates to have a straightforward and clear outline of their findings on the processed information sheets, which will enable them to then add further detail, explanations, summaries and concluding remarks about their chosen topic.

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. Since 2017, only 3 of the 14 marks in section B are available for description of research findings and so candidates must be able to show their understanding by offering explanations of what they have found, in order to access all of the marks available.

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 by SQA, write-ups should be completed strictly under controlled conditions, within one hour, and that candidates should only have one opportunity to do so.

There should be no opportunity for candidates to receive detailed feedback on drafts, including marking of drafts. This would be classed as going beyond reasonable assistance. The only information which candidates should have access to during the write-up, is their two A4 sheets of processed information which should be submitted along with their assignment reports. The marking instructions for the National 5 Geography assignment assessment task published on SQA's 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 prepare candidates.

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	10757
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	9795
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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	29.4%	29.4%	2883	70
B	20.4%	49.9%	2001	60
C	20.9%	70.8%	2050	50
D	15.5%	86.3%	1516	40
No award	13.7%	-	1345	-

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 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.

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.