Course report 2023

National 5 Geography

This report provides information on candidates' performance. 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. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 10,267

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 10,335

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	3,616	Percentage	35	Cumulative percentage	35	Minimum mark required	49
B	Number of candidates	2,182	Percentage	21.1	Cumulative percentage	56.1	Minimum mark required	40
C	Number of candidates	2,022	Percentage	19.6	Cumulative percentage	75.7	Minimum mark required	31
D	Number of candidates	1,509	Percentage	14.6	Cumulative percentage	90.3	Minimum mark required	22
No award	Number of candidates	1,006	Percentage	9.7	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics and information page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper was well received, with results showing that it was accessible to most candidates. There was a slightly higher proportion of 5- and 6-mark questions in 2023 and therefore, slightly fewer 3- or 4-mark questions than in 2022. This format was on standard with previous years and helped to differentiate between candidates.

It is important to note that some questions at National 5 level are intended to be more demanding than others to allow discrimination between A and C level candidates. Most of these questions are worth 5 or 6 marks, with weaker candidates generally finding it more difficult to access all the marks through an extended explanatory answer.

Some questions did not perform as expected. Questions 6 and 8(a) did not differentiate between candidates as expected. The prompt in question 9(b) was misinterpreted by some candidates. As a result, the C grade boundary was lowered to ensure that candidates were not disadvantaged by these questions.

Most candidates understood what was required and completed all three sections of the question paper in the allocated time.

In the global issues section, the health and environmental hazards questions were quite popular choices, but many candidates chose the climate change question, which was the most popular option.

Assignment

The requirement to complete the assignment was removed for session 2022–23.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Questions 1(a) and 2(a)
Candidates answered these questions well and showed good map skills by matching landscape features with the correct grid reference.

Question 3
Generally, candidates seemed well prepared to answer this question and this is reflected in their performance.

Question 4
Most candidates were able to give good examples of how the landscape was used, with corresponding map evidence. A few candidates lost out on 1 mark by referring only to one land use.

Question 5
Many candidates performed well in this question by being able to explain why different land users were in conflict. Many candidates made good references to case studies they had studied.

Question 7
Many candidates answered this question well and were able to explain the effects of latitude, relief, aspect, and distance from the sea on UK temperatures.

Question 8(b)
Although this question had not appeared at National 5 level before, most candidates made good use of their map skills and performed well by using their knowledge and skills to explain why Duffield is a popular settlement for residents. A few candidates confused Duffield with Derby.

Question 8(c)
Most candidates were able to score well in this question by identifying relevant features from the Ordnance Survey (OS) map. Crucially, they were then able to elaborate on how these features may have influenced the developers' choice of location.

Question 9(a)
Many candidates provided detailed and explanatory answers although some did not fully explain the reasons for the differences shown or did not compare both countries using words like 'higher' or 'lower', which meant that they could not access the full range of marks. This was a discriminator question where it tended to be the more able candidates who were able to access all the marks.

Question 9(b)
Most candidates answered this question well. Some candidates misinterpreted the prompt and were unable to access the full range of marks.

Question 10
Most candidates answered this question particularly well although a significant number of candidates appeared to have been confused over biofuels, and their answers seemed to suggest that biofuels are an agricultural chemical.

Question 11(b)
Most candidates were able to highlight many ways that climate change can be managed. However, a few candidates did not explain methods sufficiently, which meant that they could not gain full marks.

Question 13(b)
It was evident that a variety of case study areas had been taught by centres. Most candidates referred to a specific volcanic eruption in their answer and were able to write about the impact on both people and landscape. However, some candidates did not explain this adequately and therefore could not gain full marks.

Question 16(b)
Most candidates chose heart disease when answering this question. Many candidates were able to explain how the control measures that they highlighted helped to reduce the impact of the disease, although some candidates did not explain this sufficiently and therefore could not gain full marks.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 1(b)
Many candidates did not use diagrams to help them answer the question. These would have been helpful to explain the process of longshore drift and show progression between a sand spit and sand bar. A few candidates did not attempt this question.

Question 2(b)
Most candidates did not use diagrams to help them answer the question. These would have been useful to show change in the landscape over time and explain their answer. A few candidates did not appear to understand the processes of carbonation and solution. A few candidates did not attempt this question.

Question 6
Many candidates described the weather conditions shown on the weather station circle but then, crucially, did not go on to explain these weather conditions. Although this was a discriminator question, many candidates were unable to access the full range of marks for this question.

Question 8(a)
Many candidates found it challenging to obtain full marks for this question as they did not manage to compare the urban environments, and instead listed the features that were in each area.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

It is clear that many candidates had been well prepared by their centres, particularly in relation to case studies, for example, on land use conflicts and changes in developing world farming. This enabled candidates to provide detailed answers, with some demonstrating in depth geographical knowledge and performing well in 5- and 6-mark questions, and the question paper as a whole.

It was pleasing to see many candidates referring to up-to-date examples, which they studied in class, and were then able to highlight these in a way that was relevant to the question. For example, in question 11(b) (climate change), there were many references to good examples of initiatives that are managing aspects of climate change such as low emissions zones, and recent international conferences.

It is vital to note that up-to-date case studies are important in answering many questions in all three sections of the National 5 Geography question paper. Centres are encouraged to refresh teaching materials to ensure candidates' answers are accurate and therefore more likely to achieve full marks.

Centres should note that OS map skills will continue to be an integral part of the National 5 Geography question paper. Interpreting OS maps is a skill in itself, but they are also a medium through which it is possible to assess candidates' knowledge of physical and urban landscapes, land uses and land use conflicts. Centres should therefore continue to make good use of OS map extracts and ensure that map skills continue to be fully incorporated into National 5 Geography courses.

In the skills section of global issues questions, candidates continue to show improvement in describing graphs in detail by quoting figures. For example, in question 13(a) (natural hazards) candidates were able to describe in detail the changes in the number of earthquakes greater than magnitude 6.5 over the decades. It was also noted that an increasing number of candidates are identifying trends from the graphs. For skills questions that use maps, candidates are good at showcasing their geographical knowledge when identifying places from world maps. Centres should encourage candidates to also make full use of the keys in these maps to highlight places that are affected by the different categories displayed. For example, in question 15(a) (tourism), a good response would include mention of specific areas that have less than 1 million, 1–10 million, 10–50 million and 50+ million tourist arrivals.

In part b of the global issues questions, candidates also showed good knowledge of case studies. It is important however, that they relate their case study knowledge to the question in a way that is appropriate. For example, in question 16(b) (health), most candidates were aware of control measures that are used to manage the disease they had chosen to write about. A few candidates wrote lists of these measures such as 'stop smoking', 'eat fewer fatty foods', and 'exercise more' for heart disease, but did not then elaborate as to how these helped to reduce incidence of the disease.

It is vital that candidates know the difference between 'explain' and 'describe' questions, as there are still a significant number who confuse these two command words. Some candidates could not access the full range of marks because they described rather than explained. Centres should continue to reinforce the need for candidates to fully explain the impact of what they have learned in their case studies to be able to access all available marks.

For examples of candidate responses to National 5 Geography question papers, teachers and lecturers can refer to the Understanding Standards website. Each anonymised response has been marked and a commentary provided for each candidate to explain why marks have, or have not, been awarded. The website will be updated with responses from the 2023 question paper.

Assignment

Understanding Standards events are being held in November to provide centres with guidance on delivering National 5 assignments. In addition, there are five examples of candidate assignments accompanied by detailed marking commentaries currently available on the Understanding Standards website.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade 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 for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report.