



Questions and answers

Higher Geography

Question paper 1: Physical and human environments

Hydrosphere

If it's hydrological cycle in a drainage basin, would condensation be part of that?

Yes.

River discharge: Is there a specific length of lag time for urban and rural? For example, less than 10 hours = urban?

No, however, the steepness of the rising limb should make it obvious.

Atmosphere

If candidates regularly miss out the atmosphere question should its place/structure/content within the Higher course be reviewed?

The structure of atmosphere questions and content of marking instructions is constantly reviewed during the question paper development process, which involves a team of Geography teachers including the Principal Assessor, Depute Principal Assessor, question writers and checkers; QP reviewers and validators. The process takes account of feedback from markers, as well as any feedback received from centres, after an exam. Candidate performance in the exam also feeds into this process. Generally speaking, atmosphere questions are well answered by candidates.

Atmosphere's inclusion in the Higher course can be reviewed when National Qualifications are reviewed. More challenging questions are required to provide differentiation between A and C grade candidates.

Is the global heat budget still an acceptable question in the new Higher?

Yes. The global heat budget was assessed in 2021 assessment resource.

Population

Can the question include impacts on the migrants too, or just the country?

Impacts should be on the country(s) affected.

Are we still required to teach an example of both forced and voluntary migration?

The course specification is being updated and now reads: 'Causes and impact of forced **or** voluntary migration'. This means that, for the question paper, candidates can answer about either forced migration or voluntary migration however, you can teach both if you wish.

Urban

What was it that can link to air quality?

Traffic management which is more than just about congestion - the LEZ is focused on air quality.

The transport improvements in city centres have a lot to do with encouraging more people into the city centre shops etc, not just to ease the flow of cars.

Please can future Urban mark-schemes for Rio de Janeiro be more up to date?

The main purpose of marking instructions is to enable markers to mark the responses that candidates have submitted. If a significant number of candidates

submit responses based on more up-to-date information, the marking instructions will reflect this.

What case studies are people doing for Urban?

An attendee answered: Glasgow and Mumbai.

Question paper 2: Global issues and geographical skills

River basin management

Can characteristics of a river basin be asked in the question paper?

Yes, this is stated in the mandatory content section of the course specification published on the SQA website.

What case studies are people doing for RBM?

An attendee answered: Colorado.

Climate change

Would a strategy such as 'meat free Mondays' in schools and work places gain marks?

A strategy should be a planned response. As this is a planned response it would be acceptable if explained in the context of climate change as opposed to a health strategy.

Development and health

For development and health, there hasn't been a question recently on development indicator validity or reasons for differences in development, is this something still to be included in the course?

Yes, as stated in the mandatory content section of the course specification published on the SQA website, candidates can be asked about the validity of development indicators and differences in development.

Question 2(a) in the 2025 question paper relates to validity of a development indicator and question 8 in the 2018 question paper asked about differences in development. Question papers sample from the course therefore, some questions may appear more often than others.

Assignment

Please expand on what 'more than sitting' might look like practically, ie how to ensure security of candidate outcomes especially if digital?

You now have the flexibility to deliver the write-up in one sitting, or more than one sitting. Centres who chose to do it in more than one sitting often deliver it over two. The total time for multiple sittings must not exceed the maximum time allowed which is 1 hour 30 mins for Higher Geography.

If you choose to deliver the write-up over two or more sittings, then you must retain your candidates' work, whether hard copy or digital, and store it securely between sittings to ensure that they do not add to it outwith the time and conditions allowed. You must not provide any additional teaching or provide feedback in relation to the assignments between sittings.

How can candidates compare photographs or maps to pet PI marks?

Candidates can extract and interpret information from photographs to be awarded a PI mark.

If population was chosen as the topic, would it be okay if a candidate focused on the youthful/aging aspect rather than birth rates and death rates?

It depends on whether this would provide enough scope for the candidate to gather data of suitable range and complexity.

Has there been any change in marking of the assignment since it has been reintroduced?

There has been no change to the marking since the assignment was reintroduced. The majority of markers are experienced markers and Geography teachers. Nationally, candidate performance has remained stable, with a very slight improvement in the 2025 diet.

Can the scales be on the graph with numbers?

Yes, numbers on the axis but not on the columns. Markers need to be able to interpret the graphs.

Can clarity of 'overuse' be provided? Can the coding be added to specs? When you mean a pictorial mind map, do you mean hand drawn pictures and not copied and pasted symbols from a website?

The course specification and course assessment task are being updated with information about the use of codes, symbols etc. You can also find guidance in the course report.

Are there any tips for the KU section when there is a fieldwork-based study, eg urban study?

Candidates are required to demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding in relation to their assignment topic. For an urban study this might include knowledge of urban models, or background information on a specific area.

There was a noticeable difference (in my centre) in marks between a human burgess model study and soils study for previous two years. Is there a reason why soils assignments are marked more harshly?

The marking instructions are the same regardless of the topic. The topic chosen by candidates however, must allow the gathering of data of suitable range and complexity. Some topics provide limited scope for candidates to gather suitable data. You are able to provide feedback to candidates on their choice of topic.

Candidates should choose a topic they are interested in. This makes their research more meaningful and can build their confidence when completing their assignment report; this can mean that group collected fieldwork may not be the best choice of assignment topics for all candidates.

For KU marks in the assignment, will definitions of key terms still apply? For example, definition of attrition in a river study and definition of inner city in urban study?

Marks are awarded for relevant knowledge and understanding related to the assignment. As such the candidate's knowledge must be relevant to their topic and reflect SCQF level 6. This will vary; for some candidates attrition may be relevant to their river study, for other candidates it may not.

Generic questions

Are there any other changes to the mandatory content in the course specification?

No.

Why use the wording 'recent' in the course specification if some changes which are not recent are accepted?

A time period has not been specified in relation to 'recent'. During RNQ, we engaged widely with teachers in an attempt to specify 'recent'. From our engagement however, we found that it is difficult to specify a time period, without disadvantaging some candidates, as it very much depends on the topic. For example, some changes which took place some time ago, have impacts which are still relevant in today's world and therefore, to current candidates.

Is a ruler specified in the invigilator pack for Geography?

Yes. For all levels of Geography, the 2025 Invigilators' Handbook contained the following instruction:

Candidates should have access to a ruler.

Can double desks be specified for the National 5 and Higher Geography examinations?

Centres can provide double desks if they wish however, due to the number of candidates at National 5 and Higher, the provision of double desks may not be possible in every centre.

Could the marking schemes give more variety of case study answers – these help teachers gain confidence to move to newer case studies?

The main purpose of marking instructions is to enable markers to mark. They need to be practical for markers to use, and they need to reflect the responses that candidates have submitted. The marking instructions therefore, cannot be an exhaustive list which is why they include the instruction 'or any other valid point'. That said, if a significant number of candidates submit responses based on new case studies, the marking instructions will reflect this.

Will there be any consideration about giving candidates more time to answer question paper 2?

Evidence from the examination diets demonstrate that candidates are able to complete the question paper in the time allowed. This will continue to be monitored, as it is for all levels and components.

Will there be any more Understanding Standards examples on the site from the 2025 diet?

You can find a range of materials on the Understanding Standards website for Higher Geography. For the question paper there are materials from the 2019, 2022 and 2023 examination diets. For the assignment there are nine examples covering both fieldwork and desk-based research. We will update the site after a future diet, if the need arises, but have no plans to add materials from the 2025 diet.

There seems to be more overlap between what's required for describe, discuss and explain. Could you clarify each?

In 'describe' questions candidates must make relevant, factual points. Candidates must provide more than an outline or list to gain marks.

In 'discuss' questions candidates must explore ideas about a strategy, or the impact of a change. They should consider the positives and negatives. This might not be a balanced argument, but they should give a range of impacts within their answer.

In 'explain' questions candidates must explain or suggest reasons for the cause or impact of something or refer to causal connections and relationships.

For global issues could the national average marks for each topic, including map applications, be published to help guide learning and teaching for all.

A range of materials are available to help you with learning and teaching. These include:

- marking instructions published after every examination diet – these provide possible answers and indicate how marks are awarded
- Understanding Standards materials – these include candidate evidence with marking commentaries, to show how the marking instructions were applied to particular candidate response
- course reports published after every examination diet – these highlight the areas where candidates performed well and the areas that they found demanding and also include advice for preparing future candidates.

...or just tell us how each centre did in each question so that we can reflect on our teaching practice and improve.

We do not have the means to share this level of detail with centres. You may be aware however, of the pilot project which allowed centres, for a limited range of subjects including National 5 and Higher Geography, access to marked scripts after the 2024 diet. Next steps for this project are currently being considered. You will see from the evaluation published on the SQA website that there are challenges to be

addressed, both for centres and SQA, if this service is to be made available to all subjects and all centres.

Can another session be run given that other social subjects get full days at in person Understanding Standards events?

The webinar is published on the Understanding Standards website which means that you can revisit it if you need to and it is available for anyone who couldn't attend. We have no further events planned this session.

We carry out Understanding Standards activity, such as the production of materials, webinars and events, where we can see that there is a need. Our analysis after the 2025 diet indicated to us that centres required some support for Higher Geography and for this reason, we arranged the Higher Geography webinar.