Course report 2025

Higher 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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 7,570

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 7,101

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	2,380	33.5	33.5	77
B	1,546	21.8	55.3	64
C	1,446	20.4	75.7	51
D	1,034	14.6	90.2	38
No award	695	9.8	100%	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

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

In this report:

- ‘most’ means greater than or equal to 70%
- ‘many’ means 50% to 69%
- ‘some’ means 25% to 49%
- ‘a few’ means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the statistics and information page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Question paper 1: physical and human environments

This question paper performed broadly as expected. Feedback from the marking team indicated it was accessible and fair. Some questions were found to be more challenging than expected and grade boundaries were adjusted to take this into account.

Question paper 2: global issues and geographical skills

Development and health (question 2) and global climate change (question 3) remain the most popular options in this question paper. As in 2024, the number of candidates choosing the energy option (question 4) increased.

This question paper performed largely as expected, however, one question was found to be more challenging than intended and grade boundaries were adjusted to take this into account.

Assignment

The assessment conditions for the assignment changed this session, allowing candidates to split their 90 minutes write up into more than one sitting.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Question paper 1: physical and human environments

Question 1: Most candidates performed well in this question. Most candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of the processes of glacial erosion. Most candidates were able to give a named example of an arête.

Question 2: Many candidates were able to give clear explanations of coastal erosion processes and give a named example of either a headland or bay.

Question 5(a): Most candidates were able to give clear, detailed descriptions of both air masses.

Question 6: Most candidates were able to describe a range of strategies to collect population data. Many candidates were able to describe methods beyond a census, including sampling and other government agencies.

Question 7: Most candidates were able to explain a range of problems encountered in collecting accurate population data and give relevant named examples to support their answer.

Question 8: Many candidates were able to discuss the impacts of a migration flow. Markers noted that candidates referenced a much more diverse range of case studies this year.

Question 11: Most candidates were able to describe a range of conflicts caused by land uses in glacial or coastal areas. Many candidates were able to use named examples to enhance their answers.

Question paper 2: global issues and geographical skills

Question 1(a): Some candidates were able make full use of the sources by interpreting them and scored well in this question.

Question 1(b): Some candidates were able to explain a range of negative impacts of a water management project. Those candidates who referenced more recent projects, generally gained higher marks.

Question 2(b): Many candidates were able to describe a range of primary health care strategies and provide detailed comments on their effectiveness. Markers noted that candidates referenced a wide range of contemporary case studies.

Question 3(b): Many candidates were able to discuss a range of impacts of climate change, with most candidates able to provide recent, relevant examples to enhance their answers.

Question 5: Most candidates were able to give detailed explanations of the suitability of the site, referring to the map. Most candidates were able to discuss a range of positive and negative impacts of the development. Many candidates were able to give appropriate map evidence to support their answer.

Assignment

This was the second year that the assignment was externally assessed since 2019, and candidate performance was slightly better than in 2024, although still lower than in 2019. Candidates covered a range of topics, with a notable increase in desk-based assignments. Those candidates who chose their topic carefully, to allow Higher level analysis, scored well.

Most candidates referred to only two gathering techniques, with those undertaking primary data collection gaining higher marks in this section.

Those candidates with a clear structure, and with a distinct section referencing background information, scored well in the knowledge and understanding section.

Candidates with a range of data in their processed information sheets scored higher marks in both the processed information and analysis sections. Those candidates who processed their information beyond raw or tabulated data, also gained more marks in these sections.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question paper 1: physical and human environments

Question 3: Many candidates found this question challenging and were unable to describe the hydrological cycle beyond a basic description. Some candidates used incorrect terminology to describe the various stages of the cycle.

Question 4: Some candidates gave a description with very limited explanation of podzol formation for this question. A few candidates confused the podzol with other soil types. A few candidates did not attempt this question.

Question 5: Some candidates struggled to read the graph accurately, with a few confusing the months of the year, for example August with April. Many candidates did not refer to the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) in their answer for this question. A few candidates did not attempt this question.

Question 8: Some candidates described the impacts of the migration flow on the migrants rather than on the country. A few candidates

described the impacts on both donor and receiving countries, and a few candidates discussed reasons for migration rather than impacts.

Question 9: Most candidates did not respond correctly to the second command in the question and rather than explaining the strategies to manage housing, instead commented on effectiveness of the strategies.

Question 10: Most candidates did not respond correctly to the second command in the question and rather than explaining the strategies to manage rural land degradation, instead commented on the effectiveness of the strategies. Of those candidates who opted to discuss rainforest areas, some instead focused solely on the impacts of deforestation without linking this to rural land degradation. A few candidates did not attempt this question.

Question 11: A few candidates mistakenly discussed solutions as well as, or instead of, land use conflicts.

Question paper 2: global issues and geographical skills

Question 1(a): Some candidates struggled to read the graphs correctly with a few confusing months of the year, for example April with August. A few candidates explained the positive impacts of a water management project rather than the need for one.

Question 2(a): A few candidates did not attempt this question. Some candidates were unable to give any explanation beyond a simple explanation of averages.

Question 2(b): Some candidates referred to very dated primary health care strategies, some from over 50 years ago.

Question 3(a): Some candidates did not refer to reasons why greenhouse gas emissions were changing, rather, simply stating their sources.

Question 3(b): This year, an increasing number of candidates referred to the impacts of poor air quality on health rather than climate change. While this can be a secondary impact, candidates did not express it in this way.

Question 4(a): Some candidates struggled to give reasons beyond increasing technology for this question.

Question 4(b): Some candidates did not relate their answer to the question asked. Specifically, they did not discuss the effectiveness of meeting energy demands.

Question 5: Some candidates merely reworded statements from the scenario without developing these using evidence from the sources. Some candidates gave data from the graphs without putting this into context, for example, describing a change or comparison.

Assignment

Markers noted that literacy levels did not always reflect the standard expected at Higher level. Markers noted that it was not evident that many centres appeared to have taken advantage of the new assessment conditions for the assignment.

Some candidates did not have two A4 sides of processed information; this can make it challenging to access the range of marks available for referring to processed information and analysis.

Some candidates had graphs with a scale that made it very difficult to read accurately from. Centres should note that if candidates have learned and remembered data, rather than being able to be read it from their processed information sheets, this is marked as knowledge and understanding rather than referring to processed information.

Some candidates had processed information that was very difficult to read, for example, poorly photocopied graphics and graphs with no labels on axes or titles.

A few candidates used tables of raw data on their processed information sheets. Centres should note that copying data from a table will not gain a mark for referring to processed information.

Markers commented that some desk-based studies were pitched more at National 5 level rather than Higher level due to the simplicity of the topics chosen.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Question paper 1: physical and human environments

Candidates were well prepared for landscape formation questions and were able to give named examples. Centres should continue to focus on processes of landscape formation as these are often transferrable to different landscape features.

Candidates should take care when reading graphs; interpreting data is an integral part of the course and can be assessed in all components. Candidates should consider using a ruler where appropriate to help read graphs accurately and avoid errors, such as mixing up months of the year.

Centres should ensure candidates are confident in the meaning of different command words used in the question paper. Many candidates did not respond to the correct command in the human environments section. In particular, candidates should ensure they are clear on the difference between the ‘explain’ and ‘comment on the effectiveness’ command words. When asked to ‘explain’, candidates should focus on the reason for a strategy being introduced, whereas ‘comment on the effectiveness’ asks candidates to comment on the impact of the strategy, either positive or negative; this should be an evaluative comment.

Markers noted that candidates discussed more contemporary migration flows in this years’ answers. Teachers and lecturers should ensure that the case studies they choose are up to date and relevant to today’s learners. Candidates should be sensitive and avoid broad stereotyping when discussing issues such as migration.

Question paper 2: global issues and geographical skills

As in the physical and human environments question paper, candidates should take care when reading graphs. Interpreting data is an integral part of the course and will always be assessed in question 5, and potentially in other questions, in this question paper. Candidates should consider using a ruler where appropriate to help read graphs accurately and avoid errors such as mixing up months of the year. Candidates should ensure that they add value when interpreting data, for example when they compare changes or trends in the sources.

Markers observed a notable improvement in how accurately candidates referenced the ordnance survey map this year, with more candidates able to provide accurate six figure grid references.

While the move to more contemporary case studies was noticeable in the physical and human environments question paper, it was less evident in this question paper. Some of the primary health care strategies discussed dated back to the 1960s and were not relevant to today's world, or today's learners. Similarly, some of the impacts of water control projects that candidates referred to were almost 100 years old. Centres should note that case studies should be relevant and up to date.

Assignment

Fewer candidates carried out fieldwork or primary data collection to complete their assignments and as a result, candidates submitted more desk-based assignments this year. Candidates should take care when choosing their topic and ensure that the topic chosen provides opportunity for analysis appropriate for Higher level, rather than National 5 level. This is particularly evident where candidates choose to compare two very different countries with no real reason or justification to do so. In addition, to gain marks for knowledge and understanding, candidates should note that background information must be relevant to the study undertaken.

Centres should ensure that candidates are clear on the guidance for producing processed information sheets. Candidates should consider the scale of the graphs

they create and ensure that these can be clearly read, using minor grid lines where appropriate.

This year, an increased number of candidates used a substantial number of pictures and symbols in their processed information sheets. Limited use of pictures, mind maps and symbols are acceptable as a prompt, however, using them as a coded draft of the assignment report is not acceptable and could result in a malpractice referral for the candidate. Appropriate processed information examples are available on the Understanding Standards website.

Centres should familiarise themselves with the changes to the assessment conditions for the assignment.

Examples of candidate responses to Higher Geography assignments are available on the Understanding Standards website, where we have provided anonymised, marked responses alongside a commentary to explain why marks have or have not been awarded.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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, we hold 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 our 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. We 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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy.