Course report 2026

Higher Geography, SCQF level 6

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

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Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 7,101

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 6,953

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	2,370	34.1	34.1	76
B	1,580	22.7	56.8	63
C	1,388	20.0	76.8	50
D	947	13.6	90.4	37
No award	668	9.6	100	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- ‘Most’ means greater than or equal to 70%.
- ‘Many’ means 50% to 69%.
- ‘Some’ means 25% to 49%.
- ‘Few’ or ‘a few’ means less than 25%.

You can find statistical reports on our website.

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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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.

How the course assessment performed

Question paper 1: Physical and human environments

This question paper performed broadly as expected. Feedback indicated it was accessible and fair. Some questions were more challenging than expected and we adjusted the grade boundaries to account for this.

Question paper 2: Global issues and geographical skills

This question paper performed largely as expected, however, some questions were more challenging than intended and we adjusted the grade boundaries to account for this. Development and health (question 2) and global climate change (question 3) were the most popular options in this question paper. Many candidates chose the energy option (question 4).

Assignment

The assignment performed as intended. Many candidates did not carry out fieldwork or primary data collection to complete their assignments and instead, produced desk-based assignments.

How candidates performed

Areas where candidates performed well

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 and gave a named example of a pyramidal peak.

Question 3: some candidates performed well in this question. Many candidates demonstrated an understanding of the processes of river erosion.

Question 4: many candidates gave accurate detailed descriptions of the hydrograph.

Question 5: most candidates performed very well in this question and provided detailed annotations describing the properties of a gley soil.

Question 7: most candidates discussed a range of consequences of an ageing population including references to more topical terminology such as pressure on the ‘carenting’ or ‘sandwich’ generations.

Question 9: most candidates gave clear detailed descriptions of socio-economic and environmental problems of informal housing specific to their case study cities.

Question 12: many candidates described a range of contemporary strategies to manage land use conflict in glaciated and coastal areas. Most candidates developed their answer using appropriate named examples.

Question paper 2: Global issues and geographical skills

Question 1(a): many candidates gave clear descriptions and explanations of the factors affecting the site of the dam.

Question 1(b): some candidates explained a range of benefits of a water control project and gave named examples that helped contextualise their answers. Those candidates who answered on more recent projects generally achieved higher marks.

Question 2(a): many candidates explained a range of factors leading to difference in development, with named examples to develop their answers.

Question 2(b): most candidates gave clear explanations for the management of a water-related disease, with many illustrating their answers with named examples. Some candidates focused on more current management strategies, particularly for malaria.

Question 3(a): most candidates explained some physical causes of climate change, with some candidates giving very detailed answers.

Question 4(a): many candidates gave clear explanations for the differences in energy production around the world.

Question 5: many candidates gave explanations of the suitability of the site, referring to the map. Many candidates discussed a range of positive and negative impacts of the development. Most candidates gave appropriate map evidence to support their answer, with few candidates giving incorrect six-figure grid references.

Assignment

Candidates covered a range of topics, with many candidates completing desk-based assignments. Those candidates who chose their topic carefully, to allow Higher level analysis, performed well. Most candidates correctly 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, performed well in the knowledge and understanding section. Candidates who had gathered and processed a wide range of data in their processed information sheets achieved 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 where candidates did not perform well

Question paper

Question paper 1: Physical and human environments

Question 2: some candidates responded to this question by explaining processes of coastal erosion rather than deposition.

Question 3: some candidates gave confusing explanations of the role of riffles and pools.

Question 4: some candidates gave little explanation of the long lag time in the graph, and some candidates did not use appropriate, correct terminology such as interception or infiltration in their responses.

Question 6: a few candidates did not attempt this question. A few candidates gave a response more suited to atmospheric circulation.

Question 8: many candidates did not respond to the ‘explain’ command in this question and instead gave basic descriptions. Some candidates referred to historic migration for which the reasons are no longer relevant.

Question 10: most candidates did not respond to the ‘comment on the effectiveness command’ and instead explained their strategies. Some candidates referred to very dated strategies such as New Towns and the GEAR project for Glasgow.

Question 11: a few candidates did not attempt this question. Those candidates who answered on the Sahel often achieved higher marks, with some of those referencing the Amazon focusing their answers on the impacts of deforestation. While some crossover exists, all points must be relevant to the question.

Question 12: many candidates did not respond to the ‘comment on the effectiveness command’ and instead explained their strategies to manage land use conflict. Some candidates focused on the land use conflict rather than its management.

Question paper 2: Global issues and geographical skills

Question 1(a): a few candidates referred to physical rather than human factors affecting the site of a dam.

Question 1(b): some candidates struggled to provide a range of benefits of water control, with a few candidates giving answers that were very historical and no longer relevant.

Question 2(a): some candidates did not recognise this question and instead gave explanations relating to development indicators. Many candidates referenced developed world countries in this question.

Question 2(b): many candidates commented on the effectiveness of the strategies they used rather than explaining.

Question 3(b): some candidates gave limited responses to the impacts of climate change with very little development. A few candidates referred to generic environmental issues such as litter, air pollution and ocean plastics without linking these to climate change.

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 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. Some candidates did not read accurately from the graph. Many candidates gave multiple repetitive statements about leisure activities in the wider area.

Assignment

Some candidates produced desk-based assignments on topics they did not properly contextualise, resulting in seemingly random country comparisons. This goes against the intent of the assessment and affected candidates' ability to deliver high-level analysis.

Some candidates had graphs with a scale that made it very difficult to read accurately from. This was more noticeable in assignments when the processed information was created using IT where the interval on the Y axis was too large to read the graph accurately. If candidates have learned and remembered data, rather than reading 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, low-quality photocopies of graphics, and graphs with no labels on axes or titles. A few candidates used tables of raw data on their processed information sheets. Copying data from a table will not gain a mark for referring to processed information.

Some candidates produced desk-based assignments that were of National 5 standard rather than Higher level due to the simplicity of the topics chosen.

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper 1: Physical and human environments

You 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(s) 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.

You must ensure that candidates using ICT know that any diagrams they are asked to draw, such as a soil profile, must be drawn in the answer booklet provided.

In migration and urban case studies, much of the detail was historic. You should ensure that the case studies you choose are up to date and relevant.

Question paper 2: Global issues and geographical skills

You should remind candidates to take care when reading graphs. Interpreting data is an integral part of the course and is always assessed in question 5, and sometimes in other questions across the assessment. You should encourage candidates to consider using a ruler to help read graphs accurately. You should prepare candidates to give accurate numerical trends or comparisons from graphs. Many candidates accurately referenced the Ordnance Survey map, providing accurate six-figure grid references.

Similarly to question paper 1, some case study information was historic and no longer relevant. Certain malaria management strategies dated back to the 1940s, while others have never been used beyond lab-based trials, so are not relevant. Discussing the use of egg whites or mustard seeds is now historically outdated and these examples are not acceptable evidence for contemporary malaria management questions. Similarly, the widespread use of spraying water bodies with oil will not

gain marks, unless candidates refer, for example, to modern alternatives like bio-pesticides or experimental nano-emulsions.

Many water-control projects are now dated, however, their consequences and impacts should be relevant. Some of the impacts of water-control projects that candidates referred to were almost 100 years old.

Assignment

Many candidates did not carry out fieldwork or primary data collection to complete their assignments and instead, produced desk-based assignments. You should encourage candidates to think carefully when choosing their topic to ensure that it will provide them with an opportunity for analysis appropriate for Higher level, rather than National 5 level.

You should remind candidates that to gain marks for knowledge and understanding, background information must be relevant to the study undertaken, and not a topic learned from the question paper without contextualisation.

You 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 gridlines where appropriate to allow them to access the marks available for referring to processed information.

We've included examples of candidate responses to Higher Geography assignments on our Understanding Standards website, where we've provided anonymised, marked responses alongside a commentary to explain why marks have or have not been awarded.