



Course Report 2016

Subject	Geography
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. It 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.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

The overall performance in the 2016 question paper was very mixed, with fewer candidates scoring high marks than in recent Advanced Higher Geography question papers. Most candidates fully attempted all three questions, and there was no evidence of time management issues. The majority of candidates, therefore, appeared to complete the paper in good time.

Feedback from markers indicated that candidates were not writing in enough depth and detail to meet the standard required at Advanced Higher level. It was clear that candidates were not achieving full marks in questions worth 4, 5 and 6 marks. Answers were often vague and did not show the level of knowledge and understanding required for Advanced Higher. Candidates frequently did not answer the question asked.

Post examination analysis found that the question paper was more demanding than intended. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries.

Components 2 and 3: Project- Folio

The Project–Folio is made up of two components:

- ◆ Section A (Geographical Study)
- ◆ Section B (Geographical Issue)

Overall the quality of performance across both sections of the Project-Folio was variable. Fewer candidates, in comparison with previous years, scored very high marks. High scoring candidates demonstrated extensive, good quality background reading.

The range of topics chosen for the Geographical Issue was excellent. They were often interesting, well written and relevant, with candidates using sources that were up to date. Likewise, there was a wide range of interesting and 'different' topics for the geographical Study. Wide use of secondary data was evident.

Traditionally, candidate performance has been stronger in the Geographical Issue, but this was not evident this year with the Geographical Study showing a slightly stronger performance.

The majority of candidates adhered to the word count for both the Study and the Issue resulting in very few submissions receiving a penalty.

Post-examination analysis found that both sections of the Project Folio were more demanding than intended: marks were less accessible to candidates due to the structure of the marking instructions. This resulted in a lowering of the grade boundaries. Development work will be carried out, in advance of the 2017 diet, to address this.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Q1 (b) (i) & (ii): some tracing overlays were annotated extremely well, often with no accompanying written answer, and were able to be credited with full marks. In general, 'drawing to scale' was accurate.

Q2 (a): this was well answered, with many examples of detailed knowledge and understanding of relevant techniques.

Q3 (a) (ii): this was generally well answered.

Q3 (b) (i) (ii) (iii): this was a straightforward question which afforded candidates the opportunity to illustrate a sound knowledge and understanding of statistical analysis, and gain full marks.

Components 2 and 3: Project Folio

Candidates performed well in the following areas of the Geographical Study demonstrating evidence of planned research, fieldwork, as well as the use of appropriate techniques to process relevant and detailed information:

- B Plan and carry out detailed research, which could include fieldwork
- E Use a wide range of appropriate techniques to process the gathered information

Candidates performed well in the following areas of the Geographical Issue, demonstrating evidence of being able to summarise and evaluate a wide range of clearly defined viewpoints:

- B Undertake wider background reading from a wide range of sources relating to the geographical issue
- C Summarise a wide range of viewpoints on the complex geographical issue
- D Critically evaluate each of the viewpoints

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1: Map interpretation

The main areas of concern were:

- ◆ Incorrect placing of tracing overlay.

- ◆ Formulaic answers that resulted in irrelevant information.
- ◆ Lack of sound map reading and interpretation, which at Advanced Higher should include the use of 6 figure grid references, an understanding of relief, drainage, aspect, direction, scale etc.
- ◆ Using the key to support information, where necessary.
- ◆ Reference to the 'whole map extract', where appropriate.

Q1 (a): this question generated very poor responses. It was evident that a significant majority of candidates did not understand what the 'site' of a settlement was, and therefore what the question was asking. It was recognised that the text box may have led candidates to think that the question was about tourism.

Q1 (b): the selection of the site was variable, and candidates lost marks as a result of either incorrectly placed tracing overlays, a lack of good map interpretation, poor understanding of what a Park & Ride is, or failing to use the contextualising information in the text box.

Q1 (c): a significant number of candidates did not fully understand what a Nature Reserve was, and failed to use the text box in conjunction with the OS map and Supplementary Item that were all relevant to answering this question.

Question 2: Gathering and processing techniques

Q2 (a): to achieve full marks candidates were expected to apply their knowledge and understanding to the **specific** requirements of the question

Q2 (b): there was a lack of knowledge and understanding of sampling techniques, often from entire centres, and lots of generic answers. The question specifically asked about '**vegetation across the Nature Reserve**'. The term 'micro-climate' seemed to be misunderstood by many candidates.

Question 3: Geographical data handling

Q3 (a): answers tended to be descriptive and did not explain the 'pattern' of city population. Use of atlas was lacking.

Q3 (c): many answers were very general and descriptive. There was a lack of understanding of 'net migration' and the data shown in the table. Careful examination of the data and dates would have ruled out irrelevant information relating to Syria and EU migration etc that was regularly included within answers.

Components 2 and 3: Project- Folio

Geographical Study (Section A)

A Justify the choice of a complex geographical topic to research: many candidates made no mention of justification and consequently lost marks.

C Evaluate the research techniques & the reliability of data gathered: this was often not included.

D Demonstrate a detailed knowledge & understanding of the topic being studied from wider reading: the KU was often evident but it often wasn't used to support findings.

F Reach reasoned conclusion(s) supported by a wide range of evidence: conclusions were often thin and repetitive. There was a lack of holistic comments.

Geographical Issue (Section B)

A Justify the choice of a current complex geographical issue to critically evaluate: this was often missed out by all candidates from a centre, rather than individual candidates.

E Reach reasoned conclusion(s) supported by a wide range of evidence: conclusions were often thin and repetitive. There was a lack of holistic comments.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Given that the question paper is two and a half hours long, it is expected that candidates:

- ◆ Should have plenty of time to read each question carefully, **in its entirety**, and then look at all the relevant information to allow them **to consider their response before completing it** (eg highlighting key words/info).
- ◆ Should provide answers that show a level of knowledge and understanding that is appropriate to the standard required for Advanced Higher.
- ◆ Will not use a formulaic approach to answering questions — this can lead to the inclusion of irrelevant information.

It is important that candidates are made aware of the significance of text boxes, which will continue to feature in the exam: likewise, Supplementary Item material. The instructions at the beginning of each question are important, as is the mark allocation. Question 2 directed candidates to (continue) to use the OS map. Very few did.

In relation Question 3, centres should note that the correct terminology for stating a null hypothesis is 'there is no *relationship/correlation ...*'.

It was encouraging to see evidence of the atlas being used more than in the past, but the appropriateness of its use now needs to be addressed.

Components 2 and 3: Project-Folio

General

Justification regarding the relevance and choice of topic needs to be clearer, with perhaps more guidance from centres and reference to the marking instructions in terms of what is expected. Quality of referencing remains very variable in written text/graphics and

bibliography. All citations should be referenced clearly, as should graphics, which should also be referred to and interpreted within the text.

The use of appendices is rarely appropriate and should be discouraged.

The AH Geography Course/Unit Support Notes provide detailed advice about the layout of the Issue and Study.

The liberal use of text boxes was of concern, and this was often a centre approach taken by all candidates. Text boxes should be used for enhancement rather than containing essential information. Candidates need to be aware that text boxes containing information that is essential to the study or essay (and which should therefore be embodied in the main text rather than in a box) may be included in the word count.

The main areas of concern in relation to the Project-Folio are:

Geographical Study

- ◆ Insufficient data, resulting in poor analysis. Too few sites or revisits.
- ◆ Too much lengthy detail (and therefore use of unnecessary words) relating to simplistic data gathering techniques.
- ◆ Inappropriate use of statistical techniques: centres should note that the use of statistical techniques is not a compulsory requirement.
- ◆ The background reading/research and KU was often not at the level required for Advanced Higher.
- ◆ The evaluation of techniques: some centres missed this out completely, resulting in loss of marks. Also, a tendency to be formulaic and simplistic with no mention of next steps.

Geographical Issue

There was a disappointing use of images/maps as enhancement.

Lightweight sources: pamphlets, blogs, page from a website. Candidates who chose a robust range of sources, supplemented by background reading, generally performed well across Sections B, C and D.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	0
Number of resulted entries in 2016	900

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	22.2%	22.2%	200	93
B	37.7%	59.9%	339	76
C	30.0%	89.9%	270	60
D	5.7%	95.6%	51	52
No award	4.4%	-	40	0

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will 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.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings 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.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ 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.