Course report 2024

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 2024 appeals process.

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Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   7,426

Number of resulted entries in 2024:   7,570

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	2,479	Percentage	32.7	Cumulative percentage	32.7	Minimum mark required	76
B	Number of candidates	1,607	Percentage	21.2	Cumulative percentage	54.0	Minimum mark required	63
C	Number of candidates	1,569	Percentage	20.7	Cumulative percentage	74.7	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	1,135	Percentage	15.0	Cumulative percentage	89.7	Minimum mark required	37
No award	Number of candidates	780	Percentage	10.3	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

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 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.

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Section 1: comments on the assessment

It is encouraging to see further rise in entries this session for Higher Geography.

Question paper

Question paper 1: physical and human environments

The question paper performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team indicated that it was accessible, fair for candidates, and comprehensive in terms of course coverage.

Question paper 2: global issues and geographical skills

This year saw the reintroduction of a second global issue following course modifications in 2022 and 2023. The most commonly chosen questions were question 2; development and health, and question 3; climate change. There was an increase this year in the number of centres delivering the energy option (question 4).

The question paper performed largely as expected, however, some questions were found to be more demanding than expected and grade boundaries were adjusted to take this into account.

Assignment

This year saw the reintroduction of the coursework assignment following course modifications in 2022 and 2023. The standard was slightly lower than 2019.

The removal of the National 5 assignment may have had a negative impact on Higher candidate performance because candidates this session may not have had experience in researching and evaluating gathering techniques, preparing processing techniques, analysing data, and creating conclusions based on data gathered. This was taken into consideration when setting the grade boundaries.

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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. Many candidates were able to give a named example in this question.

Question 2:   Many candidates who attempted this question gave clear explanations of the formation of their chosen feature of glacial deposition.

Question 3:   Many candidates were able to read the graph with accuracy and give a range of detailed explanations of the factors affecting changing river levels including land use, gradient and the number of tributaries.

Question 5:   Most candidates drew detailed annotated soil profiles.

Question 6:   Many candidates who attempted this question gave clear descriptions and detailed explanations for the pattern of ocean currents.

Question 7:   Most candidates were able to describe a range of methods to collect population data.

Question 8:   Many candidates were able to provide a range of consequences of an ageing population.

Question 9:   Most candidates were able to provide detailed descriptions of the issues found in areas of informal housing, with some able to provide issues specific to their case study area.

Question 10:   Most candidates were able to describe a range of strategies to manage transport issues, with some able to describe current solutions and strategies authentic to their case study.

Question 12:   Most candidates were well prepared for this question with many discussing current and contemporary management strategies specific to their case study area. Most candidates were able to give named examples which further developed their answer.

Question paper 2: global issues and geographical skills

Question 1(a): Some candidates gave clear descriptions and explanations of the physical factors influencing the site of a dam.

Question 1(b): Some candidates were able to explain a range of benefits of a water control project and give named examples which helped contextualise their answers. Those candidates who answered on more recent projects generally scored higher marks.

Question 2(a): Although this is the first year that this area has been sampled, many candidates gave detailed, specific answers.

Question 2(b): Many candidates were able to explain a range of strategies to manage their chosen water-related disease. Some candidates gave up-to-date strategies focusing on new developments. There was a noticeable increase in the number of candidates choosing to discuss cholera as their case study.

Question 3(a): Most candidates were able to discuss some impacts of climate change, with some able to provide detailed and current answers.

Question 4(a): Many candidates were able to suggest a range of reasons for increasing energy demands in middle and lower-income countries.

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Question 5: Most candidates gave detailed explanations of the suitability of the site and were able to offer a range of impacts of this development on the local area. A few candidates produced detailed and insightful comments on both the site of, and impacts of, this development.

Assignment

This is the first time that the assignment has been externally assessed since 2019 and, despite this gap, the standard was good overall, with many markers commenting on a positive performance. There were a range of topics covered with both fieldwork and desk-based assignments scoring well. This year saw an increase in desk-based assignments discussing differences in development. The candidates with highest marks chose countries thoughtfully, focusing on those with a common theme or geography.

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

Those candidates who had a clear section referring to background reading and/or geographical models, scored well in the knowledge and understanding section.

Many candidates had collected numerical data (primary, secondary or both), and these assignments generally scored more highly in both the processed information and analysis sections. Those candidates who processed their information well (as opposed to including raw data), were able to score more highly in the 'referring to processed information' section and were able to access more analysis marks.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper
Question paper 1: physical and human environments
Question 2: A few candidates did not attempt this question. A few candidates wrote about the formation of an esker or wrote an answer which confused multiple features of glacial deposition. A few candidates repeated glacial erosion processes for this question.
Question 3: A few candidates were not able to read the graph with accuracy.
Question 4: A few candidates seemed unprepared for this question. Some candidates misread the heading on the diagram in question 4, the stem for the question, and the wording of the question, and wrote about the formation of U shaped valley rather than a V shaped valley.
Question 6: A few candidates did not attempt this question. A few candidates wrote about atmospheric circulation instead of oceanic circulation.
Question 7: A few candidates provided very simplistic descriptions and wrote instead about development indicators, for example, birth and death rates, rather than birth and death registration.
Question 10: Whilst part (i) of this question was answered well, many candidates found part (ii) more demanding, giving an explanation for the introduction of a strategy rather than a comment on its effectiveness or success. Some candidate answers were very historic in nature, rather than recent as outlined in the course specification.

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Question 11: A few candidates did not attempt this question. Candidates should take care to explain the impacts of land degradation, rather than the impacts of deforestation. Whilst there is undoubtably some crossover, all points should be relevant to the question.

Question 12: A few candidates went beyond the command to first describe land use conflicts, before going on to comment on strategies to manage conflict required as directed in the question.

Question paper 2: global issues and geographical skills

Question 1(a): A few candidates described human factors affecting the site of a dam. A few candidates described consequences of dam building rather than considerations of the site.

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

Question 2(a): A few candidates provided vague answers lacking in detail.

Question 2(b): Some candidates went beyond the command in the question and went on to evaluate the success of management strategies. A few candidates offered little beyond stating a reversal of human causes of their chosen water-related disease.

Question 3(b): Many candidates wrote vague responses to tackling climate change rather than focusing on strategy (implying detailed plan or policy) or as outlined in the course specification. A few candidates went beyond the wording of the question and included adaptation strategy rather than mitigation. Some candidates described general environmental policy such as Low Emission Zones, or plastic waste. Whist these can be related to climate change, candidates need to make that link for credit to be awarded.

Question 4(b): A few candidates answered with a focus on renewable energy. Some candidates did not relate their answers to the question asked; '...in meeting the energy demand of a country'.

Question 5: Some candidates did not read the scenario carefully and failed to discuss the main development; housing, instead focusing solely on tourism. Some candidates, whilst referring to the graphs showing unemployment and house prices, did not use figures from the graphs to develop their answer. Some candidates merely provided a list of things to do in the area, without relating this back to the question. The trend of fewer candidates giving map evidence continued this year with a few candidates referring to the roads in the legend (A35) rather than those on the extract.

Assignment

Markers commented on the wide range of assignments; whilst many scored well, a notable number were very low scoring. Markers also noted that literacy levels did not always reflect those that might be expected at Higher.

Some candidates did not have two A4 sides of Processed Information; this can make it more challenging to access the full 6 marks for processed information and the full 8 marks for analysis.

Markers commented on a few candidates submitting Processed Information sheets of a poor quality; often poorly photocopied diagrams, graphs with no headings or labels, or graphs with the wrong (or no) scale. These are very difficult for markers to read therefore by default, must be very difficult for candidates to read and often resulted in candidates misreading information.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Question paper 1: physical and human environments

It is essential that candidates read each question and all sources carefully, and that they understand and respond to both the command word and any other key words in the question. Answers which are generic and vague will not gain full marks.

Candidates should take care to read graphs accurately when this is asked of them; this applies most obviously to the hydrograph and ITCZ type questions.

Candidates should ensure they are clear on the difference between the 'explain' and 'comment on the effectiveness' command words in the human environments section. The first is a reason for a strategy being introduced, the latter is a comment on its impact, success or otherwise; it should be an evaluative comment.

Centres should ensure that all case studies used are up to date and relevant. Those candidates who scored most highly in all of the case study type questions, were those referencing contemporary world issues.

Question paper 2: global issues and geographical skills

Candidates should ensure that they link all points in their answer back to the key point in the question. Whilst this was perhaps most noticeable in the climate change section, it applies to all questions.

Centres should ensure that all case studies are up to date and relevant. Whilst many water control projects are now dated; their consequences and impacts should be relevant to today's learners.

Centres should ensure that when candidates are presented with resources such as graphs in the geographical skills question, that they can make full use of these resources by reading accurately from them.

Assignment

The standard of assignments was a positive picture. With the reintroduction of this component there are some points worth noting for centres delivering in the future:

♦ Candidates are allowed to have, and should be encouraged to have, two sides of A4 (or one of A3) of Processed Information. Processed Information can take many forms but should be processed in some way by the candidate. This allows the candidate to understand their data therefore, making processed information marks and analysis marks easier to access. Some candidates submitted only one sheet, or more than two. Centres should ensure their candidates are not disadvantaged and have access to the assignment task instructions.

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- A few candidates had Processed Information sheets which were text-heavy. It should be noted that this is not processed information, just information, and therefore, it is difficult for candidates to gain marks for interpreting it. It is clearly stated in the general marking instructions (available on SQA's website) that candidates are expected to give an element of added value to the information on their Processed Information sheets. Often this will be in the form of explanations or analysis. No marks are awarded for work that is directly copied from the Processed Information.

- Candidates should be sensitive and avoid broad stereotyping when making statements on more deprived areas, both locally and internationally, when they do not have the evidence to back these up.

- There is no advantage or disadvantage to a candidate in fieldwork being undertaken individually or as a group. It must be noted however, that only the fieldwork stage should be completed as a group. All other aspects of the assignment, including processing information should be undertaken independently. Candidates, therefore, should not have identical Processed Information sheets.

- It should also be noted that group-based fieldwork does not necessarily suit all candidates. There was again evidence of candidates having undertaken fieldwork on topics that they did not entirely understand. Centres should note that all candidates should have a choice of topic.

- Candidates should be aware that background knowledge included in the write-up stage must be pertinent to the topic being discussed for marks to be awarded.

- Candidates are expected to use the Processed Information sheet to generate the evidence under controlled conditions, and they must submit it with their evidence. The Processed Information sheet is not assessed formally however, it is important that teachers and lecturers ensure that candidates know how to prepare, use and submit Processed Information sheets which are referred to during the marking process.

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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.

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.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in March 2024 and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

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grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).

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