



Course report 2022

Subject	Geography
Level	Advanced Higher

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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any appeals.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	1025
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	24.4	Cumulative percentage	24.4	Number of candidates	250	Minimum mark required	98
B	Percentage	34.8	Cumulative percentage	59.2	Number of candidates	355	Minimum mark required	80
C	Percentage	28.0	Cumulative percentage	87.2	Number of candidates	290	Minimum mark required	62
D	Percentage	10.1	Cumulative percentage	97.3	Number of candidates	100	Minimum mark required	44
No award	Percentage	2.7	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	30	Minimum mark required	N/A

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in appendix 1 of this report.

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 more statistical reports on the statistics page of [SQA's website](#).

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

This was the first Advanced Higher Geography course assessment since the revision of National Qualifications. Only minor changes were made to the course assessment as a result of the review.

Revision support published in March 2022 highlighted specific sections within the 'Gathering and processing techniques' section that would not be assessed in the question paper, allowing candidates to focus on human gathering techniques.

Generally, the question paper performed as expected, however, there were issues with some questions and, as a result, the grade boundaries were lowered.

Feedback from centres and markers suggested it was a fair assessment in terms of demand and coverage. The level of demand was balanced to allow for differentiation of candidate performance by way of mark allocation within each question, the selection and use of command words, and organisation of the components that made up each question.

Markers reported that, compared to previous diets, candidates continue to improve their management of the length and/or detail of their responses and that most candidates were able to complete the paper within the time allowed.

Project-portfolio

The project-portfolio is made up of two components:

- ◆ Section A: geographical study
- ◆ Section B: geographical issue

There were no changes made to the project-portfolio for the 2021–22 session. However, candidates did not perform as well as they did in previous diets. Feedback from markers suggests many candidates struggled to access marks that were previously accessible. The pandemic may have had an impact on opportunities for candidates to gather fieldwork. In addition, the removal of the Higher assignment may have had a negative impact on Advanced Higher candidate performance because candidates this year may not have had experience in researching and evaluating gathering techniques, preparing processing techniques, analysing data, and creating conclusions based on data gathered. While most candidates will have prepared their National 5 assignments in session 2019–20, many may not have had the opportunity to further develop their skills and knowledge prior to their Advanced Higher project-portfolio. This was taken into consideration when setting the grade boundaries.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Question 1: map interpretation

Question 1(a): this question was answered very well. Many candidates were able to achieve the full range of marks and chose good sites for the location of a solar farm. Most candidates were able to accurately draw the site to scale on the tracing overlay.

Question 1(b)(i) and (ii): this question was marked holistically across the two parts. Most candidates were able to access the full range of marks, and many achieved full marks.

Question 1(c): many candidates correctly used supplementary item C to apply appropriate points.

Question 2: gathering techniques

Question 2(a) generated strong candidate responses, with many candidates demonstrating a good knowledge and understanding of land use mapping as a gathering technique.

Question 2(b) generated a more mixed response, however, most candidates were able to access the top range of marks. Candidates demonstrated a good awareness of alternative human gathering techniques and appeared to be familiar with use of these techniques.

Question 3: data handling

Question 3(c)(i): this was the best answered question with many candidates achieving full marks. Most candidates were able to take information from both tables and describe trends in detail.

Project–folio

Candidates performed very well in section A in both the geographical study and the geographical issue. Candidates developed their justifications through use of wider reading and purpose with clarity.

Markers noted the variety of topics presented in the geographical study this year. These included many physical topics like beach profile and river studies. Despite difficulties presented by the pandemic, many candidates showed skill and ingenuity in their gathering techniques.

Markers commented that some candidates demonstrated a wide range of new technology and innovative techniques to generate data. There was a significant increase in the number of candidates using online surveys as part of their data collection.

Some of the skills for the geographical issue are developed and assessed for the first time at Advanced Higher level, therefore this component appears to have been less affected by the course modifications at Higher and National 5 over the last two years. Candidates performed well in some sections of the geographical issue, with markers commenting that many

candidates used academic sources to obtain information. The variety and originality of the topics was also noted.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 1(c): evidence from markers suggests that some candidates were confused by the words 'enhance' and 'biodiversity'. This question was heavily researched, and biodiversity is clearly enhanced in areas with solar farms. Consequently, many candidates did not discuss biodiversity in the fullest sense, instead discussing either plants or animals, but rarely both.

Question 1(d): candidates in previous question papers have struggled to make good use of the atlas. Candidates this year were asked again to make use of the atlas to assist their answer. Unfortunately, some candidates relied solely on their atlas and did not include in their answer prior learning, or any evidence from the OS map.

Question 3(a): the diagram in supplementary item D displays the river, proximity to Sydney city centre and major roads. These formed the basis of almost all answers in candidate responses. Few, if any, candidates discussed other common features of inner-city areas like parks, brownfield sites, shopping areas and industrial estates.

Question 3(b): many candidates struggled to access the full range of marks in this question. Markers have stated that many candidates simply did not know how to answer the question. The question is worded in a familiar manner; part (i) asks candidates to discuss the significance of the result, and part (ii) asks candidates to comment on the suitability of using nearest neighbour analysis.

Question 3(c)(ii): many candidates could not fully explain in detail alternative techniques, either graphical or statistical. It is possible that a lack of experience in completing processing techniques, due to the removal of the Higher assignment, has had an impact on candidate performance in this question.

Project-folio

Candidate performance in the geographical study was not as strong as in previous examinations diets, particularly in sections C, E, F and G. In particular, many candidates struggled with their conclusions in the geographical study.

Likewise, the geographical issue saw a decline in candidate performance when compared with previous years. In sections D and E in particular, candidates did not perform as well as in previous years.

Markers noticed a higher number of candidates submitting incomplete folios, as well as an increased number of centres sharing data for the geographical study.

It is possible that reduced performance across the geographical study and geographical issue is as a result of the removal of the Higher assignment. Markers have suggested that the lack of skills development was evidenced by candidates using fewer techniques in the geographical study.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

The general comments outlined in previous reports should be referred to and used in conjunction with the following additional comments to advise and prepare future candidates.

- ◆ Practice in the use of the tracing overlay for question 1 needs to be highlighted. Some candidates did not match the overlay correctly this year.
- ◆ The accuracy of drawing a site to scale needs to be absolutely precise. Marks are not awarded where there is a deviation from the size of site required, in this case, 1.6cm x 1cm in question 1(a). Continued practice using scale and rulers is essential.
- ◆ Use of the atlas is crucial, but in question 1 that information must be paired with prior learning and the OS map. For example, in question 1(d) candidates could gain marks by including evidence from the map; many candidates relied solely on the atlas. It is good to see candidates use and apply different information from the atlas, but they should practice this in addition to map evidence.
- ◆ It would be beneficial for candidates to have more practice in exam technique to help them appreciate and recognise differences in the wording of the questions. For example, questions requiring analysis should be practiced. Careful reading of questions is important. For example, question 1(b)(ii) asked for social and economic impacts of the solar farm, however, some candidate responses focused on environmental impacts.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to read their answers carefully to avoid repetition of information.
- ◆ Candidates and centres should be encouraged to read the course specifications for Advanced Higher Geography. They should be aware of the skills and required knowledge and understanding that are being assessed in the 'Gathering and processing techniques' and 'Data handling' sections of the question paper. Awareness and practice of these skills and knowledge can then benefit and enhance the project–folio.
- ◆ Centres should continue to help candidates to understand the relevance and significance of information contained within text boxes and supplementary items. This was evident in candidate responses this year, resulting in answers that correctly related to the context of the question.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to annotate sketches and diagrams to assist with explanation of data techniques. For example, some candidates cleverly used annotated or labelled sketches to assist with explaining alternative processing techniques in question 3(c)(ii).

Project–folio

- ◆ Centres should encourage the use of technology and innovative techniques to generate data, for example, the use of online surveys.
- ◆ Marking is holistic and therefore separate pages are much preferred. Binding folios is unhelpful as it makes it difficult for markers to cross-refer.
- ◆ Many candidates included page numbers which, due to holistic marking, is very helpful.
- ◆ There were clear improvements in the quality of bibliographies this year, though there were a few that still caused some concern. A bibliography should be a work-in-progress

throughout the entire project–folio process and should be reflected within the issue and study through citations and footnotes or endnotes.

- ◆ Candidates should include the date articles were written instead of when they were viewed. This is particularly helpful in the geographical issue.
- ◆ An issue or study without a bibliography is self-penalising. Bibliographies should be correctly formatted (not just a list of websites). There are online reference generators that centres should encourage candidates to use.
- ◆ Some candidates included vast bibliographies without any real evidence that wider reading was used. In terms of prioritisation of sources for the geographical issue, candidates should clearly identify their main sources of information. This is not meant to be a list of best to worst sources of information.
- ◆ Section C of the geographical study is an evaluation of gathering techniques, and comments on the reliability of the data gathered. Candidates should also discuss next steps, for example the way in which their data collection may be improved. This year, many candidates instead described, in detail, the way they collected their data. This is unnecessary at this level, particularly when there is a word limit.
- ◆ Group fieldwork was a notable concern this year. The sharing of data is acceptable, but it can reduce the opportunity for candidates to develop and demonstrate their own ideas and skills. Candidates should state in their planning and evaluation sections if data was gathered collectively.
- ◆ Centres should also ensure enough data is collected to allow for a variety of different ideas to be investigated. Some centres may have given their candidates the same or a very narrow range of topics for geographical studies. This resulted in candidates in some centres producing studies that were very similar. Candidates should be encouraged to develop their own skills and should not feel pressured into writing a study based on a particular group fieldwork experience. There should be options for the geographical study.
- ◆ Where candidates are sharing data, centres should make sure that candidates are always working independently. Candidates should not be sharing processing techniques and analytical points. There was a clear improvement in overall adherence to word limits in both sections of the folio. Most candidates this year included their word limits and signatures on their flyleaves. Centres should encourage candidates to adhere to the word limit. Word limits ensure fairness, help avoid repetition of ideas in essays, test candidates' communication skills, and help focus candidates' evaluative and analytical skills.
- ◆ The Bradshaw Model may not be the most appropriate method to compare most candidate-researched streams to and should not form the basis of an entire study. Wider reading often benefits candidates who conduct river studies.
- ◆ Candidates should ensure that they have enough research sites to enable them to gather sufficient data. In a river study, for example, 8 to 12 sites would allow sufficient data to be gathered. Candidates should also be encouraged to include a map of their study sites.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to use a wide range of data gathering techniques. Secondary sources are just as valid as primary sources. However, some candidates this year treated different websites as different secondary sources. Centres should encourage the use of online questionnaires, textbooks, books, journals, make use of

technology like conducting interviews using software like MS Teams, as well as 'standard' research on websites.

- ◆ Candidates' evaluations of sources for the geographical issue should focus on both the author and/or publication and the content of the source. For example, many good evaluations this year included wider reading that supported/opposed statements made within the source. There should be less focus on the word choice within those sources.
- ◆ For the geographical issue, candidates should be encouraged to compare sources in their evaluations. Additionally, candidates could make more explicit use of wider reading to support/oppose statements in their sources.
- ◆ Many candidates had very good titles for their geographical study and geographical issue that provided clear purpose this year. This was enhanced in the justification with clear relevance and explicit use of wider reading. Candidates should be encouraged to answer title questions and refer to their justifications when completing their conclusions.
- ◆ There was an improvement in the number of candidates presenting fewer pages of appendices. Centres should encourage candidates to avoid the use of contents pages and appendices. Marks are not awarded for anything in an appendix, and if graphical evidence is located in appendices, marks for 'integration of techniques' will be lost.

Appendix 1: 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.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures including assessment modifications and revision support, was introduced to support candidates as they returned to formal national exams and other forms of external assessment. This was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams have done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2022. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2022 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2022 Awarding—Methodology Report](#).