Course report 2024 — externally assessed course component

National 5 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.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   10,335

Number of resulted entries in 2024:   9,894

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	3,694	Percentage	37.3	Cumulative percentage	37.3	Minimum mark required	72
B	Number of candidates	2,091	Percentage	21.1	Cumulative percentage	58.5	Minimum mark required	61
C	Number of candidates	1,822	Percentage	18.4	Cumulative percentage	76.9	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	1,296	Percentage	13.1	Cumulative percentage	90.0	Minimum mark required	39
No award	Number of candidates	991	Percentage	10.0	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

Question paper

The question paper was well-received by stakeholders and was accessible to most candidates. There was a slightly higher proportion of 4-mark questions in 2024 and therefore, slightly fewer 6-mark questions than in 2023.

It is important to note that some questions at National 5 are intended to be more demanding than others to allow discrimination between A and C-level candidates. Most of these questions are worth 5 or 6 marks, with some candidates finding it more difficult to access all the marks through an extended explanatory answer.

Some of the discriminator questions, such as questions 3, 10 and 12 did not differentiate between candidates as expected. As a result, the A grade boundary was adjusted.

The most frequently answered global issues options were climate change, health, and environmental hazards. Less frequently answered were the options on natural regions, tourism, and trade and globalisation. The climate change question was the most popular with most centres now delivering this option.

Most candidates understood what was required and completed the three required sections in the allocated time. A few candidates, however, answered all questions in the paper. It was evident that a few candidates may not have been ready to be presented for National 5 and that National 4 may have been a more suitable level for them.

Assignment

This year saw the return of the assignment with the same assessment arrangements in place as 2019 when this component was last assessed. Overall, the assignment performed very much as expected with a marginal increase in the average candidate score compared with 2019. The marking approach was exactly the same as it was in 2019.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper
Questions 1(a) and 2(a)
These questions required candidates to match features of a glaciated landscape or features of a limestone landscape.

The questions were answered well by candidates who showed good mapping skills by matching landscape features with the correct grid reference.

Question 3
This question required candidates to explain the advantages and disadvantages of the map area for a development.

Most candidates were able to score well in this question by identifying relevant features from the Ordinance Survey (OS) map. Crucially, they were then able to elaborate on how these features may have influenced the developers' choice of location.

Question 4
This question required candidates to explain ways in which different land uses may conflict with each other, for an area they had studied.

Most candidates were able to score well in this question, despite some omitting their case study named area. A few candidates mistakenly discussed the solutions as well as the land use conflicts.

Question 5(a)
This question required candidates to match weather station circles to the correct location.

Most candidates performed well in this question.

Question 6
This question required candidates to match locations on an OS map to the correct distances.

Most candidates performed well in this question, showing good mapping skills.

Question 7
This question required candidates to match the grid reference to the correct urban land use zone.

Most candidates performed well in this question.

Question 8
This question required candidates to describe the changes that have taken place in a map area between 1994 and the present day.

The question was well answered by most candidates who were able to pick out changes between the OS map and the map extract.

Question 10
This question required candidates to describe the ways in which shanty towns are being improved in an area they have studied.

Most candidates had a good knowledge of their case study and performed well in this question.

Question 12
This question required candidates to explain the advantages and disadvantages of recent developments in farming in developed countries.

The question was particularly well answered by most candidates. It was evident, however, that some candidates had confused their answer with a developing world case study. Centres should ensure that case studies are relevant, up to date and appropriate to the named area studied.

Question 13(b)
This question required candidates to explain the effects of climate change.

Most candidates were able to highlight many effects of climate change. A few candidates, however, did not explain methods sufficiently and therefore, could not access all the marks available.

Question 15(b)
This question required candidates to explain the impact of an earthquake they had studied.

It was evident that a variety of case study areas had been taught by centres. Most candidates referred to a specific earthquake in their answer and were able to write about the impact on both people and landscape. A significant number of candidates, however, did not explain this adequately and, therefore, could not access all the marks available.

Question 18(b)
This question required candidates to explain the effects of a developed world disease they had studied.

Most candidates chose heart disease when answering this question. Many candidates were able to explain the effects of their chosen disease on people and the countries affected, although a significant number of candidates did not explain this sufficiently and therefore, could not access all the marks available. Some candidates discussed causes in their answer instead of effects.

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Assignment

Section A

Many candidates scored well in the research methods section and were able to discuss how they had gathered the data for their assignment.

Section B

Most candidates were able to achieve all 3 marks available for description. Some candidates had written far more descriptive points than required for full marks.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 1(b)

This question required candidates to explain the formation of a corrie.

Many candidates did not use diagrams to help them answer the question. These would have been helpful to explain the processes involved in the formation of the physical feature.

Question 2(b)

This question required candidates to explain the formation of a cave or cavern.

Most candidates did not use diagrams to help them answer the question. These would have been useful to show change in the landscape over time and explain their answer. A few candidates did not understand the processes of carbonation and solution.

Question 1(c)

This question required candidates to explain different ways in which people use glaciated landscapes.

A significant number of candidates were not able to access all available marks as they had described the way the land was used but did not explain why those land uses are found in glaciated uplands.

Question 2(c)

This question required candidates to explain different ways in which people use upland limestone landscapes.

Many candidates were not able to gain full marks because they had described the way the land was used and did not explain why those land uses are found in limestone landscapes.

Question 5(b)

This question required candidates to give reasons for the changes in weather associated with the passage of a depression.

Many candidates described the weather and did not explain the changes by linking it to the different parts of the depression. It was pleasing to see that some candidates had named cloud types, and these were credited due to positive marking.

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Question 9
This question required candidates to give reasons for recent changes that have taken place in the CBD of a developed world city.

Many candidates found it challenging to obtain full marks for this question as they did not manage to explain the changes in the CBD. Some candidates were confused and discussed inner city changes.

Question 11
This question required candidates to explain the ways in which chosen indicators show the level of development in a country.

Many candidates described the development indicators but then, crucially, did not go on to explain how they show the level of development in a developed or developing country.

Question 17(b)
This question required candidates to explain the impact of eco-tourism on people and the environment in a named area.

Most candidates who attempted this question were confused and did not understand the question or indeed, eco-tourism, and in some instances related their answer to mass tourism.

Assignment
Section A
Some candidates found it challenging to access all 6 marks for their research methods as they found it difficult to exemplify them.

Section B
Some candidates found it difficult to gain the full range of explanation marks available.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

It was apparent from many of the candidates' responses that centres have prepared their candidates well for the National 5 question paper, especially in relation to case studies, for example on land use conflicts and informal settlements. This helps candidates to write detailed answers, demonstrate their in-depth geographical knowledge and therefore be able to access all the marks in 5- or 6-mark discriminator questions and to achieve a higher overall mark in the question paper.

It was pleasing to see many candidates referring to up-to-date examples studied in class, and then discuss these in a way that is related to the question. For example, in question 9 (b) (changes in a CBD studied), there were many references to good examples of recent changes in cities studied such as Low Emissions Zones in Glasgow.

Centres should ensure that all case studies are relevant and up to date. It is important that current examples are used in answering questions in all three sections of the National 5 Geography question paper. Centres are encouraged to refresh teaching materials to ensure candidates' answers are accurate and, therefore, more likely to achieve full marks.

Candidates performed well in mapping questions in both the physical and human environments sections. Centres should note that OS map skills will continue to be an integral part of the National 5 Geography question paper. Interpreting OS maps is a skill in itself, however, maps are also a means to assess candidates' knowledge of physical and urban landscapes, land uses and land use conflicts. Centres should therefore continue to make good use of OS maps and ensure that map skills continue to be fully incorporated into National 5 Geography courses.

In the skills section of global issues questions, candidates continue to demonstrate improvement in describing line graphs and bar graphs in detail by quoting figures. For example, in question 14(a) (natural regions), candidates were able to describe in detail the changes in deforestation in the Amazon. It was also observed that an increasing number of candidates are identifying trends from the graphs. For skills questions that use maps, most candidates are excellent at showcasing their geographical knowledge when recognising places from world maps. Centres should encourage candidates to also make full use of the keys in these maps to highlight places that are affected by the different categories displayed. For example, in question 17 (a) (tourism), an excellent response would include reference to specific areas that have less than 1 million, 1-49 million, 50-499 million and 500 million or more air passenger journeys.

In part b of the global issues questions, candidates demonstrated good knowledge of case study areas. It is important, however, that they relate their case study knowledge to the question appropriately. For example, in question 15 (b) (natural hazards), most candidates were aware of the impact of their chosen earthquake on the people and the landscape. Some candidates, however, wrote lists such as 'many deaths', 'roads blocked' and 'buildings destroyed' but did not then elaborate on the details such as 'there were many deaths because falling buildings killed many people'. It is vital that candidates know the difference

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between 'explain' and 'describe' questions, as there are still a significant number who confuse these two command words. Sometimes candidates lose marks because they describe rather than explain. Centres should continue to emphasise the need for candidates to fully explain the impact of what they have learned in their case studies to be able to access all available marks.

It is important to note that marks are scaled at Higher level for the question paper, so comparisons cannot be drawn with National 5 level.

For examples of candidate responses to National 5 Geography question papers, teachers and lecturers can refer to the [Understanding Standards website](). Each anonymised response has been marked and a commentary provided to explain why marks have, or have not, been awarded.

Assignment

It was noted that fewer centres carried out fieldwork or primary data in order to complete their assignments. As a result, there were more desk-based and secondary data assignments this year. Most assignments were related to human geography with less physical geography assignments than in previous years.

The standard of Processed Information sheets and handwriting was of poorer quality this year. Candidates should ensure graphs have titles and scales, and graphs should be appropriately sized. Candidates should be careful when including tables in their Processed Information sheet since no marks are awarded for copying from the Processed Information sheets. Candidates, therefore, need to do more than just lift the data or information from a table to gain a mark for example, identify a trend or make a comparison.

Candidates should ensure they write their assignments in blue or black ink.

For examples of candidate responses to National 5 Geography assignments, teachers and lecturers can refer to the [Understanding Standards website](). Each anonymised response has been marked and a commentary provided to explain why marks have, or have not, been awarded.

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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

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.