



Course report 2025

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 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 9,894

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 10,056

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	3,232	32.1	32.1	70
B	2,074	20.6	52.8	59
C	1,964	19.5	72.3	48
D	1,479	14.7	87.0	37
No award	1,307	13.0	100%	Not applicable

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 or equal to 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.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper was well received by teachers, lecturers, and the marking team, with results showing that it was accessible to most candidates. There was a slightly higher proportion of 5 and 6-mark questions in 2025 and therefore, slightly fewer 4-mark questions than in 2024. The format was on standard and helped to differentiate between candidates.

Some questions at National 5 level 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 weaker candidates generally finding it more difficult to access all the marks through an extended explanatory answer.

Post-examination analysis indicated that the question paper was less accessible to C level candidates due to there being fewer 'describe' questions. As a result, the C boundary was lowered.

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

Most candidates understood what was required and completed the three required sections in the allocated time. However, a few candidates answered all questions in the paper. It was evident that a few candidates were presented at the incorrect level.

Assignment

This was the second time that the assignment was externally assessed since 2019. This year there was a change to the assessment conditions. Candidates are now permitted to complete the assignment write-up over more than one sitting within the one-hour time frame. Overall, the assignment performed as expected, with a

marginal decrease in the average candidate score compared with 2024. The marking approach was the same as in 2024 and we shared this approach at Understanding Standards events in November 2023 and on SQA's Understanding Standards website.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Questions 1(a) and 2(a)

Many candidates answered these questions well, showing good mapping skills by locating different landscape features at correct grid references.

Question 3

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

Question 4

Most candidates scored well in this question, showing good mapping skills and explaining the attractions of the Bridgend area, for example, there is a camp and caravan site at 817799 for visitors to stay overnight.

Question 5

Most candidates were able to link the weather associated with a polar continental air mass and its effects on people.

Question 6

Many candidates scored high marks in this question as they were able to compare the differences in weather between the two locations situated at different points in a depression.

Question 7

Many candidates answered this question well and were able to correctly explain different ways that land use conflicts can be managed in an area they had studied.

Question 8(a)

Most candidates performed well in this question, demonstrating that candidates were well prepared on urban map work.

Question 8(c)

Most candidates answered this question and were able to pick out location factors on the OS the map extract and explain them in the context of industrial location.

Question 10

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

Question 11

Most candidates were able to explain the advantages and disadvantages that modern developments in farming such as new technology, GM seeds and biofuels have brought to developing countries.

Question 12(b)

It was evident that most candidates were able to discuss both physical and human causes of climate change.

Question 14(b)

It was apparent that centres had taught a variety of case study areas. Most candidates referred to a specific volcano in their answer and were able to write about different management strategies.

Question 17(b)

Many candidates were able to explain the methods used to manage HIV/AIDS.

Assignment

Section A

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

Section B

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

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 1(b)

Most 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)

Many 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.

Question 8(b)

Most candidates found it challenging to obtain full marks for this question as they did not manage to explain the characteristics of the suburbs and CBD.

Question 9

Some candidates described the population structures without giving reasons for the differences in birth rates and death rates, and were unable to gain full marks.

Question 12(b)

A few candidates did not explain the causes of climate change sufficiently and therefore could not access all the available marks.

Question 14(b)

A significant number of candidates did not explain the strategies adequately and could not gain full marks.

Question 17(b)

A significant number of candidates did not explain the methods sufficiently and therefore could not access all the available marks.

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

Many candidates appeared to be very knowledgeable about their case studies, for example, on management of land use conflicts and informal settlements. Candidates were able to write detailed answers demonstrating their in-depth geographical knowledge, therefore accessing all the marks in high-scoring discriminator questions. This enabled these candidates to achieve a higher overall mark in the question paper.

Many candidates referred to up-to-date examples studied in class and then discussed these in a way that was related to the question. For example, in question 17(b) (explain methods used to manage HIV/AIDS), some candidates made references to good examples of recent management strategies such as the use of drug consumption rooms to reduce sharing needles and potentially limit the spreading of the disease.

Centres should ensure that all case studies are relevant and up to date. It is important that candidates are able to use current examples when 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 more likely to achieve full marks.

Overall, most candidates performed well in mapping questions in both the Physical and Human Environments sections. Centres should note that Ordnance Survey (OS) map skills will continue to be an integral part of the National 5 Geography question paper. OS maps is a skill in itself; maps are also a medium through which it is possible 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 17(a) candidates were able to describe in detail the changes in both malaria cases and deaths. Markers observed that an increasing number of candidates are identifying trends from the graphs. For skills questions that use maps, candidates are adept 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 16(a), an excellent response would include reference to specific areas that have 0–1 million, 2–10 million, 11–199 million and 200–300 million international tourist arrivals.

In part b of the global issues questions, candidates showed good knowledge of case study areas. However, it is important that they relate their case study knowledge to the question appropriately. For example, in question 14(b), most candidates were aware of the strategies used to prepare for and reduce the effects of a volcanic eruption. However, some candidates wrote lists such as ‘evacuation plans’, ‘exclusion zones’ and ‘tiltmeters measuring changes in the volcanic cone’ but did not then expand on the details such as ‘there are evacuation plans put in place to get people to safety and save lives’.

It is vital that candidates know the difference between ‘explain’ and ‘describe’ questions, as there are still a significant number who confuse these two command words. Sometimes candidates miss out on marks because they describe rather than explain. Centres should continue to emphasise the need for candidates to fully explain what they have learned in their case studies to be able to access all available marks.

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 candidates have, or have not, been awarded marks.

Assignment

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

The standard of processed information and handwriting was of poorer quality again this year. Candidates should ensure graphs have titles and scales, and graphs should be appropriately sized. Some candidates used a substantial number of pictures and symbols in their processed information sheets. Limited use of pictures and symbols is acceptable as a prompt however, using them as a coded draft of the assignment report is not acceptable and could result in a malpractice referral for the candidate. Appropriate processed information examples are available on the Understanding Standards website.

Many candidates used tables in their processed information, and they should use the information to draw comparisons, for example, higher or lower to avoid copying data in their write-up. It is important to note that information that is copied or 'lifted' from processed information sheets cannot be credited with marks.

Some candidates included background information in their assignment and this is not credited at National 5 level.

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 candidates have, or have not, been awarded 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.

Appendix: 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 is 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 to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of our 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. 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.

- 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.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).