Course report 2025

Advanced 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 2025 appeals process.

1

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024:   994

Number of resulted entries in 2025:   867

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	258	29.8	29.8	105
B	284	32.8	62.5	89
C	207	23.9	86.4	74
D	86	9.9	96.3	58
No award	32	3.7	100	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

2

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.

3

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Overall, the question paper performed as expected with feedback from centres and markers suggesting it was positive and fair in terms of accessibility. Candidates were prepared in general and performed well.

One question was found to be more demanding than expected, which resulted in the C boundary being lowered.

Project–folio

No changes were made to the project–folio for session 2024–25. As in previous years, candidates researched a wide range of interesting and relevant topics. Candidate confidence in the geographical study has improved, with experience from the Higher assignment supporting candidate responses this year.

Candidates used a range of styles this year in the geographical issues essay, with some candidates preferring to integrate summaries and evaluations.

4

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Candidate performance in the question paper improved in 2025. Markers observed that many candidates demonstrated excellent map and data handling skills.

Question 1: map interpretation

Question 1(a)(i): The question paper has not had a route design question for several years. Most candidates answered this question well. Many candidates were able to measure an appropriate length for their routes, identify a good start location, and include both on-road and off-road sections within their route.

Question 1(a)(iii): In explaining the positive socio-economic impacts, many candidates were able to identify the need for short-term employment, and the positive impacts on local businesses and accommodation.

Question 1(b): Some candidates did very well in explaining the impact on the biodiversity of the reservoir site, and many candidates correctly identified the need to re-route existing roads. Most candidates discussed the negative impact on farmers losing valuable and potentially fertile land.

Question 2: gathering and processing techniques

Question 2(b): In terms of planning, most candidates identified appropriate health and safety measures.

5

Question 3: data handling

Question 3(b)(i):   Most candidates correctly stated the null hypothesis.

Question 3(b)(ii):   Many candidates demonstrated key skills by correctly evaluating the result in terms of the null hypothesis. Many candidates identified the result being greater than the critical values, and many then went on to identify a clear negative relationship. Most of these candidates correctly suggested that therefore the null hypothesis should be rejected.

Question 3(b)(iii):   Many candidates compared the ease of SRCC versus PPMCC. Many also correctly noted that SRCC was suitable because there were 18 sites, far more than the minimum required.

Project–folio

Candidate performance in the project–folio improved in 2025. Feedback from markers indicated notable improvements, especially in the geographical study. Across both parts of the project–folio, candidate justifications and research were particularly well done.

Geographical study

Section A

As in previous years, most candidates performed very well in section A of the geographical study. Wider reading and clear purpose helped candidates develop their justifications. Candidates demonstrated a greater understanding of the relevance of their study in a wider geographical context.

In line with previous years, candidates presented a variety of topics in the geographical study.

Sections B and C

Many candidates showed skill and ingenuity in their gathering techniques. Some candidates demonstrated a range of new technology and innovative techniques, for

6

example the use of online surveys, to generate data alongside good evaluations of the reliability of these techniques.

Section D

Markers commented on an increase in the number of candidates explicitly referencing wider reading to help with analysis.

Section E

Markers noted an increase in the variety of processing techniques, allowing greater numbers of candidates to access marks this year.

Geographical issue

Section A

Many candidates achieved full marks for section A. Markers noted a great variety in original topics, with most being current, and many supported with extensive bibliographies.

Section B

Candidates' choice of wider reading improved this year, and they are becoming more skilled at explicitly referencing it in their essays. Very few candidates included vast bibliographies without any real evidence that wider reading had been used but where that did happen, it was difficult for candidates to achieve marks in this section.

Section C

Most candidates achieved 5 or more marks. Markers commented that the quality of summaries had improved, with many candidates integrating facts, statistics, and diagrams from the source material.

Section D

Skills in evaluation improved this year, with many candidates achieving 6 or more marks.

7

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 3(a)(i):   Some candidates wrote limited responses and a few mixed up transects with land use mapping meaning they were unable to access the full range of marks.

Project–folio: geographical study

Section B

Some candidates did not research enough sites meaning they did not have enough data, which impacted their analysis and conclusions. Candidates who only used two or three sites had insufficient data, limited analysis, and therefore achieved lower marks.

Section G

A few candidates repeated findings but did not do this in detail and did not refer to the purpose and aims detailed in their justification.

The number of candidates presenting fewer pages of appendices improved this year.

Project–folio: geographical issue

Section B

A few candidates did not have very much wider reading, which limited their evaluations.

A few candidates used broadly similar viewpoints, which limited their evaluations.

8

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

- Candidates and centres should familiarise themselves with the mandatory content and course assessment information in the course specification.
- Candidates should focus on the 'Gathering and processing techniques' and 'Geographical data handling' sections in the course specification to understand the assessed skills and knowledge. Practising these skills can also help candidates improve the project–folio.
- Candidates should read the information included in the text boxes carefully.

Map interpretation

Candidates should:

- practise past paper questions regularly
- use a highlighter to identify key words and phrases in questions and text boxes
- practise using tracing paper to help with question 1
- practise using string to help determine the length of potential routes. Tying two knots in the string to indicate the length of the route assists with trying out routes on the OS map before making a final choice

The accuracy of drawing a site to scale needs to be precise. Marks are not awarded where there is a deviation from the size of site required. Continued practice using scale and rulers is essential.

Candidates must take care to avoid simplistic answers when discussing the advantages and disadvantages of a site. Generic statements like 'it's flat, so it is easy to build on' are not detailed enough at Advanced Higher level.

Answers should be based on map evidence. Candidates must think realistically about their choice of sites or routes in map interpretation questions.

9

Gathering and processing techniques

- Encourage candidates to practise explaining how they would collect data.
- Candidates should practise explaining the suitability of data gathering techniques.
- Candidates must read the question carefully, checking if it asks about gathering methods, processing techniques or evaluation.
- For question 2(a)(i), a river discharge gathering question, responses should be limited to gathering river data, for example width, depth and velocity, and working out discharge. Avoid unnecessary details such as sampling choices or equipment explanations.
- Where possible, encourage candidates to practise gathering techniques within the local area or around their schools.
- Candidates should practise the variety of processing techniques described in the coursework assessment task document. For example, drawing and labelling kite diagrams or interpreting data from a table could be done as a homework activity.
- Encourage candidates to always evaluate processing techniques.

Data handling

- Encourage candidates to practise describing data using a range of graphical techniques.
- Provide opportunities for candidates to practise hypothesis testing. Ensure candidates understand how to create a null hypothesis.
- Ensure candidates can explain the advantages and disadvantages of statistical techniques, clearly linked to the data and the context of the question.
- Support candidates in interpreting statistical results in relation to the null hypothesis, for example the significance, critical values, direction of relationships and whether to accept or reject the null hypothesis.
- Encourage candidates to look at different kinds of data and identify appropriate statistical techniques to best analyse the data.
- Candidates should practise selecting suitable graphical techniques for processing data.

10

- Encourage candidates to stay focused on the purpose of the question when referring to supplementary items, for example in supplementary item D, keep linking analysis to noise levels.

Project–folio

Candidates and centres should familiarise themselves with the information and guidance in the coursework assessment ask.

Word count

- Candidates must read and sign the flyleaf, which includes their stated word counts and an acknowledgement of those limits.
- Contents pages and bibliographies are not included in the word count.
- Evaluations in tables are included in the word count.
- If candidates are concerned about the word count, they should consider reducing some sections such as limiting the justification to one page or removing unnecessary methodology content in the study.
- Remind candidates that the project–folio is an assessment and therefore work submitted by candidates must be their own.
- Encourage candidates to adhere to the word limit. Word limits ensure fairness, help avoid repeating ideas, test candidates' communication skills, and help focus candidates' evaluative and analytical skills.
- A 10% penalty is applied to those candidates whose submissions exceed the word limit.

Geographical study

- Encourage candidates to develop their own skills and not to feel pressured into writing a study based on a particular group fieldwork experience. Candidates should always have a choice for their geographical study.
- Candidates must form their own research questions or hypotheses. These should not be centre led.

11

- Encourage candidates to explore the impacts of climate change, changing river ecology and geomorphology, water quality, and other factors when considering river studies.
- Marking is holistic and therefore separate pages are much preferred. Binding folios is unhelpful as it makes it difficult for markers to cross-refer.
- Encourage candidates to include page numbers which, due to holistic marking, is very helpful for markers.
- Candidates need to have sufficient data for analysis. For example, in a river study, examining a minimum of 10 sites should provide enough data for a thorough analysis and enable candidates to gain more marks. Candidates who chose two or more streams or two or more settlements were able to compare in their analysis.
- Secondary sources are just as valid as primary sources. An increasing number of studies use both primary and secondary data. Most websites are a single gathering technique, regardless of the number used.
- Where candidates gather data in a group, make sure that candidates acknowledge this and are always working independently.
- Candidates must not share processing techniques and analytical points.
- Encourage candidates to reflect on the reliability of the data that they have gathered. Candidates who did this well discussed in detail the limitations of their research because they experienced them and could therefore develop their points.
- Next steps should be as detailed as possible. (What would ensure more reliable data next time a traffic survey is conducted? What would improve the reliability of data next time a slope analysis is conducted?)
- Candidates must manage their time effectively. The geographical study is an assessment that is carried out over time, therefore, stating a 'lack of time' in relation to data collection is not acceptable.
- Encourage candidates to use wider reading effectively. It should be used to support or challenge findings, and be integrated throughout, not just appearing in 'theory' sections. High-performing candidates consistently applied relevant, explicit references to wider reading throughout their studies, strengthening both analysis and knowledge and understanding.

12

- Advise caution in relation to broad models like the Bradshaw or Schumm Model. They do not suit small-scale river studies. Candidates often expect their stream(s) to fit the model and then find it difficult to proceed with analysis when they do not match.
- Discourage candidates from relying on simple processing techniques. Simple techniques can be enhanced by adding labels and annotations, integrating them onto maps and transects, or using them to support analysis. High-performing candidates included multiple examples of many different processing techniques.
- Encourage integration, which could include labelling techniques, placing analysis alongside the techniques, and using images or annotations effectively.
- In the analysis section, encourage candidates to follow a simple structure:

  o describe the data
  o use phrases like 'this is because…' to explain
  o support with wider reading to strengthen analysis

  This strategy can help candidates who struggle with analysis. To attain the 12 marks available, description alone is not enough. Candidates who only describe are unlikely to score above 4 marks.
- Unexpected results can lead to strong analysis. Rather than attributing them to poor data collection, encourage candidates to explore explanations using textbooks or online sources.
- Strong responses resulted from candidates comparing their data with broader literature, enhancing their analysis.
- Encourage candidates to use linking phrases (for example firstly, additionally and similarly) to build more structured and coherent explanations.
- As a starting point for their conclusions, advise candidates to restate the purpose of their study and summarise the key focus areas from their research questions.
- Encourage candidates to explain the wider significance of their results.
- Strong conclusions discuss the implications of findings for each research question.
- An effective conclusion will end with a clear and insightful final paragraph that reinforces the overall aim or purpose of the study.

Ensure candidates are aware of the following key points.

Justification

- limit to one page, including diagrams
- clearly state the purpose of the study, directly or in the title
- clearly state why the topic is relevant and worthy of investigation
- use relevant wider reading with proper citations
- discuss the area under investigation, providing relevant context by identifying current issues
- avoid any historical detail

Planning

- gather enough data for processing and analysis
- plan as early as possible to maximise the time available for data collection
- include information about sampling techniques
- avoid relying on Higher assignment data as this is not enough data to produce a good study
- create their own research questions, aims or hypotheses
- avoid simplistic research questions — research questions must allow for analysis
- include a labelled map of their research sites — candidates who did this were able to contextualise their research with greater ease
- state in the planning and evaluation sections if data was gathered collectively
- use a wide range of data gathering techniques
- consider using online questionnaires, textbooks, books, journals, and online technology to help conduct interviews, as well as 'standard' research on websites

Evaluation and reliability of research techniques

- avoid describing how data was collected as there are no marks available for this
- focus on strengths, limitations and improvements
- discuss next steps, for example the way in which their data collection may be improved and how this would then impact reliability

14

- ensure that evaluations in tables can be easily read because poor formatting can make it very difficult to follow

Knowledge and understanding

- integrate wider reading throughout the study to support or challenge their findings
- be aware that a stand-alone theory section can demonstrate knowledge and understanding but it rarely helps analysis

Processing techniques

- be aware that processing techniques are not limited to those stated in the course specification
- develop and enhance their skills and avoid relying only on simplistic processing techniques, for example bar and line graphs
- ensure scales are consistent — this is especially important in cross-sectional diagrams
- integrate techniques — all processing techniques should be embedded within the study, not grouped together in isolated pages
- avoid placing processing techniques in appendices as these are not marked

Analysis

- include explanations
- use the structure 'describe → explain → support' to integrate wider reading
- link findings back to their hypotheses and research questions and include specific examples to support their points
- explore unexpected results

Conclusion

- briefly restate the purpose and summarise findings
- address each research question clearly and in detail, referencing specific data
- discuss implications, use wider reading and suggest future research
- end with a clear, purposeful statement

Geographical issue

- Encourage candidates to clearly state the purpose of their issue. Even a simplistic 'the purpose of this essay is to…' is clear enough.

- The relevance of the issue is important. Candidates should clearly provide the link to geography. That relevance can then be deepened by expanding on why the issue is worth investigating. Many candidates this year who did well contextualised the issue first. For example, essays about plastic pollution could discuss the immediate and local effects on wildlife in the oceans before expanding to issues concerning climate change.

- Wider reading must be clear and explicitly demonstrated. Candidates should practise proper citation techniques and take advantage of the many valuable 'how to' resources available online for guidance. This year, more candidates used citations, footnotes, and other direct references to secure marks for wider reading.

- Wider reading in the justification should contain references to relevant geographical literature. Encourage candidates to find sources that contain geographic 'substance'.

- Candidates should prioritise three main sources to summarise.

- Those three sources should be good quality and detailed. Discourage candidates from choosing a 'weak' source simply to have 'more' to say in the evaluation as they may then not be able to access the full range of marks.

- Candidates should include, in their bibliography, the date articles were written instead of when they viewed them.

- Candidates should keep their three main sources separate in the bibliography to make them more easily identified. Some candidates cleverly put their three main sources under a separate title in their bibliographies.

- While the issue should be as current and up to date as possible, there is no age limit on sources. Some older sources may be appropriate for some topics. It may not be appropriate, however, to have out of date prioritised sources when the rest of the wider reading is much more recent.

- The summary section is worth 10 marks, equal to the critical evaluation section, and should be given the same importance as the evaluation section to ensure a balanced essay.

16

- A reader should develop a clear understanding of the source's content as a result of reading the summary.

- Common phrases like 'the author says...' should be accompanied by specific details about the author's points. For example, instead of saying 'the author discusses warming oceans', the candidate should include more detail and write 'Smith states that the world's oceans are warming as they have absorbed up to 90% of the additional heating created when humans burn fossil fuels like oil, coal and gas'.

- Encourage candidates to avoid a 'paragraph by paragraph' approach, as this suggests they are merely summarising each section without fully demonstrating an understanding of the whole source.

- Diagrams can be included if they enhance the explanation of the source and can be labelled to provide additional enhancement.

- Examples of wider reading can be included in summaries to further develop the points made in the sources.

- An issues essay (and a study) without a bibliography is self-penalising. Bibliographies should be correctly formatted (not just a list of websites). Encourage candidates to use online reference generators.

- Everything listed in the bibliography should be explicitly included in the essay.

- Do not force a style onto candidates. Separate sections for summaries and evaluations can help candidates achieve more marks. Integrated answers were often well written and of a high standard.

- Candidates who find the issue difficult should be encouraged to do their critical evaluation separately. To help these candidates, the focus should be:

  o author credibility
  o source reliability
  o identifying areas of bias
  o identifying areas of exaggeration
  o commenting on the facts and/or figures
  o wider reading to support
  o wider reading to oppose
  o comparing sources 1, 2 and 3

17

- Candidates should discuss the reliability of the author and the credibility of the source. They should look at their credentials, expertise and history of writing similar articles. Encourage candidates to use wider reading to demonstrate this.
- Encourage candidates to think about the strengths and weaknesses of each source and give evidence that demonstrates this. Comparing explicitly to wider reading is helpful.
- Encourage candidates to identify areas of bias and exaggeration in the sources. This can be strengthened by comparing to wider reading. Candidates who did this well often found statistics and up-to-date facts in wider reading but not in some of their sources, demonstrating bias.
- Some candidates divided their critical evaluations into sections, allowing markers to see clear evidence of wider reading. For example, some had a paragraph that stated, 'research that supports this viewpoint includes…' and 'research that opposes this viewpoint includes…'. This is a helpful method for many candidates to access the full range of marks.
- Candidates should compare their three main sources in all their critical evaluations. Some candidates this year skilfully used wider reading to support one of their sources and then used that to demonstrate weaknesses in their other sources.
- Good conclusions resulted from candidates answering their title questions clearly and with evidence from all their sources and wider reading.
- In good responses this year, candidates used wider reading to suggest possible courses of actions.
- Candidates should attempt to link the points made by each source to their justification. It is important that candidates keep referring to the 'purpose' of their essay.
- Candidates who researched widely and used wider reading throughout their essay tended to bring more insight and development to their conclusions.
- A strong and insightful closing argument demonstrates breadth of knowledge.

18

Ensure candidates are aware of the following key points.

Justification

- limit their justification to one page and clearly state the purpose and geographical relevance of the issue
- contextualise with current issues before expanding to broader impacts

Wider reading

- ensure that their wider reading is relevant, clearly referenced, and properly cited using formal techniques
- focus on three high-quality main sources, clearly identified in the bibliography
- ensure sources are current and identified in a bibliography that is correctly formatted
- use all sources listed explicitly in their essay

Summaries

- explain the content clearly in the summary with specific detail rather than vague statements
- use diagrams where helpful (not essential)
- include reference to their wider reading

Critical evaluations

- avoid repeating the summary
- evaluate author credibility, reliability, bias, exaggeration, and compare facts and figures
- use wider reading to support their evaluations
- compare all three main sources
- structure evaluations clearly, for example, 'research that supports or contradicts this…'
- avoid focusing on the language used in sources as this can detract from the content and message of the sources

19

Conclusion

- refer to the titles and justifications, answering the main question with evidence
- review the main points from sources and wider reading
- reflect on implications and future action
- provide a strong conclusion that shows insight and a clear final judgement

20

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.

21

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](#).