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Geography

2016 Chief Assessor’s Report

# Geography

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## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Fieldwork

**The more successful responses**

* included excellent mapping, e.g. proficient use of symbols, categorising features, and clearly illustrating location of fieldwork
* used technology to produce visuals
* used various techniques, including hand-drawn maps scanned into reports
* exhibited a wide variety of techniques, e.g. transects, quadrats, traffic-flow diagrams, surveys, interviews, longshore-drift measurements, kite diagrams, and bipolar analysis
* used more sophisticated survey questions and were not reliant on basic yes/no survey questions
* carried out transects, quadrats, and cross-sections to a high standard and demonstrated good use of symbols
* showed a strong understanding of geographical concepts and then integrated this understanding meaningfully throughout the fieldwork report
* effectively used annotations to add to the meaningfulness of the diagrams through pointing out key features of their research
* demonstrated sophistication by integrating quantitative and qualitative data
* when focused on local studies, were able to better show changes over time (temporal variation)
* chose topics which had a good spatial component (e.g. a comparison of sites or an analysis of a particular site), and kept the research question or hypothesis simple and focused.

**The less successful responses**

* demonstrated limited use of fieldwork techniques
* completed fieldwork that was not very obvious in the report
* relied too much on Google Maps, which were not appropriately adapted, nor made relevant to their topic
* included too much information in the introduction and relied too much on historical background (the introduction should be about geographical background)
* included tables that were text heavy
* were unable to identify spatial patterns
* did not clearly state the question of investigation
* had broad topics without focused questions or hypotheses.

*Range of Topics*

A variety of option topics were chosen to provide the best possible opportunities for developing, selecting, and applying a range of geographical and fieldwork skills, especially the biodiversity and urbanisation option topics.

Students should be commended for their inventiveness in developing their own fieldwork techniques to match the particular needs of their topic.

**General Information**

The SACE Word-count Policy Procedure, available on the SACE website, can be used to clarify what is and is not included in the word-count.

The option topic should be clearly specified in the fieldwork report.

Teachers are reminded that fieldwork should not be completed on the core topic.

Assessment Type 2: Inquiry

**The more successful responses**

* often resulted when students were provided with the opportunity to pursue areas that they were passionate about
* tended to select topics that were spatial in nature and relatively narrow in focus
* structured the issue around an appropriate question, rather than a topic; this approach allowed students to more easily evaluate a variety of viewpoints
* used a wide range of graphics and maps to effectively illustrate their understanding and analysis
* in the best cases, used a range of techniques to present the local, national, and global perspectives, cleverly linking the issue to each context
* used the structure for the inquiry outlined in the subject outline to enable them to cover each part of the task effectively
* provided succinct synthesis and analysis
* were rich in geographical terminology
* used recent and highly relevant sources
* exhibited attention to detail, precision, and accuracy in the application of graphing skills, leading to creative analysis
* developed and adapted individual maps to the intended purpose, and avoided maps that were cluttered or unclear.

**The less successful responses**

* had a broad topic — teachers need to guide students to narrow their topic and to be specific, which improves the focus of the inquiry
* did not follow the structure for the inquiry outlined in the subject outline
* undertook globalisation and climate change topics that were too broad

*Task Design*

Inquiries are not to be based on the core topic.

Teachers are encouraged to use the layout of the inquiry in the current subject outline and the performance standards when guiding the development of the inquiry. A number of formats are available for the presentation of this assessment type, but the most commonly used was the written report.

Where teachers provided a prescribed task or a single option topic for a class or group of students, it often limited their overall achievement.

*Range of Topics Covered*

A range of geographical issues were considered, including many on the option topics of climate change, sources and use of energy, and biodiversity, as well as specific topics including wind power, solar energy, desertification, child labour, comparison of flooding impacts on MEDCs and LEDCs, palm oil, climate change and sea-level rise, and impacts of climate change on disease.

*Word-count*

Almost all students met the required word-count as designated in the subject outline.

*Provision of Opportunities for Students to Achieve at the Highest Level*

In addition to the previous comments:

* Negotiated topics should be approved by the SACE Board.
* Teachers are encouraged to use the inquiry structure presented in the 2017 subject outline. ‘Social and ethical issues’ is no longer required within the inquiry.
* The topic chosen must have a geographical and spatial focus.
* Inquiries framed with a question, rather than a statement or heading, are generally more successful.
* Students are encouraged to assess the economic, environmental, and social implications of *responses* to the issue.
* It is important to ensure that the impact of the issue can be considered at varying scales (local, national, and global).
* Bibliographies should be appropriately detailed.

Assessment Type 3: Folio

**The more successful responses**

* demonstrated comprehensive geographical knowledge and understanding across the tasks in the folio
* integrated data well, using a range of technologies and forms (e.g. tables, pictures, mind maps, flow charts)
* analysed spatial patterns and processes related to geographical issues, using a range of unique maps, tables, annotations, and charts
* effectively used a variety of methods including text, flow charts and mind maps to present their information
* used relevant geographical terminology.

**The less successful responses**

* arose when task design was too simplistic to enable all students to achieve at the highest level
* were often when the tasks comprised mainly tests, as student achievement tended to be limited
* squeezed in extra maps, graphics, and pictures that, while often relevant, were too small and difficult to read in broadsheets.

*Task Design*

Structuring tasks using the performance standards led to higher results. Limiting the number of specific features in assessment design enabled students to achieve at the highest level.

Limiting the number of folio tasks to four enables students to develop greater depth of analysis and sophistication in responses.

Folio tasks should provide students with sufficient opportunity to achieve at the highest level through activities that challenge, but at the same time develop, students’ skill and knowledge.

Folio tasks must have a geographical dimension, rather than being tasks that could be from science or social studies. A broad range of tasks were presented, including PowerPoint presentations, broadsheets, and essays. Teachers are reminded that mapping tests should authentically assess the depth and breadth of skills for students to achieve at the highest level. Assessment responses should be graded against the performance standards, including tests

*Range of Topics Covered*

There were a significant range of tasks presented. Mapping tests were commonly used and often enabled the teacher to limit the word-count. Many assessment tasks in the folio related directly to the core topic, including population change, ageing versus youthful populations, comparing climate and water supplies in different cities, voluntary and forced migration, renewable energy versus non-renewable energy, ecological footprints, and transboundary issues of rivers and polluted rivers.

*Word-Count*

Teachers are encouraged to limit the number of tasks presented to stay within the word-limit. Teachers are encouraged to limit the components and assess fewer criteria in a task to avoid exceeding the word-limit. Large examinations or tests with a number of extended responses made it difficult for the students to stay within the prescribed word-limit.

*Provision of Opportunities for Students to Perform at the Highest Levels*

Assessment tasks that were designed around the core topic and provided students with a case study were completed well and allowed students to be better prepared for the examination.

In addition to previous comments:

* Folio tasks should have a geographical focus and/or spatial element.
* Limiting the number of specific features assessed in each task and the number of folio tasks increased the likelihood of success for students,
* Limiting the number of tests within the folio enabled students to achieve at a higher level.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 4: Examination

Students undertake one 2-hour written examination on the core topic. There was a wide spread in students’ results.

Comments on individual questions follow.

*Question 1*

* Most responses demonstrated a good understanding of using bearings.
* Many responses were less successful in using the legend from the map to identify features.
* Students are encouraged to be careful and accurate in their use of scales on the map. This skill was carried out accurately by a large number of students.

*Question 2*

* The majority of responses were accurate in relation to the tracking of tributaries to the river shown on the map.
* Many responses successfully identified the appropriate term from the hydrological cycle, but some weaker responses used terms unrelated to this aspect of the core topic.

*Question 3*

* Parts (a) and (b) were answered successfully by many students, highlighting their ability to identify features between the maps and the satellite image.
* Part (c) proved more problematic, with many responses demonstrating difficulty in understanding the concept of larger and smaller scales.

*Question 4*

* Most responses to both parts demonstrated good ability in calculating grid references, and answers in relation to the direction of photographs were much improved on those of previous years.

*Question 5*

* Many responses were correct for both sections of this question, demonstrating a good level of ability in interpreting patterns on topographic maps.

*Question 6*

* The majority of responses reflected a good understanding of GIS characteristics, although a number only provided one answer.
* Knowledge in relation to water scarcity was less consistent; while most responses identified population growth as a factor, many struggled to provide a valid second response. Successful responses demonstrated understanding of the term ‘social’ and provided a valid effect.

*Question 7*

* Almost all responses identified the correct population pyramid.
* The most successful responses to part (b) were based around detailed case‑study knowledge and a good understanding of the characteristics of a youthful population. Many weaker responses were based around information from non-valid case studies, such as Australia, China, and USA. A number of responses incorrectly referred to Africa as a country.
* Part (c) was answered correctly by most students, who demonstrated a good understanding of a range of policies. Common answers referred to China’s one‑child policy, use of and access to contraception, and education for women

*Question 8*

* Part (a) was answered correctly by most students, illustrating improvements in understanding latitude and longitude compared to previous years.
* The strongest responses to part (b) referred to a wide range of sources, included an understanding of the spatial pattern of the tributaries of the river and the impact of this on water availability, and an explicit evaluation with a conclusion. The weakest responses only listed information from the sources.

*Question 9*

* Most responses to part (a) were of appropriate detail, with links to marine ecosystems and a brief explanation.
* The responses to part (b) were weaker, with many answers incomplete in regards to the definitions of ‘ecological footprint’.
* In part (c), most students correctly identified the increase in aquaculture, but many weaker responses did not link this adequately to a reduction in cost or an increase in the availability of fish as a resource

*Question 10*

* The majority of students correctly identified plankton as the producer. Incorrect responses often referred to the sun as the producer, with plankton mentioned in the explanation.
* While part (b) was well answered, a significant minority of responses incorrectly interpreted banning of fishing leading to a decrease in fish stocks.

*Question 11*

* The strongest responses to part (a) included detailed case-study knowledge with specific information related to the migrant’s country of origin, examining a range of economic, social, and environmental impacts. Weaker responses focused on push and pull factors without stating impacts, and lacked locational information.
* Students generally demonstrated an excellent understanding of forced migration in section (b).

*Question 12*

* The majority of responses correctly identified an advantage of biofuels, but disadvantages stated were often generic and not necessarily relevant to biofuels.

*Question 13*

* Almost all responses correctly outlined the change in the weather conditions in part (a).
* Stronger responses to part (b) correctly identified frontal rainfall, and explained the related processes of uplift and condensation. Weaker responses were confused and focused on the isobars on the map.

*Question 14*

* Most responses were credited with at least 1 mark for one correct answer in part (a).
* A range of incorrect terms were stated in part (b), including ‘groundwater’ and ‘the water table’.
* Almost all responses provided the correct answer to part (c).

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

All tasks for nominated students must be submitted; a sample of these tasks is not sufficient for the purpose of moderation. The assessment materials for each student should be submitted in separate clear plastic bags and sorted by assessment type.

Teachers who include marked/highlighted rubrics with each task provided useful information for moderators to be able to review their work.

Teachers are reminded to include the task sheet and assessment decision for each piece of work submitted. Teachers are encouraged to assist their students by clearly outlining the requirements for each task and linking them to the related specific features. It is useful if teachers provide information on how the folio grade has been determined for each task and as a whole. Assessment cover sheets for the fieldwork and inquiry should include the option topic selected to assist with moderation.

Please ensure that assessment tasks match those indicated on the learning and assessment plan (LAP), any changes should be indicated on the LAP addendum.

All student work should include the student’s SACE registration number for ease of identification.

Geography

Chief Assessor