

GCSE

GEOGRAPHY

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Report on the Examination

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General

The paper differentiated well with a full range of marks achieved across all the questions and a very similar mean mark across all questions. Those questions that demanded the application of knowledge and skills and the ability to write at length were particularly successful in serving to differentiate between students. There was clear evidence that those students who had prepared well and who had good examination technique were able to access very high marks. As on the foundation tier, the most popular combination was 1, 2 and 6 and these were also the most frequently answered. Questions 4 and 5 seemed equally popular with few schools opting for question 3. Rubric offences are rare on the higher tier as might be expected.

Whichever questions were answered there were clearly differences in how the specification content had been approached between schools. It was clear that a significant minority of students were unfamiliar with a few phrases and terms used within the specification, notably “non birth control” in question 1 and “external factors” in question 6. It is important that the language and content of the specification is used in teaching rather than that which may appear in textbooks and resources. As with previous years qualitative evidence suggests that there is perhaps an over-reliance on one or two textbooks and one revision guide. This can cause problems when conscientious teachers and diligent students use the material therein and learn it well but it does not fit exactly to the specification. It is from the specification wording that the questions must be derived. If schools are in any doubt about what information is acceptable then they should contact the AQA subject office. Furthermore, if content appears in the specification then questions should be expected on that content as it is a requirement to ensure complete specification coverage over the lifetime of the specification.

Case studies remain important and will always be essential in providing real world contexts and exemplars for the content, and the specification is clear about where case studies are required. Students need to be taught that there is more to do than learn their case studies verbatim. They need to be aware that they will have to extract different themes and ideas and adapt their answers to meet all the demands of the question. It is this latter skill of application of knowledge, particularly with regard to sustainable development in questions 1, 5 and 6 that challenged some students in accessing level 3 on the 8 mark questions. Schools should be aware that many topics which are taught through a case study can be examined from different angles and they need to be prepared to deal with these and be able to extract the relevant strands and themes from their case studies.

Mapwork and other skills have always been integrated into the specification and examination, and account for approximately 20% of the marks. The OS maps were completed to a very variable standard with some otherwise able students let down by a lack of facility with grid references. The best students used grid references and directional and locational language to show clear use of the extracts and used these to address the question. As last year describing patterns and distributions seems to be very challenging despite being a fundamental geographical skill with too many students failing to use a range of categories displayed in a key or offering isolated points with no overall view. Similarly, the use of stimulus material such as photographs as where the question refers to a figure students need to realise that there will be skills marks allocated for using that figure and they will limit their achievement if they fail to do so. All these skills benefit from repetition and practice before the exam.

SECTION A

Question 1 Population Change

1(a)(i) was answered correctly almost universally and 1(a)(ii) was similar. Where students lost a mark on the latter question it was usually a matter of not taking care to either read the key accurately or transpose the minus before the first figure. Students should be reminded that care is essential with such questions as even the most straightforward marks count the same and may make a difference to their grade. With 1(a)(iii) the point made in the introduction regarding pattern was very apparent. Most students scored two marks as they were able to pick out and name specific areas but failed to identify the pattern, most commonly because they ignored the areas of negative change or made sweeping statements regarding “most of the world”. Students should be familiar with areas such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe and be able to use them without prompting. A few students lapsed into explanation of the varying rates rather than the question set. Figure 2 was generally studied in 1(b)(i) as instructed and where students did not use the figure the results were less successful. The answers, however, proved variable with many struggling to clarify cause and effect with regard to population growth instead describing what was shown or stating the problems that were caused by the situations in the figure. A significant number, presumably those who had studied question 2, gave rural-urban migration as the cause of shanty towns. 1(b)(ii) served to differentiate particularly well. There were excellent answers seen on Kerala and Indonesia as intentioned and also France and Germany with regard to working population size and balancing the ageing society. Disappointingly a significant minority wrote about China’s One Child policy. Whilst this is popular and clearly well known by students, schools are reminded that all elements of the specification must and will be examined and they cannot expect the same elements to appear year on year. Every effort was made to signal the content of the question by boldening the key phrase. More positively it was clear that many adapted their knowledge and case studies to try and meet the demands of the question. The better students were able to connect the policy features to level 3 by addressing the aspect of sustainable development showing the need to address all aspects of a question for full marks. Sustainable development is a clear and over-arching theme of the specification and stated in the specification with regard to population management and schools should have been aware of this. 1(c)(i) posed few problems with full marks often achieved unless students failed to use data from the figure or counted to pictograms incorrectly. On 1(c)(ii) many students were familiar with the problems but were unable to clarify their impact on economic development for the second mark in each case, again highlighting the need to practice tailoring information to a variety of questions.

Question 2 Changing Urban Environments

Very slightly higher performing than question 1, the highest mean mark came on this question. 2(a)(i) was intended as simple question but proved more challenging for a significant number of students because they either couldn’t identify a grid square or gave vague answers. Similarly the skills of description and OS maps, both weak elements in the students armoury, combined in 2(a)(ii) where most were able to identify features from the map in list form and access level 1. However, few progressed beyond this as they were unable to give grid references or got the Northings and Eastings the wrong way round. A large number failed to use the map and wrote all they knew about the rural-urban fringe instead. A common question with the foundation tier and the standard was little better here indicating that these are skills which schools need to develop across the full range of abilities. 2(b)(i) showed that students had a good level of awareness of brownfield sites and their issues but failed to gain themselves full credit by not making reference to the figure clear, as instructed, relying instead on their own knowledge. Similarly 2(b)(ii) many students were not sure enough of their understanding of sustainability to be able to apply knowledge to the strategies presented, all of which are stated on the specification. Few were able

to score more than one mark for each strategy as their answers were little more than platitudes. 2(c)(i) and 2(c)(ii) were answered well almost universally, though a few questioned how life could be improved by living in a squatter settlement. Students displayed some excellent case study knowledge in their answers to 2(c)(iii) including Kibera, Mumbai, Favela Barrio (Rio) and had a sound knowledge of site and service and self-help schemes. The improvement aspect required for level 3 was where students fell short, often because the standard of written work cannot cope with what they are trying to say and they were therefore not fully able to apply knowledge to the demands of the question.

Question 3 Changing Rural Environments

As with previous years this was by far the least popular question on the paper. 3(a)(i) presented few problems, though as with questions 2 and 6 the OS map in 3(a)(ii) was not well answered overall, though there were some good attempts. By and large students remained at level 1 as they gave generalised answers without considered use of the map and appropriate evidence. 3(a)(iii) differentiated very well with the weaker students describing the photographs and the stronger answers were evident through referring to typicality. The best answers were able to connect the house style and the commuters it was intended for with the impact on services shown by the supermarket and food –led pub. Whilst not necessary for full marks this showed an encouraging depth of knowledge and understanding. 3(b) was well answered with good case study coverage of Cornwall, the Lake District and North Wales and social and economic factors equally covered. Cash crops were well known for 3(c)(i) and whilst most gained some marks for 3(c)(ii) not all were able to clarify the impact for the country concentrating instead on the benefits to individuals. 3(c)(iii) saw almost all students gain the first mark in each case and many were then able to link the impact to the change in farming, with the strongest answers usually for impacts 2 and 3.

Question 4 The Development Gap

4(a)(i) the best fit line was well plotted though even some able students need reminding that different conventions apply in geography and the line must be straight and may also need reminding that examinations must be read carefully as some did not attempt the question, presumably because they assumed it led to the next question. 4(a)(ii) was well answered on quality with detailed reference to diseases and therefore the impact on lives, but quantity was less well covered. It was interesting, especially given the nature of the topic, that the average teenager seems to think water is purely for washing and drinking and has little idea of its role in agriculture and industry. Given how well measures of development are covered in many resources it was disappointing that the answers for 4(a)(iii) were not stronger. This was partly because students had failed to read the question accurately and did not deal with plural disadvantages, although many were able to support their answers with illustrative figures and case study information. Whilst the question could have been answered in the abstract this is something to be encouraged by schools as it will almost inevitably add clarity to answers. As with 4(a)(i) a number of students missed out 4(b) despite its size. For a simple skill the variety of answers offered was quite remarkable with many clearly flummoxed by what was required. Students should be able to accurately interpret a key, draw a line that is 3mm thick, using a ruler, and that starts and ends in the correct place. 4(b)(ii) on the other hand was well done by all but the weakest students with any errors usually being to describe advantages to the recipient countries. 4(c) showed that students need to be reminded that text resources are intended to stimulate response and not simply to be read and then quoted back to the examiner as this will lead to a basic response at best. As with maps and photographs the extract needs to be used and applied so that information is extracted and then marshalled in support of the answer as in this instance only the stronger students linked information to future development. There were many possibilities here such as the loss of potential in children, mis-direction of funds to military use over development needs and a loss of workforce

through death and disease. 4(d) explored a similar theme and case study knowledge was excellent at all levels of development from the Haitian earthquake to the Japanese tsunami with many achieving level 2. The best students accessed level 3 with strong links as to how the destruction affected development though such answers were the exception rather than the rule.

Question 5 Globalisation

This question was roughly equal in popularity with question 4 and of similar quality. 5(a)(i) produced varied responses as the definition was either known or not. Many mentioned increased linkages but not all clarified the world scale which was vital for an accurate definition. 5(a)(ii) showed the same tendencies as 1(a)(iii) in that some students struggled to deal with the concept of pattern concentrating instead on one category from the key. They were however quite strong on the reasons. On 5(b)(i) Far more students than expected included nuclear in their answer to give 19%. This may have been due to the positioning of the nuclear segment between renewables and if so it reinforces the message to study figures when they are provided. Economic impacts in 5(b)(ii) were generally well done and were certainly much better understood than social. The better students here were quite topical and covered matters such as rising fuel poverty and the impacts on communities of fracking and large turbine farms. The weaker students confused environmental with one or both of social and economic. There was some evidence that the case study in 5(c) was not covered in the equivalent amount of detail as other case study questions, tending towards the generic, however many good examples were seen of wind farms in the UK / Spain and other more unusual such as hydrogen vehicles in Iceland. Where the question differentiated was in addressing sustainable development which only the stronger students were able to do. All knew that these were renewable, that they reduced fossil fuel use and/or CO₂ emissions but they could not explain how it actually achieved sustainable development. 5(d)(i) was generally well done, if not it was because students didn't use both figures or used the scale poorly. 5(d)(ii) apart from a few who assumed local food would be cheaper and always organic, produced an excellent standard and range of responses covering the local economy, freshness and connections with producer and consumer and some excellent terminology such as food miles and carbon footprints which was most encouraging.

Question 6 Tourism

Although the most popular question on the paper it was lower performing than other popular options. This has been a perennial issue and anecdotal evidence is that it may be due to it being frequently the first studied (in some schools in year 9) and therefore furthest from students experience, or an assumption on the part of students that it is easier and they know it anyway. More simply it may be that students tend to answer in the order in which questions appear on the paper and therefore suffer with timing. Schools might consider which applies to them and see if this could be remedied. 6(a)(ii) was little different from the other OS questions on the paper with answers tending towards basic lists of features. Markers were instructed to be strict so that both use of the map and clarifying the attraction were required for level 2 on what was a common question with the F tier. Schools and students are reminded that they must do more than name features or state a list of places that can be seen in order to demonstrate use of the map extract. It is not difficult for students to give grid references and / or use directional and locational language to meet this criterion. Equally they need to develop answers beyond stating that something is attractive to say to whom it is so e.g. families or why it might be so e.g. the fact that there are fewer traditional seaside piers left to visit. 6(a)(ii) yielded 3 marks for the majority of students whose knowledge of the model had clearly been improved from last year, the limiting error was in not labelling the axes for the fourth mark. 6(b)(i) was straightforward and invariably correct. 6(b)(ii) was more variable, hinging on the students understanding and / or knowledge of what constituted external factors. Weaker answers focussed on the weather, history and culture and the royal

wedding, none of which are external factors. There were however some excellent answers dealing with the Icelandic eruption, terrorism, and exchange rates and the Euro crisis, showing good topical application and understanding. The ubiquitous “jobs and money” were a feature of many answers to 6(b)(ii). Only the better answers were able to develop concepts such as the multiplier effect and how money moves through an economy, still fewer the value of foreign currency in poorer world mass tourism destinations. Many answers here seemed to view mass tourism as entirely negative focussing on leakage and exploitation suggesting a need for students to be made more aware of balanced views when approaching such topics. 6(c) produced very good case study knowledge from the majority of students. Tataquara lodge (with many weird and wonderful spellings) was common as was the Galapagos but it was encouraging to see some other examples such as Gorilla sanctuaries in Rwanda and Iban longhouses in Sarawak showing that there are alternatives away from the main textbooks. Some struggled to apply case studies which were not obviously ecotourism such as Antarctica and focussed on management more, though this was given some credit. Very many wrote in detail and described well. There were fewer level 3 responses as students did not seem to know how these places were sustainable other than references to resource use. Those who succeeded had some discussion about the future viability of these locations and minimisation of impact and also addressed social sustainability through local co-operative ownership and direct receipt of monies which were then invested in educational and health enterprises.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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