



GCSE

Geography A

90301F Physical Geography
Report on the Examination

9030
June 2015

Version: v0.1

Further copies of this Report are available from aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2015 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

General

Questions 1, 5 and 7 remain the most popular combination. Question 1 is almost universally answered. Often, candidates scored relatively highly on the structured questions on this paper, such as 1(a) and 1(b), 4(c) and 5(b)(i). Where the content was known, there were some good answers to longer questions, such as the positive and negative effects of a volcanic eruption and the ways in which a river transports its load.

The use of photographs in the exam was, overall, disappointing. The use of such resources demands an identification of what is visible – whether this is conveyed by labelling an image as in 1(c)(i) and 5(c)(i) or by writing text to describe what can be seen as in 3(c) and 4(d). Too many gave inaccurate labels which did not reflect where the arrows were pointing or identified features that were not able to be seen. In the case of the longer descriptions, a significant proportion wrote about what they knew without referring to the resource provided. Thus, marks which should have been obtainable were lost.

There is a need to obey the instructions given. For example, in 2(b) there was a requirement to write a letter for each statement, not just one in each category. Similarly, candidates need to understand the command words. 'Describe' does not match with a list-like identification of features, but there is a need to develop and link statements. Similarly, explanation is not relevant when a question is asking exclusively for description as in 1(c)(ii) and 5(d). Candidates should be familiar with the list of command words and their meaning which is available on the AQA website.

It was encouraging that case studies were used at times to illustrate answers, even when there was no specific need to do so. This was the case in 1(c)(ii) and 1(d)(ii) when volcanoes such as Mt St Helens and the Soufriere Hills volcano were used and this was one way of accessing Level 2, if points were developed. Where a question explicitly demands a case study, there must be specific reference to it – beyond just naming it – to access Level 2.

Each of the questions in Section B had an OS map extract. Maps were also present in questions 2, 3 and 4 in Section A. The best map used was in question 4 linked to the distribution of temperate deciduous forest. However, in many other cases a lack of accuracy with regard to measurements, lack of knowledge of compass points (often reversed) and a reluctance to use the key to describe features, as in 7(d)(ii), led to marks not being awarded all too frequently for these are basic skills. Even where the term relief was qualified in 5(a)(iii), many candidates did not read off an accurate height or interpret the proximity of the contours correctly.

The explanation of landforms in Section B was poor. There is a need for candidates to be aware of the formation of all those prescribed in the specification content. Even waterfall was poorly done and many had no idea how a pyramidal peak or wave cut platform formed – to add to problems regarding the dry valley in question 2. Simple step by step guidance is needed so that there is a clear sequence with reference to processes – some were just making it up as they went along or were guessing – writing down terms in a random fashion that didn't make sense. In a similar way, many did not understand the term coastal habitat and focussed wrongly on coastal erosion and management.

SECTION A

Question 1 The Restless Earth

In **1(a)**, the age was better known than the density and the renewal/destruction of oceanic crust. Many did get constructive in **1(b)(i)** but there were also some that gave the wrong boundary or referred to a location or type of crust. The first two statements were most often correctly identified as false and true, with the third one proving most problematic and being wrongly identified as false, followed by the last one being seen as true. Part **1(c)(i)** was poorly done with candidates failing to write what was visible and in many ways just stating the obvious - such as the presence of buildings, the peak and the gently sloping sides. Despite some drift to responses and monitoring of volcanoes, many were able to consider both positive and negative impacts of volcanic activity in **1(c)(ii)**. Here, case studies were sometimes well used to illustrate points, although some dwelt too long on basic factual information. The key discriminator for Level 2 was a coherent description of the pluses and minuses which linked ideas together and addressed both types clearly. Generally **1(d)(i)** was well done but there is a need for accuracy in the measurement which allowed plus or minus 2 of the specific measurement. In **1(d)(ii)**, differences had to be established to obtain the marks (the presence of a cone versus a caldera or the recognition that a supervolcano is much bigger) whilst there was a need to have both a global focus – going beyond stating the word global – and some sequence and/or development in statements in **1(d)(iii)**. For example, random references to ash, planes and crops was a Level 1 response whilst recognising that ash would cut out sunlight in places, including the UK, and the impact this would have on photosynthesis, crop growth and food supplies constituted a Level 2 answer.

Question 2 Rocks, Resources and Scenery

Most were able to access at least one of the marks in **2(a)(i)** and a substantial number accessed both marks by being accurate in the length of the period. Part **2(a)(ii)** was more challenging as there was a need to refer to an era and not what may also be true for a period. Many gained credit for noting it consisted of a number of periods. Most understood the task in **2(b)** and could categorise the statements correctly. The problem was that many identified only one in each rock type and then moved on, instead of obeying the instructions given. Responses to **2(c)(i)** were variable – knowledge was required of the specific landforms that linked to limestone and not chalk – thus a resurgence was needed for Z and not a spring line. All too often, **2(c)(ii)** was incorrect with the limestone being described rather than the rock below it – again a need to read and answer the question asked. Many candidates did not seem to know what a dry valley was and just guessed. Some did recognise the presence of a river at some point but many did not take this first step. Most did not know why there had been surface water which was no longer present today. Instead, they wrongly focused on swallow holes or guessed at what might have happened. Part **2(d)(i)** should have been straightforward and for some it was. However, for others the compass directions were reversed and the distance inaccurate. The describe command in **2(d)(ii)** was often not adhered to as pluses and minuses were identified. There was significant drift to responses and management which were not relevant to the question. The best focused on the impacts and offered some precision with regard to jobs in areas that didn't have much else apart from farming and described problems linked to heavy traffic going through villages.

Question 3 Challenge of Weather and Climate

Accuracy was critical in **3(a)(i)** and where care was taken, marks were awarded. There was a need to actually work out the range in the last part, not just state the highest and lowest. The basic idea was established by a reasonable proportion on **3(a)(ii)** relating to Edinburgh being further north but few could explain the significance of this fact. **3(a)(iii)** was more challenging with many disregarding the reference to altitude in the question and considering nearness to the sea. Some

did recognise that it got colder with increasing height. Responses to **3(b)(i)** were mixed. Some clearly understood and circled the correct alternatives. More got the first two answers correct than the last two. The responses to **3(b)(iii)** were very disappointing. Many did not answer the question asked with reference to the cloud cover, precipitation and wind speeds related to the passage of a cold front. Instead, many gave definitions of the terms and gained no marks. The use of the photograph was problematic in **3(c)**, with many disregarding what was shown. Candidates that described what was visible regarding the damaged roof and the queues of people in Figure 9a, and the debris in the water and empty areas to the bottom right of Figure 9b, were able to access Level 2. Often, even when a case study was named in **3(d)**, the response was generic which prevented progress into Level 2 - some knowledge of specific facts is therefore essential. Similarly, there was significant drift to effects and a clear need for candidates to be able to distinguish between subject specific terms such as effects and responses. The best answers referred to examples such as Hurricane Katrina or Sandy and described what was done, with some reference to specific places. Some wrongly chose an example from a poorer area but could access some marks if information was valid in the context of the question.

Question 4 Living World

There was again a need to follow instructions given and to 'Use Figure 10' in **4(a)(i)**. Even where this was done, many wrongly stated people as a physical factor. There was a need to get **4(a)(ii)** and **4(a)(iii)** the correct way around. Where this was done, many noted the leaves falling and then decaying in **4(a)(ii)** and the soil providing water and nutrients for the vegetation in **4(a)(iii)**. Part **4(b)(i)** was well done, with many recognising the sequence and obtaining all 3 marks. Many had some appreciation of the differences in **4(b)(ii)**, with statements indicating that the producer made its own energy via photosynthesis and the consumers relied on the producers – eating these to obtain energy. Part **4(c)** was well done although the third sentence was the least awarded due to a lack of precision regarding the locations stated. There was often minimal reference to the photograph in **4(d)** and many candidates disregarded it. The answer lay in what was visible on Figure 12 and so many gained few marks as they described features that were not present or drifted onto soils and explanation. As in **3(d)**, even where a case study was named, information included was often generic. Many also struggled to focus on uses such as recreation and timber. There was frequent reference to management which was not relevant and it was rare to find anything in the responses that tied it to the named location – essential for Level 2.

SECTION B

Question 5 Water on the Land

Most identified the correct distance in **5(a)(i)**, whilst in **5(a)(ii)** there was a need to convey the shape in a way that would give the reader a clear impression of what the shape was. Thus, answers such as Nike sign, elongated foot shape, triangular, cone were accepted and, more conventionally, indicating that it was narrow, but widened near the dam (in the latter case there had to be reference to specific area where it widened). Responses to **5(a)(iii)** were often vague and imprecise. There was a misconception that the slope was gentle and often there was no specific height – where this was present, units had to be given. Most recognised hard engineering in **5(a)(iv)**. The rainfall and population density figures in **5(b)(i)** were usually accurately indicated and many could identify an area of water surplus and deficit in **5(b)(ii)** – although there was a significant minority who got them the wrong way around. In **5(b)(iii)**, there was a need to link the rainfall to the population density and use the clues given in the maps. Thus, areas of high population density with limited rainfall, such as the South East, would require water from areas of low density and high rainfall such as Wales so that demand from the people could be met. Some clearly understood and engaged with the question, whilst many did not. References to flood control or due to drought were not valid. The labelling of the waterfall was poor; many only got a correct label for Z; elsewhere labels did not reflect the features shown. Waterfall was not permissible for X as the landform was indicated in the question. However, noting the step or the white water was a valid approach. Responses to **5(c)(ii)** were often partial in terms of sequence and many lacked process. For such a well-known landform, relatively few had a clear idea regarding its formation. Many had a waterfall present at the start – especially when diagrams were used to illustrate and there was significant drift to a gorge. There is a need to show how a relatively shallow gradient steepens to form the vertical drop – the waterfall. A simple, easy to remember sequence on a series of post-its or cards is required in the delivery of the content for there is an expectation that the quality of responses here should be much better. The final part **5(d)** was relatively well done and there were some very good answers. Here candidates knew the four processes of traction, saltation, suspension and solution and could accurately describe the process and the size/type of material being moved. If the content was known, answers were clear and purposeful. Elsewhere, there was some significant drift to erosion and confusion regarding the types of movement and size of material. This was especially the case with solution which was the least understood.

Question 6 Ice on the Land

Both **6(a)(i)** and **6(a)(ii)** were generally well done. However, in **6(a)(iii)**, there had to be reference to the idea of balance and/or recognition of both inputs and outputs. Many did get the idea regarding the additions of snow in winter and the subsequent increase in the size of a glacier, versus the melting in the summer and loss of ice causing retreat instead of advance in **6(a)(iv)**. In **6(b)(i)**, the direction was straightforward where candidates knew compass points – for others reversal was a common error. There was some confusion between 949m and 950m in **6(b)(ii)** and a need for accuracy as indicated by the 6 figure grid reference. Hardly any candidates recognised the arête for X, whilst Y was much better done in **6(b)(iii)**. Many clearly did not know what a pyramidal peak was and could certainly not explain its formation in **6(b)(iv)**. Often, recognition that there were three corrie glaciers was as far as candidates got – many just guessed and wrote responses that did not make sense. Part **6(c)(i)** was well done with the correct statements being identified. In **6(c)(ii)**, there was a need to comply with the ‘describe’ command. Frequently, answers were list-like and often with no reference to the unreliable snowfall aspect for a resort relying on skiing. Some appeared to refer to seaside resorts. The best responses were aware of the unreliable snowfall context and developed answers noting specific jobs lost, such as ski instructors or cable car operators, and were aware of the social impacts with regard to people having to move out of the area.

Question 7 The Coastal Zone

In **7(a)(i)**, as with other questions using a photograph, there is a need to describe what is visible. Thus the material that had collected at the foot of the cliff for X or the presence of sea defences such as revetments or groynes, but not a sea wall for Y. The impact on people had to be addressed in **7(a)(ii)**, not just that caravans may fall into the sea. Many identified an impact such as homes lost without development via the need to move caravans back and the stress involved. Many did recognise the beach at Z; some wrongly suggested beach nourishment which is not a landform. As with the other questions demanding an explanation of landforms, **7(b)** was poorly answered. A minority knew the sequence and were aware of the stages in formation, seeing the emergence of the wave-cut platform following the retreat of the cliffs. Some had a partial idea but many lacked understanding. Some saw it as the result of being built up, rather than a product of erosion. As long as Figure 20 was used (and statements not just copied), **7(c)(i)** was well done. There was often a clear understanding of the way groynes protect the coast with a sequence stated. Most gave the correct 4 figure reference for **7(d)(i)** – a 6 figure one was incorrect as the question did not ask for this. Similarly, most identified the correct distance in **7(d)(ii)** although there was some confusion over the scale. Responses to **7(d)(iii)** were variable with the best using the key and identifying the flat, low lying marshy area. Others wrongly noted cliffs and features of the land, rather than the coast. **7(e)** was poorly done. Many did not understand the concept of a ‘coastal habitat’. At best, there was description of species in a named habitat but even these answers were all too rare. Many saw the question as relating to coastal erosion and management; others described seaside resorts. Again, a clear need to know the meaning of key concepts contained in the specification.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)