
GCSE

GEOGRAPHY A

Unit 2 / 90302H – Human Geography
Report on the Examination

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General

The paper differentiated well with a full range of marks achieved across all questions. Most candidates produced work of a standard commensurate with the Higher Tier, although there remained a minority for whom the quality of answer indicated that the Foundation Tier might have been more appropriate. Centres may therefore need to give thought to the most suitable tier of entry. As on the Foundation Tier, the most popular questions were 1 and 6 with 2 close behind. These three also proved to be the most popular combination. There was an even spread between questions 4 and 5, with question 3 infrequently attempted. Rubric offences are infrequent as might be expected on this tier and where they do occur they appear to be the result of an under-prepared candidate “having a go”.

The overall standard of writing and language continues to improve, though there is some evidence that in an effort to secure SPaG marks some candidates and centres are using overblown words and phrases which do not sit well with their overall answer. “Moreover”, “notwithstanding” and “wherewithal” are prime examples where candidates might be better simply writing clearly and precisely and focusing on geographical language rather than trying to jump through a perceived hoop.

The questions that demanded writing at length were particularly successful at differentiating between candidates. As last year, candidates need to be aware that there are more to case studies and place knowledge than just learning information and then repeating it wholesale on command. They need to practice drawing out different themes so that their answers meet the demands of the question. This skill of application of knowledge was what challenged many able and otherwise well prepared students, notably in those questions where 8 marks were available. Many did not access Level 3 as a result. Extended prose still demands precision and the extra sheets favoured by some candidates do not necessarily aid their cause if they simply produce more writing at the same standard. Indeed this sometimes limits their marks if they write too much extra in early questions and then are short of time towards the end. Centres might usefully train their candidates to be more succinct and focused in their extended writing, a valuable skill.

Linked to this is the apparent situation that many candidates either do not read or, if they have read them, do not understand the command words in questions. Centres might usefully display the [command word document](#) on the AQA Geography subject pages which lists command words and their definitions. For example ‘discuss’ in Questions 3(c) and 6(d) required two sides of an argument to fully answer and ‘account for’ in 1(b)(ii) and 4(e) required reasoning. Even more fundamentally, and a perennial issue, describe was taken to mean explain and vice versa. Very few indeed understood what was required to answer 1(a)(iii) and 2(a) for example. Candidates need to ensure that they have fully read and understood the demands of the question, and not assumed its requirements based on a quick skim.

Centres also neglect skills in favour of knowledge at their and their candidates’ peril. The use of maps was again very variable this year as was the use of stimulus material such as photographs. 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.

Overall, despite the issues above, which can all be addressed, the significant majority of candidates were well-prepared, seem to have been taught well and their geographical knowledge was a pleasure to read.

SECTION A

Question 1 Population Change

Question **1(a)(i)** was invariably answered correctly, with **1(a)(ii)** proving more challenging than expected. Whilst the sketches were mostly correct in shape and gained some credit, many candidates failed to access all three marks due to simple errors such as not adding a central line to their sketch or only drawing a pyramid with labelled axes. Some drew in far more detail than the required sketch, for example with carefully constructed bars, and wasted time as a result. Even strong candidates struggled with **1(a)(iii)** which meant that very few gained any marks; this was mainly because they failed to recognise the ‘structure’ element of the question, with most explaining the changes in terms of birth rate and death rate fluctuations. Those that did gain marks often did so for descriptions of the pyramid shape changes rather than structure per se. **1(b)(i)** showed the need for candidates to go into an exam with a sharp pencil and ruler as it was carelessness and inaccuracy that limited marks for some and also a lack of attention to detail as some drew the bars well but then neglected to shade and differentiate between them according to the key. **1(b)(ii)** produced many good answers with encouraging geographical terminology and excellent detail, usually utilising the UK or France. It was generally well answered up to Level 2 with clear descriptions of how individuals in France gained from payments and incentives for example, and accounts of immigration and raising the pension age in the UK. Only the better candidates were able to ‘account for’ by making a strong link between the policy action and how it helps cope with the ageing population. Candidates must also take care to accurately learn up to date material as there was great variation in suggestions for the new UK pension ages or the length of French maternity leave. The cartoon in **1(c)(i)** differentiated well. Some candidates used this as an opportunity to write everything they knew, or sadly assumed, about migrant workers whilst the better ones recognised the issues of skills gaps and migrants being employed in preference as they undercut the prices of an indigenous labour force and the resentment this can create. An encouragingly positive and balanced attitude towards migrants came across in the majority of responses. **1(c)(ii)** was also fairly well answered but some candidates did not name examples or develop their statements beyond a list and so remained in Level 1. A small proportion referred to migration from outside the EU, some even believing Poland to be outside the EU, and therefore gained no credit. Where examples were used it was generally Poland to the UK although some used retirement migration to Spain and many mentioned the ease of movement within the EU as a factor.

Question 2 Changing Urban Environments

As with 1(a)(iii), **2(a)** was very poorly answered with very few gaining any credit, largely because they did not explain as per the command word. Instead they offered descriptions of the differences by continent or of richer / poorer parts of the world or assumed erroneously that growth rates were higher in richer parts of the world. Question **2(b)** was generally well answered with most students using both resources and some going on to mention other aspects such as e-waste. A significant number wrote generically about cities which could have been in any part of the world, often assuming that urbanisation just meant more cars, or about unspecified pollution which kept otherwise good responses in Level 1. Industrialisation was infrequently covered despite its intrinsic link to the urbanisation process. Whilst many students did reach Level 2, the question differentiated well in that only the best were able to link the growth of poor world cities to the types of pollution shown and some made good use of their shanty town case studies to develop and support their answers. **2(c)(i)** was almost universally correct whereas **2(c)(ii)** seemed to elicit either three marks or none at all, the issue being that some candidates produced separate accounts with no contrast or did not write about distribution at all, referring instead to total

numbers. Clearly training in such skills so that they recognise the command and they know how to respond is of benefit to candidates. There were some excellent answers in **2(c)(iii)** relating to case studies across the UK and only the weaker candidates merely stated the strategies with no reference to how they provided support. Most did well in **2(d)(i)** and a range of reasons for CBD decline were offered ranging from crime rates and congestion to e-commerce. However, as on the Foundation Tier paper, there remains an issue where some candidates only gain one mark out of two in questions such as 2(d)(i) because they fail to develop their answers and remain somewhat vague. Similarly **2(d)(ii)** was generally well done, although a significant number confused CBD and inner city areas with reference to docks and city challenge schemes. Most answers described a process rather than a named town or city, whereas some of the most successful responses were based on local examples, which a wider number of centres might consider emulating.

Question 3 Changing Rural Environments

3(a)(i) was generally correctly answered as was **3(a)(ii)** to a degree. Many were able to give some impacts but were unable to elaborate their answers to really describe. An equally large number misinterpreted the question and explained the causes instead. Even more poorly answered was **3(a)(iii)** where candidates tended to see rural-urban migration in terms of a consequent loss of farmland as a result of urban sprawl which did not have any relevance to farming in the rural area as a result of the out-migration of the workforce. There were many good answers to **3(b)** with students able to infer that the hedgerow was unusual and the result of payments to the farmer to maintain something that otherwise be sacrificed and also able to link this to named policies such as stewardship. Those who remained in Level 1 did so because they stated the policy only or, more commonly because they failed to use Figure 7. Candidates should be reminded that where stimulus material is referred to in the question they must make clear reference to it for access to all of the marks. As with other 8 mark questions, **3(c)** led to a wide range of marks, with many generic answers that did not offer an example of any kind. Many students wrote well but limited themselves to Level 2 by only referring to one factor, usually supermarkets, or by offering no real discussion. Most students only considered negative impacts, thus missing the opportunity to discuss, and the actual link to the impact was difficult to discern. The best candidates used detailed knowledge of places, crops or products and prices to illustrate well defined impacts on the farming process. Pattern was the crucial word in **3(d)(i)** and those who engaged with this did well but it remains a concept that many students would benefit from practising so that they are aware it involves more than stating isolated locations. In **3(d)(ii)** most responses were good because the candidates used the map and linked this to a reason.

SECTION B

Question 4 The Development Gap

4(a)(i) produced some good answers and equally many poor ones which either consisted of one word for each feature or failed to grasp the concept of a pattern or confused trade and aid. Many candidates in **4(a)(ii)** simply repeated content from **4(a)(i)** or gave basic descriptions without going on to link to how this worsens inequality other than a generalised concept of lack of fairness. The concept of a trade gap was generally known however. Charitable aid in **4(b)** was more familiar territory with many good answers, some making good use of exemplars such as the 2004 tsunami and Haiti's earthquake. Those who did not fare so well were often the victims of the perennial issue of confusion between trade and aid. Responses to **4(c)(i)** and **4(c)(ii)** suffered from a failure to distinguish the difference between quality of life and standard of living amongst some candidates, with quality of life better understood. There was a lot of information in the article in **4(d)** which many candidates used and equally many used their own knowledge, though few progressed beyond Level 1 as both of these elements were rarely used concurrently. This was a shame as some excellent understanding was shown along with detailed knowledge of various schemes, but candidates should be reminded that they must read the question carefully and follow all the instructions given. Centres should look for opportunities to develop the skill of using text as well as map and other skills as too few students progress beyond quoting words or passages of text. **4(e)** saw few students engage well with the question and its demands. Many saw the reference to EU countries and used this as a launch pad into a well-rehearsed description of The Netherlands and Bulgaria, often with reference to a question and resource that had been used in a previous examination. Some combined this with a description of the two maps and the data they showed but kept the parts of their answer as separate entities. Better candidates contrasted rather than dealing with two countries separately, and only the best responded to the opportunity provided by the two maps to account for the contrast in terms of infrastructure levels (internet) and the state of the economy (unemployment). Centres and candidates must be equipped to deal with a wider range of question styles for the longer tariff questions and be prepared for the application of their geographical knowledge, which must also be examined, instead of relying on learnt answers.

Question 5 Globalisation

In **5(a)(i)** almost all candidates recognised the role of ICT in encouraging globalisation and were able to offer examples, with the internet being the most common, although not all were then able to explain their role in aiding globalisation. Similarly **5(a)(ii)** was fairly well answered, although some missed the economic aspect and used social factors instead. There were some good references to low wages and cheaper land and a few candidates moved beyond this to look at beneficial tax regimes in India. The bars in **5(b)(i)** were accurately completed by all but a very few and then in the follow on part **5(b)(ii)** many candidates able to develop a sense of pattern. Weaker candidates tended to just list those countries that traded with China and sometimes the more able did not take sufficient notice of the command word and therefore did not help themselves by explaining the map when description was all that was required. Candidates demonstrated good knowledge of China's economic growth in **5(b)(iii)** and the better ones fully developed their answers, with some of the most able making the use of the map to discuss factors such as shipping routes. Some were limited in their marks as they did not sufficiently expand on their statements, a common issue in 'outline' questions or they were generic and not clearly about China. **5(c)(i)** was answered well by the vast majority. **5(c)(ii)** produced a good range of answers. As the specification does not explicitly require a case study, though it is difficult to see how it could be covered without one, a broad view was taken of the requirement for examples so that naming places, crops, or locations

was sufficient. There were some very good answers on Kenya's flower industry which showed detailed and specific knowledge which was well targeted to the question. Some candidates did not cover both social and economic effects and this kept them in Level 2, while some also lost marks by referring to environmental factors which gained them no credit. The weakest candidates' answers were hindered by being vague and generic with very simplistic statements about jobs and money.

Question 6 Tourism

Whilst a few answers to **6(a)(i)** were unclear as they weren't qualified, the vast majority were correct and showed an interesting range from the popular "natural disasters" to the unusual "outbreak of the plague". Most managed two marks in **6(a)(ii)**, despite some of the answers being a little outdated; where candidates missed the last mark this was for not sufficiently making the global element apparent. In **6(b)** there was a disappointing lack of progress from last year in the development of candidates' map skills as far too few managed to score marks at Level 2. This was because many simply produced a list of features from the key or just described the features, or failed to show enough clarity about how different attractions drew tourists to Bruges. Some even focused on the strategies to manage tourists such as the cash machines or seemed to think that public toilets constituted a tourist attraction. Equally disappointing was the fact that the grid and scale on a map remain mysteries to the vast majority of candidates. In **6(c)(i)** only the weakest failed to get both marks as they were too vague or just gave an example, whereas the majority made effective use of a well learnt definition. The answers to **6(c)(ii)** frequently yielded full marks also. In **6(c)(iii)** there was quite a range of marks, with almost all candidates gaining some credit at Level 1. Some remained in that level as they did not make explicit use of the figure or bring in their own knowledge, or they outlined strategies but did not link them to the reduction of the negative effects. Sadly "more litter bins" remains a common incorrect offering in such questions despite the fact that the removal of litter bins is a much more likely strategy. The better candidates understood the sign and then moved on bringing in their own case study knowledge with plentiful realistic suggestions. **6(d)** differentiated well. A few candidates failed to gain any credit as they did not select an extreme environment, and some remained in Level 1 as they simply listed actions taken. Some also limited their achievement through basic geographical inaccuracy or carelessness such as statements that polar bears and penguins are found together, that penguins bite visitors, or that the Arctic is at the South Pole. Antarctica (with a myriad variety of spellings) was the popular choice, with Nepal / The Himalayas also common, and many students had good knowledge of their case studies such that Level 2 scores were frequent through clear reference to positive coping strategies. The discursive element required for Level 3 proved a challenge and only the best candidates were able to present the balanced argument of both positive and negative coping. Thus the final question illustrates very well the headline comment that candidates must learn strands and themes to their case studies and apply them to question commands in order to excel.

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](#)