



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GEOGRAPHY (NEW)
SPECIFICATION A**

SUMMER 2010

Statistical Information

The Examiners' Report may refer in general terms to statistical outcomes. Statistical information on candidates' performances in all examination components (whether internally or externally assessed) is provided when results are issued. As well as the marks achieved by individual candidates, the following information can be obtained from these printouts:

For each component: the maximum mark, aggregation factor, mean mark and standard deviation of marks obtained by *all* candidates entered for the examination.

For the subject or option: the total entry and the lowest mark needed for the award of each grade.

Annual Statistical Report

Other information on a centre basis is provided when results are issued. The annual *Statistical Report* (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

GEOGRAPHY (NEW) - SPECIFICATION A

General Certificate of Secondary Education 2010

Chief Examiner: Geraint Williams

Raw mark grade boundaries (GCSE Geography A)

Individual unit results are reported in UMS. Threshold boundaries for UMS are recorded in the Specification on page 23. These thresholds are fixed. They will not change year by year.

The actual, or raw, marks awarded to each candidate are used to fix the grade boundaries each year. These grade boundaries are set by the judgement of the Chief and Principal Examiners. The raw mark threshold boundaries for Unit 1 in 2010 are reproduced below. These will change year on year.

	Max. Raw Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Unit 1:Written Paper (Foundation)	90				57	48	39	30	21
Unit 1:Written Paper (Higher)	90	77	66	55	45	35	30		

Unit 1 Foundation Tier

Principal Examiner: Allan Carter

General comments

As this is the first examination in a new specification, it is clearly difficult to make comparisons with performances in previous years. Although it could be argued that candidates are still following a GCSE Geography course, albeit with somewhat different content, there are significant differences in the candidature which need to be understood when considering the overall performance of this paper.

Firstly, the vast majority, if not all candidates who sat this examination will have been students in Year 10 and thus, were a year younger than would normally be the case. No allowance can be made for the 'maturity factor' and scripts have been assessed at the GCSE standard in line with the requirements of the specification. This point was made very clear to examiners at the marking conference and will be vital in subsequent years when candidates from both years 10 and 11 will be taking the same paper.

The second important point that will have had an impact on performance is the change in the balance of entries between the foundation and higher tiers. In previous years (on the Legacy Specification A) there has been a fairly even distribution of candidates between the two tiers with schools tending to enter borderline candidates mainly at the foundation level in order to gain a C grade. This year, however, due to the new entry rules which enable re-sits and the possibility of candidates sitting both tiers over the two examined units the balance has been shifted heavily in favour of the higher tier with a split of around 65:35. This would seem to suggest that schools have entered their borderline candidates at the higher level with the prospect of either re-sitting next year or sitting Unit 2 at the foundation level in order to potentially gain a grade higher than C, leaving a much more representative candidature at the foundation level.

A third factor which makes it difficult to compare with previous years is the change in balance of the assessment objectives with a much greater emphasis on the skills and the application of knowledge at the expense of traditional recall and it is clear that candidates at the foundation level have struggled this year with the change, particularly when being asked to apply their knowledge to questions in using case study material.

The three points outlined above, and in particular the first two, can be taken together to help explain the generally disappointing performance of candidates on the paper. As one would expect from the above, there were very few examples of high scoring scripts and the mean mark of 44.9 is at just about half marks on what was felt to be a quite accessible paper. There were few requirements for candidates to write extended answers and many marks were included in the paper for short answers of various types. Where questions did demand extended writing, as in the final part of each question, the standard was generally weak with level 1 and 2 responses very much the norm.

Performance on individual questions

The availability of Item Level Data would appear to confirm the general feeling of the examining team with regard to performance across the six questions with themes 4 and 5 on population and globalisation respectively proving to be more challenging to candidates.

Question 1 - Water

A surprising number of candidates struggled with the multiple choice questions at the start and those who achieved correct answers in all three were in the minority. It is difficult to tell at this stage whether this was due to a general lack of knowledge and understanding of river processes or whether due to an unfamiliarity with this style of question which is a new innovation in GCSE Geography. Interpretation from a photograph is a geographical skill and although many candidates found (b)(i) quite accessible, a significant number sought answers that were not apparent from the photograph. Part (c)(iii) differentiated well with the more able candidates able to give simple advantages and disadvantages but few responses were specifically aimed at hard or soft engineering strategies as required by the specification and consequently few gave sufficient detail to enter level 3.

Question 2 - Climate Change

This proved to be a fairly accessible question with most candidates demonstrating a reasonable understanding of the issues concerned. Part (b)(i) showed a good understanding of the greenhouse effect and most were able to label the diagram appropriately. In (b)(ii) many candidates were unable to develop their effects to earn the second mark. In part (c), the key was to identify the link between the change in behaviour and the reduction in the impact of climate change. Many answers focussed descriptively on the stimulus material without recognising the bigger picture, for example making the link between energy conservation and the need for fewer fossil fuels to be burnt in power stations. At the higher level, equating to the C grade, candidates need to appreciate the macro aspect of large numbers of people changing their attitudes.

Question 3 - Living in an active Zone

The entire question was accessible to most although in (b)(ii) a significant number of candidates chose to write about the hazards associated with volcanoes rather than earthquakes. Most were also able to make sensible points in part (c) and references to fertile soils, opportunities for tourism and geothermal energy were in abundance. Indeed, there were a great many very encouraging answers in terms of the benefits of volcanic activity. However, the major weakness here was the almost universal inability to relate these points to case study material or even fleeting examples and, as such, only a minority of candidates achieved level 3 responses.

Question 4 - Population

This question was overwhelmingly the one which caused greatest problems for candidates with an average mark of only 5.7 out of 15. It was clear that candidates at this level were generally unprepared for population pyramids and it took a lot of effort for examiners to try to decipher valid responses from some often very confused language which did not help the flow of the answer. There was also a very poor response to the final part of the question with many candidates confusing falling birth rates with death rates. Those that did manage to achieve level 2 wrote mainly about China's One Child Policy but few were able to give the level of explanation required to reach level 3. It has to be stressed here that level 3 equates to the C grade and although examiners are reminded that they are not looking for A* quality, candidates still need to be able to write in sufficient detail for the C grade.

Question 5 - Globalisation

In (a)(ii), candidates needed to give some level of accurate quantification from the graph to score the second mark beyond stating that there had been an increase in Polish migrants. Interpretation of trends from graphs is an important skill and the need to quote figures to give fuller descriptions should be noted for the future. In (a)(iii), there was a general lack of detail beyond simple statements like 'increased trade, increased markets and increased workforce.' Many candidates failed to explain one impact as required by the question and this is an issue of exam technique in reading the question carefully and making sure that enough development is given in the response to earn the three marks on offer rather than giving three separate impacts which can only score one mark. In part (c), responses were again very generalised and lacking in specific place knowledge or case study material even though the mark scheme was opened up to allow reference to any countries that have benefitted from globalisation and not restricted to India and China.

Question 6 - Development

This proved to be the most accessible question with most candidates able to score highly on the first 10 marks. However, they again came unstuck when asked to write in detail in part (c). In this question level 2 responses which lifted material from the photographs with little real explanation was very much the norm. A few more able candidates were able to use their own knowledge along with the resource to explain how the chosen strategies help to reduce child death rates.

Overall, the paper appears to have been fairly straightforward to mark and there were few issues of contention either in conference or after. I am indebted to my team leaders and the entire examining team for their diligence and professionalism throughout the process.

Unit 1 Higher Tier

Principal Examiner: Dirk Sykes

General comments

The examination was an effective test of knowledge, understanding and skills. A mean of 55.4 (61%), a range of 10 - 89 and a standard deviation of 12.9 confirms that the paper performed positively.

All questions were accessible to candidates with questions 4 and 5 proving marginally more demanding. A small but significant number of candidates achieved low marks. This long “tail” suggests that a number of borderline candidates were entered for the higher tier whereas their ability would have been more suited to the foundation tier. This policy is understandable given the safety net of re-sitting the examination in Year 11, however, whether it proves to be an effective policy remains to be seen.

With notable exceptions, answers to the 6 mark questions lacked the detail and case study knowledge necessary to achieve level 3 in the mark scheme. This is partly explained by the fact that 99% of students entered for the examination were 15 years of age or under and have yet to fully mature as GCSE students. Performance, particularly in these questions, varied between centres reflecting the quality of teaching in different centres.

Centres should note the change in weighting of assessment objectives in this examination when interpreting candidate performance.

Performance on individual questions

Question 1 - Water

Part (a) - the majority of candidates were able to name and describe processes although a significant number lost marks here. This should be basic knowledge for higher tier candidates.

Part (b) - although the majority of candidates scored 3 marks many lacked understanding of the term *distribution*.

Part (c) - most candidates were able to give map evidence such as the presence of a river but few gave grid references or specific map detail. Most candidates demonstrated good understanding of flood management approaches but often did not achieve level 3 in the mark scheme by failing to address both command words or by failing to give a range of management approaches.

Question 2 - Climate Change

Part (a) - most candidates understood the graph although some failed to score both marks in part (ii). There remains a need to stress that in a points marking scheme 2 points need to be clearly made to score 2 marks.

Part (b) - many candidates lacked clear understanding of the greenhouse effect with many confusing this natural process with global warming. In part (ii) candidates need to ensure they develop the points they make in order to achieve full marks.

Part (c) - the cartoon was included to give candidates a stimulus and get candidates started. However, many candidates gave answers that were too simplistic and failed to develop their answers. The better candidates explained how lifestyle changes would reduce the impact of climate change or demonstrated understanding of how, for example, a collective approach is needed to make any significant difference.

Question 3 - Living in an Active Zone

Part (a) - although few candidates failed to score, many did not achieve full marks either because they failed to read the question carefully, which asked them to use map evidence, or because they did not fully understand the term *distribution*.

Part (b) - it was pleasing to see the majority of candidates understanding the difference between labelling and annotation. Most demonstrated good knowledge of hazards.

Part (c) - answers often showed excellent understanding and knowledge of technology but most failed to achieve a level 3 answer by not including reference to specific examples or case studies.

Question 4 - Population

Part (a) - it was pleasing to see the majority of candidates understanding the nature of population pyramids, a skill that many have found difficult in the past. Few candidates scored full marks on parts (ii) and particularly (iii); again there is a need for candidates to answer in enough detail to make enough points to gain full marks in a points marking scheme.

Part (b) - surprisingly relatively few candidates fully grasped the opportunities in this question and failed to gain high marks. Some did not understand the term *sparse*, others the idea of distribution, many failed to address the importance of physical factors and many failed to take the opportunity to use the world outline map provided.

Question 5 - Globalisation

Part (a) - most candidates understood divided bar graphs and scored well. Candidates should be encouraged to use the statistics in the resources to quantify descriptions. Many candidates failed to score both marks in part (iii) lacking understanding of the concept of social impact. Sadly answers sometimes reflected prejudice rather than understanding.

Part (b) - the standard of answers varied between centres and reflected the quality of teaching in these centres.

Part (c) - there were few good quality answers to this question and as in part (b) the quality of answers varied between centres. Generally there is a need to improve the quality of teaching of this part of the specification.

Question 6 - Development

Part (a) - skills appear well developed with the overwhelming majority able to interpret the choropleth map. Many candidates did not score full marks in part (iii) by failing to make 3 clear points.

Part (b) - most candidates showed understanding of infant mortality although answers were often simplistic and failed to make or elaborate enough points to score 4 marks.

Part (c) - there is a continuing need to impress on candidates the value of resources and using resources to maximise marks. Some candidates merely copied out resources and achieved a level 1 answer, many candidates added explanation and achieved a level 2 answer although few candidates identified another Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and achieved level 3.

In summary, examination technique and quality of teaching continue to be crucial factors in success. Quality of teaching was particularly evident in this examination especially in questions 5 and 6. The most successful candidates:

- Have a good knowledge of basic geographical terms and concepts
- Read questions and instructions carefully
- Understand the meaning of command words
- Answer in detail, guided by the marks for that question
- Develop points to give a full description or explanation
- Address all parts of a question
- Make good use of real examples and case studies
- Study resources and use them effectively



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