



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

GEOGRAPHY A

SUMMER 2013

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GEOGRAPHY A

General Certificate of Secondary Education

SUMMER 2013

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Unit 1 Foundation Tier (4231 01)

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

An area of the paper that performed well for candidates was the entire question 2 and it is clear, year on year that candidates are comfortable with the theme of climate change. The examiners saw a great number of very good answers to question 2(c) and many candidates achieved the top level here by explaining a range of positive and negative effects of climate change and locating them correctly in named places. In question 1(c), many candidates demonstrated good knowledge of various strategies for reducing the impact of flooding and there were plenty of descriptions of hard and soft engineering approaches to flood management. However, the majority let themselves down on the AO2 aspect of the question, as outlined below. Candidates also demonstrated a decent knowledge and understanding of the factors affecting fertility differences between the three key areas identified in the specification in question 4(c) and many responses identified a range of factors. However, only a few very good candidates were able to appreciate the subtle difference between Western Europe and South Asia along a continuum of fertility and most tended to group these regions together and compare them as a whole with Sub-Saharan Africa. There was also a fairly limited response to question 3(c) where the knowledge and understanding of the four given techniques for monitoring the level of activity in a volcano was at best basic and lacking any real depth and detail.

AO2 – Application of Knowledge and Understanding

Despite considerable attention being given in CPD and in previous examiner reports, there is still an unwillingness or inability on the part of many foundation tier candidates to relate their answers to specific examples. This is a key element of AO2 particularly in the extended answers worth 5 marks (where two AO2 marks are allocated). It is expected that the content of the specification will be taught through case studies and real places and that these are then applied to different or unfamiliar contexts in the examination paper. Examples include questions 1(c) and 3(c). Both questions produced decent responses in terms of knowledge of flood protection strategies and of the monitoring of volcanoes, although as stated above, the latter was less secure in terms of detail. However, both failed to relate them to real examples to demonstrate an ability to apply case study material to the requirements of the question. Furthermore, question 1(c) required a simple evaluation of the chosen strategies and in many cases this was either lacking or very basic. Candidates also found difficulty in applying their knowledge and understanding of the causes of flooding to the resources provided for the unfamiliar context of the Conwy Valley in question 1(b). Candidates able to achieve full marks in this question were in the minority. Finally, and related to this, a great many candidates found difficulty with question 6(c) and, as in previous years, it seems that the theme of development is quite challenging for many foundation tier candidates. Most answers tended to be generalised, lacking in precision and real detail and not related either to named MDGs or to specific aid agencies or countries where attempts have been made to improve people's lives.

As a CPD exercise, teachers are advised to note the AO column contained explicitly in the mark schemes for all questions, particularly where there is often a 3/2 split between AO1/AO2 in the final sub-questions. This means that failure to address the AO2 component will mean that a good answer showing plenty of knowledge and understanding cannot enter the top level and will score, at best, only 3 marks. These issues will be addressed in the on-line training that will be available this autumn on the WJEC website.

AO3 – Geographical Skills

The examiners saw evidence of a high level of performance in AO3 with the majority of candidates demonstrating good geographical skills across the range of activities. This included good map skills as in question 1(a) where most candidates were able to interpret key features of rivers from the map, although a significant number found difficulty locating the source of the Afon Roe. Good command of basic graph skills was in evidence as in question 2(b)(i) and 4(b)(i) and it was pleasing to see many attempting to quantify from the graph when describing trends. The reading and basic interpretation of a population pyramid posed little problem for the majority although only a few candidates were able to achieve the second mark in this question for developing their answer and many made an error here in quantifying the 0-4 age range as 8% rather than 16% by adding the males and females. There was also a good response to the choropleth map in question 5(b). One skill that did pose a problem for many candidates was the requirement to locate Karachi's latitude and longitude position and this tended to differentiate between, rather than within centres.

Unit 1 Higher Tier (4231 02)

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

Candidate performance varied significantly between questions. Generally responses displayed a secure and often impressive knowledge and understanding of Themes 2, 3 and 4 but a less secure and detailed knowledge and understanding of Themes 1, 5 and 6.

In question 2(c) responses that gave specific examples, such as the BedZed community, demonstrated a high level of understanding. In 3(a)(ii) detailed knowledge was demonstrated by the use of specialist terms such as pyroclastic flows. In question 3(a)(iii) many candidates gave specific detail such as the creation of tourist sector jobs at volcanic features such as Mt Etna. In question 3(b) evidence of locational knowledge was demonstrated by the use of case studies such as hazard mapping in Montserrat.

In question 4(c) the majority of candidates understood that birth rates in South Asia are generally decreasing but few were able to give detail or specific examples, such as changes in Kerala, India.

Candidates would have benefited from a more detailed knowledge of basic geographical terminology. For example, in question 1(a)(iv) many responses showed a lack of understanding of the term “relief”.

AO2 – Application of Knowledge and Understanding

There was a further improvement in the use of case studies and examples. However, candidates need to ensure that they read the question carefully so that their case studies are applied appropriately to the question. Weaker candidates on this tier tend to recount their knowledge of a case study without applying it directly to answer the question that has been set. For example, in 1(b) a significant number of candidates wrote at considerable length about Boscastle with little regard to the question which was about changing approaches to river management. By contrast, in question 5(b)(iii) candidates successfully applied their knowledge of an appropriate case study, such as Ghana, to explain why development is being hindered.

There also continues to be a need for candidates to apply their knowledge to resources provided in the examination in order to make effective use of them. For example, in question 1(a)(v) many candidates described the features in the photograph but failed to develop this into an explanation of why this gives an increased risk of flooding.

AO3 – Geographical Skills

Candidates were secure in most skill areas assessed. Responses showed a good understanding of direction, grid references, use of scale, describing trends and completion of the bar graph. Candidates were less secure when asked to describe a distribution and to compare features of a resource.

In 4(a)(i), for example, many candidates described the shape of the pyramids rather than looking for similarities and differences between them. In 5(b)(ii) relatively few candidates scored 3 marks, some listing exports and imports or identifying fuels/mining as the largest import without further development.

Unit 2 Foundation Tier (4232 01)

General comments

Our Changing Coastline and Tourism remain the two most popular option choices for study. However, it is of concern that there are still a significant number of candidates who attempt to answer the questions for all 6 themes. Teachers should continue to emphasise the importance of answering questions for which the candidates have been prepared.

This year candidates were assessed for the first time on spelling, punctuation and the accurate use of grammar. Most candidates at this level achieved at least the threshold performance with many reaching the intermediate level.

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

Unfortunately answers to the 6 mark questions lacked the detailed knowledge necessary to achieve level 3 marks and the use of case study material was either omitted or simply referred to in passing. In Question 3(b), for example, some candidates could not correctly identify a large ecosystem and in Question 1(d) there remains some confusion about how rising sea levels may affect people. A number of candidates simply described a flood event and there were others who wrote about river floods.

Candidates who study the Weather and Climate option at this level seem to find the traditional meteorology questions more difficult to answer than those on weather hazards. Question 2(b), on explaining the weather associated with high pressure (Enquiry Question 2.1 in the specification), was done very poorly. Candidates also need to have a more secure grasp of the key words/terms which are used in the specification.

AO2 – Application of Knowledge and Understanding

Some questions require candidates to apply their knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar places through the stimulus of a resource. For example, photographs and maps of places such as the Holderness Coast, the Forest of Dean, Martin Mere and the Brecon Beacons were used to access application. In Question 1(a)(iii) most candidates did not go beyond recognition of the soft rock. Boulder clay is an example of such a rock which is easily eroded at the base of the cliff and results in slides or slumps. In Question 4(c) the photographs were made use of but the answers were not developed fully. Likewise, in Question 5(b)(ii) most candidates simply reworded the statement and there were very few references to the use of brownfield sites and regeneration in city centres. An important key command word in questions which test application is 'suggest'.

AO3 – Geographical Skills

In Question 3(a)(ii) many candidates were unable to identify the spot heights and lack of contour lines to show that the land was flat and low lying. Otherwise, candidates scored well on the skills based questions. In Question 4(a)(iii), for example, most candidates were able to give at least two other facts about the location of the Forest of Dean. Likewise, in Question 2, they were able to identify the weather conditions associated with high pressure from the weather map. Those who study Theme 12 also made very good use of the OS map and photograph provided.

Unit 2 Higher tier (4232 02)

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

The majority of candidates were able to demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding linked to physical and human processes / concepts e.g. coastal engineering strategies and factors linked to tourism. This was often supported by some reference to place and in the best examples there was good or excellent use of specialist terms.

Area for Improvement: Knowledge and Understanding is often correct without being detailed. Candidates should be challenged to extend points that develop answers into higher levels, eg part (b) of each question.

AO2 – Application of Knowledge and Understanding

Candidates need to ensure that they read the question carefully so that their case studies are applied appropriately to the question. Weaker candidates on this tier tend to recount their knowledge of a case study without applying it directly to answer the question that has been set. The best responses applied appropriate examples to support the points made. This is an improving factor but remains peripheral for too many sitting the higher tier, particularly in part (c) of each question. In these cases the information is by name only or not recognisable to a specific location in the manner in which it is developed.

Improvements were noted in the way that candidates recognise and apply their answer to key words used within the question such as people and the environment but not always in relation to scale, be it local or global.

Some candidates had difficulty when applying their knowledge and understanding to stimulus materials of unfamiliar places when using photographs or extracting information from a source.

Area for Improvement: Candidates must focus on key words in the question. Knowledge and Understanding related to the concepts of sustainability and urban regeneration of one European city in question 5(c) were not applied successfully by many as was the reference to 'different groups of people' in question 6(c).

AO3 – Geographical Skills

There was good and excellent evidence of candidates using different skills. However, the level and quality of annotation is highly variable.

There are increasing signs that pupils are being taught higher level literacy skills and also encouraged to use more complex language that includes connectives such as 'furthermore' and 'consequently'. Candidates are improving their ability to express clear opinions as appropriate e.g. the most effective strategies for managing weather hazards.

Area for Improvement: Simple skills such as completing the diagram of longshore drift and describing factors from OS maps were often basic suggesting a lack of familiarity from candidates with using such skills. Completing pie charts proved difficult for some.

Previous examiner reports have emphasised the inability of too many candidates to use and apply skills accurately. At the higher tier these may be lower 'tariff' questions but their level of challenge requires more practice!

Unit 3 Controlled Assessment (4233)

General Comments

- Some work still lacks focus, and this can hinder the candidates in the sense that they cannot provide enough evidence for all the assessment criteria e.g. comparing the upper and middle part of a river.
- There was still evidence of a lack of internal moderation in some centres. Where portfolios have been marked by more than one teacher centres must have a rigorous procedure in place to internally standardise candidates' work before it is sent for external moderation.
- Annotation is excellent in some cases, but poor in many. There is a tendency to highlight all areas of a level in the mark scheme, rather than fine tuning between levels and highlighting specific phrases. This makes it difficult for a moderator to ascertain how a centre has arrived at a particular mark. Apart from using the grid sheet, annotation within the body of the work is recommended. There were some examples of excellent annotation within the body of the work.
- There are still examples of administrative errors e.g. marks added up incorrectly; CAA forms not signed by teachers and candidates; resources not sent with the work. These errors are very much in the minority. The inaccurate completion of forms contributes to more work and adds to the possibility of compounding errors. WJEC will not accept the work of candidates that has not been authenticated.

Fieldwork Enquiry

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

On the whole marks were awarded in the correct level, but were occasionally over marked as some teachers had not considered the detail needed in the conclusions as well as background knowledge and understanding needed at level four. In some instances more information could have been provided about the location of the enquiry e.g. labelled or annotated location map.

AO2 – Application of Knowledge and Understanding

In a number of examples there was a lack of evidence of independence. Structure of some of the tasks was over prescriptive leaving little scope for candidates to achieve marks at the higher levels. Candidates need to be fully aware of the demands of the mark scheme e.g. evaluating their work will help provide an opportunity to ask wider geographical questions and /or look at other areas e.g. consider how applicable their conclusions might be in other areas in a river study. Greater individuality with sub questions should be encouraged. Some centres awarded marks at level four where conclusions were simple and straightforward rather than perceptive and informed.

AO3 – Geographical Skills

AO3 needs to be considered in its entirety, rather than just concentrating on presentation techniques. Using presentation techniques in the body of the work is the important point, rather than presenting all data from a field activity if it has a purpose or not. In AO3 there is a reference to collection and presentation of primary data (which is compulsory in fieldwork), communication, and evaluation. Candidates often fail to reflect on the validity and limitations of the evidence. Annotation of the work is important to highlight points like this.

Decision Making Exercise (DME)

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

There is a tendency by some candidates to copy out large sections of resources as evidence of understanding of the topic or issue. If they have copied then the understanding is very often limited as is the use of geographical terminology and this tends to become more evident as the work progresses. Consideration should be given to how candidates are guided in structuring their work.

AO2 – Application of Knowledge and Understanding

The maximum many candidates do is to mention the word sustainability, and there is often a limited understanding of this important concept. There should be more focus on decision making when developing the task, creating opportunities for candidates to analyse various options and their sustainability. A lack of adherence to this aspect can lead to very good candidates being over marked for this AO. The teaching of the topic related to the chosen DME title could focus more clearly on developing an understanding of the different elements of sustainability. Conclusions must be "perceptive and informed" to be awarded marks at the top of level four. It is important to remember that there is more than one descriptor in this AO, where annotation can help to pinpoint evidence. A discriminator between level three and four is the word "complex" at the higher level.

AO3 – Geographical Skills

One weakness here is that some centres are not organising decision making tasks, but rather asking candidates to give opinions e.g. is town X water front project sustainable? This leads to candidates agreeing/disagreeing and giving their own opinion on a previously agreed project rather than explaining the varied viewpoints of stakeholders. The recognition of bias is still a weak area in many centres, and this could be achieved by considering the reliability of sources, and/or the biased views of stakeholders in the decision making process. There were examples where viewpoints were listed but where there was little or no analysis of those points of view. Often this part of the mark scheme is not given enough emphasis, and as a result candidates are given too high a mark. The final decision needs to be clear and justified.

Many candidates fail to manipulate or present any data, and some stick in photographs which are not relevant or not used effectively.



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