

GCE GEOGRAPHY

Unit 1 – Physical and Human Geography
Report on the Examination

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General

It is important that students are taught all of the content of the units covered. At times, for example, students appeared to be unfamiliar with landforms resulting from the submergence of a coastline. Specific knowledge is needed of all relevant landforms and students should bear in mind the need to cover the sequence involved in formation and specific processes.

There is a need for students to be familiar with key terms. Whilst definitions are not always asked for, students should as part of a revision process define key terms as they must be understood in order to answer questions such as that on the glacial budget or isostatic and eustatic sea level change. Sometimes, as in the first parts of the Human optional questions, definitions were demanded. These should be accessible marks to most students as they are testing a body of knowledge which can be learnt and students should develop a working knowledge of these key terms throughout the course.

It is worth re-iterating some points regarding resources. Resource material is supplied as some of the marks on this paper are skills related. These materials are intended to form the basis of an answer and not to be seen by the student as a hindrance. Marks are available for describing what is visible on a photograph and using tabulating data in the human section to make points. There is often one mark available for data being manipulated from a table or reading off information accurately from a graph. However, doing this repeatedly does not gain additional marks – although it may add support in the context of statements made. Students should be encouraged to read the question stem with greater focus so that they are aware of what information is being displayed in the resources provided. This was particularly significant with regard to Question 1(b)(i), where students were being asked to describe the flood management strategy of the dam and not the dam *per se* and in Question 4 (a)(ii), where the photo and the impact on the road was a start of an answer, but not the whole answer. The use of a text remains problematic for a substantial proportion of students, choosing to regurgitate it, instead of using it. This was apparent in Question 7 (b)(ii) and Question 6 (b)(ii) – where even the bullet points were ‘lifted’ instead of being used to convey the varied and linked causes of food insecurity.

As ever, there is a need to restate the perennial comment regarding the command words and deconstructing the question. It is imperative that command words are not just known, but that their meaning is understood so that students know how to respond. Thus, in Question 1 (c), there should have been a discussion not just description of factors; *comment on* in Question 6 (b)(ii), Question 7 (c) and Question 8 (b)(ii) demanded more than description of information given but also some analytical point. In connection with this, the 15 mark questions do not really require an introduction but a conclusion is a key characteristic of a Level 3 answer in coming to a view regarding for example, the importance of physical and human factors affecting river discharge or assessing the attempts to manage population change.

As stated in January, case study material can enhance answers – even if it is not a stated requirement of the question. It can provide evidence for points made and allow significant elaboration and illustration. However, it must be included in a way which is linked to the question for example, flooding case studies could be used in Question 1 (c) so as to link to the reasons for a rapid increase in discharge. Students should be encouraged to select their illustrative material and make its purpose clear.

There are a number of general points to note. Some students spend a disproportionate amount of time on the short questions and this squeezes time available for the longer 15 mark questions especially. Students obviously practise past questions as part of their preparation for the exam. However, it is important to emphasise to students that the same question is highly unlikely to appear. It is important to reiterate with students the need to communicate well when writing answers and to ensure that their writing is legible.

Section A

Question 1 - Rivers, Floods and Management

In several responses to part (a)(i), the terms were repeated without defining their meaning or were guessed as the terms were not known – such as measuring river level. Those students who scored the 2 marks available focused on the idea of size versus how often, and frequently illustrated with examples. Over half gained 1 mark, usually for description and about a quarter gained 2 marks. There was a need to obey the command to comment on the usefulness. Many did not recognise that frequency could not be identified as there was no specific information present in the form of dates.

Part (b)(i) was well done with a high proportion of students gaining 3 or 4 marks. Most students recognised the dam and gained credit for this going on to describe how this worked as a flood management strategy, with regard to the lake created behind for storage and control of the flow. Some recognised the suitability of the area for a dam. A limited number saw it wrongly as a coastal barrage. The key discriminator in part (b)(ii), was they had obeyed the command word. Thus, they went beyond describing advantages and disadvantages but commented on them. Some used examples such as the Three Gorges Dam and the Aswan Dam in a valid way and offered comments relating to the need for forced relocation and the scale of it, the sustainability of resulting energy that comes from the dam, the impact on river processes, etc.

The extended writing question, part (c), was wrongly perceived by some students as a question on flooding. However, it was designed to test a different part of the specification – namely that regarding 'factors affecting river discharge' as indicated in the question. The fact that some did not de-construct the question led to the indiscriminate use and regurgitation of case studies on Boscastle and the River Quaggy. Some students drifted to channel characteristics. Better answers had a partial sequence identifying impermeable rock or urban areas leading to water not being able to infiltrate. However, students often omitted the next part of the sequence where surface runoff occurred as a more rapid transfer to rivers, thus, leading to higher discharge. The best answers had a fuller sequence and addressed the command to discuss, and assessed the relative importance of the factors. Pertinent comments related to the importance of heavy or persistent rain made worse by human factors such as deforestation or extending the urban area.

Question 2 - Cold Environments

In part (a), there was a tendency to see the glacial budget equating with glacial advance and retreat. Although these concepts are linked, they are not synonymous. Some saw the components with regard to inputs and outputs, but not the overall balance. Students needed to take a minute to study Figure 3 before writing an answer. Those that did recognised the retreat and were able to provide evidence of the extent, unevenness or direction of this.

There was a fairly even spread of students through the range of marks available in part (b)(i). The best had a diagram that was clearly recognisable as an esker and then added descriptive labels regarding the location, the shape, the material from which they are made. Some had dimensions that were accurate; unfortunately some had labels that related to explanation and so were irrelevant. Explanation was required in part (b)(ii) and this demanded recognition of the sequence. Typically students were aware of the drop in hydrostatic pressure resulting in a fall in velocity and subsequent deposition. For many, there was just a recognition that water and deposition were involved with no specifics as to how.

In part (c), many students referred to all five given in the question, rather the minimum of two required. This led to limited depth. There was a wide variation in knowledge and much confusion between extensional and compressional flow, a belief that rotational flow occurs when corrie glaciers spin and that basal sliding is due to ice melting because of friction. Students need a much better understanding of these concepts to effectively answer a question such as this.

Question 3 - Coastal Environments

In part (a)(i), students generally perceived the global versus local nature of the difference and exemplified causes. Below this, there was much confusion and a belief that eustatic was a rise in sea level and isostatic a fall, and for many, a failure to appreciate the contrasting scales. In contrast part (a)(ii) was well answered. Trends were clearly noted with supporting evidence from Figure 4.

Responses to part (b)(i) hinged on the student knowing a relevant landform associated with a coastline of submergence. Unlike the two comparable questions on Cold and Hot Desert Environments, the landform was not specified due to the wording of the specification. Thus, students had to identify this. Unfortunately, there were raised beaches but many general landforms such as headlands and bays which were not applicable here. Those students who did gain 3 or 4 marks made reference to fjords (which appeared to be better done), rias and Dalmatian coasts. In part (b)(ii), fjords seemed to be tackled better when selected as a landform. However, many disregarded the initial formation of the landform and noted the rise in sea level and subsequent flooding (often unaware of the large scale involved). It was this complete sequence that was needed for Level 2.

There were a number of clear reasons why some students did not reach Level 2 or 3. As in Question 2 (c), many covered superficially all the processes stated. Some gave clear and detailed descriptions of the processes – but did not perceive that this was only part of the required response and disregarded the need to link to the shaping of the coast. Where this was realised, there was much scope as headlands and bays, spits, indeed any coastal landform could be referred to. For those who had de-constructed the question, there was an attempt to discuss the relative importance which had to be addressed for Level 3 and for Level 2, a consideration of importance at least.

Question 4 - Hot Desert Environments and their Margins

In part (a)(i), students gave more than was required as various sources of water were described. Most considered different types of rivers, although some noted groundwater and precipitation. Some drifted to subsequent sources such as vegetation and those resulting from river management. In part (a)(ii), there was a need to refer to the photograph and recognise the destruction of the road by floods or amount of debris in the area and then apply this to impact on landforms. This link was essential to obtain more than 1 mark. At this end, a recognition of deposition or impact on the road usually gave the mark.

In part (b)(i), not all students knew what yardangs were and there was some confusion with rock pedestals and zeugen. There were some clear diagrams that added detail on the vertical bands of rock and the shape of the landform. There were some clear labels regarding shape, the different rock types and size. Some drifted to processes and thus to explanation which pre-empted (b)(ii). Here, students gained Level 2 by recognising the vertical bands in the hard and soft rock and the significance of the direction of the prevailing wind and differential erosion – often with specific processes named. Level 1 answers were typically in a random sequence, partial and oversimplified.

In part (c) many students referred to all those given in the question rather than the minimum requirement and seeking depth. There was evidence of a limited or lack of understanding at times. Students convey the rising limb of the Hadley cell which is not as important as the falling limb and fail to appreciate the significance of this with regard to high pressure. Most described causes separately and did not see links nor realise that it is a combination of causes that leads to aridity. Some did drift to causes of desertification.

Section B

Question 5 - Population Change

Part (a) was well answered with clear statements regarding street pattern, type of housing, roads and services present. Where fewer marks were gained, this was due to a lack of contrast and a tendency to drift from the area outlined or to features that were not visible on the map, such as socio-economic characteristics.

In part (b)(i), the key to achieving Level 2 was to draw out contrasts in two socio-economic characteristics and to offer some specific support from case studies. There was some drift to housing characteristics and services which were not relevant. In part (b)(ii), there was a limited understanding of the term 'social welfare'. Some did not seem to have come across it previously and saw it as benefits. Some viewed it as what was needed rather than what was present. The better responses related to education, health, feeling safe and facilities provided. When relevant features were recognised, there was then a need to obey the command to 'comment' which proved to be a good discriminator.

In the extended writing question, some students spent a long time explaining why there was a policy, rather than focussing on its impact and success. China was the most frequent case study with France, Italy, Romania, Thailand and UK also being used often. The better responses probably referred to pro and anti-natalist, whilst those looking at an ageing population were generally less creditworthy. Some drifted into an assessment of impact of population policy on HIV/AIDS in Thailand. The best were able to describe the strategies but more importantly to provide evidence of their success or otherwise and come to a view about this.

Question 6 - Food Supply Issues

Part (a) was a knowledge-based question, but some students struggled to gain marks. Such terms should be learnt as part of the preparation for the exam.

In part (b)(i), there was a recognition of the varying rate of increase with support. Those that accessed Level 2 in part (b)(ii), used the text provided to comment on the causes of food insecurity with regard to the multiplicity of causes, the links between them or an explanation of how they caused such insecurity. Too many just selectively 'lifted' information.

The emphasis in part (c) was often on a description of how agricultural systems are classified rather than explanation as demanded in the question. Some had a limited knowledge of a classification with about 30% scoring 2 marks or less.

Part (d) gave students a structure via the title and the more able students used this to organise their response. Many answers were vague and superficial describing advantages and disadvantages of farming in poorer countries without a real consideration of the question. There was some drift and focus – wrongly on TNC's and Green Revolution.

Question 7 - Energy Issues

There was a better response to part (a) here than that in Question 6. It was clear the concept was known and understood.

In contrast, responses to part (b)(i) were weaker as there was a tendency to rank the countries in the table, rather than describe the information. Too many drifted into reasons disregarding the command to 'describe'. There was again, too much 'lifting' of information in part (b)(ii), rather than seeking to use it. Students seemed to be put off by the information provided and appeared reluctant to add to it, which is what the phrase 'with the help of' is demanding. The best used their own knowledge and considered the cost of developing the technology and whether it was worth it when there were other possibilities available.

Many students clearly knew the effects of acid rain in part (c), but fewer could obey the command to 'comment'. Few students had the knowledge and were able to comment. Such comments referred to the impact on historical buildings or on ecosystems and possible political impacts.

Part (d) gave students a sequence and sense of what to include – if they de-constructed it. There was a need to consider supply, consumption and trade and the easiest way was to select one type of energy and focus on this. The main pitfall was the failure of students to pick up on the global element and therefore, the need to pick out only the main aspects of where oil was produced, consumed and the trade that resulted. A significant number looked at individual countries which relates to an earlier question rather than the one set.

Question 8 - Health Issues

Most students had an idea of how to define morbidity in part (a), but a much smaller proportion went beyond the idea of illness for 2 marks.

Part (b)(i) was well done with a high proportion of students gaining 2 or 3 marks. There was often recognition of the longer expectancy of the least deprived, the contrasting difference for males and females and some data manipulation in support. Where fewer marks were gained, this was often due to speculation regarding cause or a listing of differences, rather than a description of the data. In part (b)(ii), some students obeyed the command to 'comment' and progressed from a description of the information given. This was critical as some gained 3 marks for description, but did not take the final step with regard to possible links between causes of death, the extent to which Manchester was worse, or to consider reasons.

There was a wide range of areas used in part (c). Areas chosen were too large to be classed as local, e.g. Cornwall as a county featured as did countries. The selection of the appropriate scale was pivotal in progressing to Level 2. The best answers had details – where a local area in England was used – of doctors' surgeries and the services they offered and then which hospitals provided secondary care and what they specialised in. Knowing which case study to choose is important in such questions.

In part (c), there were very few students who did not select an infectious disease. HIV/AIDS was the dominant choice, followed by malaria. As in the other optional questions in Section B, the wording of the question provided a structure for the response. Many did use this and it was the level of detail and support and the extent to which there was discussion that proved to be key discriminators. Thus, those who recognised the impact on life expectancy and diseases people were likely to contract; the lack of well, young people to spur on development, the drain on resources caring for the ill, the lifestyle of many orphans, the role of grandparents, and lack of schooling, gained most credit where discussion was emphasised.

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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