



Pearson

Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2018

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In Geography (WGE02_01)
Unit 2: Geographical Investigations

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Introduction

This was the second sitting of WGE02 Contested Planet and the entry was small, however the standard of responses was generally good and encouraging in some areas such as the fieldwork where some very good answers were encountered.

Most candidates managed to answer all questions on the examination paper and few 'blanks' were encountered. As might be expected there was variation in the quality of answers but there were many interesting and informed responses.

There was a roughly an even split between the physical and human options (Q4 and Q5).

Centres may wish to consider some general points going forward:

- The paper totals to 60 marks and candidates were given 90 minutes to complete the paper.
- This exam paper consists of 5 questions, with the last two being paired options. In most cases each question has been tiered with longer, cognitively higher questions at the end of each section.
- Questions 1 and 2 test a mixture of AO1 and AO2 skills, whereas question 3 (compulsory), 4 (option 1) and 5 (Option 2) are based largely on fieldwork which is examined as an AO3 skill.
- Neither the Sample Assessment Materials nor the January 2018 examination paper used the command word 'describe'. There are few marks for descriptions, and description should be used as a means to an end i.e. leading to an explanation, not an end in itself.

OVERALL IMPRESSION

The overall impression given by examiners was that the paper has discriminated well between candidates and has proved accessible. However, Examiners did identify some issues in candidate performance which centres should be mindful in future preparation of candidates for this exam. This included:

- Breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of the unit specification varied considerably, even with this small sample of students. There was variation especially in knowledge and understanding of key theoretical concepts, particularly with respect to some of the more technical physical geography.
- Although stimulus response material was provided many candidates are still not applying their knowledge accurately or relevantly. Many candidates still have problems in using evidence directly from the resource (an AO2 skill) in order to be able to generate a successful answer.
- Some candidates had a poor knowledge and understanding of the fieldwork questions, especially Q3d when they was a tendency to write "all I know" rather than giving a focus on presentation and data analysis. For this question, many failed to get into the L2 or L3 mark band as their answers were simply too generalised and non-specific.

- In addition, there was often a lack of fluency and structure in the longer answers, with many candidates just describing and explaining, rather than a focus on assessment or evaluation when appropriate.

QUESTION BY QUESTION FEEDBACK

Question 1 had a focus on the Crowded Coasts part of the specification (Topic 2.3). It was perhaps surprising the number of students who struggled to identify both parts of the littoral zone presented in Q1ai. These questions will always be about responding to the resources which have been provided. Rehearsing how to respond to photographs, data and maps is an important skill to encourage prior to taking the exam (e.g. by using these resources as starters at the beginning of lessons), allowing candidates to deal with features, patterns, trends and even anomalies. Q1aai was generally successfully dealt with by many, showing good understanding of the process, whereas Q1b presented a challenge for many. It seemed for the majority there was a lack of clear understanding about value as a concept (in relation to services – AO1) and as a factor linked to the aspect of threat. Some of the better answers linked for example:

- Mangroves as a buffer for storm surges, waves and future sea level rise, linked to increasing coastal development and removal of the forests.
- Biodiversity as an ecosystem service, e.g. coral reefs, and the various threats from acidification and ocean warming. Leading to a loss ecosystem value and possibly a loss in linked tourism revenues.

Many also found it problematic to “examine” instead treating more of a case-study question, in which case their answers ended up too descriptive.

Question 2, by comparison had a focus on the Urban Problems part of the specification (Topic 2.4.) Again, this threw up similar difficulties for some candidates as in Q1. Most were able to extract data, information and sometimes meaning from the traffic flow data and few struggled to get maximum marks.

Q2aai was not always well answered as some projects were not explicitly urban (e.g. Eden project?). Again, practice is needed in developing descriptions into explanations.

In Q2b urban challenges can cover a range of housing problems in urban areas, but many candidates did push this concept rather too far towards examples that were poorly selected. The best answers had 2-3 well-chosen places and projects, with a good level of detail. Assessment was often interpreted as simply ‘another problems is...’ and only relatively few candidates really focused on deeper understanding through analysis or assessment, i.e. recognising that one challenge is worse than another one.

Question 3 was the compulsory fieldwork question, examining the fieldwork that the candidates has done themselves ("familiar" fieldwork). 3a was mixed, with some able to show good understanding of an idea and linking it to the purpose of the investigation. Whilst others were not able to identify either a model or idea, or consider any linkage to investigation focus. It's clear that not all candidates have an understanding of either the sequence or nature of the enquiry. In Q3b however a significant proportion of candidates did not understand the distinction between qualitative techniques and quantitative ones. Even though Examiners allowed questionnaires as quantitative (closed questions), it was clear from many student responses that they were unfamiliar with these important fieldwork concepts.

Q3c was mixed with some very good answers at the top-end, showing ideas, e.g. repeating sampling, using group data, calibration of equipment etc. Other were less coherent, instead describing the problems in vague terms and not managing to connect their likely sources of errors to what their fieldwork was planning to do.

Q3d was the longest question on the paper. As in June 2017 there were big problems for some candidates, who seemed to have no what the concept of 'evaluate the success' meant in this context. Whilst at AS this exam does not expect a deep understanding of the scientific method and fieldwork principles a lack of awareness of the route to enquiry was often troubling. This was all too often evidenced by students describing the wrong part of the enquiry sequence. The focus for this Q was on Stage 5 (page 70) rather than the design and methods which are Stage 3-4. In this question in particular, students are still finding it troublesome to evaluate, rather than describe. Remember that the AOs are rewarding for the use of skills, rather than the skill of (fieldwork) recall which is characterised by description. In Q3 the fieldwork questions cannot simply be describe.

In other answers, there was evidence that candidates were writing what appeared to be pre-rehearsed responses, which in many instances were not specifically answering the question set.

Questions 4 and 5. These are the parallel optional aspects of this paper, where students can either chose to answer a coasts or urban-based question. As in June 2017, these were the most successful parts of the paper for many candidates, providing good answers that were detailed and specific and that matched the questions set.

Q4biii and 5biii were of note due to the fact that many candidates were able to successfully use evidence from the resource to develop their answers, showing a good understanding of the design (and problems) of recording sheets.

Q4c and Q5c were however difficult for many as the detail bar is set a little high with the 3 mark explain one reason which requires good development. Evidence showed only limited understanding of the utility of GIS, in particular its role in being able to make connections and analyse different

data sets, e.g. a historic map of the coastline vs a more contemporary overlay.