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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In Geography (WGE02)
Paper 2: Geographical Investigations

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Introduction

This was the fifth sitting of WGE02 Geography Investigations and whilst the entry remains small, the standard of responses seems to show continual improvement.

The fieldwork in Q3 this series was somewhat mixed. A proportion of candidates explained their results and conclusions rather than evaluating the success of their investigation. As a result, their answers were self-penalising. Conversely, there were also some very good fieldwork answers which were judgemental and reflective.

Overall however, there continues to be a marked improvement over time for many candidates.

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 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.
- A continued reminder that neither the Sample Assessment Materials nor any of the live examination papers have 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 candidates. There was variation especially in knowledge and understanding of key theoretical concepts, particularly with respect to some of the more technical physical geography, e.g. geology in Q1.

- 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 there was a tendency to write "all I know" rather than giving a focus on the part of the enquiry pathway that was being examined. For this question, some 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, many candidates just describing and explaining, rather than a focus on assessment or evaluation when appropriate. The AOs remain very important for this assessment as in previous series.

QUESTION BY QUESTION FEEDBACK

Q1 had a focus on the Crowded Coasts part of the specification (Topic 2.3). As in previous series, these questions will always be about responding to the resources which have been provided, i.e. the coastal ecosystems 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.

Q1(a)(ii) was mixed. Evidence from the photograph resource must be explicit or at least inferred ("**..... shown in the photograph**") , rather than generalised around development *per say*. Remember for the second mark the response needs to show a clear extension and linking words such as "**because**" are often useful in helping to secure 2/2.

Q1(b) presented a challenge for many. It seemed for the majority there was a lack of clear understanding about geology as well as other factors that might impact of rates of coastal recession. Some of the better answers included, for example:

- Clear separation showing understanding of lithology and structure, rather more than just "**hard vs soft**".
- There was an understanding that rates of erosion vary from place to place, providing located evidence to support the assessment.
- Able to see that lithology is much less important on depositional coasts, e.g. places where spits are found and transport and deposition are more important

Many also found it problematic to “**evaluate**” instead treating more of a case-study question, in which case their answers ended up too descriptive. For a few discordant and concordant coasts, were for many, a distraction over the role of lithology and coastal engineering for instance.

Q2, by comparison had a focus on the Urban Problems part of the specification (Topic 2.4. Again, this threw up some similar difficulties for some candidates as in **Q1**. Most however were able to use the photograph resource to identify cranes and new / modern buildings.

Q2(a)(ii) in many respects was similar to **Q1(a)(ii)**.

Many candidates clearly had the right intention but often didn’t specify the particular elements based on from the image of regeneration in Dublin. Vague and generic ideas like “pollution” without context, e.g. dust / noise / water etc caused by construction for example did not get reward.

In **Q2(b)** some good answers which clearly understood benefits, identifying some of the different players or groups using a clear geographical conceptual framework such as for example, social, economic or environmental advantages. As in previous years, the best answers had 1-2 well-chosen places (could be within the same city), with a good level of detail, e.g. supporting data / evidence. The best answers recognised that regeneration is often complex, creating different winners and losers. Assessment was often interpreted as simply ‘**another problem is....**’ and only relatively few candidates really focused on deeper understanding through analysis or assessment, i.e. recognising that benefits may be difficult to determine, or the fact that advantages of regeneration can vary spatially etc. Closure on the assessment and the AO2 can be effectively delivered through very short 1 or 2 sentence conclusions.

Q3 was the compulsory fieldwork question, examining the fieldwork that the candidates have done themselves (often termed “**familiar**” fieldwork in the UK home GCSE and AS specifications). As in previous series, **Q3(a)** was mostly very successful, with most able to show good understanding of a title (or idea) and linking it to the potential risks.

Q3(b) was mostly well understood, with the majority recognising the meaning of “quantitative” in relation to primary fieldwork and data collection. Some were self-penalising in terms of not providing sufficient development of ideas, therefore getting 2 or 3 out of a maximum of 4.

Q3(c) be was mostly successful with some good development around specific sources, e.g. local planning documents, newspapers, GIS and then how that helps for instance to plan the fieldwork locations as well as provide a context for the enquiry.

Q3(d) remains the longest question on the paper. As in previous series there were big challenges for some candidates, who seemed to have no real understanding of the command '**evaluate**'. Whilst at AS this exam does not expect a deep understanding of the scientific method and fieldwork principles. Yet a lack of awareness of the route to enquiry was often troubling, especially in the context of an evaluation in relation to the investigation focus. This was all too often evidenced by candidates describing the wrong part of the enquiry sequence. The focus for this Question was on **Stage 6 and Stage 1 (pages 69-70)** rather than the design and methods which are **Stage 3-4 (page 69)**. For this question, candidates are still finding it troublesome to evaluate, preferring instead to list and describe fieldwork techniques. Remember that the AOs are rewarding for this evaluation and analysis skill, rather than the skill of (fieldwork) recall which is characterised by description.

In **Question 3** the fieldwork questions cannot simply be describe, and candidates should be reminded of this.

As in other series, 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 final, parallel optional aspects of this paper, where candidates can either chose to answer coasts or urban-based question. As in previous series, these were some of the most successful parts of the paper for many candidates, providing good answers that were detailed and specific and that matched the questions set.

Q4(a) and **Q5(a)** produced some excellent results from the majority, being able to offer sensible and well-evidenced criticisms of the resource provided.

Q4(b) and **5(b)** were also mostly good quality, with the vast majority managing to get 2 marks for linking sample size to reliability for instance. The third mark on these sorts of questions is always going to be more challenging since it involves additional development without introducing other reasons. However, a proportion of candidates were successful and provided a well-reasoned and well-developed set of ideas linked to sample size.

Q4(bc)(i)-(ii) and **Q5(c)(i)-(ii)** were mostly successful showing how these number skills must have been practised allowing confidence in the exam. Remember the mathematical skills out outlined in **Appendix 1**.

Q4(d) and **Q5(d)** were troublesome for many instead describing what they saw on the photographs rather than think about specific advantages.