Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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

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Introduction
This was the sixth sitting of WGE02 Geography Investigations and whilst the entry remains small, the standard of responses seems to show continual improvement. The fieldwork in Q3d this series was somewhat mixed. A proportion of candidates explained their focused on techniques and methods, although the majority were able to link their ideas to the correct part of the enquiry sequence. Those that focussed too much on data collection rather than what they had found produced answers were self-penalising. There were also some very good fieldwork answers which were judgemental and reflective and showed some understanding of reliability and accuracy.   Overall however, there continues to be a marked improvement over time for many candidates and schools.

It should be noted at this point however that the success of this "familiar" part of the fieldwork (Q3) really does depend on how suitable the fieldwork is that is set-up by the school itself. Sometimes it's simply too ambitious and unanswerable, e.g. those students who find themselves investigation the impacts of London's Crossrail or similar large-scale projects which are, as yet, incomplete. Schools would be well advised to review the manageability and appropriateness of their fieldwork, particularly whether it is actually possible to reach a realistic conclusion give the location, scale and data collection methods.

AS in previous series, 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 an Q5).
AS a reminder, schools 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 notice that neither the Sample Assessment Materials nor the 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 provide some observations in terms of candidate performance which centres should be mindful in future preparation of candidates for this exam. These 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 (structure) in Q1aii.
- Although stimulus response material was provided some 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. This remains more the case in Q4 and Q5, rather than in earlier parts of this paper.
- Some candidates had a poor knowledge and understanding of the fieldwork questions, especially Q3d when there was a tendency to write generically around fieldwork and their data collection experiences. Instead they need to give explicit focus on the part of the enquiry pathway that is being examined. For this question, some failed to get into the L2 or L3 mark band as their answers were simply too simple and non-specific in terms of places and outcomes.
- 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

Question 1 had a focus on the Crowded Coasts part of the specification (Topic 2.3). As in previous series, these questions are about responding to the resources which have been provided, i.e. the coastal zones map 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. Q1aii was overall poorly delivered. There were lots of answers around hard and soft rocks, even explanations of concordant and discordant headlines. Only a minority, however, were able to explain the link between structure (i.e. joints, bedding planes, weaknesses etc) and its rate or vulnerability to erosion.

Q1b also presented a challenge for several candidates. Often there was a lack of clear understanding about the sediment cell concept in terms of inputs and outputs etc. The mark scheme identifies these as AO1. It also

indicates that these ideas would be particularly important in respect of AO2, i.e. the interpretation, assessment and judgment ideas.

- *Most agree the systems approach is a great help coastal managers and planners and is a modern approach*
- *Coastal systems are very complex, and some would argue that the sediment cell concept is an oversimplification: temporally and especially spatially*
- *In reality, some sediment does get transferred between neighbouring cells therefore the utility of the concept can be questioned in terms of helping to understand coastal management / systems approach.*
- *Large features like a peninsular are often used as boundaries (littoral drift divides) between cells form a "convenience point of view" rather than and evidence-based systems theory.*
- *Littoral drift divide can occur without any dramatic change in the shape of the coast (e.g. in North Norfolk) and this position changes over time limiting the utility of the model.*

Only a few candidates attempted an "examination", i.e. some sort of evaluative assessment.   instead treating more of a case-study question, in which case their answers ended up too descriptive. Once again discordant and concordant coasts were written about, unfortunately providing a distraction over the role of a sediment cell and its linkage to a system.

Question 2, 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.   The vast majority, however, were able to use the photograph resource to identify the range of evidence linked to regeneration.
2aii was much more successful than 1aii. Many candidates were able to correctly contextualise an urban transport solution in the context of a named city. On occasions, some candidates here provided far too much detail. These are not case-study questions, merely questions requiring a stamen of explanation linking "the way", to how it has reduced urban air pollution.

In Q2b there were some very good answers which clearly understood waste management identifying some of the different reasons and approaches using a clear geographical conceptual framework. Most answers also including a valid and, in some cases, reflective comparison between developed and developing countries. As in previous years, the best answers had 1-2 well-chosen places with a good level of detail, e.g. supporting data / evidence.

The problem for most however, which acted as a barrier to L3, was that they failed to assess "how far". In other words, they didn't set waste management against a backdrop of other city problems such as housing, transport, health, education etc.   Only a few students stated that waste

management was for example, less important than urban air pollution. Examiners were not expecting too much writing on a comparative judgement, but it would have usefully been included in the conclusion allowing access to L3. Even a short, single sentence, would have provided enough evidence for the "Assess".

Question 3 was the compulsory fieldwork question, examining the fieldwork that the candidates has done themselves (often termed "familiar" fieldwork).
As in previous series, Q3a is usually rooted towards the start of the enquiry sequence. Many candidates seemed to struggle with linking a theory to what they had done. It is worth bearing in mind that examiners take a wide interpretation of theories, concepts or even assumptions that could be reasonably tested in relation to fieldwork. Its recommended that centres give more thought to this in preparation for future series.

3b 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 only score 1 or 2 out of a possible maximum of 3.

3c demonstrated mixed successes. Many had good development of specific ideas around sites, although broader locations, e.g. particular towns, areas of cities or coastal locations were less clear. Again, its key that as part of the preparation for fieldwork, centres are encouraged to share the planning and decision-making process with students so that they understand both the "why" and the "how".

Q3d remains the longest question on the paper. As in previous series there were big challenges for some candidates, who still struggle with the command 'evaluate'. Even at AS, this exam does expect a good understanding of both 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 (reliability and accuracy) 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 7 (pages 69-70) rather than the design and methods which are Stage 3-4 (page 69). For this question in particular, candidates are still finding it troublesome to evaluate, preferring instead to list and describe fieldwork techniques and events. 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 Q3 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.

As in previous series, Q4a and 5a produced some excellent results from the majority, being able to offer sensible and well-evidenced risks from the images.

Q4aii and 5aii were also mostly good quality, with the vast majority managing to get 2 or 3 marks. The fourth mark on these sorts of questions is always going to be more challenging since it involves additional development without introducing other problems. However, a proportion of candidates were successful and provided a well-reasoned and well-developed set of ideas linked to the resources provided in Q4 and Q5.

Q4bi-iii and Q5bi-iii were mostly successful showing how these number skills must have been practised allowing confidence in the exam. Also, the plotting of the pie chart was straightforward for most candidates. Remember the mathematical skills outlined in Appendix 1.

Q4c and Q5c were troublesome for many. Many candidates identified problems with the questionnaire itself, rather than thinking about the data collection and sampling. The marks scheme provides valid ideas of what should have been included.