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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2101

Pearson Edexcel International A Level

In Geography (WGE04)

Paper 4: Geographical Research

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Overview

There was a small entry for this January examination and probably an untypical one. Some candidates will be those who have been entered early for this paper in their Year 13, as is usual, whilst others may have been looking to improve on their summer centre assessed grade. There were some unusual answers that, perhaps, suggest that some candidates were underprepared for the questions posed suggesting that the latter group may have been without very much centre support. The most obvious example of this was the number of scripts that had no report structure written as seamless essays. In every cohort there are a few of these but there was a significant increase in that minority on this occasion.

In this report feedback will be organised by the sections of the generic mark scheme rather than by chosen option. This should help focus on the strengths and weaknesses of all candidates. Please note that no candidates in this cohort selected Option 2

Introduction (5 marks)

In most cases the introduction can be, in part, pre-prepared by candidates given the amount of information offered by the pre-release steers. However, it is important to focus on 'in part' because although the pre-release information marks the broad outlines of the topic. The most glaring aspect of the weaker responses was the omission of any meaningful deconstruction of the titles. For Option 1 that needed to address not only 'magnitude and frequency' but also the titles contention that 'disasters' would 'increase in the future'. For Option 3 there should have been some discussion of how 'significance' might be evaluated whilst, for Option 4, the evaluation of measuring success was necessary. A useful litmus test when preparing candidates should be whether or not the question asked is obvious after reading the introduction.

Research (15 marks)

The 'research' section offers an opportunity for candidates to gather marks despite possible weaknesses elsewhere. Even for those candidates who struggled to focus their answers in their introductions and, partly as a result of that struggled with both their analysis and conclusions, there are marks available for detailed and relevant 'case-study' based evidence. Those who had chosen to study Option 1 offered a wider range of evidence than their contemporaries managed for either of the other two options. Some selected rather oddly by choosing to include hazards that ultimately had a relatively small impact on people or even the environment and it would be sound practice to have a range of examples in the bank, leaving the final selection process of which of these to focus on

until the pre-release steers allow a clearer view of how these case studies might be deployed. In the case of Option 1 The steer should also have directed candidates and their teachers towards researching the overarching theme of magnitude and frequency. This type of background research was not always apparent and nor was it in Option 3 where the nature of the threats to cultural landscapes did not always emerge strongly from the research. Similarly, for Option 4 examples of lo-tech and intermediate technology were offered with little research evident on how reducing health risk might be evaluated.

Analysis (20 marks)

This was, for many candidates the least successful section of their report. In part that was a function of too narrow a research foundation but more often it was an inevitable consequence of a failure to address the key focus of the question asked. For Option 1 the most apparent oversight was a failure to explore how the magnitude of a disaster might be measured. Those who had prepared thoroughly, investigating disasters by teasing apart their direct impact on people's physical well-being from the inevitable impact on the economy, both long term and short term were in a much stronger position to answer the question set. Too many ignored one or other 'impact' and a significant minority restricted themselves to the quite different question of measuring the magnitude of the hazard rather than the disaster. Obviously, the concept of vulnerability was crucial here and should have been part of the research platform. For Option 3 the phrase 'most significant' should have been deconstructed in the introductory section research should have covered a sufficient range of examples to allow candidates the luxury of selecting those that were most appropriate to illustrate the significance. One or two candidates made intelligent comments about the short-term costs and benefits of tourism measured against long term impacts reducing cultural diversity comparing it with globalisation in a more general sense seen to be more invasive of cultural landscapes and diversity. Similarly, there were a few thoughtful comments about the way to measure the success of a 'solution' to a health risk including a decrease in child mortality and an increase in life-expectancy. One or two sensibly commented that intermediate technology had a very limited role to play in controlling Covid-19 although an imaginative and thoughtful exception was the candidate who referenced hand-washing and lock-down as very low-tech 'solutions' to the spread of the virus.

Conclusion and evaluation (15)

It would be simplistic to overstress the truism that the amount of time and space devoted to this 15 mark section is often best described as 'disappointing'. Nonetheless, many are brief, most are repeats of earlier comments and evaluation is often an expression of regret that more case-studies were not included, or more up-to-date data not included. It would help candidates enormously if they recalled the message that they will certainly have been told to draw together the evidence and reflect on whether the central contention of the essay has been supported or otherwise. As with other sections mark scheme familiarity would be helpful. As with the introductions the litmus test of this section would obviously be a clarity over what question is being answered. Not all would pass this test. Those that did would also be well advised to read the final bullet point of the mark scheme with care and 'recognise the complexity of the question'. That would include a reflection on the partiality of the evidence and, perhaps most critically, the validity of the definitions of the key terms. In this spirit a reflection that magnitude of hazards might not increase but the magnitude of disasters might. That was a feature of the stronger responses. Similarly, a reflection on 'significance' or 'success' and how the evaluation of these might very well vary both from place to place and from time to time would have been very useful for those tackling Option 3 and Option 4. Very few did this in this unusual cohort.

Quality of written communication (5)

There were a number of very well presented and carefully organised reports but, regrettably, a few that did not reach the usual standard. The most common errors were either a failure to write a report at all or a lack of any obvious methodology in selecting evidence. References were often quite limited but also absent altogether from a minority of scripts.

Summary

This cohort was unusual, stemming from the unusual circumstances leading to their entry. Thus, the lessons learnt may be less valuable than in previous outings. However, some messages are not new or in any way specific. Of these the most important is the need for candidates to be sensitive to the difference between the information that they carry into the examination hall and how to deploy that information to answer the question that they will be asked. That is vital.

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