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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2022

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In Geography (WGE03)
Paper 1 Contested Planet

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Introduction

This exam series for WGEO3 Contested Planet is the first with a significantly-sized entry under usual circumstances since summer 2019 after several challenging years for both Centres and candidates. All should be congratulated for meeting the challenge of preparing for and sitting this examination. Well done: there was some very interesting geography and cogent writing to be found within the answers the candidates provided. Overall the standard of answers was good suggesting sound preparation by many teachers and students.

The vast majority of answers were focussed on the questions as set, with Covid-19 barely being mentioned (it was not relevant, in almost all cases). The situation with Russia and Ukraine did feature quite prominently, however it does have relevance to Q4b and Q6 so in most cases reference to it was used wisely (if not always accurately).

It is worth stating that such potentially relevant 'ongoing events' that occur in the run-up to an exam series do benefit from some teacher (i.e. expert) input: don't leave students to glean all of their interpretations from the media.

Most candidates wrote full answers to all questions and there was limited evidence of timing problems i.e. few 'blank' answer spaces or rushed answers.

In terms of the questions that are optional:

- Question 4 Energy Security was more popular than Q5 Water Conflicts (roughly a 60/40 split).
- Question 6 Superpower Geographies was more popular than Question 7 Bridging the Development Gap, as in past exams (roughly 65/35).
- The difference in quality of answers between optional questions was small, although in Q7 knowledge of the MDGs / SDGs was quite variable.

Some overall observations:

- Data stimulus questions (those using a Figure in the Resource Booklet) are still sometimes answered with limited reference to the figure. These questions test the skill of interpreting geographical data and answers which fail to show this will score low marks.
- Some candidates still waste time describing figures, for which there are no marks: the questions always use the command words 'explain' or 'suggest reasons' i.e. *why* not *what*. This was especially true in Question 2 with often up to half a page of description of the map provided before any reasons were offered.
- Mark schemes refer to 'evidence': this can come in the form of examples, case studies, data, facts, detailed reference to places, concepts and geographical theory. This is important in terms of overall mark.
- 15 and 20 mark questions that use the command words 'assess', 'to what extent' or 'evaluate' benefit from a conclusion which is often not included in candidate answers.

Country classification

Centres should note that the country classifications used in the Specification (see page 75 of the Specification) are:

- **Developed**
- **Emerging**
- **Developing**

These divisions are based on the **Human Development Index**. Many candidates use the terms MEDC and LEDC, or HIC and LIC. These are perfectly acceptable terms to use in answers, but centres need to be aware that they will not be used in examination questions, or mark schemes.

Question 1a Atmosphere and Weather Systems

Figure 1 showed monsoon rainfall anomalies for India between 1940 and 2019. A small number of candidates interpreted the 'bars' as representing days, not years. It was common to encounter a paragraph of description at the start of answers: this is not very helpful as the question asks for explanations (command word = explain). Candidates do need to refer to the data in Figure 1, but should do so within their explanations not as a discreet description.

A small minority suggested explanations for either causes or impacts, but not both. This approach clearly has a negative impact on overall marks. The main explanations provided were those of ENSO cycles (El Nino/La Nina), global warming, deforestation changing the local water cycle and the ITCZ. The latter was frequently mentioned which was very pleasing to see. Many explained that the movement of the ITCZ is highly variable year-on-year and this could explain both above and below normal years. However, some incorrectly explained that the below average rainfall anomaly years were caused by the ITCZ being in the southern hemisphere. It was also quite common for weaker answers to explain the causes of rainfall (orographic, convectional, frontal) but these causes on their own do not explain the anomalies. The term 'anomaly' was understood well by almost all. Some explanations involving mid-latitude depressions and the mid-latitude jet-stream / Pc air masses are not applicable to South Asia. Broadly, impacts were explained quite clearly by the majority i.e. the impacts of floods or droughts on India – often correctly linked to impacts on India's megacities, water supply and especially its agricultural sector. Answers focused on trends were often more successful than ones that attempted to explain anomalies for specific years.

Question 1b Atmosphere and Weather Systems

Almost all candidates provided a full answer to this question. There was good understanding of drought and less confusion between drought and aridity than in the past. Understanding of tropical cyclone impacts was also sound. Answers frequently made reference to specific examples of drought and tropical cyclones – rather than discussing in less helpful general terms. However, this question did have an issue with the difference between governance (the word in the question) and 'government'. Although clearly closely related 'governance' and 'government' are not the same thing. Government is a body of people in control of a country or area, whereas

governance is the process of governing (decision-making) and its effectiveness. Section 3.3.3 of the Specification refers to "*The importance of governance in extreme weather management*".

Many candidates simply read the term 'governance' in the question, then used the word 'government' in their answers. Governance was rarely defined. 'Government' answers were not necessarily poor, however, they were not directly focussed on the question and many tended to be lists of 'what governments do' rather than an assessment of governance as one factor among many. A minority of the 'government' answers drifted into answering a different question about 'players' i.e. which players are the most important. Other factors were not mentioned – but these are important in terms of AO2. That said, many answers did focus on the quality of governance and referred to issues such as corruption: strong answers also assessed other factors such as level of development, foreign aid and prediction before coming to a conclusion.

A small number of answers focussed almost entirely on one case study (usually Hurricane Katrina from 2005) but lacking a contrast, tended to be descriptive. It's worth noting a very wide divergence of opinion as to whether Katrina represents a 'success' or 'failure' in terms of governance ! If you would like to explore governance in more detail, this link to the World Bank is a good starting point: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>

Question 2 Biodiversity under Threat

Figure 2 is a map showing percentage of terrestrial area protected in 2018 by global region. More so than in Question 1a, candidates often wasted time with a long-winded description of what they could see on Figure 2. Please try and encourage candidates to move straight into reasons – they should refer to Figure 2 within their reasoning / explanation of course.

The majority could provide a range of reasons for the data, however, there was some confusion about which regions were developed / emerging / developing in a minority of answers.

Very importantly, as this is a data stimulus question, reasons provided need to be linked the regions on Figure 2. Some answers provided only general paragraphs of reasoning that did not make specific reference to 'Europe' or 'South Asia'.

It's worth noting that there is no 'simple' pattern on Figure 2. Some candidates saw a clear developed versus developing pattern which is not supported; equally the pattern is not related to the position of the equator. Some reasoning was based on the level of biodiversity (or number of 'hotspots') in regions: this is one possible reason but by no means the only reason. Equally, the data can't be explained purely by level of development / available income for protection. Some other points worth noting:

- Biodiversity may be low in deserts / tundra areas – but that does not mean it is not worth protecting, or indeed is not protected: it may be that threats are lower in underpopulated, isolated places.
- Drought / hazards don't affect biodiversity over medium to long-timescales: hazards have been around much longer than humans.
- Simplistic statements such as 'not educated enough in south Asia' are just that, simplistic and stereotypical and need to be avoided.

Candidates really need to be trained to ask questions of the Figures in the Resource Booklet i.e. "is the pattern related to development level?" "is the pattern related to biodiversity level?"and then think about what the answers are.

Having said all of the above, most candidates provided a good range of reasons linked to perhaps 3 or 4 regions from the map related to pressure to industrialise / urbanise / farm (South Asia), prioritizing resource extraction (Russia), changed attitudes to the environment /post-industrial economies (Europe) or pressure to conserve / globally important biomes (Latin America).

Question 3 Synoptic

The key point here is that this question was answered well by many. Both globalisation and biodiversity were usually understood, and very frequently defined at the start of the answer: this is helpful to candidates especially when they have to find links between two concepts.

The question uses the command phrase '*to what extent*' which points toward the idea that globalisation could be causing all, most, some or no destruction of biodiversity i.e. a spectrum of possible answers. In addition, what other factors might be destroying biodiversity? Many answers recognised this and argued that globalisation was responsible but that population growth and demand for resources were also to blame. A majority argued that globalisation could actually help protect biodiversity by increasing awareness and cooperation (although this argument was a little over-blown in some cases, as biodiversity loss globally is not slowing or reversing).

The best answers focussed on globalisation as a process: improvements in transport and connectivity, trade growth, rising tourism, offshoring by TNCs and the global shift. Once answers focussed on these changes they tended to clearly explain how globalisation affects biodiversity. Weaker answers sometimes:

- Confused economic development with globalisation (related yes, the same no)
- Focussed on a somewhat amorphous 'pollution' and 'global warming' but not linked to globalisation.
- Quickly drifted away from globalisation and into wider 'threats'
- Lack of a link to *biodiversity* specifically; more a rather general 'environment'.

There were some interesting points about developed countries exporting pollution to the emerging world (global shift), and hence also exporting loss of biodiversity.

Question 4a Energy Security and Question 5a Water Conflicts

These 5-mark data stimulus option questions are usually answered quite well, although as in the past a minority simply describe what they can see without providing any reasons. When reasons are provided these must be linked to some data / information from the Figure.

Q4a was about providing reasons for change: Belgium's use of oil does not change so focussing on this aspect of Figure 3 was problematic. In Q5a it was common for candidates to provide reasons for changes to Singapore's

water use (population growth, changing attitudes to the environment, desire to be more water secure) but not link these to Figure 4. Phrases like 'attitudes have changed' on their own do not provide sufficient detail to show understanding of what has changed.

Question 4b Energy Security

This question focussed on international energy pathways. Most candidates had a good understanding of what these might be i.e. oil and gas pipelines, electricity interconnectors, oil and gas marine tankers, rail and road. In addition, energy security was quite often defined in terms of energy affordability, accessibility and reliability of supply. The concept of domestic versus foreign energy sources was also frequently referred to.

A significant number of answers provided examples of situations where energy pathways had been disrupted and this had reduced energy security for importing countries. However, many answers did not proceed further so that they showed good understanding (AO1) but had less evaluation, analysis and interpretation (AO2). Stronger answers went on to argue that some pathways were in fact quite secure e.g. Canada's exports to the USA, or that increasing reliance on domestic renewable energy reduced dependency on imports and therefore increased energy security. This 'other view' is very important for Level 3 and Level 4 marks.

Perhaps inevitably there was an over-reliance from some candidates on the Ukraine-Russia situation and Europe's gas supply i.e. one large case study with limited AO2. Often this style of answer had a confused time-line in terms of Russian actions in 2006 and 2009 on Ukraine's gas supply, the Crimea invasion in 2014 and the events of 2022. There was also confusion over whether Nord Stream I and II were gas or oil pipelines. A minority of candidates were unaware of what international energy pathways are and these answers tended to discuss energy 'players' (TNCs, OPEC, consumers) rather than pathways (although sometimes pathways appeared more by luck than judgement).

Question 5b Water Conflicts

A slightly less popular choice than Q4b, but in some cases suffering from the same over-reliance on one large case study e.g. the Three Gorges Dam or Grand Renaissance Dam. In essay questions it is generally much more useful in terms of generating an argument or discussion to use a number of smaller contrasting examples rather than one large usually descriptive case study.

A small number of candidates answered Q5b by relying on Figure 4 from question 5a. This is not the purpose of Figure 4 which is only for Q5a. While the majority of answers were largely about dams, water transfers and desalination plants a number started with off with the idea of hard and soft engineering as their answer framework: these answers were not successful in almost all cases because by definition major engineering schemes are 'hard' and it was unclear what 'soft' was in candidate answers. It's worth noting that some relied on the Aral Sea. This is a problematic case study in the context of a question about water supply as even in the 1960s the brackish Aral Sea was not a source of fresh drinking water (the two rivers feeding the sea were) and the restored part today is too salty to be used as

drinking water. The restoration of part of the sea has rejuvenated the local fishing industry to some extent, however.

Slightly disappointing was how infrequently answers considered other methods of securing water supply that do not involve large scale engineering. The most obvious is water conservation -which can be engineered, as in Singapore, but is more often localised or domestic in nature. Equally small-scale, local, intermediate technology schemes could have been considered as alternatives: pumpkin tanks in Sri Lanka were the most often used example.

Question 6 Superpower Geographies

As in the past, this was a popular question. It was often answered successfully, but a problem for a minority was a lack of understanding of the key term 'sphere of influence'. This term was rarely defined. This is the part of the Specification being tested (3.7.3):

- **Enquiry question:** What spheres of influence are contested by superpowers and what are the implications of this?
- **Detailed content:** Global influence is contested in a number of different economic and geographical spheres. Tensions can arise over the acquisition of physical resources where ownership is disputed or over perceived geographical spheres of influence.

Spheres of influence are spaces that are not directly controlled by a country (the country does not have sovereignty) but the country feels they have some right to influence policy in those spaces. This is most commonly understood to be a physical geographical space i.e. a region of land or ocean, but spheres of influence can be economic (see 3.7.3.2) or even cultural.

Some answers began with the 'pillars' of superpower status idea as their structure, and others with hard versus soft power, but in both cases these structures often did not lead to a discussion of spheres of influence but rather what makes a superpower, a superpower (a different question altogether). Stronger answers did try to define 'sphere of influence' often not very clearly but quickly moved on to consider some disputed spheres e.g. the Arctic, South China Sea, Middle East or eastern Europe and the implications of this. In general there was far too much on the Russia-Ukraine situation and often rather too much history rather than contemporary geography. While some historical perspective is useful (Cold War) long stories about the 1945-1990 era did not answer the question. There is no doubt that this question was high demand. The real challenge was to consider 'economic prosperity' and 'geopolitical stability'. Most did try to do this but most often in terms of 'economic prosperity and geopolitical stability' as one thing rather than two separate things. The best answers referred to them separately, and the very best (rare) considered other threats i.e. the long-term threat of climate change or pandemics as potentially more disruptive than disputes over territory.

Question 7 Bridging the Development Gap

Of all the questions on this exam paper this one was the most polarising. It was slightly surprising how many candidates had a very limited

understanding of the MDGs and SDGs. In the Specification 3.8.3 makes direct reference to both:

- Progress against the 2000-2015 Millennium Development Goals reveal significant differences in terms of overall development progress, and toward specific targets (progress of MDGs in a named country).
- The Post-2015 Development Agenda (Sustainable Development Goals) provides a global framework for national action towards sustainable development in the future.

A surprising number of answers made no reference at all to the MDGs and SDGs and simply discussed the development gap – and solutions to it – in general terms. Specific details about a named country's progress or details about specific MDG targets was rare. There was lots of consideration of other ways to reduce the gap in many answers such as FDI, the work of NGOs, top-down and bottom-up development projects and fairtrade but in many cases not a lot about the MDGs and SDGs. A minority misunderstood the agendas as being focussed in short term / emergency aid. That said, there were some very good answers that considered specific targets such as universal primary education or eliminating hunger and poverty and had some supporting data. These answers often recognised the non-binding nature of goals / targets and the crucial importance of supporting finance from the developed world. Some strong answers argued convincingly that the pandemic and looming food crisis were external shocks that could easily and quickly derail progress.

Exam format reminder

It is important to understand that the examination question types and mark tariffs for WGE03 **do not** vary from one examination series to the next. However, within Sections A, B and C the questions **will vary** from one series to another. This variation is random and does not conform to a pattern.

Some important points to note are:

- In Section A, Question 3 is a synoptic question and it will always be a 15-mark essay question.
- In Section A, there will always be a 10-mark data stimulus question on both A1 Atmosphere and A2 Biodiversity. The 15-mark essay question could be on either A1 or A2.
- In any exam series, Section B will either consist of a 5-mark stimulus question plus a 15-mark essay question, or a 20-mark essay question.
- Section C will be the opposite structure to Section B in any given examination series.

Please see the WGE03 Contested Planet Assessment Guide for further details:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/International%20Advanced%20Level/Geography/2016/Teaching%20and%20learning%20materials/Contested-Planet-Unit-3-WGE03-Assessment-Guide.pdf>

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