

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

International GCSE
Geography 4GE0_01

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General Comments

This examination saw an expanded entry of both home and overseas candidates, a higher mean mark and a greater proportion of A*/A-C grades than the 2011 examination. The very large proportion of these higher grades is testimony to the quality of the entry. The spread of marks was slightly smaller than in 2011 as the percentage of A*/A grades did fall.

The general improvement in performance in the mid-range of candidate ability (grade C) was largely due to the better preparedness for fieldwork questions, especially items 1c, 2c and 3c. It was evident that large numbers of candidates had actually investigated first-hand the quality of river water, the sediments along a beach profile, the temperature of the air and the speed and direction of the wind. This bodes well for the introduction of the revised specification for first examination in 2014 with its greater emphasis on fieldwork.

There, however, remains scope for improvement in the answering of finale items (part (d)) where a named case study as per the specification was generally sought. Teachers are advised to encourage candidates to offer more specific detail applicable to their named study and to focus more precisely on meeting the demands of the command words of the question i.e. not just explain but perhaps, how or why also. Too many part (d) answers identify an appropriate case study but then proceed to write a loosely related non-Level 3 response full of generalities.

The practice of setting 2-mark definition items again proved effective in allowing candidates to show differentiation.

It is pleasing to report that despite an approximately 15% rise in the candidature the number of candidates exceeding the allotted answering space did not rise from the 2011 amount. This remains a significant amount and teachers are advised to emphasise to their students that clear, concise responses can and do achieve maximum marks. The manner in which candidates handle question choice and avoid rubric offences suggests that advice and examination preparation points are followed carefully by candidates.

Question-specific Comments

Section A : The Natural Environment and People

Question 1 – River environments

This was the second most popular of the three questions in this section of the paper. As a topic well covered in many existing curricula much of the content is well understood by candidates. Those opting for the question tended to score reasonably well. Surprisingly though some did fail to give either the correct or any compass direction in (a)(ii); downstream figured in some answers. The other items in (a) posed no problems for almost all candidates. There was the expected range of quality in the attempts to define a flood plain with 1-mark answers being more common than the full and accurate definition required for maximum marks. Meandering and oxbow lakes (item (b)(ii)) were generally well understood though many failed to develop the erosional breakthrough across the meander neck sufficiently for maximum marks. The factors behind rising water demand were familiar to most candidates; developing these sufficiently into 2-mark full reasons did discriminate some candidates. There was wide variation in quality in the responses on rivers fieldwork (item (c)) but overall the responses were better than in 2011; practical methodology and field and follow-up techniques were quite in evidence. Many offered creditworthy diagrams. Item (d) called on an identified case study and the choice made was often crucial in the mark attained. There were many top level responses on the Three Gorges project where distinct advantages and disadvantages had been clearly learnt.

Question 2 – Coastal environments

This was the least popular of the Section A questions though it did have a substantial take-up. The vast majority of candidates scored highly in part (a) but experienced greater difficulties in part (b). Candidates found accessing maximum marks in items (b)(i) and (ii) more difficult than they did in the equivalent items of Question 1; estuary and beach formation proved more challenging than flood plain and ox bow lake formation. Comprehensive accounts of beach formation were relatively rare. Item (b)(iii) on the ecosystem threats from economic development was generally well done. As with rivers fieldwork the responses on beach field investigations though varying from centre to centre, did tend to be better than those offered in the 2011 examination. The finale case study item in this coastal question did generate a wide variety in response quality. Marks tended to be

lower than in question item 1(d). Too many responses lacked focus on the demands of the question set; these called for explanation of actual named management strategies. Only a minority of candidates properly addressed this focus. Too many candidates wrote about growing conditions and the threats and issues facing their chosen ecosystem. Description often took precedence over explanation. Total scores for Question 1 were generally the lowest in Section A.

Question 3 : Hazardous environments

This was the most popular question in Section A and frequently scored well though many got off to a disappointing start in part (a). Surprisingly large numbers erroneously identified wind direction as north-easterly in item (a)(i) but went on to correctly answer items (a)(ii) and (iii). Item (a)iv) generated a wide variety of feasible impacts from solar dimming to water pollution, including air travel disruption. Part (b) was generally high scoring with most candidates appreciating the concept of volcanic activity, being stimulated into constructive margins processes from Figure 3 and being able to rationalise humans populating plate margins despite the risks. Reasons for the latter were often more realistic than such textbook suggestions as geothermal energy and mineral wealth. Item (b)(ii) did lead to some candidates referring wrongly to destructive plate margins and saw too few referring to shield volcanoes. The weather data collection and recording fieldwork (item (c)) had clearly been undertaken by the majority of candidates, and done well in many cases if judged by their examination responses. There were many good descriptions of the appropriate technology, both digital and traditional and its use, including sampling, standardising and reliability. Recording often got overlooked and some candidates did stray beyond wind and temperature, and did in a few instances unnecessarily link weather measurement to volcanic areas. Item (d) was a good case in point as to how to answer a case study question well or badly. Weak answers either addressed non-tectonic events such as tropical storms and/or dealt with hazard management schemes such as evacuations or hazard impacts such as death tolls. Good answers chose an earthquake, tsunami or volcanic eruption and explained how its impacts were affected by hazard management. Some of the best answers evaluated the management strategies applying to the Kobe earthquake or the Pinatubo eruption.

Section B : People and their Environments

Question 4: Economic activity and energy

This was a popular choice of question with almost all candidates handling items (a)(i)-(iii) competently and the majority appreciating that item (a)(iv) was about the impacts and response to de-industrialisation. There were some excellent responses on unemployment and regeneration, including the movement into the tertiary sector. The positive effects were often illustrated with named industrial examples. There were some candidates who did not correctly identify a valid de-industrialised city/region. The concept of informal employment was usually well known with most candidates being able to list some key characteristics ((b)(i)) and suggest why people in LICs often did those jobs ((b)(ii)). Few candidates obtained maximum marks on (b)(ii) either because they failed to get to grips with the word, "importance" or because their responses were unbalanced with regard to primary sector and informal employment. The role of the primary sector in the national economy was largely ignored. Surprisingly, a significant number of candidates left the bar completion exercise (item (c)(i)) blank. Sufficient accuracy was not always present among those that did complete. On the whole, however, item (c)(ii) was answered well with many candidates accessing Level 2 marks and typically offering a statement by statement approach.. Those reaching the top level used Figure 4b data, including the undecided responses and made reference to the broad pattern of change with generic conclusions and commentary. Greater use of their own fieldwork findings would have further enhanced the quality of answers. Item 4(d) was generally quite well answered with the candidates generally appreciating that we accept a broad range of industries as sufficiently high-tech e.g. car assembly and any industry with manufacturing in its production chain e.g. biotechnology R & D. Most candidates focussed their responses on location factors, often discussed generically e.g. M4 corridor, Cambridge Science Park, rather than tackle the issue of their growth. There were some good examples of case study knowledge e.g. Lucky Goldstar but often not deployed as well as could have been for question set.

Question 5 : Ecosystems and rural environments

This was the least popular question in this section. Candidates tended to start well with maximum marks for items (a)(i) and (ii) but (a)(iii) and (iv) did confuse some who saw "... income and "... investment" in

the flow diagram (Figure 5a) as evidence of commercial farming. Most candidates recognised the effects of food shortages on migration, death rates and rural population structure and scored well in item (b)(i). Equally, (b)(ii) scored positively with many knowing different methods to increase food production. The best responses indicated how the stated methods worked to raise production. Case study material though not required was offered by some. It is worth pointing out aid alone is not a creditable method. Most candidates not missing out item (c)(i) scored full marks though the quality of the arrows and/or labels often left something to be desired. There was evidence of both carelessness and ingenuity e.g. keys from the bullet point list on this item. Candidates' responses to item (c)(ii) were generally disappointing; the concept of a system appeared to not be particularly well understood by many candidates. Candidates used the information from Figure 5b quite well and there was a general recognition of the relationship between different aspects of the farm but few referenced input, process and output or the term, "operation." The need for further fieldwork was a very rarity in the responses. The responses to item (d) were very varied. There was the usual problem in case study questions, that of a valid name, but more significantly was the problem of relating their prior learning to the demands of the question set i.e. the reasons for selection not management. It was a why question. Few went beyond the physical and ecological value reasons into other aspects of the area's importance and uniqueness. Lack of place-specific detail was often striking.

Question 6 : Urban environments

This was a very popular and high-scoring option. Part (a) appeared to pose few difficulties for most candidates who were familiar with the term, mega-city ((a)(iv)) and whose answers recognised the problems associated with mega-cities and rapid urbanisation. Some candidates unfortunately, gave single word answers to (a)(iii) e.g. crime, pollution ... which were in need of development so that it was implicitly problematic e.g. increased crime. The majority of candidates knew the difference between greenfield and brownfield sites and were able to give good definitions and examples of the characteristics of each type of site e.g. derelict factories. However, many did not compare the sites as per the question wording e.g. contrasting locations so not reaching maximum marks. Candidates needed to be aware that item (b)(ii) related to HICs and to inner cities only; this was not always the case. However, many were conversant with inner city regeneration in places like the London Docklands, the London Olympic Park and Sheffield's Don Valley and described new developments there, often referring to re-imaging and re-branding. The best answers put these redevelopments in the

context of what was there before redevelopment. Item (c)(i) proved as expected very straightforward though some were penalised for careless plotting. Generally, the responses to (c)(ii) were pleasing with candidates interpreting the data to make statements drawing out the patterns of difference between the urban zones. Better responses provided conclusions by means of justified statements. Few candidates made any reference to their own fieldwork. There were some excellent responses to the finale item ((d)) with the vast majority of candidates appreciating that and why shanty towns surround many LIC cities. The link between shanty towns and rural-to-urban migration was frequently well made and developed. Equally, the “why” demand in the question enabled candidates to refer to the different factors behind edge of HIC city developments. The best answers showed good understanding of the different ways that cities grow without any recourse to case study knowledge. Candidates were often stronger on one of HICs or LICs but examples of characteristics from one of the two types of city edge was sufficient for Level 3 credit.

Section C : Global Issues

Question 7 : Fragile environments

This question was the most popular in this section with most candidates gaining the first 3 marks though centres are reminded that item (a)(i) required units of measurement in a creditable answer. (a)(iv) discriminated very effectively for a 2-mark item with the better answers giving two distinctive weather/climate changes and others offering either one or two non-weather/climate changes, especially sea level rise. Item (b)(i) was generally not well answered with many candidates offering reasons relating to the enhanced greenhouse effect e.g. methane from livestock or melting permafrost. Only the better candidates knew of solar or orbital change. Some candidates confused mitigation and adaptation with regard to global warming so that clear methods of adaptation were often absent from responses to item (b)(iii). Sound explanations regarding mitigation difficulties were fairly frequent in response to (b)(ii); these were too often repeated in (b)(iii). The effects of desertification were generally well enough explained with the better responses developing their argument into migration and its impact on both origin and destination areas, and offering place-specific examples, frequently from the Sahel. The finale item (d) was an effective differentiator with almost all candidates being able to at least list some valid deforestation factors and the most able offering a range of fully developed reasons, often linked to economic development. Amazonia was the favoured named area. Generally, the question was well answered.

Question 8 : Globalisation and migration

This question was less popular than question 7 but a little more so than question 9. Part (a) again proved as expected straightforward for practically all candidates with maximum or near-maximum being gained. Voluntary migration ((b)(i)) and the workings of the push-pull model ((b)(ii)) were other fruitful sources of marks for most candidates. Some candidates very effectively offered a mini-case study e.g. Mexico-USA international migration to explain the effects of push and pull factors. Item (b)(iii) presented candidates with their first real challenge in this question. Many candidates were able to identify general problems associated, usually with immigration e.g. lack of jobs but few raised the genuine management issues around the question of international migration e.g. refugees; skilled labour. Maximum marks for (b)(iii) were rare. Item (c) was about how the global shift of manufacturing to Asia Pacific, including India and China as large beneficiaries has changed the global economy. Less place-specific wording in the question would have improved it but nevertheless, candidates coped well with the question set. Level 3 marks were attained from good understanding of global shift, today's globalised economy and the emergence of India or China without the need for case study knowledge of Chinese or Indian manufacturing. For a finale item not necessarily requiring case study information, (d) produced disappointing outcomes. A significant number of candidates neither defined "sustainable" nor seemed to implicitly know what it meant. The best answers offered a critique of a sustainable tourism project e.g. ecotourism, which included the extent of its sustainability. Good answers also came from candidates who addressed the sustainability changes being introduced into traditionally non-sustainable tourist resorts e.g. Benidorm, Spain. Too many candidates did little more than list tourist initiatives some of which were tenuously sustainable.

Question 9 : Development and human welfare

Fewer candidates opted for this question than they did questions 7 and 8. Part (a) scored very well, especially items (ii) and (iii). The absence of the word, year prevented some candidates from gaining the mark in item (i). Most candidates had a rough idea of the meaning of GDP and were awarded 1 mark; full and accurate definitions were offered by a substantial number of stronger candidates. Item (b)(ii) was generally well answered. Distinctive development indicators were well known by most and adequately described by a majority of candidates. The changing distribution of global development has challenged students in previous examinations. To some extent this was again true in item (b)(iii). Many candidates knew NICs and developing LICs, and recession in

the HICs; only the better candidates appreciated the gradual breakdown of the traditional North-South pattern. Those candidates did describe two distinctive changes to gain maximum marks. Intra-urban contrasts were well explained by some candidates in item (c) who introduced a range of contributory factors often in the context of a named city that they had studied. Weaker candidates tended to restrict their responses to LICs/NICs as per Figure 9b and the contrasts between shanty town quality of life and developments in other urban areas of such countries. Item (d) generated very large numbers of responses about China's one-child policy but their case study knowledge was not always used to best effect. Many candidates simply recalled their case study learning and gained Level 2 marks but without directly referring to the impacts of the policy on Chinese population change needed for a Level 3 mark.

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