



General Certificate of Education

Geography 2030

Specification

GEOG2 Geographical Skills

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - June series

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General

This was the first June sitting of GEOG2 as part of the new AQA GCE Geography specification. The only comparative reference materials which centres had access to were the specimen paper and the January 2009 paper.

The paper itself was worth 50 marks in total; 25 marks were available for Geographical Skills (taken from page 16 of the Specification). The 'vehicle' through which the skills are examined is always either the Core Physical Section (Rivers, floods and management) or Core Human Section (Population Change). In this paper Rivers, floods and management was the topic area which all candidates should have been taught by the time they sit the paper should all have been taught the Core Physical Section. There are always 6 marks allocated to Assessment Objective One (Page 18 Specification) for this paper. This means that some content, concepts and processes have to be examined in each skills paper, making it advantageous to have studied the core units before the examination. This is more of an issue for those wishing to use the January sitting of the Geog 2 module.

This year the theme for the first question was flooding on the River Severn, around the Shrewsbury area of Shropshire. The paper was similar in demand to the January 2009 series with many candidates scoring well in this section. Centres may have noted the final question in Section A was based on a piece of text about flood management. This was a similar style and layout to the January 2009 final question on China's ageing population. Centres must not assume that this is part of wider pattern for the structure of the paper. It was merely coincidence that both papers ended their Section A with a text based stimulus.

The second part of the paper (worth 25 marks) was a series of linked fieldwork questions; five in total on this paper. The questions had to be sufficiently broad to allow all candidates who had undertaken a range of physical and human themes, fair and equal access to the paper. The basis for the questions is always in the Skills Checklist found on page 16 of the Specification. It was very pleasing to see so many candidates having undertaken a wide variety of enquiries. River studies were very common again, as in the January 2009 series. Although fieldwork should come from some part of the AS Specification some responses showed at best only a very tenuous link to the Specification. In terms of the development of the fieldwork section of the paper, it is also important to note that questions will vary in every series. This is in order to reduce the formulaic nature and potential predictability of writing about fieldwork. If candidates have undertaken a full piece of fieldwork and experienced all aspects of the subsequent write-up, they will have every chance of being successful in the examination. Centres are therefore advised to use model answers with care when preparing their students for the examination.

As the paper evolves over the next few years and as we examine the full range of skills, candidates will be expected to undertake more practical activities linked to the Skills Checklist (p.16 Specification). It will be essential that all candidates bring appropriate equipment into the examination such as a sharp pencil, ruler, compass, protractor and calculator. It is also important to note that over the lifetime of the specification, all AS skills in the specification will be examined. Clearly different skills come with different level of challenge and candidates will be required to meet the demands of all skills. It was disappointing note that many candidates failed to use a ruler and pencil in this paper as in January. Allowances were made for this but on the scatter graph some lost easy marks due to a lack of correct equipment. In future examinations candidates will not be able to access parts of the paper without appropriate equipment.

Question 1

1(a)(i) The divergent bar graph was completed with varying levels of success. Some missed the fact that each small square represented 2.5 percent rainfall variation in relation to norm. The key here is to pay attention to detail. Those that did, scored a relatively easy 2 marks. On this occasion, allowances were made for those who failed to use a ruler.

1(a)(ii) There were a huge variety of ways to score full marks on this paper and provided candidates compared differences between the 2007 data and the previous 3 years, credit was awarded. However, this question was also a good differentiator, with a significant amount of misreading reading of either the graph or the question itself. A minority of candidates referred to single years, rather than making a comparison with the previous 3 years. Many quoted figures inaccurately. Also some missed out the units / percentages when quoting figures and this continues to be a problem. However, those who did engage with the task scored well.

1 (b) (i) This was generally well answered though some candidates self penalised by not using sharp pencils or rulers. The topic was well understood by students but accuracy was sometimes poor. Some drew the best fit line through the origin which was not accepted.

1 (b) (ii) Most got a mark referring to the idea of positive correlation between rainfall and discharge. There were a variety of ways of accessing the second mark. Some qualified the first statement and elaborated on the positive correlation idea. Others referred to anomalies or used to data to qualify their correlation. These approaches were all accepted. Candidates should realise that if there are two marks available, under normal circumstances, two points need to be made. For example many candidates wrote "There is a positive correlation" and nothing else.

1(b) (iii) This was a good differentiator. While many had drawn a good best fit line, many responses failed to show how this had been derived. There were many examples of only a vague awareness of how to construct the Line of Best Fit. Better responses referred to an equal number of points either side of the line with a rejection of anomalies or outliers. These sorts of responses were credited.

1(c) Many candidates scored well on this question. The most frequent reason suggested, linked the flooding to the development of the flood plain. If only one reason was developed a maximum of three marks was awarded, as the question clearly asked for reasons. Those who referred to processes operating in meanders often failed to clearly articulate how these can cause flooding. Others referred to the lack of natural vegetation and some went further linking this to farmland drainage or soil compaction. These answers scored full marks with ease.

1(d) Candidates generally did better on this question than the comparative question in January 2009. However, many still lifted too heavily from the text and were trapped in Level One as a consequence. It is important to note also that when a question refers to two issues, both must be referred to for Level 2. Also, when there are two command words, both must be addressed. The 'comment' part of this question simply required responses to express a view or perhaps infer meaning from the data provided.

Question 2

2(a) (i) Describing the location required candidates to do more than simply name the place they undertook their study. While there was credit for this, they also needed to consider features or characteristics of the location. For example naming the precise site for the river study would

have scored a mark. For a second mark in this example, responses might have described the section of the river they were working in or some other aspect of the location. Most often

candidates approached suitability in terms of the link between the location and overall aim. This was a good approach.

2(a) (ii) Most students are still using the hypothesis testing approach to fieldwork. While this is clearly acceptable, centres might consider alternatives such as research questions, particularly with some of the human studies about which candidates wrote. For example a good research question linked to the Core Human Section might be 'Why do social characteristics of locals populations vary in different parts of city x?'. This might give greater scope for discussion of the issues. Describing associated methods was generally well done, particularly for the river studies. Velocity measurements were particularly common. For human studies, methods were generally a little more vague and imprecise and sometimes not clearly linked to the preceding hypothesis. Being able to replicate the method from the information given was a key characteristic of a Level 2 answer.

2(a) (iii) The main pitfall in responding to this question, came with those who briefly described limitations before suggesting improvements. This evaluative approach was not required in this question and such responses were held to Level 1. Also some chose to write about basic, simple methods with which they had very little to discuss in terms of limitations. This was quite self penalising. Those who understood the question and chose appropriate methods found ready access to Level 2. Human error was allowed as a limitation.

2(b) 'Outline' required candidates to write a short account of how they used their chosen technique. The justification relates to the appropriateness of the technique in relation to the data being collected. Many candidates found this question difficult. As in 2(a)(iii) some chose very basic techniques, often more related to presentation of data. If there was no clear attempt to explain how the data was analysed using the technique, responses were held to Level 1. Clearly those who used statistical techniques were in a very strong position in relation to the question provided there was clear outline and justification.

2(c) This was not a particularly well answered question. Candidates were expected to use their findings to explain what they now understood about the topic area. They could have confirmed some underlying theory or discussed how their findings suggested more complex relationships than textbook theory often covers. There were many ways of writing a successful response here. Weaker answers simply stated findings in a long descriptive fashion. Others described how the understanding of the enquiry process had been improved - this was not the question.