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General Certificate of Education

Geography 2030

Specification

GEOG2 Geographical Skills

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

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General

This was the third series of GEOG2 as part of the AQA GCE Geography specification.

The paper was worth 50 marks in total; 25 marks were available for Geographical Skills. The 'vehicle' through which the skills are examined is either the Core Physical Section (Rivers) or Core Human Section (Population Change). In this paper Rivers was the topic area. While it is not compulsory for candidates to have been taught the Rivers, floods and management unit, there are 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.

The second part of the paper worth 25 marks was a series of linked fieldwork questions; four in total on this paper. The questions had to be sufficiently broad to allow all candidates fair access to the paper. The basis for the questions is always page 16 of the Specification and specifically the Investigative Skills section. It was very pleasing to see so many candidates having undertaken a wide variety of enquiries. River studies were very common. Centres also have to be aware that the fieldwork should be based on the content of the Specification. Some responses showed at best only a very tenuous link to the Specification.

As the paper continues to evolve and as we examine the full range of skills, candidates will be expected to undertake more practical activities in question 1 and also to a lesser extent in question 2. There will still be questions which require extended prose but there will also be a requirement to complete practical tasks. 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.

In terms of the development of the fieldwork section of the paper, it is 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. In this examination, it appeared as though some candidates had not carefully read some of the questions and instead wrote answers relating to questions on previous series. This is referred to in the comment on Question 2 below.

Question 1

1 (a)(i) Plotting two points on a dispersion diagram should have proved a straightforward task for candidates and did so for most. Candidates who lost marks here failed to pay attention to detail with regard to the scale. Some drew dots which were much too large to clearly identify their selected location on the graph. For the median (841), candidates either knew that this was the rank ordered mid value or they did not.

1 (a)(ii) This question caused some problems, particularly for candidates who also study Mathematics. In Geography it is conventional to rank the highest value (in a data set) as one. A small number of centres expressed concern that their students may have ranked the lowest value in the data set as one. Allowance was made for this in the mark scheme. However, when examining this and other skills such as Spearman's rank correlation test, candidates will be expected to apply the geographical convention of ranking from highest to lowest and not vice versa.

1 (a)(ii) This is a very common style of question on a skills based paper. Once a graph or map has been completed, candidates are often required to describe the completed pattern, in this case dispersion. Credit was available for describing the clustering between 800-900mm as well as the wide variation rainfall across England in 2005. Marks were also available for manipulation of data. This required some sort of calculation for example the mean (846mm) or the range (763mm).

1 (b)(i) Basic OS map skills were being examined in this question through the use of scale and contour lines. This skill was largely completed successfully. Most scored 2 marks for the identification of the river and start/finish at 50m. A simple third mark was available for the 10m flat base. A final mark was reserved for the accurate change of gradient.

1 (b)(ii) This question examined basic OS map skills through describing the differences between the cross profiles and some other aspects of Assessment Objective one (page 18 specification), through suggesting why the cross profiles differed. In order to access Level 2 (5-7 marks) responses had to show an understanding of fluvial processes.

1 (b)(iii) Meanders where shown on the OS map and some evidence of landforms was evident, for instance in grid square 1095. This question was also examining Assessment Objective 1 (page 18 specification), particularly through processes affecting different parts of the meander. There were two marks available for this. Candidates generally engaged well with this question though it was disappointing to see some responses confuse the locations of slowest and fastest flow. Also many could not name/locate landforms such as river cliff or slip-off slope.

Question 2

2 (a)(i) Describing the method proved to be quite straightforward for most. The key differentiator was the amount of detail. Examiners are expecting sufficient detail to allow the method to be replicated from the information given. The inclusion of sampling where appropriate was a very useful addition. The main issues related to vague aims which had barely any relationship to the specification at either AS or A2. This was a particularly common feature of some of the human studies.

2 (a)(ii) Describing strengths in terms being 'quick and easy' may be valid but only really constitutes a very basic answer. Those who only wrote in these terms were restricted to Level 1. Weaknesses were generally more effectively explored. Some also included evaluative comment which was a useful addition.

2 (b) This was probably the least well answered question on the paper. Too many candidates confused presentation with analysis. For example describing how a statistical technique was performed was held to Level 1. Another common error was to drift into justification of the technique which is a higher order skill, but not the question in this series. It appears as though some candidates had written responses to a question from a previous series (Question 2 (b), Geog2 June '09). This is one of the real dangers of preparing model answers for the fieldwork section of this paper. Candidates must be able to interpret the question accurately and respond accordingly.

2 (c) There was a broad distinction here between those who had undertaken physical and human fieldwork. In general terms those who had undertaken river studies, succession studies or other coastal studies, were able to produce much more concise answers in relation to the '...geographical theory, concept or idea...' part of the question. Human fieldwork is an entirely legitimate approach at AS but responses are generally not as focused in the 'methods' type questions or the 'underpinning theory' type questions. Those who scored highest marks where able to explain how far their findings matched the underlying expectations and, where appropriate, when findings differed from expectations, good suggestions/possible explanations were offered.