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ASSESSMENT and QUALIFICATIONS ALLIANCE

General Certificate of Education

Geography 2030

GEO4A Investigating the shrinking world

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General

This was the first summer examination in this specification in which fieldwork and fieldwork skills were assessed by written examination. It was pleasing to see the preparation that had been carried out by centres and candidates for this examination and centres are to be commended for their diligence. The best preparation for the paper, as centres recognise, is for candidates to have firsthand experience of fieldwork, including a write-up of the investigation. Centres again demonstrated a variety of approaches to the investigation, including all candidates undertaking the same investigation, varied investigations in small groups and completely individual investigations. Fieldwork on rivers was very popular, but psammoseres, microclimates and settlement studies were again well represented.

40 marks are allocated for the examination of the candidates' own fieldwork investigation, whilst 20 marks are allocated for the assessment of fieldwork related skills.

What was good:

- Candidates had worked well carrying out fieldwork, developed their investigative skills and were able to demonstrate what they had learned from the fieldwork experience
- Specific detail about the fieldwork location, data collection, analysis, results, conclusions and evaluation, thus demonstrating with confidence the fieldwork investigation experience
- The great majority of candidates were able to make a clear effort to respond to all sections of the paper
- There was continued evidence of clearly expressed and well-presented explanation, couched in geographically appropriate language, demonstrating that the candidate 'thinks like a geographer'.

What needs further development:

- There is still the need for some candidates to recognise, understand and respond appropriately to the command words. Explain, evaluate, justify are examples of command words that trigger access to the higher mark bands
- The consistent application of detailed knowledge of the fieldwork undertaken to move from the implicit to the explicit to access the higher mark bands
- Familiarity with all skills listed in the specification.

Question 1

In general, this question was answered well with most candidates accessing Level 2 by responding to the command word. Candidates were invariably able to explain reasons for the selection of the investigation and examiners were able to credit a range of responses, including comment on the location, theory, access, availability of equipment, testing the specific hypotheses etc. The best candidates were able to convincingly refer to their fieldwork experience. Some centres had a prepared response on aims, frequently based on the question from January 2010. Although this usually allowed candidates to reach Level 2, it did restrict some candidates from fully adapting their knowledge to the question, preventing more talented students from accessing the higher marks. The better candidates had a clear aim/ hypothesis and had the freedom and confidence to adapt their knowledge to the question rather than using the prepared response. The best candidates frequently included a sketch map or diagram to aid their explicit, detailed explanation of why the aim had been selected.

Question 2

The responses to this question were commendable in the main. Most candidates had experienced either formal or informal risk assessment and were able to describe their knowledge of the process. Some made reference to a formal risk assessment table that scored risks according to their seriousness. However, the command word 'justify' proved to be a continuing discriminator, for many candidates were unable to show why the assessment of the particular risk had been undertaken and how their response to it would minimise the risk. Many responses were thus generalised and failed to identify the detail of the specific risk assessed, i.e. what might be the potential injury.

Question 3

The most popular method of data analysis used was Spearman's rank, others used included Chi squared, nearest neighbour, standard deviation and Mann Whitney. A significant number of candidates used graphical techniques which did not work well unless perhaps they had decided on scatter graphs, which could be used to show analysis. Many techniques suggested were not specifically about analysis, though credit was given where candidates tried to show how analysis was aided and made appropriate to the investigation. There were some good descriptions of techniques with better candidates giving sound explanations, using evidence and results and relating it to their fieldwork. The better candidates were able to describe the working of the technique, interpreted the result, with reference to significance, linked to their own fieldwork results. Some candidates discussed more than one technique and some just described methods of data collection.

Question 4

The responses to this question were encouragingly and consistently good and candidates were able to competently evaluate the success of their investigation. There were many ways in which the investigation could be evaluated, including evaluation of the aims/hypotheses, the results, the methods/limitations, the overall success of the investigation, the location, improvements and extensions. This flexible approach enabled candidates to really show their understanding of what they had learned from the investigation process. Again the better candidates related their answer clearly to their experiences, used data in support and linked it to the aim. There was some good understanding of how the work could be improved, in some cases well supported by evidence. Some had little idea about improvements and some wrote responses that only made weak references to the aim. This question allowed the better candidates to demonstrate how well they could 'think like a geographer' and thus demonstrate synoptic thought.

Question 5

Part (a) of this question showed that candidates were not always familiar with the skills listed in the specification. There was, in general, a lack of understanding on how triangular graphs might be used; it was obviously a technique that many were not familiar with. The use to show the three sets of % data, adding to 100% and thus the clustering patterns of similar wards in different parts of the graph was unclear to many. However, many candidates were familiar with the skill and were able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of both triangular graphs and pie charts and to assess their merits. Despite the stimulus provided (Fig 1(b)), many candidates appeared unaware of the merits of pie charts and these were often dealt with in a superficial manner. Many responses showed a lack of balance, therefore. On the other hand, many candidates were able to competently assess the merits of pie charts. Evaluation of the techniques varied from the excellent to the minimal. It was perfectly possible for candidates who demonstrated knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of both skills, evaluated their suitability and applied this knowledge to the

stimulus to gain full marks. These candidates provided evidence that they could ‘think like a geographer’.

In part (b), most candidates showed some knowledge of sampling techniques, most common were stratified, systematic and random. Some use was made of random number tables and many understood the advantages of stratified sampling. Detail on how the sampling was carried out was frequently lacking, however. Reference to housing characteristics was variable; some focused on them at the expense of sampling; a number just described data collection techniques. There was an encouraging number of candidates who made reference to the map provided (Fig 2) in clarification of points on both sampling and housing characteristics. The better candidates recognised that the housing appeared to vary both in distribution and type and that this could affect the nature of the sampling method selected. There was often good description, although justification was not always well expressed. Again the importance of the command word ‘justify’ as a trigger for discrimination cannot be understated.