



General Certificate of Education

Geography 2030

GEOG3 Contemporary Geographical Issues

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General

This is the first report on the main A2 content paper (GEOG3) for the new AQA GCE Geography specification and it focuses on aspects of the question paper and its construction, the nature and demands of command words and the importance of key words, as well as its assessment. With the availability of the Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA) it is now possible for centres to see not only the performance of their own candidates on a question by question basis, but also to see information on the relative popularity of each question, and the degree to which it was successful in the examination context. Consequently this report will not comment in a detailed fashion on these aspects. However, it is possible to state here that a number of general characteristics were evident.

1. The majority of students attempted two physical geography questions and one human geography question, with well over half answering Question 19 (the Plate Tectonics essay question).
2. There were very few rubric contraventions, which is pleasing to report. However, for those candidates who did break the rubric, the outcomes were significant. Centres are requested to ensure that students are made well aware of the rules regarding question choice. When rubric is contravened, examiners are required to mark the whole paper and then take the best scoring marks (by option) to the candidate's advantage. In most cases this meant that one of the structured options was disqualified.
3. Most centres used the new AQA answer booklet, with the peach coloured cover and edging and small boxes for candidates to write in their question choices. Centres are asked to ask their students to write the numbers of the questions attempted on the front page, in numerical order.
4. Some candidates answered the questions in Section by Section order, Section A first, followed by Section B and so on; others chose to answer Section C first or second. It is worthy of consideration if it is in the candidate's best interest to leave the 40 mark essay to the final part of the examination. If the essay is unfinished then this does affect the overall mark the candidate can achieve as the essays are assessed in their totality. There was some evidence that some students ran out of time, though not in large numbers, and hence poor time management may have contributed to lower marks for those concerned.
5. Finally, it is pleasing to report that the full range of marks was achieved.

GEOG3 is a paper that consists of options, and teachers and lecturers may be tempted to just read those sections of this report that relate to their chosen areas of study. However, it is suggested that they read all of the following report, especially as some of the types of data stimulus will 'move around' to the other options in no particular sequence, and it would be wise to become aware of the major areas of concern for any format of data stimulus. For example, the graphs of Figure 5 – Question 13 - presented a certain issue (known as data waffle) which may repeat itself in other options in subsequent series.

The nature of the examination paper

The examination paper consists of two types of questions: structured questions and long essays. Each of the structured questions, both Physical and Human, was constructed to the same format. The mark allocation for each of these was 7, 8, and 10, and for each the philosophy behind the nature of the tasks was the same.

a) The 7 mark question

This required the candidate to examine a data stimulus (a photo, a map, a chart, a set of graphs, a diagram) and in each case to examine it and then 'comment on' what he/she could see. In question 4 and question 10, additional commands were given. In each question material that was described or 'lifted' was awarded Level 1 credit. Candidates had to do more than this though – they had to infer other geographical aspects from the data that were not immediately obvious. Two examples will illustrate this. Firstly in Question 01, candidates will have recognised the existence of tents. As this was an area that had experienced an earthquake (as stated in the stem of the question) candidates could have said that these tents were there for locals to sleep in due to their houses being rendered unsafe or collapsed, or because there was the possibility of aftershocks and therefore still at risk. Secondly, in Question 13, candidates were given a variety of graphs to 'comment on'. To simply identify trends in those graphs achieved Level 1 credit to a maximum of 4; commentary required the candidate to try and establish links between the graphs, or to suggest possible reasons for the variations shown. In each case, candidates are being required to demonstrate geographical processing and/or thinking. Further points on individual questions are given below.

b) The 8 mark question

These questions were thought to be the most straightforward for candidates, testing as they do knowledge and understanding of relatively focused areas of the specification. The command words used in the questions were more familiar to students and less challenging. However, they were the most disappointing in terms of outcome. Candidates simply did not seem to know the material they were being asked questions on either in sufficient detail, or with the degree of sophistication required at this level. Many answers were very generalised and simplistic. The worst performing questions of this type were Questions 05 and 08, though it is fair to say that high marks were rare on all of them. Further points on individual questions are given below.

c) The 10 mark question

The 10 mark questions take the knowledge and understanding that a candidate has into a slightly higher level of thinking, and require him/her to apply that knowledge and understanding in a situation that necessitates one or more of analysis, evaluation, discussion and interpretation. This is flagged up in the questions by the use of more complex commands such as 'Compare', 'Discuss' and 'Evaluate'. Performances here were more varied. Some candidates addressed this aspect of the question well; others simply described the chosen area of content without any sense of the nature of the task. Differentiation was therefore achieved quite successfully and more detail on this is given below.

d) **The 40 mark essays**

These questions are synoptic in design and they are also open-ended in terms of their demands, to varying degrees. There is no correct or perfect way to answer any of them, and candidates should be encouraged to have confidence in going about their task in the knowledge of this. The Notes for Answers in the mark scheme provide some guidance on the nature of content that could be included, and also suggestions as to how synopticity could be achieved, but once again it should be re-iterated that candidates can 'set out their stall' and assemble their own argument, within the parameters of the question set. It is however important that the argument is completed, and rounded. It is assessed in its totality. In some questions candidates are also asked to express an overall view or opinion – 'to what extent do you agree with this view?' Candidates should be encouraged to be confident about this – they can have their own opinion so long as their argument supports it. They do not always have to find the middle line, or be obliged to follow the accepted view. More questions of this type will be set and we welcome critical and lateral thinking.

The essays are assessed using a generic mark scheme, which is given in tabular form in the mark scheme. All the essays are assessed according to five criteria, and examiners allocate a Level, to a maximum of 4 levels, for each of these criteria before awarding a summative level and then deciding on the mark to be awarded within the range of marks available. The five criteria are:

- Knowledge of content, ideas and concepts
- Critical understanding of those concepts and ideas, including the processes that underpin them
- The use of case studies to support the argument
- Evidence of synopticity – the degree to which students can synthesise geographical themes and recognise the roles of values, attitudes and decision making
- Quality of argument – the degree to which an argument is constructed, developed and concluded.

It is again pleasing to report that a wide range of responses was evident – with full marks being awarded on several occasions. In terms of discrimination, the essays were successful, and some candidates are to be congratulated on the quality of their responses to these questions. It is wonderful to behold some of the depth of intellectual thought and processing, together with accuracy of knowledge, that some students possess, and this augurs well for the future of the subject. One just hopes these students will be studying Geography at university.

Command words and key words

This is not the forum to write at length regarding the precise meaning of command words, but it is still worthwhile to comment on the degree to which candidates self-penalise by not responding to the precise demands of the questions, in particular failing to take note of command words and key words. Some examples illustrate these points.

1. Question 03. Candidates were required to *compare* two seismic events in terms of their *management*. On too many occasions candidates gave two separate accounts, with the bare minimum of comparison – often just the use of the word 'however' or 'whereas' to link the two. Some answers gave no link word at all. Hence the marks awarded were restricted in both these scenarios. Similarly, many students wrote at length about impacts rather than *management* – hence a lot of detailed information provided was irrelevant.

2. Questions 09 and 12. To gain the maximum level, candidates had to respond to the higher level command of 'assess *the success*' and 'evaluate *the success*'. Some candidates gave little indication of success at all – specific description alone remaining within Level 2; others gave statements such as 'it is/was successful...' without any attempt to say how this view can be recognised or supported. These are complex tasks, and candidates need to recognise this complexity and respond with sophisticated statements that are appropriate for this level.
3. Question 18. A discussion of the *economic* impact of the chosen conflict was required, yet there was a great deal of background provided which was not required. Some candidates also discussed other social and political impacts, which again made the awarding of credit difficult.
4. Questions 08, 09, 12. A very fundamental set of key words concern numbers: *one, two*. Candidates should concentrate their answers on the requirement for a limited set of information. Candidates are in effect wasting time by giving more information than is required.

The final part of this report examines salient points regarding each of the individual questions.

Question 01

Most candidates did state something appropriate and relevant about the evidence of an earthquake in the area shown, and most could interpret this in terms of earthquake damage. Some even addressed the point that the event was 'recent'. Most suggested that there had been landslides, although their evidence from the photo was sometimes less well developed – with some referring incorrectly to avalanches of snow. There was good observation of 'piles of rubble', 'tents', 'trucks', 'lack of people' etc, and inferred points were then made as suggested earlier.

Question 02

Some reasonable knowledge of the main measurement scales (Richter and Mercalli) was evident, but there were very few full mark answers. Many candidates did mention seismographs (seismometers), but only a small number had any idea as to how these actually measured seismic waves/earthquakes. Many candidates offered information about methods of detection of plate movement or animal/water table/gas behaviour prior to an event, rather than measurement. There were also several accounts of P, S and L waves, none of which was relevant.

Question 03

As stated earlier, the main issues concerned the lack of understanding of command and key words. Most answers presented overlong preambles about the background/causes of their chosen event(s), or the effects, before they went on to mention management. However this did differentiate - weak answers provided very simple and generic points about aid and evacuation (or the lack of) whilst better answers gave some specific detail on building design/planning, level of preparation, responses, etc. Most comparisons were implicit and somewhat accidental rather than direct. Full and precise development with a focus on comparison usually accessed the Level 3 range of credit.

Question 04

Description was usually well done with most candidates identifying the area of most warmth, though variations in the decline in temperatures from this point (B3) were described less well. Comments were mainly regarding the standard reasons for urban heat islands rather than linking to the map. Some correctly noted the time of day and its influence, and also some related the warming influence of the Liffey estuary correctly. Better answers recognised key aspects such as the 'cliff' and 'plateau' with a degree of understanding. However, there were some answers that were either entirely descriptive, and those that were all theory about UHI without any attempt to relate this to Dublin. Such answers could not access Level 2.

Question 05

This question probably received the consistently weakest answers on the whole paper. Apart from 'winds being slower' and 'winds not being able to go through buildings' (the deflection scenario), only a small number of candidates offered much in the way of complexity to do with turbulence and eddying around buildings or aspects such as 'skimming flow'. There was some misuse of the term 'Venturi effect'. This was one question where a selection of diagrams could have provided a clear illustration of the impacts, and indeed the better responses tended to do this.

Question 06

Examiners commented on the fact that so many candidates began their answers with passages, quite lengthy in places, which outlined the causes and consequences of coal-based smog and particulate pollution, especially in the 1950s. The focus of the question was solutions. Most answers did generally present some form of policy or action, but there was an over-reliance on car-based responses with little attempt to relate this to particulates. Many answers referred to general atmospheric pollution with long observations about Copenhagen/Kyoto/Rio and greenhouse gases/global warming. The global responses to climate change and to rising carbon dioxide emissions was generally not relevant, although credit was given for more local and nationally based schemes where applicable. Overall, examples were not well developed. It would appear that every city in South America or Asia possesses either odd/even or colour-coded number plates and residents who own two cars so that they can undermine the policy. It is no wonder there is such a problem of particulates in these cities. It is also clear that the perception of success of the London Congestion Charge is widespread.

Question 07

The data stimulus here was of a different kind, requiring candidates to process and classify information into a summative form. Most candidates worked down through the table and lifted information and some did re-arrange the words to make new sentences. Less able students had some difficulty making sense of the material. Often they had little appreciation of the implication of the points/characteristics they were quoting. There were, of course, some very good answers that made a whole series of well-reasoned points and usually presented a statement of overview either at the start or end of their answer.

Question 08

As with question 05, this proved to be a challenging task for most students of this option and answers were disappointing. Many candidates did not appear to realise what was required; a majority of answers were at the urban-wide level - increases in pollution, more built-up areas, plants/animal adaptation. It is also worthy of note that the complete destruction of an ecosystem – say the replacement of fields to become a car park is not a change in that ecosystem. For a change to be a change there must be a start and finishing point. There were also some very generalised answers. Some candidates could identify one ecosystem, such as derelict land or routeways, but even these lacked detail on the actual changes. The best answers named plants as part of a recognisable succession or vegetation change, though many could only muster the Oxford ragwort. One candidate did claim that this ‘had escaped from Bracknell’, so obviously the clue was not in the name.

Question 09

Examiners adopted a very flexible approach to this question. The intention was that answers should come from that part of the specification looking at ecological conservation areas at a local scale. However, many students operated at a much larger scale and wrote about fragile environments in a more global context. All contexts were accepted as long as the thrust of the question was addressed. There were many good answers on this; a mixture of very local studies or internationally known areas such as the Serengeti, Jau National Park or The Barrier Reef. Candidates were able to describe the conservation area but often did not outline the aims or methods used to achieve success - they claimed that the area ‘has been successful’ without providing the supporting evidence. A lot of statements of success were simplistic. Local based studies were often quite limiting in that there were no specific outcomes, or they were still being developed. Some were simply ‘left to nature’ - it was difficult to appreciate how success might be evaluated. Equally, inappropriate areas were given, such as The Peak District, the Lake District, even London. On the other hand some answers were very detailed and matched successful developments with the stated aims; this was done particularly effectively for the international schemes. Good candidates did present some very good material on well-known (or at least text-book examples) such as Dulwich Upper Wood, but it would be pleasing to encourage local visits to conservation areas as this provides a great opportunity for field activity.

Question 10

Most candidates had little difficulty recognising that the area shown in Figure 4 was an area of spontaneous settlement – a shanty town. Having done this they then launched into an account of what typical shanty towns look like, and then followed this up with accounts of sites and services schemes, self-help schemes and the like in response to the second part of the question. The focus of the question seemed to be lost. There were, however, some very good responses; candidates did comment on the makeshift nature of the buildings suggesting that these were likely to be illegal and rapidly constructed from whatever was available or given, and that there were signs of some upgrading – the tiled roofs for example. Better candidates did appreciate that the dirty looking tower blocks might have been part of a previous attempt at improvement, and there were comments on the levels of atmospheric pollution evident. Candidates need to be made aware that the stimulus is meant to be used and referred to.

Question 11

As with the other 8 mark questions, this question was not answered well. Candidates could define the process and give general push/pull factors, but they did not offer much sophistication in the way of the process in operation. There was little understanding of the outward movement over time nor links to changes in transport over time. Many suggested that internet and e-mail developments allowed people to work from home; it is not at all clear why one would then wish to live in the suburb of an urban area. Examples were rare, often just the name of a suburb, or even a village or town well beyond the green belt. There was therefore a great deal of confusion with counter-urbanisation, with the town of St Ives featuring regularly. Answers were very generalised in the main. Suburbanisation was also attributed as being 'the' cause of inner city decline, CBD decline, and the decentralisation of retailing. Although it is a contributory factor to these processes, it is not the main one, and there was too much emphasis on these aspects as effects. The focus should have been the effects on the area(s) where suburbanisation is taking place – the suburbs.

Question 12

Very wide ranging material featured from well documented national schemes such as the LDDC or Thames Gateway, or the regeneration of Notting Hill to more 'local' developments based on Bristol, Manchester, Hull, Birmingham or Newcastle, depending on the teacher's preference and knowledge. For some schemes there was some confusion – for example mixing the outcomes of the Hulme City Challenge and the work of the Central Manchester Development Corporation. Some candidates attempted to discuss the regeneration of Dharavi in Mumbai, which could have been appropriate if up-to-date, but most drifted into generic sites and services schemes.

With few exceptions most answers suffered from the same problem in that the candidate spent a lot of time outlining the background issues as to why the area needed regenerating. He/she then failed to present much in the way of detail about the actual scheme and its aims, other than very general ones. Success was difficult to evaluate; often there were no criteria against which success could be judged. Some 'schemes' were still in the planning or building stage and it was almost impossible to assess how successful they might be. Centres do need to select a scheme that does have tangible outcomes; this would have been so much easier if candidates had looked at a 'before and after' case study. There seems to be an over-reliance upon text book examples. Some answers were on gentrification, which can be a 'scheme' in the oft-disputed range of definitions of the regeneration process, but these tended to be self-penalising because it was difficult for candidates to establish specific aims against which the results could be assessed.

Question 13

This question highlighted a common issue in that students have difficulty demonstrating that they understand data, rather than being able to 'put the data into words'. The data encouraged a large degree of up/down and increase/decrease statements – known as data waffle – which was often very full and elaborate, but rarely going beyond quantitative manipulation. Consequently, there were many Level 1 answers. In order to be comparative to the demands of the other data stimulus questions, candidates had to give some commentary on what either lay 'behind' the data, or to establish links between the various items given. There were some sensible comments looking to link GDP changes with the nature of employment change and the corresponding growth of high-skilled activities in IT, but unfortunately Level 2 answers were more rare than in the other options.

Question 14

Bearing in mind the straightforward nature of this task, the outcomes were very disappointing, particularly for India. It was, at times, difficult to distinguish answers on China from those on India. Whilst many of the factors are the same: cheap labour/land, low taxes, fewer regulations etc, they do appear as generalised attractions and specific detail was less forthcoming. Even those who did mention Special Economic Zones in the context of China often failed to give any further detail. Answers that could actually name some locations and give specific attractions of these areas in India/China were rare. Few candidates could actually name any TNCs or industries that had been developed in their chosen country. As always there were some very detailed answers - clearly some candidates used their sources better than others. Answers based on India and China were balanced in number.

Question 15

Some advice was given earlier on the importance of key words – in this question the key word was ‘global’, and unfortunately many candidates failed to recognise this. A lot of time was wasted describing and giving reasons for the growth of NICs (and in many cases the growth of TNCs) rather than commenting on their impact on the rest of the world. Impacts were also very superficial such as improved trade, they affected MEDCs, etc. Less able candidates did not get beyond this narrative about NICs, of varying generations. On the other hand there were some very detailed answers looking at specific impacts such as loss of employment in named firms/towns, or particular sectors of office based activities, in the UK or USA. Equally some did refer to the fact that the NICs are now becoming countries of origin in their own right and spreading their influence back into the more developed world. Such recognition of change over time, if supported, allowed access to Level 3.

Question 16

This question presented another variety of data stimulus, where commentary required some depth of understanding of the process shown. For many candidates comments consisted largely of paraphrasing parts of Fig 6, or some used case studies with little reference to the figure at all. When they did refer to an example they often described the conflict rather than commenting on how it related to the process of decision making shown. However, some better responses used the figure to refer to ideas like democracy, time issues and fairness, sometimes with exemplars.

Question 17

It could be argued that this question gave more help to candidates than the equivalents elsewhere. Some made use of this help and referred to the key words – nature and origins – as a means to structure their answers. Others simply wrote about a list of conflicts they had studied, and often with some confusion. The best answers selected a limited range of conflicts and used them to address some of the influences given in the question – identity, ethnicity, resources etc. A few tried to fit one conflict to all of these issues – for example the Basques – not an easy exercise. Perhaps this was a situation where breadth was more appropriate than depth?

Question 18

The importance of the key word ‘economy’ in this question is identified earlier. Most candidates concentrated on the Afghanistan, Israeli/Palestinian and Iraq/Kuwait conflicts though there was again some confusion – for example between the problems facing Gaza and The West Bank which are quite different in economic terms. Whilst the better ones did focus on the economic issues quite effectively, even these, as with less able candidates, did waste some time on a description of the causes of the conflict, sometimes in great detail. Somehow we need to raise the level of confidence of candidates to just answer the question that has been set.

The essays

As was pointed out earlier, Question 19 was by far the most popular, and hence has more commentary below than the other essays. Questions 20 and 21 were very unpopular, and there was an even spread of responses to the human essays, Questions 22, 23 and 24.

Question 19

This appeared to be the most anticipated and prepared for topic of a question on the whole paper. The overall results were that answers demonstrating knowledge of often detailed case studies were set in the framework of a poor and/or simplistic and polarised argument – essentially that rich countries can cope with earthquake/volcanic disasters whereas poor countries cannot. There was large scale regurgitation of case studies: a mix of at least two earthquakes (from Kobe, Sichuan, Northridge and Haiti), two volcanoes (from Mounts Etna, Soufriere and St Helens or Chaiten and Nyiragongo) and often a tsunami thrown in for good measure. Weaker answers presented a lot of information (sometimes inaccurate), repeating themes and facts about events and effects of the hazard. This usually consisted of a rich/poor contrast, although not always that explicit. Such answers only addressed the question obliquely, almost by accident and they did not discuss the 'extent to which' element in the question.

Better answers did have more focus on the question but were still heavily based on factual overload. The best essays did set out a structure of themes (some making good use of an essay plan) that was then supported by reference to pertinent case studies; not en bloc but as required to illustrate a point, and applied to the question. They were also more balanced and usually took one of two angles: firstly, that there were many other factors to take into account (population density, power of the event, perception etc.); or, that within events, there were both rich and poor that were affected to varying degrees. Perhaps most importantly they answered the question set, and came to a view which was mature, coherent and perceptive. These also tended to be interesting to read, in itself a useful guide to the final mark to be awarded.

Question 20

There were very few responses to this question, though it did differentiate. The bulk of answers gave details of the Great Storm of 1987, and better answers were able to provide additional breadth with references to Boscastle, Carlisle and Cockerthorpe (Cockfosters in one case). The main issue again was a failure to address the question – too much information was given on causes rather than discussing impacts, and references to responses were very weak, if present at all.

Question 21

As one examiner described it – an acquired taste? There were some very good answers with detailed material on longer term changes, climatic climax vegetation succession together with illustrations of plagioclimax and even some discussion of subtle physical influences in the development of sub-climax forms. But, the more generalised type of response was very weak on this option – many candidates simply had little idea of changes over time other than negatives such as destruction through urban growth, which was a futile argument to take. The central tenet of the question – 'relative importance' – was addressed by only a few.

Question 22

Though difficult to quantify, it would seem that both options of this question were equally popular. There was potential to describe well known case studies in detail, from a range of developed world and developing world contexts, and to apply them to the theme of the question – sustainability. Weaker answers did just the former with no underlying plan to focus on the question. Better answers did consider a range of transport or waste management systems and did discuss elements of sustainability for each form of management. What was quite rare was any attempt to evaluate the extent to which these schemes could be adopted or applied in the wider context; they worked where they had been tried but would they be transferable to other societies? Again there were some very interesting and well written essays that did exactly what was required. Examples from the UK were surprisingly thin apart from basic knowledge about different coloured bins around the country, or the Congestion Charge in London (again) - there was little in terms of detail about some of the more local scale waste/transport management schemes that have been trialled across the country.

Question 23

One of the early stumbling blocks to this question was the failure to fully understand that the question referred to the Least Developed nations of the world, and not to nations such as India, China, and the other NICs. They could have been made relevant by using them to illustrate the lessons learnt from the past, as ‘models’ which might be applicable to countries trying to make economic progress, but regrettably few did this. Another area of weakness was to miss out the first element of the quotation – challenges faced. The majority of answers moved swiftly to trade, aid, export-led development etc. and hence it was a pity that some other aspects of the question were not addressed. However, as with all of the discursive questions, the sting was in the tail: candidates did present facts, case studies and knowledge, they sometimes appreciated the role of people and organisations, but only the best answers paid heed to the requirement to consider ‘to what extent do you agree with this view’.

Question 24

This was a slightly different type of essay question in that at the outset it appears a much more straightforward task – compared with say Questions 19 and 23. It is fair to say that many students went about the task by providing lots of depth and/or breadth of case studies of separatism – a Cook’s Tour of world conflict (though again with some inaccuracies). The key elements though were ‘analysis’ and ‘discussion’ and better responses were able to categorise or classify either or both of reasons and consequences. This may have proved more demanding for the less able candidates. Most candidates were aware of the meaning of the term ‘separatism’ though there were a few incorrect references to people wishing that the UK leaves the EU. Some other examples were quite complex and confusing, and examiners endeavoured to be sympathetic to the candidate. A discussion of the Israeli/Palestinian situation presented some difficulties in this context – it is fair to say that it is the Palestinians who want a separate state (or states) from the state of Israel as they are currently in the administrative area of Israel, and not the other way round.